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Causal analysis of radical Islamism in northern Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Gbemisola Animasawun and Luqman Saka

This article attempts an agential explanation of the *raison d'être* for *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad*, also known as Boko Haram (meaning Western education is forbidden), an Islamist sect that came to public consciousness in 2009 after the extra-judicial killing of its leader. Conceptualising Nigeria as a weak state, the article identifies the failed prebendal relationship between politicians in northern Nigeria and members of Boko Haram, and the extra-judicial killing on 30 July 2009 of Mohammed Yusuf, as agential causations of the current wave of radical Islamism. The article argues for the need to transcend the orthodox interpretation of the current wave of Islamist terrorism being demonstrated by the Nigerian state to a more nuanced approach that pays attention to the essentialist, psychological, political and economic perspectives of Islamist terrorism at the structural and individual levels.

Keywords Sharia, Boko Haram, Fourth Republic, Islamism

Introduction

Democratisation, as propounded and promoted by the West since the end of the Cold War, has produced consequences that are inimical to internal peace and security in many countries of the world. One of the explanations for this is the varied manifestation of the clash of civilisations as predicted by Samuel Huntington, otherwise described by some as the globalisation phase of imperialism.¹ For the critics of globalisation, its imperialistic and expansionist intent is identifiable as motivation for spreading democracy by all means, including force. This recalls the security dilemma of the Cold War days that resonated after the 9/11 attacks. This dilemma is subtly reflected in a statement made by Tony Blair in 2004 on the decision to go to war in Iraq that 'it's simply that I believe that democracy there means security here'.² This clash of civilisations, or the globalisation phase of imperialism, has evoked

a change in the patterns of wars and conflicts globally and calls into question the validity of the democratic peace theory upon which the promotion of democracy is hinged by the West, as led by the United States (US).³

Omar Encarnacion cautions against a hyped celebration of democratisation in its third wave as the main cause of the reduction in interstate conflicts, cognisant of the fact that the same has sparked horrific intrastate conflicts in a way that requires the promoters of the notion to rethink.⁴ This makes it imperative for the international community, in its commitment to world peace, to focus on how to address issues and causes of intrastate conflicts such as poverty, repression, and the denial of rights, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts. Criticism of the notion of democratic peace is further accentuated by the insecurity caused by violent conflicts owing to the absence of fundamentals that make democracies averse to war, including governmental transparency, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for civil and human rights in many democratising states, which has informed descriptions such as 'illiberal democracies', 'bloody democracies', 'undemocratic democracies' and 'semi-democracies'.⁵

Consequent upon the advent of semi-democracies and predatory democracies, there have also emerged two patterns of warfare.⁶ These are warlordism and intrastate conflicts, while the war against terror has become a global problem since 9/11. A similarity across these forms of warfare is that they target the civilian population as their victims.⁷ As a continent, Africa has not been excluded from any of these, and democratisation and nation-building processes across the continent are today threatened by internal unrests and the negative effects of terror networks around the world, which have made some of the countries of the continent their recruitment and training grounds.

At the centre of the internal instability in many countries of the world and the global war on terror are those who have been described variously as fundamentalists, extremists and Islamists.⁸ Sam Harris explains that Islamists assert that 'Islam must inform every dimension of human existence, including politics and law ...'.⁹ Therefore, the insistence that state affairs should be conducted based on Islamic laws is what defines Islamism. However, much as the war on terror masks a veiled conflict between Westernisation and Islamism, religious violence predates 9/11 at the global level and in many countries across Africa now experiencing it.

The attacks launched against vital interests of the US on 9/11 illustrate a phased challenge to the hegemony of the US since the demise of the East-West divide. Ali Mazuri opines that out of the four pillars of globalisation (economy, empire, technology and religion), the US controls all of these except religion.¹⁰ It is in this context that the attack of 9/11 can be situated as a challenge to US power and not to its values such as Christianity. According to Mazuri:

The terrorists of the September 11, 2001 targeted the World Trade Center as a symbol of American economic power. They targeted the Pentagon as a symbol of American military might. The fourth plane which was brought down in Pennsylvania was probably intended to target a symbol of American political power – either Congress or the White House. But there seemed to be no effort by the terrorists to target an American cathedral or any other symbol of America's religious heritage.¹¹

The above clarifies the motive and target of contemporary global Islamism as a frontal challenge to the hegemony of the US. By extension, Islamism has constituted a dangerous challenge to liberal democracy in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, where *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad*, known as Boko Haram (meaning Western education is

forbidden), has emerged, using the tactics of the Taliban and alleged to have links with al-Qaeda.¹² This invites a causal analysis of this terrorist group that has the Islamisation or establishment of a strict version of Sharia law in all the core northern states of Nigeria as its stated objective. Presently, the group constitutes not only a threat to Nigeria but also a global threat, based on the deaths and casualties recorded after it bombed the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, on 26 August 2011, and on the inclusion of three of its leading figures as global terrorists.

