

THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA: THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest challenges facing the Nigerian state is known to be the issue of insurgency predominantly in the north eastern part of the country. Boko Haram, the terrorist organization responsible for unleashing terror and deploying extensive violence towards the citizens of Nigeria and even foreigners claim to be Muslims and are doing it for the cause of Allah. This paper argues that the insurgents are only manipulating the religion of Islam so as to trigger hostilities between the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. This study combined both the analytical and descriptive methodology in explaining the variables. This study identified that the manipulation of religion in Nigeria is as a result of poor policing on the part of the state to identify and dismantle such acts before it degenerates to a higher level and also Boko Haram uses religion being the opium of the people according to Karl Marx to control the minds, actions and behaviour of people by deploying the extensive use of violence and terror to achieve their selfish agenda. However this paper recommends that in order for radicals not to be able to penetrate and manipulate people, there is a need to enhance peace education in Nigeria's education curriculum so as to educate students on peace. Also women should be used as a tool of spreading peace because of their maternal attributes.

Keywords: Manipulation, Boko Haram, Nigeria, Islam, Christianity

Introduction

In discussions regarding peace and security in the world today terrorism lies at the forefront with countries battling various forms of terrorist groups and organizations. These groups operate at a global, regional or national scale depending on the location of their activities. In this article we concentrate mainly on the Boko Haram terrorist organization of Nigeria with the aim of providing possible solutions to the conflict. The Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria is one that currently rests at the fore in terms of violent conflicts in the country. Nigeria has endured years of attacks from the armed group which has engaged in guerrilla tactics thereby making them a faceless terrorist organization. While Nigeria suffers the biggest brunt of their attacks, the terrorist organization has taken a regional dimension with activities recorded in neighboring countries of which Chad, Niger and Cameroun. This regional dimension has forced the affected countries to form a joint military action to tackle the group.

The military cooperation amongst these affected States has played a significant role in arresting and reducing some of the imminent threats posed by the group however, this paper argues that it is not sufficient that the cooperation is only at the military level. It is the opinion of the authors that the cooperation needs to be extended to other areas of governance in order to successfully win the fight against Boko Haram. Areas that need to enjoy this kind of cooperation include social structures such as education. While members of this organization pose a threat to the security of members in the areas out of which they operate, we have to bear in mind that they still remain a part of the society and as such, solutions proffered will be geared towards reintegrating them in society.

Meaning of Terrorism

There is no unanimous agreement among scholars on the definition of terrorism. For the purpose of this article we will explore definitions from a number of authors in order to find features of terrorism that are unanimously accepted by scholars.

The term “terrorism” is usually synonymous with “violence”, however, in its broad sense it encompasses not only the use of violence. It includes the threat of violence used to create fear and panic (Proença and Aurélio, 2011). Terrorism according to Proença and Aurélio (2011) is any form of sub-state political violence against the state. This definition includes state terrorism, however, it has to be noted that not all forms of violence carried out by the state is terrorism. According to Walzer (2015), terrorism includes the deliberate killing of non-combatants with the purpose of forcing the hand of political leaders. He goes further to include that it is the systematic terrorizing of whole populations. Its purpose is to destroy the morale of a nation or a class, to undercut its solidarity; its method is the random murder of innocent people (Walzer, 2015).

Islam and Conflict

Considering the nature of the Boko Haram conflict it is important to discuss conflict from an Islamic perspective. Islam could be translated to mean submission, a total submission to God. A Muslim therefore is said to be liberated from submitting to any other form of authority be it in form of false deities, authoritarian regimes, money, passion of self or any other thing. To a Muslim therefore religion has two dimensions, that is, vertical and horizontal (Aruoa, 2011). The vertical relationship is between the individual and his or her Creator while the horizontal relationship is between the individual and other creatures. Religion to a Muslim affects all spheres of life including in conflict situations.

Islam sees conflict as a positive thing and it is stated in Qur’an 49:13 that “O you Mankind! We have created you of a male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you may know each other.” This verse states clearly that Allah created diversity in order for human beings to learn how to live with each other. This diversity which could be a source of many conflicts is due to the fact that people have not learnt to live together and as a result diversity is seen as a negative thing.

It could be argued that the reasoning behind the above verse is that Islam encourages conflict and conflict in turn drives development. We can imagine a hypothetical society where conflicts have ceased to exist, what will follow is stagnation.

