Boko Haram: An enquiry into the socio-political context of Nigeria's counter-terrorism response

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1 INTRODUCTION

In more ways than one, Boko Haram ramifies the national security threats that confront Nigeria. Since its resurgence in 2009, the sect has waged a war of terror on Nigeria, exploiting ethno-religious differences in the country to advance its brand of religion. The sect's capacity to threaten peace, security and political stability has been felt by some countries that share borders with Nigeria, and the human

fatalities that have resulted from its violent activities are disturbingly high.[1] A recent report by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court claimed the sect's egregious "large-scale attacks" provide a reasonable basis for believing that it has committed crimes against humanity.[2] Such fatalities are not new in Nigeria. Indeed, Boko Haram merely perpetuates a long narrative of violent clashes over ethnic, regional and religious differences in Nigeria. In the early 1980s, a Muslim sect called the Yan Tatsine instigated a wave of violence that claimed several hundred lives in several states in Northern Nigeria. Like Boko Haram, Yan Tatsine was vehemently opposed to Western civilization.[3] Both sects drew large followings that had one thing in common – an obsession with rigid creed.

How such movements easily garner a strong following of youths has been a subject of interest. More pertinent to the object of this article however, is the ability of such movements to threaten national security and political stability. A study on youth activism in Nigeria blamed youth involvement in violence on the persistent failure of the nation's political leadership to redress "the bleak future" confronting "the Nigerian youth in the context of deepening national economic crisis".[4] The view may well explain why violent youth groups like the Odua People's Congress, the Arewa People's Congress, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, and a host of others, emerged across Nigeria. The study also suggests that the emergence of the groups points to their centrality in the dynamics of politics in Nigeria, and to their capacity – in particular - to influence those dynamics.[5] Youth activism and violence are often vehicles though which young people respond to events or processes that reinforce feelings or experiences of disconnection from the mainstream of the socio-political and economic life of a country.

That, however is hardly the sole reason. A disturbing trend, which the study did well to identify, is that the groups are typically defined by identity. Their identities, and if one may add, their character and aims, often include "ethno-regional and religious dimensions",[6] or gratify interests that are so defined. Their activism injects them into the very heart of Nigeria's socio-economic and political dynamics, which unfortunately are defined by the country's geo-political and ethno-religious configurations. Hence, it is not surprising to find identity based youth groups who become important integers in the political calculus of winning elections in Nigeria. Through their activism, they insert

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[1] More than 3,000 persons have been killed in clashes between Boko Haram and state security forces. More than 1,600 fatalities are attributed to the sect and several hundreds to security forces. See Human Rights Watch "World Report 2013: Nigeria" (2013). For a chronology of Boko Haram's attacks, see UK Border Agency "Nigeria: Country of Origin Information (COI) Report (2012) at 8-11, 23-26; IRIN Africa, "Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence," (2012).

[2] Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Court "Situation in Nigeria: Article 53 Report" (2013) para 89; see also paras 1, 4 and 83.

[3] The Yan Tatsine group was started by Mohammadu Marwa, and the riots were called the Maitatsine riots. For an explanation about the sect, see Lubeck PM "Islamic protest under semi-industrial capitalism: Yan Tatsine explained" *Journal of the International African Institute* (1985) 369.

[4] Sherrod LR (ed) *Youth activism: An international encyclopaedia* (2006) at 447.

[5] Sherrod (2006) at 442-3.

[6] Sherrod (2006) at 445.

themselves in Nigeria's murky political process, further defining and becoming defined by it, while also imbedding its divisive elements. Often, their pandering to regional or sectarian interests comes with grim consequences.

It is within this divisive context that Boko Haram emerged. Its emergence occurred at a time of serious socio-political ferment and economic decline in the country. As with the Yan Tatsine sect before it, Boko Haram drew a large following among poor unemployed youths in Northern Nigeria, and soon led them into violent confrontations with the state. Its success with recruiting unemployed youths has informed claims that economic deprivations lie at the root of the Boko Haram crisis. This article probes beyond such claims to interrogate the ideology of violent change that its leaders propagated, and the socio-political ferment that has enhanced the sect's appeal. It does so with the aim of analysing the efficacy of political responses to the threat constituted by the sect. The article contends that understanding Boko Haram requires probing deep into sensitive political issues in Nigeria. It contends that the violence, or the socio-political grievances that underpinned it, need not have degenerated to such ominous proportions, had the nation's political leadership been decisive enough to head off the crisis while it budded. The paper argues that Boko Haram raises questions that are intrinsically political, and that resolving the root causes of the crisis demands pragmatic political choices, more than the indiscreet military strategy that underwrote early responses to the sect, and still continues to define ongoing military confrontations with the sect.