This puts to rest the argument over whether it is a terrorist organisation or not.¹³ The terrorist status of the sect is underscored in this article based on its targets, utterances and activities, which are often directed towards symbols of state sovereignty and control on the one hand and churches which symbolise Christian values on the other. Therefore, Boko Haram constitutes an Islamist terrorist organisation embroiled in a violent conflict with the Nigerian state through the use of terrorism, nurtured in a milieu of communal tensions, radical Islamism, and anti-Americanism in northern Nigeria.¹⁴ Perhaps this is why the senior US military commander and top officer at Africa Command, General Carter F. Ham, in the *New York Times* on 15 September 2011 listed three militant organisations – al-Shabaab in Somalia, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram in northern Nigeria (which is yet to show its capacity to conduct significant strikes outside Nigerian borders) – as terrorist organisations.¹⁵

As a step forward in providing a causal analysis, this article focuses on the agential issues involved in the current manifestation of the sect. This article identifies the strained prebendal relationship that existed between politicians in northern Nigeria and members of Boko Haram, and the extra-judicial killing in July 2009 of Mohammed Yusuf, the leader of the sect, as agential causes. In doing this, the article examines the local and transnational conditions that have plausibly given rise to the current wave of radical Islamism in northern Nigeria, while tracing the roots of the current wave of Islamism to political Islam, illustrated by the move for the full implementation of Sharia and the affective relationship between politicians and members of the Boko Haram sect. Also, the resort to full-blown terror tactics by the sect following the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf by officers of the Nigeria Police Force provides further agential explanation of and implications for the use of violence by security agencies of the Nigerian state in triggering radical Islamism.

Taking a cue from Katerina Dalacoura, we opine that state response to Boko Haram should be nuanced and cognisant of the essentialist, psychological, political and economic perspectives of Islamism, going by the sect's activities and demands.¹⁶ The essentialist perspective emphasises the nature of Islam, the pervasiveness of religious education and the influence of radical Islamist leaders and symbols. The psychological perspective underscores the effects of urbanisation, unemployment and social anomie on members of Islamist sects. The political perspective focuses on Islamist sects that arise with the objective of overturning or undermining the US or Western political and economic domination and issues like the Israel–Palestine crises. The economic perspective of terrorism links the emergence of Islamist sects to economic underdevelopment, deprivation and poverty. This is pertinent because the utterances and activities of Boko Haram reflect strands of these perspectives.

Conceptual discourse: state failure, nay weak state, Islamism and the economy of affection

Since the emergence of the nation-state sequel to the demise of the golden age of the Church and the negotiation of the treaty of Westphalia in Europe, the state has remained at the centre of discourses with implications for humanity. This has warranted and sustained the evaluation of capabilities of sovereign political communities by their citizens. Goran Hyden observes that states emerge in response to needs that confront groups in societies.¹⁷ He goes further to clarify that those who occupy positions in the state are different from the rest because the positions they hold carry an element of authority that may be delegated or forcefully acquired, as is the case with military coups. Hyden presents the early historical states as rudimentary, representing a mere extension of the king's household.¹⁸ Characteristically, states are hierarchical organisations, systems of power conferred with legitimacy to perform specific functions and having officials who are expected to serve the people. B C Smith defines the state as institutions through which legitimate power (political authority) is exercised and enforced in the overall interest of the citizens.¹⁹

The peculiar patterns of governance, politics and frequency of conflicts, amongst other issues, have warranted a nuanced view of the Third World state – especially African countries. This has been informed by the myriad internal challenges confronting the post-colonial states in Africa. However, as diverse as the states in Africa are, they have suffered many of the same misfortunes, from colonialism to the extant phase of neo-colonialism and internal instability.²⁰ The shared challenges confronting the post-colonial states in Africa are reflective of their inability to fulfil the responsibilities expected of the state to its citizens, such as constructive management of diversity, democratic participation, equitable distribution of wealth, respect for fundamental human rights, and civil liberties.²¹ While these challenges accentuated the urge for self-determination and civil wars during the Cold War, they have made the struggle for the control of patrimony in many African states bestial, and democracy in its third wave on the continent has become defined by violence, corruption and instability. The net effect of this, according to Pierre Englebert, is that African states have developed a culture of irresponsibility and alienation towards their citizens.²² We locate this sustained culture of irresponsibility by African states as the main factor undermining peace and development on the continent as it also constitutes a drawback to the functionality or therapeutic impact expected of international aid to the continent. Giles Bolton puts it succinctly when he notes that: 'There is very little that can be done to help badly run African countries.'²³