Islam's Position on Terrorism

The holy Quran in so many verses has described the religion to be a religion of peace. The holy prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) was known to be a peaceful man throughout his life time and even at a point in time it was recorded that he actually lived among people who didn't believe in his faith but lived peacefully with them. However there are two categories of people who practice Islam. There are those who practice radical Islam and those who practice the religion of Islam. The former are the ones who input their own innovations into Islam in order to suit their needs while the later are the ones who practice Islam according to the Quran and Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (Peace be upon him). As Gawrych (2005) notes, the suicide attacks on the United States of America on the 11th of September 2001 further made the American government to appreciate the fact that there are some forms of people who were more extreme than the others. Terrorism above all is murder that is why Islam forbids the killing of even an unbeliever, let alone another Muslim. In so many verses of the Quran such as in (Qur'an 6:151) which says "and do not kill a soul that God has made sacrosanct, save lawfully." (i.e. murder is forbidden but the death penalty imposed by the state for a crime is permitted)" to further buttress the above point Quran 5:53 says, "... whoso kills a soul, unless it be for murder or for wreaking corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind; and he who saves a life, it shall be as if he had given life to all mankind."

Terrorism in Islam, has no hiding place thus the religion has categorically made it clear as to its stand in the unlawful killing of people and deploying the excessive use of violence to achieve religious goals. One unique thing about terrorists who hide under the guise of Islam is that they repeatedly say that they are doing what they are doing for the cause of Allah and when one examines the Quran further to see if there is any match one is left in the dark as to where they get their divine inspirations from. Islam does not insist on the imposition of the religion on others through the use of force or even violence which is the opposite of what the Boko Haram terrorists are doing. If the motive for terrorism is religious, it is impermissible in Islamic law. It is forbidden to attempt to impose Islam on other people. The Qur'an says, "There is no compulsion in religion. The right way has become distinct from error." (-The Cow, 2:256). Note that this verse was revealed in Medina in 622 AD or after and was never abrogated by any other verse of the Quran. Islam's holy book forbids coercing people into

adopting any religion. They have to willingly choose it. In so many documents that were posted by Boko Haram, they insisted that all Nigerian must convert to Islam or face death. In examining further, if they claim they are using the Quran as a source of guidance, the above verse proves otherwise to their claims.

In Nigeria today, predominantly the Christians accuse Muslims of attempting to wipe out the Christians of Northern Nigeria mainly in the North Eastern parts of the country alleging the casualties of Boko Haram Attacks are Christians. From both dominant faiths in Nigeria, all have suffered massive casualties such as the recent attack on worshipers in Kano during Friday prayers when members of the Boko Haram group attacked Muslims as they prayed. It was reported that, up to three bombs went off at different places killing dozens of people (Vanguard News, 2014). On the other hand, the Christians have also suffered casualties with scores of worshipers killed such as the attack on a village in Bornu state north east Nigeria (BBC News, 2014). From the above, it is clear and evident that this criminal organization does not discriminate in the unlawful killing of people regardless of one's religious background.

Manipulation of Islam by Boko Haram

Before we begin to discuss on this critical and delicate part of the study, it is important to define what is understood by the word Boko Haram. According to Walke (2012), Boko Haram originally known as *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad* is an Islamic sect that has caused havoc all over the northern parts of Nigeria including Abuja. Phillips (2015) sees Boko Haram as an Islamic group that has been active in Nigeria since 2009. He further states that the name of the group literally means western or non-Islamic education is a sin. The urban dictionary, defines Boko Haram as an Islamic sect that projects that western education contradicts Sharia law and kills anyone who objects it. Having gotten a few definitions from different sources, it is clear that all of the above have one unique attribute regarding Boko Haram as an Islamic sect or an Islamic organization.

However, based on the actions, teachings and even the methodology deployed by Boko Haram, it contradicts the teachings and ideology of Islam based on what was recorded in the Quran and Hadith therefore the above definitions are faulty since they contradict the teachings

of Islam. In our own perspective, Boko Haram is a criminal organization which manipulates the religion of Islam to create fear and unleash excessive violence to achieve their criminal objectives. Furthermore Boko Haram members are not Muslims but criminals who hide under the religion of Islam to unleash terror, mayhem and havoc on both practicing Muslims and Christians in order to give Islam a terrible name. Walker (2012) corroborates this in his study, where he highlighted how the group began to rob banks carting away a very high amount of money getting to the tune of up to 2 million pounds in 2012. This group also targeted various successful businesses in Borno state and Bauchi. Looking at its original agenda as recorded, which posits that western education is unlawful and they aim at Islamizing the Nigerian state why has the group resorted to robbing of banks etc.

Late Dr. Yusuf Bala Usman, in His Book *“The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria 1977-1987”* defines manipulation as “essentially controlling the action of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all” (Usman, 1987). By this scholarly definition Usman is of the view that people can be indoctrinated and manipulated in order to achieve a particular target or objective. Boko Haram projects to the people that western education is evil and has brought about hardship in the society therefore there is a need to restructure the society in line with Islamic ideology using the anarchist style of revolution. By carefully analyzing the videos and documents posted by this criminal group, we were able to identify that they only read out their agenda but they never recite the Kalamatu Shahada (Muslim testimony of faith) or make reference to what Allah has said regarding the killing of innocent people to support their agenda of Islamizing the Nigerian state.