A caveat or two may be necessary. Since its emergence, Boko Haram has undergone several transformations. It is now beyond dispute that Boko Haram is a terrorist threat to national security, but it clearly has not remained so. Intelligence reports have linked the sect with terrorists groups outside Nigeria, in relationships that may have technically benefitted the sect in some significant respect. Soon after the reports, Boko Haram's attacks grew in sophistication and daring. There have also been reports of the involvement of foreign Islamists in the sect, and of at least one deadlier splinter group that has emerged from it. Not so long ago, the sect made its displeasure with Nigeria's intervention in the Mali Islamist insurgency known, when it launched attacks on a Nigerian military detachment as it made its way to fight insurgents in Mali. These developments suggest that there are multi-dimensional and complicated phases to Boko Haram's metamorphosis. There are also different views about the motivations of the sect, which either place the sect as an ideological movement, or as a reaction to economic underdevelopment in Northern Nigeria.

This article acknowledges that there are inherent difficulties in the differences between these views, especially in relation to how these may have influenced Nigeria's counterterrorism response. As much as the sect's extraterritorial connections with terrorist groups or its probable involvement in the Malian insurgency are difficult to ignore, this article focuses more on the sect's beginnings, and its metamorphosis into the significant domestic threat to national security that it is today. This focus is dictated by practical considerations. The conditions that have favoured Boko Haram's emergence still persist in Nigeria. Unless they are effectively redressed, they retain the potential of instigating other national security problems similar to Boko Haram. This

paper intends to focus on these conditions, and the implications of failing to address them.

2 THE SOCIO--POLITICAL CONTEXT OF BOKO HARAM's EMERGENCE

Before embarking on this study, it is important to point out that Boko Haram and all it stands for, is, for the larger Muslim community in Nigeria and in Northern Nigeria particularly, atypical. Although some of the sect's ideological sentiments are present in the ethno-religious tendencies that typify political conflicts in Nigeria, Boko Haram represents a very extreme dimension of the substance and methods of these ideologies. Although the group gained popularity on account of its social message, which resonated loudly with the poor, its solutions have not been embraced generally by of Muslims in the north, and this cuts across social strata within that community.[7] Appositely, Boko Haram is "unorthodox",[8] and it is conceivable that a majority of Muslims in Northern Nigeria do not endorse the sect's extremism and violence. Though Christians have mostly been the sect's targets, Muslims who have been vocally critical of the sect have been targets also. In recent times, the sect has been indiscriminate in its attacks, targeting Christians and Muslims. Of course, security personnel are always within its shooting sights, as these represent an institutionalised ideology it so vehemently opposes.

Boko Haram is the Hausa equivalent for the Muslim sect called *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*, which, in English, means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad." "Boko" is the word for "Western education" while "Haram" stands for "sin". The equivalent therefore means "Western education is sin", and is shorthand for the sect's religious ideology, which is opposed to Western civilization and its institutions. Boko Haram was first noticed between 2002 and 2003, when Mohammed Yusuf led a band of followers into starting reclusive faith communities in Northeast Nigeria.[9] Soon after, violent confrontations with the law led the sect to brand the Nigerian state an "enemy of Islam".[10] Repeated confrontations between 2003 and 2005 drove the sect underground, but it re-emerged in 2009, more popular and more violent than before. That year, Mohammed Yusuf and several hundred adherents were killed during violent confrontations with security forces. The brutal and extrajudicial circumstances of those killings set the sect on a precipitous descent into intemperate violence. Boko Haram embarked on a spree of vengeful attacks, targeting security forces, public infrastructure and other civilian targets.[11]

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[7] On this point, see Umara I & Mohammed G 'Strategic implications of Boko Haram insurgencies in Borno state politics' in Ajala AS (ed) *Nationalism and politics in post-colonial Nigeria* (2012) 355 at 365.

[8] Unknown Author "The popular discourses of Salafi radicalism and Salafi counter-radicalism in Nigeria: a case study of Boko Haram" (2012) 42(2) *Journal of Religion in Africa* at 120.

[9] See Cook D "Boko Haram: A prognosis" (2011) at 9. Pham PJ "Boko Haram's evolving threat" (2012) *African Security Brief No* 20 at 2-5; Marchal R "Boko Haram and the resilience of militant Islam in Northern Nigeria" *Noref Report* (2012) at 3.

[10]Blair D "Does Nigeria's Taliban have the West in its sights?" *The Telegraph* (2011).

[11]Cook (2011) at 9-12; Unknown Author (2012) at 130-131.