At the centre of the African crisis is the state, whose control has become the subject of crises, while its poor performance has become the bane of development on the continent. The latter is described as the crisis of state authority, or state failure caused by bloated and ineffective bureaucracies, the inability to deliver services to taxpayers even when they have paid for it, the inability to extract and fully control resources within its borders (which makes the state unable to finance its activities), the inability to maintain law and order, and ineffective policing.²⁴ The inability to meet these responsibilities and perennial internal crises stand at the centre of the notion of state failure in Africa.

However, the accuracy of the term *state failure* has come under scrutiny. Charles Call argues that since its addition to the political lexicon in 1990s, the events of 9/11 have returned it to the fore of discourses on peace and security, both of which seem to have eluded Africa since the end of the Cold War.²⁵ The notion of state failure contributes substantially to the (re)direction

of resources and attention to, and research on, countries that have not served their populations. One of these was 'The State Failure Task Force', set up in 2004 at the University of Maryland with the mandate to identify the underlying causes of state failure, which was defined as 'a relatively new label that encompasses a range of severe political conflicts and regime crises exemplified by events of the 1990s in Somalia, Liberia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire)'.²⁶ Since then, there has been an observed pattern of lumping states together under the category of 'failed states', despite the fact that they do not share many similarities, with disregard for the conceptual issues and practical challenges peculiar to each state. This has led to misleading generalisations in policy responses to states in the 'failed state' category. The inaccuracy of the 'failed state' concept categorisation is apparent in the face of certain yardsticks presented by Call.²⁷

These include the excessive aggregation of diverse states – for instance, categorising Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq, North Korea and Indonesia as failed states, despite marked differences in the nature of armed conflicts and level of state responsibilities in these countries, which require nuanced responses based on their peculiar realities. Similarly, the annual Failed States Index (FSI) produced by the Fund for Peace in *Foreign Policy* magazine for the first time in 2005 included 41 sub-indicators of state failure, grouped into 12 categories.²⁸ Trying to homogenise a diverse mix of nations with peculiar needs is akin to throwing a monolithic cloak over disparate problems that each require a tailored solution. This approach has led the Western policy community to apply the same generalised policy instrument to states with 3 million people (Liberia) and states with 200 million people (Indonesia), to *strong states* with limited areas out of control (Colombia) and weak states, to *legitimate states* with low capacity but high legitimacy (East Timor) and *predatory states* consciously looting the treasury for personal and corrupt ends.²⁹

The 'failed state' concept also places undue emphasis on empowering the state and executive-controlled/influenced institutions such as the police, judiciary and military because they enhance the ability of the state to maintain order and stability. However, this does not take into cognisance the likelihood of an autocratic person in authority who may circumvent these institutions for selfish and undemocratic ends. There is also a clash in the focus pursued by the normative assumption of democratisation in post-conflict and fledgling democracies: on the one hand the democratisation sub-field underscores the strengthening of political parties, civil society organisations, legislatures, and other organisations that stand between citizens and government; on the other hand the state-failure thesis focuses on strengthening the military, police, judiciary, public finance agencies, health, education and other executive agencies. The state-failure concept also equates stateness to peace. This is (mis)informed by the assumption that empowering the state reinforces peace.

Contrarily, state-building can actually jettison peace, leading to insecurity and group tensions in countries where resources are available to corrupt and predatory central governments. The Western paternalism and teleological assumptions that have led to the definition of a failed state as one which is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental tasks of a nation state in a modern world also reveal the value-laden nature of this definition of state failure that seems oblivious to the peculiar realities and histories of many third-world countries. Finally, there is a deliberate obfuscation of the role of the West in the narrative of state failure because the ahistoric and technical definition of state failure skirts over the history of colonialism and exploitation in the impoverishment and poor governance that define these failed states.