The manipulation of religion in Nigeria, is deep rooted in the poor living socio-economic conditions of Nigerians that is rapidly deteriorating and only a microscopic few of the upper class enjoy the high standards of living while the lower class continue to drown in abject poverty and psychological depression (Usman, 1987). This is done under the disguise of religion to bring divide among the people of Nigeria. An example of such manipulation is explained by Almatu (2012) where he explained how the organizations recruits its members who are mostly the poor then brain washes them and offers them huge amounts of

money ranging from 200,000-100,000,000 Naira to either become foot soldiers or suicide bombers.

Types of Boko Haram

Due to divergent operations of this criminal organization, we were able to identify three categories of Boko Haram. Akinfala (2014) concurs that there are three variants of Boko Haram. There are the criminal ones who specializes in bank robbery and extortion, the religious one originally founded by Mohammed Yusuf and the political one which attacks other members of political parties (Tukur, 2013). However there have been so many documented reports, of Christians either caught with bombs, attempting to bomb a church or are also members of Boko Haram. In an interview on the 18th of December 2014 between Vanguard news and Prophetess Nonnie who is the president of Nigerian Women in Clergy, she concurred that there are also Christians who are recruited by the Boko Haram organization to carry out their evil intentions. In her words she highlighted that “.... Even Christians are being recruited by Boko Haram because they have nothing to do. If they are given money, they are ready to go...” (Vanguard News, 2014). What this means is that, what is being projected by the media and other people all over the world is that Boko Haram members are exclusively Muslims and no other person of opposite religion can belong to this group. Similarly on the 21st of June 2012, Aminu Sarki of Muslims Against Terror Group came out with a strong statement alleging that many of so called Boko Haram bombings or attempted bombings were being carried out by Christians (News Rescue, 2012). Aminu also stated that, this group is a fusion of both Muslims and Christians who have similar ideas to use terror as a tool to achieve their aims and objectives (News Rescue, 2012). Again Tilde and Tukur (2012) shear the same views with the former, where they identified that nine men who are Christians were arrested on the morning of February 26th 2012 while attempting to bomb a CONCIN church at Miya Barkate, 20 kilometers along Jos-Bauchi High way in Bauchi (Sahara Reporters, 2012). The nine suspects are members of the same church, and as at the time of filing the report a bomb went off at the headquarters of the same Church killing scores of people. However, it is not certain if the former and the later are related (Sahara Reporters, 2012). However, Nonie, Aminu, Tilde and Tukur all agree that Christians are deeply involved in this nefarious and dastardly act

of terrorism. There is no doubt to the fact that this criminal organization Boko Haram has members who are not Muslims who carry out attacks on innocent people. To buttress the above points, below is the time line of how some Christians were either caught attempting to bomb a place or caught with explosive devices.

Year	Month	Nature of Attack	Location
2011	August	Police arrest Lydia Joseph while attempting to burn down church	Bauchi
2012	January	Police arrest Emmanuel King while attempting to bomb RCCG church	Bayelsa
2012	February	Nine Members of CONCIN church attempting to bomb their church	Bauchi
2012	February	Four Christians caught attempting to bomb St Therese's Catholic church Makurdi	Benue

Source: Vanguard Nigeria, Sahara Reporters, Leadership News, Premium Times

The Four (R) Recovery Strategy Deployed by Boko Haram

Whenever this criminal organization strikes, the casualty figures excluding the innocent civilians is either on the side of Boko Haram or on the side of security forces or sometimes both like was seen at Kodunga, where security forces killed over 200 Boko Haram members(Daily Post, 2014). However we identified that this organization uses a military style tactic to **Re- group, Recruit, Re-kit and Re-arm**. By Re-grouping, they reassemble in an undisclosed area only known to them and when they recruit they replace those who are killed in combat with fresh recruits. When they re-kit, they replace their damaged or lost gear with the exact replica used by the Nigerian forces and finally when they re-arm they replace lost weaponry, attack military formations and cart away arms and munitions and military vehicles like was seen when they attacked Baga town and cleared the armoury at Baga barracks (Daily Trust, 2015).

Recommendations

In finding solutions to any conflict it is important to first understand the conflict. Based on this fact, we have provided an extensive background on the Boko Haram group. The next step now is in understanding the nature of the goals and positions of the group. We are of the opinion that the Boko Haram conflict falls within Category B of this analysis, that is, positions in contradiction appear to be religious in nature however, and goals in contradiction appear political in nature.