Nigeria responded by rolling out the full weight of its security apparatus. The ensuing conflict resulted in serious human rights violations, perpetrated by both sides.[12]

Boko Haram's emergence was at a period of serious political ferment in Nigeria, and it threatened how the pendulum had hitherto been set in the nation's precarious political balance. As the discussion below hopes to illustrate, Boko Haram manipulates one of the very critical elements in that balance, namely religion, or to be more precise, Islam. To understand Boko Haram therefore, one has to understand the role that Islam has played in Nigeria's political history and life. And as Paden aptly pointed out, the "the key to understanding Islam in Nigeria is to recognize the central place of the Sokoto Caliphate" in the political dynamics of the country.[13] This section is devoted to exploring that "central place" and dynamic, and how these mingle with religion.

2.1 Situating Boko Haram within the challenges of Nigeria's geo-political configuration

Ethnicity, regionalism and religion are immanent fissures in Nigeria's geo-political constitution. The reasons have been attributed to Britain's colonial policy in Nigeria, which gave Nigeria's three main ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba primacy over other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, while also favouring the Hausa-Fulani over the two other main groups.[14] However, the origins of the fissures, or the factors that enhanced Britain's divisive colonial policy, predated the colonial expedition into Africa, or indeed into Nigeria. According to Ejiogu, colonial policies in Africa were influenced by pre-existing "socio-cultural and political heterogeneities" among the ethnic nationalities that inhabited the territories that were colonised. These heterogeneities comprised the "geographical distribution of the nationalities, the internal constitution of their societies, their respective histories, the nature and character of their socio-economic development" and their political institutions, amongst others.[15] These differences were obvious to Britain from the outset, and the colonial policies it shaped were in fact Britain's response to the challenges that the peculiarities of each ethnic nationality presented to the colonial enterprise. The peculiarities shaped colonial policy in Nigeria, but they were also beneficial to colonial interests. Unfortunately also, they created the template that would continue to sour relations between ethnic identities in Nigeria.

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[12] Human Rights Watch (2013); see also Amnesty International *The state of the world's human rights* (2012) at 257.

[13] Paden JN, *Faith and politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a pivotal State in the Muslim World* (2008) at 27.

[14] Malachy CE "Ethnic Identity, party politics and the Nigerian Project, 1960-2010: An appraisal" in Ajala AS (ed) *Nationalism and politics in post-colonial Nigeria* (2012) 13 at 22.

[15] Ejiogu EC *The roots of political instability in Nigeria: Political evolution and development in the Niger Basin* (2011) at 22. See also 1-3.

How colonial exploitations of these heterogeneities came to define Nigeria's political system, or offer probable explanations for Boko Haram's emergence, is relevant to this study. However, the analysis must start with how the Sokoto Caliphate may have prefigured the nation state in Boko Haram's imagination.

The Caliphate was founded in the early 19th century by Othman Dan Fodio, a Fulani Muslim scholar, reformer, jihadist and statesman, who also became the first Caliph. An ascetic living in Gobir, now in Northern Nigeria, Dan Fodio was stirred into preaching religious reformation by the corruption, greed, exploitative tendencies, extortive tax systems, and syncretism that he observed among Hausa Muslim rulers. Eventually, he waged a jihad that resulted in the establishment of the Caliphate, over which he established an autocracy that conduced to the pietistic reforms he envisioned.[16] Those who joined him in the jihad were a mix of wealthy "nomadic Fulani and disgruntled Hausa peasantry, who had all suffered under the despotism and corruption of Hausa kings."[17] It may understate the issue to suggest that Dan Fodio was motivated by mere grab for power. According to Smith, the establishment of an Islamic state was preceded by "an important intellectual movement, involving in the minds of its leaders a conception of an ideal society and a philosophy of revolution".[18]

Dan Fodio's philosophy of revolution necessarily involved a political dimension to his religious objectives. At any rate, his reformation could not have been possible without aiming for control of the political state, an aim his followers may have eagerly embraced for less pietistic reasons. He did get the state, and went on to consolidate political hegemony[19] over 1,500 miles of territory across Northern Nigeria and part of West Africa, pulling Hausa states together[20] under a Caliphate that earned a reputation for applying sharia "more widely, and in some respects more rigidly ... than anywhere else outside Saudi Arabia".[21] As Britain sought to extend its colonial influence to Northern Nigeria in the late nineteenth century, they found in the Caliphate, a powerful Islamic civilization with well-organized political institutions to boot. A series of military confrontations ensued, which eventually resulted in the conquest of the Caliphate in 1903. Thus, Britain took effective control of Northern Nigeria, and administered it as a protectorate.

2.2 Colonial policy and its impact on political Stability in Nigeria

Between 1900 and 1914, Nigeria was administered as two protectorates, the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern

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[16]See Batran A "The nineteenth-century Islamic revolutions in West Africa," in Ade-Ajayi JF (ed) *General history of Africa Vol VI: Africa in the nineteenth century until the 1880s* (1998) 218-224. See also Martin BG "Muslim brotherhoods in 19th century Africa" (1976) at 218-230.