In expanding the options for precisely and contextually describing states, Call presents alternative descriptions such as: *collapsed states*, defined by the complete collapse of a national

state without functional state apparatus for several months;³⁰ *war-torn states*, characterised by protracted civil wars; *authoritarian states*, as illustrated by Castro's Cuba, Gaddafi's Libya, Kim Jong-il's North Korea and Babangida's and Abacha's Nigeria.³¹ There are also states with weak formal institutional capacity, otherwise known as *weak states*. These states are typified by crippled state institutions. Since 1999, Nigeria has fitted into this category perfectly, going by the corrosive impact of corruption, predatory political godfatherism and threats posed by religious and ethnically based militias like the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), the militants of the Niger-Delta and Boko Haram, which represents the Nigerian manifestation of radical Islamism.³²

Economy of affection, elections and extra-judicial killing: agentials of Nigeria's radical Islamism

Of the features that inform the contextual conceptualisation of Nigeria as a weak state, political godfatherism or prebendalism is identified in this article as one of the causes of Islamist terrorism in northern Nigeria. This is because members of the political class consider winning elections as a matter of life and death. Paul Collier presents certain undemocratic electoral practices typical of the politics in many third-world democracies since the third wave of democratisation.³³ In such situations, rather than relying on manifestoes and sound logic to win elections, politicians take to affective behaviours. This partly explains the current wave of violent Islamism led by Boko Haram as fallout from the failed economy of affection between the two of them. Hyden defines the economy of affection as personal investments in reciprocal relations with other individuals for the purpose of achieving goals that would not have been possible without entering into such relationships.³⁴ The desired goals that motivate such behaviours have scarce value – they may be physically and constitutionally available, but accessing them might warrant going into an affective relationship with others. This leads to an informal institution such as the economy of affection when a group of people voluntarily agree to do something together, guided by an unwritten code that guides their relationships with (un)specified punishment for breaching such codes.

People engage in such behaviours and create informal associations/institutions in order to: 'gain status; seek favour; share a benefit and provide a common good'.³⁵ Also, as a reciprocal relationship, parties do not usually enter into legal negotiations or agreements but there is contingent use of rewards and punishments in a transaction that is likely to be driven by any of the following: mutual rewards, mutual punishment and coercion.³⁶ In cases of mutual benefits, the outcomes are often positive irrespective of whether the power relation is symmetric or asymmetric. Mutually punishing and coercive transactions usually lead to conflicts, characterised by the potential flow of punishment from one party – for instance, the withholding of rewards. In the relationship between many northern politicians, just like their other counterparts around the country, their relationship with the Islamists started out as mutually rewarding when members of Boko Haram aided their electoral successes. However, it has now become mutually punishing because of the coercive behaviour demonstrated by the politicians in the implementation of the Sharia penal code, the failure to fulfil promises made during elections, and the extra-judicial killing of the sect's leader, which was allegedly ordered by the former Governor of Borno State, now a senator of the Federal Republic, Ali Modu Sheriff.³⁷

In illustrating the affective behaviour and reciprocal relationship between politicians and Boko Haram and other such radical groups, Muhammed Umar, quoted in Abiodun Alao, opines that

[t]he leaders of these groups are normally loyal to one or two powerful political figures that are rich. They are used as pawns in political power games. This group was well known to government officials since its formation in 2004. They are not secret societies and they preach openly in their mosques.³⁸

It is also a well-known fact that this affective behaviour informed the appointment of a member of the sect as a commissioner by the Borno state government, under the administration of former Governor Sheriff, before the relationship between the sect and the governor went sour when the governor decided to reduce patronage to the sect.

In an empirical dissection of the character of politicians and political culture in Africa since the end of the Cold War, Collier explains the main options usually adopted by politicians for winning elections in the continent; options that are also common in Nigeria.³⁹ The first option is the promise of turning over a new leaf by the non-performing regime; this particular option has not been used by most of the non-performing democracies in Africa. For example, the Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, was quoted as boasting that 'it is a forgone conclusion that I will sweep the November presidential polls that will be free, fair and transparent'.⁴⁰ This particular utterance typifies the character and intent of many of the contemporary occupiers of elective offices in contemporary Africa, which forecloses the likelihood that they will turn over a new leaf. The second option is to lie to the electors by manipulating the media. However, this works largely in climes where the state still maintains absolute control of the media, where little or no liberalisation of the ownership of media outlets existed. For instance, Wale Adebawwi illustrates the limited efficacy of trying to deceive the citizens or electorate in a narrative of the pivotal role of the media in Nigeria's quest for its Fourth Republic when, despite state censorship and proscription of anti-establishment media, a substantial percentage of the public still kept faith with the anti-hegemonic press in exposing the lies and antics of the militariat hegemony.⁴¹ Also, Omnia Mehanna alludes to the repository of opportunities for citizens and the opposition in particular to monitor elections, report events and mobilise opinion as part of the gathering storm in the build-up to the Egyptian revolution.⁴² Even when state censorship and proscription of the media subsist, Ebenezer Obadare observes that the media in Africa use humour as a means of exposing the lies told by governments.⁴³ All of these torpedo the efficacy of the *second option*.