It is important that proposed solutions appear reasonably acceptable to all parties involved therefore we have based our recommendations on solutions that are found within Islamic peace building values. Our proposed recommendations need to be implemented by two key players in this conflict: the Nigerian government and religious leaders.

We have 3 broad categories of recommendations and they are: a promotion of peace building values found within Islamic traditions, education with emphasis on peace education, promoting the role of women in peace building.

1. Promotion of Peace building Values Found within Islamic Traditions.

Some of the practices found within Islam that could be used in promoting peace include social justice practices such as Zakkah (almsgiving), Sadaqah (charity) and Waqf (Islamic institutions to assist the poor and needy persons). These practices are geared towards the elimination of structural violence that leads to poverty which is pillar that holds most conflicts in place. When promoted and practiced as prescribed by Islam, they could lead to a breach of the gap between the rich and the poor and a significant reduction of poverty. Q 5:8 states as follows: “O you who believe, stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to justice and let not the enmity of others make you swerve from the path of justice. Be just: that is next to righteousness, and fear God. Indeed, God is well acquainted with all that you do.”

Islam also preaches the universality and equality of human beings. In Q 7:11 it is stated that “It is we who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down; not so Iblis; he refused to be of those who bow down.” This verse states that all human beings were created by God and therefore are equal and no human is superior to another. The verse also preaches humility.

Another value that needs to be promoted is the sacredness of human life. According to Q5:32 “And if anyone saves a life, it is as if he saved the life of the whole people” Q 6:15 goes further to state that “And do not take a life which Allah has forbidden save in the course of justice. This He enjoins on you so that you may understand” The verses speak both of the importance of saving a human life and the importance of not taking one unlawfully. Islam is not a pacifist religion, it recognized the use of violence in certain situations such as in the punishment of a crime committed such as murder. However, until it is declared by authority such a judge it is unlawful to take the life of another.

Another value is the importance of tolerance and kindness. Q16:90 states that “God commands you to treat (everyone) justly, generously and with kindness”

Finally, Islam also preaches the virtue of forgiveness. In Q23:96 it is stated that “repel evil (not with evil) but with something that is better (ahsan) that is, with forgiveness and with amnesty”

2. Education with Particular Emphasis on Peace Education.

There is a need to enhance peace education in Nigeria’s education curriculum so as to educate students on peace. Peace education consists of a variety of approaches, interventions, and initiatives used by individuals and scholars in their effort to effect positive change (Shapiro, 2010); the various approaches to peace education are multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and “trans disciplinary” (Alger, 2007:299). Since it usually develops in an effort to address a form of violence found in a society, it has been called different names depending on the problem it seeks to address: some of which include, “A-Bomb education” in Japan, “development education” in South America, “education for mutual understanding” in Ireland, and ‘reunification education” in South Korea (Harris 2004:7).

Peace education is “the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth, and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level” (Fountain, 1999:1).

Since education is a system through which culture is transmitted (Reardon, 2001); peace education is a system through which the culture of peace is transmitted. According to the UNESCO, the culture of peace is “a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour, and ways of life that reject violence and aim to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes through dialogue and negotiation between individuals, groups and nations.” (2008, p.3) Here, particular situation peace education could be incorporated into the pedagogy of both mainstream and Almajiri education.

3. The Role of Women in Peace building.

The role of women in peace building cannot be overemphasized. Women have been seen to play key roles in the promotion of peace in their communities. Also women should be used as a tool of spreading peace because of their maternal attributes.

Conclusion

Based on our analysis of Boko Haram, we have reached the conclusion that Boko Haram as an organization categorically is not of Islamic background but only uses Islam as a tool for recruiting members and promoting their ideologies. It is clear that its members are not entirely Muslims but comprises of people from different religious backgrounds and orientations. Terrorism as a dastardly act is generally not accepted by any society, and any persons or groups who perpetrates such act is a hater of mankind. Boko Haram does not discriminate in unleashing their terror on innocent people. However, members of both the Muslims and Christian faith need to be vigilant as to what happens in their society and places of worship so as to prevent any acts of manipulation and a repetition of such attacks. Also people need to be their own police and report any persons or groups who are using religion to form a kind of force with the aim of causing a sort of rebellion against the state or people as a whole.

It is also important that emphasis is laid on the three responsibilities according to which a Muslim is judged that is: 1. Responsibility to Allah (fulfilled through the performance of religious duties such as prayer); 2. Responsibility to self (fulfilled through living in harmony with oneself such as the avoidance of harmful substances like cigarette); 3. Responsibility to live in peace and harmony with other human beings. It is important that people are constantly reminded of the third responsibility.

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