[17]International Crisis Group "Northern Nigeria: Background to conflict" (2010) *Africa Report No.168-20* at 3.

[18] The words of Abdullahi Smith, as quoted by Martin (1976) at 13.

[19] Martin (1976) at 13-24.

[20] Adler PJ & Pouwels RL *World civilizations Volume II: Since 1500* (2012) at 360-1.

[21] Quotation taken from Ostien P & Fwatshak S *Sharia implementation in Northern Nigeria, 1999 – 2006: A sourcebook* Vol I (2007) at 3.

Nigeria.[22] They were merged in 1914, to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.[23] Constitutional reforms in 1947 reconstituted Nigeria into three self-governing units or regions, namely, the Northern, Eastern, and Western Regions. Each region was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo, respectively. Although the 1947 reforms were intended to make the regions become self-governing within what would later become a "federated state", they also had the effect of encouraging or ramifying ethno-regional political identities.[24]

The Northern and Southern Protectorates also featured religious differences that became important identity markers. Due to an active Christian missionary presence in the south, ethnic nationalities in the area became predominantly Christian, and embraced Western education and civilization.[25] The Muslim communities of Northern Nigeria were different. They were firm in their opposition to the Christian missionary enterprise, because they regarded it as advancing a religion and civilization that was disagreeable to Islam and its culture. To secure their co-operation with colonial intentions therefore, British colonial officers agreed to not allow Christian missionary activities in those communities.

These differences became intensified as a result of Britain's colonial policies, which combined indirect rule on one hand, and divide and rule on the other. Indirect rule was a policy of minimal interference in native governance; it allowed indigenous institutions to continue administering native affairs, under the supervision of colonial officers. Although by now subjugated by British conquest, the colonial officers saw administrative sense in allowing the political institutions of the Caliphate to continue to regulate native affairs. The decision, Ejiogu claims, was the integral element in Britain's "state building" policy in Nigeria. It deeply favoured forging closer alliances with the Hausa-Fulani elite of the defunct Sokoto Caliphate.[26] In the south, however, a more direct involvement in the administration of the Protectorate was adopted, resulting in further decimation of traditional political institutions in Southern Nigeria. It was a decimation that went beyond what equivalent institutions in the North experienced. With the amalgamation in 1914, "authority patterns" that colonial administration established in Northern Nigeria were introduced in the rest of Nigeria. It was a step that would eventually favour the North's dominance of national politics.[27]

The creation of self-governing units in 1947 indeed encouraged regional bias in politics, and imbedded differentiation on the basis of religious identities. According to Okehie-Offoha and Sadiku, colonial policy made religious identity and ethno-regional

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[22] In 1905 the Colony of Lagos was added to the Southern Protectorate, which was accordingly renamed the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

[23] Ejiogwu (2011) at 123 and 139-143.

[24] Falola F & Heaton MM *A history of Nigeria* (2008) at 148-149; Okehie-Offoha MU "Introduction" in Okehie-Offoha MU & Sadiku MNO (eds) *Ethnic & cultural diversity in Nigeria* (1996) at 1-7.

[25] Thus, the south embraced a 'monotheistic religion' that came to define its culture, and "rival" other monotheistic religions, such as Islam in Northern Nigeria. See International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing dialogue(s) for nation-building* (2000) at 72.

[26] See Ejiogu (2011) at 123-128, 139-146.

[27] Ejiogu (2011) at 123.

divisions in Nigeria to correspond.[28] Ejiogu affirms this view, saying that regionalisation made Nigerian nationalities effectively "regional", or made "regions (or homelands) synonymous with socio-cultural demarcations".[29] These correlations between ethnic and regional identities fitted into the other strategy of colonial rule, that is the divide and rule policy, which exploited heterogeneous patterns in order to entrench colonial control. The policy favoured what some described as a compliant north (i.e. the Hausa-Fulani) over the southern nationalities that exhibited an independent streak and championed the quest for political independence, a goal that colonial administrators wanted to impede as much as possible. Invariably, the policy stultified the emergence of political movements that imbibed nationalistic values that transcended ethnicity and regionalism.[30]

As it would turn out, the infusion of a religious dimension to the ethno-regional correlations in colonial policy produced a "pact" that was potentially "explosive".[31] It politicized differences became further entrenched as Nigeria's quest for political independence gathered pace. Three "ethno-religious and socio-cultural associations" emerged out of each of Nigeria's three regions, and these formed the nucleus of the three regional political parties that emerged – with membership that was largely based on ethnicity - to contend for political dominance as prospects of national independence increased.[32] In Northern Nigeria, the Jamiyya Mutanen Arewa formed the nucleus of the region's political party, the Northern People's Congress (NPC). In Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo Union metamorphosed into the National Council of Nigeria and the Southern Cameroons (NCNC), while the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the socio-cultural association of the Western Region, became the Action Congress (AC). [33]