The third option is to scapegoat the minority. Collier identifies this as one of the strategies that has been used repeatedly by the government of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who blames the minority and foreign governments for his under-performing state.⁴⁴ The fourth option is bribery; but the flaw in using this option is that people cannot always be trusted to honour agreements and deals. When using the bribery option, Collier observes that it can be wholesale when bloc votes are paid for or retail when individual voters are identified and paid.⁴⁵ The fifth option is intimidation, which can be physical, psychological and/or structural.⁴⁶ The sixth option is the restriction of the field by excluding the strongest candidates. An extreme example of this was when the late General Sani Abacha excluded all other candidates during his self-contrived transition programme. The seventh option is to

miscount the votes; this has also added expressions like *landslide* or *narrow* victories for most incumbents.

In the making of Boko Haram, described as *children of tribulation* by Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck, the fourth option has been used, with Islamism as the main consequence.⁴⁷ Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the political class has continually organised, funded and patronised violent youth groups through the purchase of retail and bulk votes for two reasons: to get them to register and vote as a group for a political party; and to use them as thugs to perpetuate electoral fraud and violence as circumstance might require. The resultant violent participation in the public space by youths across the country confirms the view of De Boeck and Honwana that 'young people often shape and express political aspirations in surprising ways'.⁴⁸

Out of all of these amoral practices, the second option (lying to the electorate) can be seen to have been at the heart of the pretensions to fully implement Sharia as a means of seeking legitimacy and maintaining control. This is characteristic of the political class in Nigeria, which latches onto the manipulation of either ethnic or religious identity in a bid to capture state power without considering the far-reaching consequences of their actions on the state and polity.⁴⁹ According to Remi Aiyede, in October 1999, when the then Executive Governor of Zamfara state, Sani Ahmed, decided to implement the Sharia code of law in his state, he was (un)wittingly setting the stage for another cycle of violence in the country.⁵⁰ While the declaration of the full implementation of Sharia law in Zamfara state attracted condemnation, although without any incidences of violence, the planned imposition of the same by the government of Kaduna state ignited a destructive conflict that claimed over 2 000 lives and destroyed property worth billions of naira, including mosques and churches, in a wave of violence that started on 21 February 2000.⁵¹ Despite widespread condemnation of the total disregard for the rights of the minorities in these states, there was no formal acceptance by any of these states to revert to the status quo ante. This made then President Olusegun Obasanjo declare that political Sharia would die a natural death. However, he failed to mention that there will be consequences for the political death of Sharia, which was rightly predicted by Akinjide Osuntokun, that

those who introduced the Sharia seem to have created a Frankenstein monster, which they may yet regret. This is because over time the Mallams may challenge elected governors in the North for political supremacy. This is because Sharia is Allah's way and should therefore be superior to man-made government. Since the governors are not religious leaders, they are in for a rough time in the nearest future.⁵²

Isaac Albert argues that these so called 'fundamentalists' were created by the abandoned Sharia project embarked upon by the northern governors.⁵³ According to Albert, 'thinking that the "Sharia governors" were truly interested in the practice of Sharia, the Islamists ... became frustrated when the Sharia project was abandoned after its political dividends had been reaped by the Governors'.⁵⁴

In response, the Islamists began to fracture, reinvent and even bypass the public space. In pursuit of the goal of Islam, members of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria have in particular fractured and reinvented the religious public space, as seen by the spate of bombings of churches on Sundays when the majority of Christians worship, which has caused widespread fear for many adherents of Christianity, especially in northern Nigeria. This is an indication of

the pursuit of the creation of an Islamic State based on the thinking of modern Islamists aimed at actualising their romanticised vision of the Islamic polity.⁵⁵ The adoption of Islamism mirrors the social imagination of these northern youths as they strive to shape society in their own way. Islamism provides a tool for this, going by the history of the region and the content of political Islam. Mohammed AyooB explains that adherents of political Islam are convinced that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be fashioned in the contemporary Muslim world.⁵⁶ Defining Islamism as a form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organisations that pursue political objectives, AyooB posits that it provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations of which rest on re-appropriated and reinvented concepts borrowed from Islamic tradition.⁵⁷