Like the socio-cultural groups that birthed them, each political party became a champion of regional interests.[34] Their regional outlook echoed the conflicting political philosophy espoused by the leaders of the political parties in the quest for national independence. According to Sklar, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria between 1954 and 1966, preferred a "multi-national" Nigeria in which the NPC, as the "comprehensively dominant [political party] in Northern Nigeria", also controlled the national government. Since the region accounted for 55% of Nigeria's population at independence, it was obvious that Ahmadu Bello's political calculus translated to dominance in national politics and government. His position contrasted with the

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[28] Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku (1996) at 5; the authors argue that religion has continued to "undermine national integration" in Nigeria.

[29] Ejiogu (2011) at 31.

[30] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2000) at 92.

[31] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2000) at 74. For a concise analysis of how religion influences Nigerian politics, see Onapajo H "Politics for God: Religion, politics and conflict in democratic Nigeria" (2012) at 42.

[32] Falola & Heaton (2008) 137. See Malachy (2012) at 22.

[33] Sklar RL *Nigerian political parties: Power in an emergent African nation* (2004) at 93. According to Sklar, one of the party's stated political objectives was "[t]o ensure that the north would be led by moderate northerners rather than radical southerners, who were feared by the traditional and educated elites of the north as a potentially oppressive alien power".

[34] Sklar (2004) at 101-102. Sklar remarks that the Action Group was announced as the Western Regional Political Party.

"ethno-linguistic autonomy" proposed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Western Nigeria's Premier from 1954 to 1959. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Premier of Eastern Nigeria between 1954 and 1959 was opposed to such ethno-centricity, preferring instead a "centralized 'commonwealth of Nigeria' consisting of eight geographical 'protectorates'".[35] The rivalry between these contrasting positions deepened over differences regarding how regional demographics should affect revenue allocation, how self-governance in the regions and representation in the national government should be attained, and when Nigeria should become independent.[36] The disequilibrium in economic and educational development between the North and South played a part in these differences, and most probably informed the North's preference for stronger regional governments and a central government in which the North was the dominant actor. It became the fulcrum of the strategy of the North's political leaders to stave off domination by their more educated counterparts from Eastern and Western Nigeria.[37] However, others read into it a religious agenda for extending Islamic dominance to Southern Nigeria.[38] As will be discussed below, that perceived agenda remains a flashpoint in Nigerian politics.

2.3 Ethno-regional relations in post-independence years

At independence in 1960, a system of regional administration had been instated for North, East and Western Nigeria. The political parties that emerged in the struggle for independence formed the government of each region. Their entrenched regional interests made Falola and Heaton observe that Nigeria was a fragile state at independence, and that the parties were, essentially, "politically conscious ethnic groups" who were vying for control of the central government.[39] Nigeria had no sooner gained independence when these tensions began to surface on the centre stage of the national government. Relations between the regions were tainted by rivalries and mutual suspicions that each region wanted to dominate the others politically. Although none of the political parties could take effective control of the national government without support from other regions, they worked hard at undercutting each other. Their attempts to extend influence beyond their respective regions frayed relations even more.

Apprehensions about the North's obsession with political and religious domination exacerbated regional hostilities,[40] and contributed to some of the alleged reasons for Nigeria's first military coup of January 1966, which was staged by soldiers

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[35] Sklar RL: "Unity or regionalism: The nationalities question" in Rotberg RI (ed) *Crafting the new Nigeria: Confronting the new challenges* (2004) 39 at 40-41. See also Falola & Heaton (2008) at 150.

[36] To understand how these issues were debated and contributed to mutual suspicions between the regions, see Sklar (2004) at 87-88, but see generally 87 to 140. See also Sklar "*Unity or regionalism*" (2004)*.

[37] Falola & Heaton (2008).

[38] Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2000) at 72.

[39] Falola & Heaton (2008).