The Islamists consciously dehistoricise and decontextualise Islam. In dehistoricising Islam, they separate it from the various contexts, in terms of time and space, in which it flourished for over fourteen centuries through different types of religious inventions (Bid'ah). Islamists decontextualise Islam by ignoring the social, economic and political milieu within which Muslim societies operate. Through a combination of both, Islamists come up with a strong ideological tool to purge Muslim societies of impurities and accretions, which they consider to be the reasons for Muslims' declining power. By dehistoricising and decontextualising Islam, Islamists enter into diametrically opposing positions with the scholars of Islamic theology and jurisprudence.⁵⁸

In manifestation, Islamism is context-specific in terms of demands and modes of operation but generic in name. The particular manifestation of Islamism is determined by specific sovereign, territorial state, and political contexts. The similarities seen in their expressions and dictions are due to the fact that they generally derive inspiration from common sources and vocabulary. However, an in-depth scrutinisation of their actions and intent will reveal that they are involved in pursuing multiple national agendas rather than a unified global project.⁵⁹ Their focus is to Islamise existing states and not coalesce into any Islamist or Islamic universe. In operation, the mainstream Islamist organisations differ from the radical ones because they rely on changing their polities through constitutional means, even when the odds are starkly against them. This makes the mainstream Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jamaat-e-Islami reformists, and unlike the radical al-Qaeda and Boko Haram.

Alao explains radicalisation as a process defined by strict compliance with a belief system that permits the use of unconventional means to pursue and achieve change along the lines of what is considered an ideal past or envisioned future in society.⁶⁰ He further describes it as a 'process, not an event, as it is the dynamics formed by the complete interaction of multiple events, actors, relationships, beliefs and institutions'.⁶¹ However, it could apply at the level of individual, group or whole society and it is not limited to religion alone. In defining a radical group, Alao posits that

[a] radical group can be defined as a group that professes a belief system that readily rejects the status-quo and actively aspires to an ideal past or envisioned future and embedded in the paradox of past as future and change as a return to the past.⁶²

Its emergence in Nigeria can be located in three epochs. These are the Maitatsine rebellion in the Second Republic, followed by the externally driven, youth-dominated movement of the Nigerian Muslim Brother led by Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zackzaky. This period saw the

mushrooming and consolidation of many other radical Islamist sects, such as the Izalat al Bid'ah wa Iqamat al-Sunnah (Group for the Eradication of Innovation and Establishment of Tradition), which was founded by the late Sheikh Abubakar Gumi to contend with the Sufi brotherhood over allegations of apostasy and innovations, which they listed as including genuflection in greeting elders, the keeping of concubines by traditional rulers, celebration of the birthday of the Prophet, visiting tombs and graves of dead scholars, and the denial of women's rights to education.⁶³ Also, during this second epoch of radicalism there was the Ja'ammatu Tahidmul Islamia, founded by Abubakar Mujahid, who broke away from Zackzaky over doctrinal differences along the Shi'ite and Sunni lines. The third epoch of radicalism in Nigeria has seen organisations emerge in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

According to Alao, there was the formation of the Al-Sunna Wal Jammah (followers of the Prophet) in 2001, comprising educated men with the know-how to handle weapons.⁶⁴ Initially, they set up a camp in Kannama in Yobe state around 2002 and early 2003. They emphasised Islamic purity and disregarded local traditions, especially property rights around farming and fishing on the banks of River Yobe, which belonged to families claiming that *everything belongs to Allah*. In 2002, the Nigerian Taliban, who had once referred to themselves as Muhajirun (migrants), emerged and demanded the full implementation of Sharia in the twelve northern states of Nigeria. They attacked the police and other symbols of government. The membership of this group was made up of religious students. Its first rebellion in Yobe state was put down by the army. The main demand of this group was the full establishment of an Islamic state in accordance with an Islamist interpretation of Islam. In 2009, there emerged the Kalakato or Quraniyun. Members of the sect believe only in the Quran and reject other sources like the Hadith and Ijma ('Sayings of the Prophet' and 'Consensus of the Ulama'). The group also performed only two prostrations in prayers instead of four, as prescribed by the Quran; rejected eating fish unless slaughtered like a cow; and did not perform funeral rites the way other Muslims do.