[40] Ejiogu (2011) at 168. According to the author, indirect rule allowed the Fulani aristocracy to realise a goal that they could not attain through jihad by bringing all nationalities in Nigeria "under their authority and sway".

who were mostly of Igbo Christian extraction. Most of those who were killed in the coup, including the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Bello were leaders of the NPC. The military junta that took power was dominated by the Igbos, and it replaced the federal system with a unitary system of government, thereby fuelling apprehensions that the Igbo were out to snatch political dominance. Consequently, in July 1996, military officers of Northern extraction staged a counter-coup. Subsequent coups d'état betrayed similar ethno-regional permutations.[41] From 1979 to 1999, Nigeria's military leaders were either part of the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy, or were avowedly loyal to it.[42]

Tensions came to a head in the events that followed the 1993 presidential election, which was adjudged to be free and fair. The election had potential for healing the rifts that had marked Nigeria's politics, because the acclaimed winner won with support that cut across ethnic, regional and religious biases in Nigeria. Sadly, the opportunity was lost when the military junta annulled the election. The annulment reinforced perceptions that the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy were bent on retaining political control, but it also forced a confluence of pro-democracy movements that made Nigeria's transition to civil rule inevitable. The Hausa-Fulani aristocracy succumbed to the pressure, and conceded political power to the south. In 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military head of state, and a Christian Yoruba from the West (or Southwest as it is often called), was elected President.

Obasanjo had barely settled into the presidency when the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy began to complain about marginalisation in key political appointments and the allocation of resources. Political appointments and resource allocation are two important components of the dynamics of fair representation and political stability in Nigeria. A national government's ability to hold the various geo-political regions together in a stable political balance depends largely on each region's perception that its interests have been adequately and effectively protected through appointments to influential portfolios in the national government, and in the allocation of resources. This has not always been an easy balance to achieve. Nonetheless, as a norm, elections, political appointments and the allocation of resource and development projects are configured to secure vital political and economic dividends for each region.[43]

However, for a geo-political region much accustomed to political dominance as the North was, absence from Nigeria's most powerful political office may require such levels forbearance than could be endured.[44] Soon enough, Hausa-Fulani aristocrats began to see President Obasanjo's policies as threatening the dominance they had hitherto wielded over national politics. Signs of their unease became apparent when 12

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[41] For an account of the coups, see International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance *op cit*, at 72; see also Ejiogu (2011) at 176-178. See further Midwestern Nigeria Government Publication *Understanding the Nigerian Crisis* (1968).

[42] See Nwankwo AA *Nigerians as outsiders: Military dictatorship and Nigeria's destiny* (1996) at 93-103 and 195-204.

[43] Orji N "Power-Sharing: The element of continuity in Nigerian politics" PhD Dissertation (2008) at 144-153; Ejiogu (2011) Ch 1.

[44] International Crisis Group (2010) at 10.

states in Northern Nigeria adopted Shari'a criminal codes, in a strategy widely interpreted as using religion to rally Muslim votes in the region.[45] Some have aptly observed that the adoption of Shari'a contributed to the emergence of demands for radical compliance with its creed, such as Boko Haram typifies today.[46] However, a further telling factor into which the unease of the North's ruling class apparently fed, was the repeated frustrations that they experienced in their bid to reclaim the presidency. Their frustrations boiled over with President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's death while in office, his subsequent replacement by President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian of southern origin, and their inability to reclaim the presidency in 2011.[47] These frustrations are spilling into the run up to the 2015 general elections, as the North intensify efforts to reclaim the presidency.

3 THE PROXIMATE FACTORS IN BOKO HARAM'S EMERGENCE

The pertinent question at this juncture relates to how Boko Haram fits into the socio-political context portrayed above. It has been suggested that resolving the question requires an understanding of how the political ideal that the Sokoto Caliphate represented shapes the worldview of today's Hausa-Fulani elites and their constituency. Indeed, understanding this also requires an appreciation of how the central role that Islam played in the Caliphate continues to contend for prominent space in the broader sphere of politics in Nigeria.[48] The question invites scrutiny of the political philosophy that underpinned Usman Dan Fodio's religious reforms, and of those proponents in Boko Haram who urge a religious obligation to re-enact Dan Fodio's legacy.

Dan Fodio's objectives were both religious and political. In his teachings, he equated the government of a people to the government of its king. Thus, a nation state was an Islamic state when its rulers were Muslims, and an unbelieving state when its rulers were unbelievers. In the latter situation, he taught that a Muslim was obligated to perform the hijra, meaning to leave his country for another, presumably until such a time that he could return to effect changes in his own country. Thus, Usman Dan Fodio propagated a revolutionary philosophy that encouraged Muslim rejection of a religious and political state of affairs that conflicted with Islam. Eventually, the reformer was forced to perform a hijra, but he returned later claiming a divine mandate to bring about social reconstruction and religious reform through jihad.[49] The outcome was the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate.

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[45] See Human Rights Watch "Political Sharia" *Report* (2004) at 4-5, 13-17, 38-40 and 90-94, particularly at 92-3. The less than pious intentions that underwrote the strategy soon began to be obvious when the states paid less than sincere commitments to implementing Shari'a.

[46] Blair (2011); Cook (2011) at 6; Gardham D "Boko Haram: the group behind the Nigerian attacks" *The Telegraph* (2011).