In a separate account, Muhammed Isa presents a historical account of the emergence of Boko Haram:

Boko Haram is a transmutation of the *Muhajirun*, *Hijrah* and *Ahl al Sunnal Wal Jamma'ah* group once referred to as the Nigerian *Taleban*. It is the same movement that was dislodged from the Kanamma region of Yobe state in December 2003 and was then led by Aminu Tashen Ilimi, a university dropout. It is also the movement that reincarnated and reinvented itself as Boko Haram in Maiduguri, from where it established, directed and controlled cell networks with cell commanders in all the major cities of northern Nigeria (Maiduguri, Bauchi, Potiskum, Wudil, Kano, Zaria, Katsina, Jos, Jalingo, Danja, etc.) between January 2004 and July 2009. The Islamist Movement after its reinvention as Boko Haram was led by a new leader, Mohammed Yusuf.⁶⁵

The analysis of radical groups and their intentions above lead to an inference that Islamism in Nigeria has always been radical along four main lines. These are:

- Attempts by such sects to prevent *Jahiliya*;⁶⁶
- Domestic socio-economic issues;
- International issues, such as reactions against attacks carried out by US forces against Iraq and Afghanistan, and the position of the US in the Middle East crises and peace process;

- Reactions against the desecration of the Quran and the person of the Holy Prophet. For example, the cartoon published by a Danish newspaper and the comments of Isioma Daniel of the *ThisDay* newspaper were considered heretic against the person of the Holy Prophet and earned her a Fatwa (Islamic ruling), despite two front-page apologies by the newspaper. Similarly, there was an attack on the building housing the *ThisDay* newspaper and other national newspapers on 26 April 2012. In claiming responsibility for the attack, the Boko Haram sect referred to the alleged desecration of the name of the Prophet by Isioma Daniel.

The radical sects examined fit into the categorisation of Islamists by Mandaville, which we refer to as the gradualists and revolutionaries.⁶⁷ Tracing the rise of Islamism to the birth of nation states in the Muslim world, Mandaville defines Islamism as ‘forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions and legal system derive directly from the Sharia’ah’.⁶⁸ However, while all Islamists are united in the conviction that Islam is a holistic and comprehensive system with right prescriptions for all aspects of human endeavours, some adopt a gradual approach while some adopt revolutionary means. Some are also content with the Sharia’isation of selected areas of the law, while others prefer a fully Islamised system.⁶⁹ These two divisions are also manifest in the three epochs of Islamism in Nigeria. For example, the Boko Haram – like the Maitatsine – could be seen, based on their demands, to be pursuing a complete Sharia’isation of the entire space and laws of the core northern states by adopting a revolutionary approach.

Boko Haram is therefore comparable to the Maitatsine sect. This is illustrated by the way they have dehistoricised and decontextualised Islam, and by their aim of changing the way the affairs of the state are conducted by rebelling against existing sociopolitical and religious orders. Doctrinally, the Maitatsine (meaning the one who curses) sect, named after its leader Mohammed Marwa, rejected the Hadith and condemned reading any book apart from the Quran, calling such behaviour paganism.⁷⁰ Mohammed Marwa denounced the use of bicycles, radios and watches, and the possession of more than an absolutely necessary amount of money. In 1979, he declared himself an *Annabi* (prophet) in rejection of the prophethood of Prophet Mohammed. His followers, acting on his instructions, attacked what they narrowly described as corrupt religious practices by the established religious communities in Kano and also rejected the authority of the Kano state government. After a series of deaths caused by the sect, the army killed Mohamed Marwa in 1980, alongside 4 177 members of his sect.⁷¹ The Maitatsine flourished in the milieu of economic challenges typified by high prices, scarcity, retrenchment and rising unemployment, which Nigerians referred to as austerity. This provides a structural explanation of the recruitment of members made up of homeless, jobless young men, mostly drawn from the countryside. The sect also carried out the immolation of its victims and engaged in the sale of human parts.⁷²

The commonalities of the two sects are more social than doctrinal or ideological. For instance, Boko Haram is yet to renounce the prophethood of Prophet Mohammed. Beyond an implied condemnation of Western education, Boko Haram does not expressly condemn literacy. In terms of targets and victims, the two make no consistent distinction between members of the security agencies and civilians. Also, the two share the same opinion as other radical Islamist organisations because they believe in the use of violence (bombings and immolation of victims). They also reject constituted authorities outside their folds by attacking

state representatives and mainstream religious adherents of Islam and Christianity. For example, Boko Haram was implicated in the killing of Imam Jafar, a popular Islamic cleric in Kano state in 2009.⁷³ Furthermore, they share similarities in their location and period. The Maitatsine sprang up within the context of austerity in the Second Republic, just as Boko Haram operates in the Fourth Republic in the midst of extreme poverty occasioned by poor governance. Apart from the Maitatsine, there have been other radical Islamist sects in Nigeria, which serve to confirm that this is not a recent phenomenon.⁷⁴

Globally, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram could be described as having similar origins and focus because of the common economy of affection and exchange relations that exist between al-Qaeda and the US in fighting a proxy war against the defunct Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the politicians and Islamists in northern Nigeria for the sake of winning elections on the other. The two also aim for the creation of an Islamic state defined by Islamism. This reveals the fact that Islamism, or any form of religious terrorism, is not borne out of any form of psychotic disorder but is part of a conscious political design irrespective of the ethno-nationalistic colouration it presents. This is why it is explicable as a form of collective action comparable to insurgencies, social movements, dissidents or guerrillas.⁷⁵

In triggering the current rage from Boko Haram, the extra-judicial killing of the sect's leader in July 2009 by the Nigerian Police in Borno state falls within the agential parenthesis of causes. This is because prior to his public execution, the activities of the sect were limited to Borno and Yobe states in north-eastern Nigeria. The extra-judicial murder of Yusuf reflects the character of the Nigerian state and its interpretation of conflict and dissent, which have always informed its responses to such. Historically and characteristically, the pattern of response to Islamism in Nigeria has always relied on the use of force through the agency of the police and army in most instances, which is similar to the way critical segments of the media (which bears no physical arms) have also been treated under military and democratic dispensations.⁷⁶

Cognisant of the fact that radical Islamism is a form of terrorism, this observed trend typifies the responses of the Nigerian state to dissent and radical Islamism as *legitimist*. The legitimist perspective of the use of violence posits that only the state has the right to or monopoly over violence, while its use by any other agency is illegal and illegitimate. Therefore, the use of violence by any other group is considered a threat to the legitimacy and sovereignty of the state. Paradoxically, the use of military and legal means to deal with terrorism strengthens the power of the state but can simultaneously precipitate terrorism, which makes state terrorism vital for its existence, based on the orthodox perspective of terrorism.⁷⁷ The orthodox terrorism theory enables states to pursue a hidden agenda such as the demonisation of political opponents and criminalisation of dissents. A drawback of the orthodox interpretation of terrorism is that it avoids a root-cause approach in resolving the question of terrorism, opting to manage it in order to sustain tight political control and justify huge spending in the name of terrorism management.

In the case of Boko Haram, it can as well be posited that the group became more violent after the extra-judicial killing of its leader and many of its members. In one of its official statements, the group insisted that

ours is a clear fight for the blood of our founder Mohammed Yusuf and other leaders who were slain in cold blood by Alimodu Sherif former governor of Borno state, the former Borno State Commissioner of Police and the late President.⁷⁸

Albert describes the extra-judicial killing of Yusuf as state terrorism and argues that it must have been allowed by the Commissioner of Police for two plausible reasons: the assumption that killing a state enemy like Yusuf would earn him a commendation, which has been the practice in Nigeria; and the need to prevent Yusuf from revealing his relationship with members of the ruling class in the northern states and the roles which he and members of his sect played in the electoral successes of these politicians.⁷⁹ These instances speak to the orthodox-styled interpretation of dissent by the Nigerian state and its style of handling conflict.

Since the sect has become more violent, the government has adopted a twofold approach by intermittently suing for peace and launching attacks against the sect. However, typical of the orthodox interpretation of terrorism, the federal government of Nigeria has consistently maintained that sponsors and perpetrators will not go unpunished. This reflects the orthodox conviction that terrorists do not act independently, which informs the (il)legal and (il)legitimate rationalisation of the use of force by non-state actors that creates the abuse of the legitimist use of violence by security agencies that led to the death of Yusuf Mohammed. Alternatively, this article advocates that responding to radical Islamism should be informed by the moderate terrorism theory, which seeks to explain and understand the roots of terrorism in the context of socio-economic, structural and political variables.⁸⁰

Conclusion

In responding to the current wave of radical Islamism in Nigeria, this article considers it germane to have a lucid grasp of the agential and structural (dis)contents that informed its emergence. The article observes that the Nigerian state has so far adopted an orthodox approach toward Islamist terrorism, based on its rigid legitimist perception of the use of force that ignores the essentialist, psychological and political perspectives of Islamism.⁸¹ This has so far obscured a nuanced and holistic engagement of the Boko Haram threat.

Although the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf worsened the attacks from Boko Haram, it must not be forgotten that most Islamist sects are inherently violent and that Boko Haram started out as a radical Islamist sect, the activities of which escalated after the killing of its leader. Therefore, a combination of individual- and structural-level approaches based on a moderate theory of terrorism, specifically from the federal government, may bring about a more nuanced contextualisation of the sect as a foreword to the systematic resolution and transformation of the conflict between the two, as opposed to the extant orthodox approach which seems oblivious to the implausibility of over-reliance on militaristic responses to radical Islamism.

Notes

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