[47] Forest JJF, "Confronting the terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria" (2012) at 27.

[48] See Paden (2008) at 27; It has been said that the way to understand ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria is to look at the socio-political history of the region and examine how this fits into and perpetuates conflicts. See International Crisis Group (2010) at 1-2.

[49] Batran (1989). See also Martin (1976) at 218-230.

Although the Caliphate succumbed to British conquest in 1903,[50] it retained a legacy of religious and political accomplishments that the Hausa-Fulani of Northern Nigeria remain proud of, and from which they derive their "sense of community and cohesion".[51] It is this legacy that underpins the Hausa-Fulani's will to power on Nigeria's national stage.[52] This legacy was in substantial measure assisted by colonial policies.[53] And though the Hausa-Fulani loathed the fact that British conquest and civilization subjugated its once proud Islamic culture, they ingratiated themselves with the British because of the political head start the later gave them over other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Boko Haram drew on this socio-political legacy in a manner that is crucial to understanding its political aspirations, message, strategy and aims.[54] Relying on Othman Dan Fodio's legacy for validation, the sect blamed the North's political misfortunes on the corrupting influences of Nigeria's Western-style democracy, and framed its ideology of change accordingly, while also invoking reminiscences of the Islamic Caliphate at its glory.[55] The International Crisis Group (ICG) describes the sect's appeal to this legacy as illustrating "how many in the far north express political and social dissatisfaction through greater adherence to religion and a resort to religious canon for solutions to multiple problems in their lives".[56] Thus, Boko Haram's resort to religion is not altogether unique. It perpetuates a political tradition in Northern Nigeria that mobilises "faith-based political identities" to advance regional political interests.[57] What makes Boko Haram rather different is the extremism of its ideology and the violent method of effecting change that the ideology inspired.

A peek into how the sect's radical ideology derives from a broader ideological discourse in Salafism may be useful. The sect's late leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was a Muslim cleric and Salafist who had also been influenced by strains of Wahhabi teachings within the Salafi stream of thought in Islam. As an Islamic ideology, Salafism advocates both a moral and political ethos that challenges knowledge and political institutions that contradict or fail to conform to the Qur'an and the Sunna or Haddith.[58]

A recent study of the sect links it to an enduring tradition of opposition to Western education among the Muslims of Northern Nigeria, and to "Salafi-Wahhabi trends" in the country.[59] Salafi-Wahhabi discourses unveil shades of thought regarding

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[50] See Falola T *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (2009) at 13-14.

[51] International Crisis Group (2010) 4.

[52] Indeed, Sklar and others have argued that the legacy of the Caliphate, which was one of political dominance over other regions continues to underpin the political philosophy of the "Muslim emirate sector". See Sklar (2004) at 40.

[53] In this regard, Ejiogu (2011) at 143 argues that colonial rule helped the 'Fulani aristocracy to realize a goal that they could not attain through their jihad i.e., bringing all nationalities in the upper Niger and beyond in the lower Niger under their authority and sway.'

[54] Warner Z "Boko Haram and the dynamics of exclusion" (2012).

[55] Umara I & Mohammed G (2012) at 364.

[56] International Crisis Group (2010) at ii.

[57] Warner (2012).

[58] The Sunna and Hadith consist of expositions of the Qur'an, the lifestyle of the Prophet of Islam, and the way of life prescribed by Islam.

[59] Unknown Author (2012) at 121.

how a Muslim faithful should relate to the modern state and Western civilization. Yusuf adopted a very radical posture in the discourse, and urged the rejection of Western education and government employment, on the premise that both were a pretext for perpetuating Western imperial hegemony over Islamic societies. He taught that they were haram, because they conflicted with, or taught knowledge that contradicted the Qur'an and Sunna. However, this teaching corresponds with a historical tradition in Northern Nigeria that refuses anything that challenges Islamic hegemony, and singles out Western education for criticism because of its obvious connection with Christianity and its role in spreading colonial and Western influence.[60] Yusuf subscribed to and propagated arguments that colonialism and Western secular education were introduced into Islamic societies with the aim of corrupting Islamic culture and morals, and to undermine the identities of Islamic communities that were "built on Salafi notions of piety and righteousness." Muslims were therefore religiously obligated to resist Western education, in order to unmask the true face of the hidden imperialist agenda.[61] To the extent that the democratic Nigerian state represent that agenda, it is an obstacle to the realisation of an Islamic state. It then becomes imperative to remove that obstacle through jihad.[62]

There was something also radically baleful about Yusuf's teachings, which portrayed the religious and political worldview that underwrote his idea of violent change. Yusuf taught that humans were born with a natural inclination to become Muslims, but they become socialised into adopting other religions.[63] Such teachings cast resistance to such socialising forces as divinely sanctioned to restore the divine order. However, the aforementioned study points out that exploring these strands of Salafist thought does not necessarily make Boko Haram easy to categorise. For one thing, Yusuf vacillated between extreme positions in which he canvassed unreserved rejection of Western education and government employment, and, when challenged, subtle positions in which he attacked specific aspects of Western education and public service that conflict with the Qur'an and Hadith.[64]

Other views also struggle with placing the sect in a mould. Abba, a political scientist in Nigeria, agrees that "the identity and mantra of Boko Haram are not properly defined" and that while "some call it a radical Islamist group ... others refer to it as a sect". Yet Abba says that Boko Haram's goals are "clear and concise", and that in the

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[60] International Crisis Group (2010) at 37-8.

[61] Unknown Author (2012) at 123-124.

[62] International Crisis Group (2010) at 37-38. An ICG interview with one of the sect's followers quotes the follower as saying that Muslim youth in Northern Nigeria "were angry at northern state governors' insincerity in applying Shari'a and allowing massive corruption and illegal affluence amid grinding poverty. Believing that Shari'a can never be implemented properly under a secular state, they insisted on establishing an Islamic regime.... they were opposed to a lot of Western culture and what they saw as its anti-Islamic and corrupting influences ... opposed to the federal and state governments which they saw as propagating these Western influences as a cover-up for their own corruption ... opposed to security forces which they saw as protecting corrupt governments and oppressing fundamentalist Muslims ..., opposed to Christians whom they regarded as infidels aligned to the west, and who had to be converted to Islam, forcefully."

[63] Unknown Author (2012) 124.

[64] Unknown Author (2012) at 123-124

sect's sights are Nigerian elites who abuse political influence to "compromise the interest, aspirations and welfare of the citizenry". In Abba's views therefore, Boko Haram's aim "is to create an attitudinal change through the use of Islamic teachings as an instrument to get rid of ... burdening liabilities imposed on the country." And since the sect's goal is "socio-economic and political justice, only that can avert [its] fury."[65] Pertinently however, the aforementioned study warns against overstating economic motivations in debates over the root causes of the sect's emergence. After reviewing Yusuf's sermons and the debates he had with other Salafists, the study came to the conclusion that neither the economy nor the corruption of the political class (which impoverished the masses) were dominant themes in Yusuf's thoughts. The prevailing poor economic conditions did however enhance his popularity with those who came to believe in him.[66] Even if they did not understand Yusuf's ideology – a fact that Yusuf's debaters alluded to - they still saw in the positions he adopted, the possibilities of social justice in a welfare Islamic state. It is also possible that Nigeria's aggressive (and sometimes unrestrained) counter-terrorism measures unwittingly confirmed images of the oppressive State that Yusuf portrayed in the minds of his many admirers. The measures may also have played a major hand in pushing the sect into an implacable posture.

These views raise an important challenge regarding how to frame discourses about how Boko Haram features in Nigeria's political dynamics. Two possible approaches, both of which are sated with political nuances, are offered here about Boko Haram's emergence and transformation. The first approach locates the sect within a long history of substantial connections between religion and politics in Northern Nigeria. Accounts of such connections describe the deployment of Islam to legitimate political ambitions and mobilise support, on the one hand, and to de-legitimate and de-mobilise "overbearing 'Islamic' regimes", on the other. Those who oppose politicians who dominate the political terrain through "the political machination of religion, also develop radically different interpretations of the same religion to deflate [that] influence".[67] In this connection, Shari'a and Boko Haram fitted, one way or the other, into populist strategies to rally Muslim votes in Northern Nigeria. However, in a society so strung between moderate to extreme views about Islam and Shari'a, and between an educated but corrupt elite, on one hand, and an illiterate or semi-literate but deeply religious and impoverished population on the other, how Shari'a is interpreted and implemented is bound to fuel conflicts.

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[65] Shaka J "Inside the labyrinth: Nigeria's unending conflicts - an interview with Dr. Sadeeque Abubakar Abba," (2011) *Journal of Conflictology* at 3-4. See also Whittaker DJ *Terrorists and terrorism in the contemporary world* (2004) at 50 and 54.

[66] Unknown Author (2012); The International Crisis Group has also made the point, quite instructively, that economic deprivation could not be Boko Haram's real motivation. Against contentions that economic reasons are responsible, the Group contends that the "north suffers from a potent mix of economic malaise and contentious, community-based distribution of resources" as anywhere else in Nigeria. See International Crisis Group (2010) at ii.

[67] See Onapajo (2012); Onapajo illuatrates this point with the example of the Yoruba Muslim minority in the Northern city of Ilorin which formed the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in counterweight to the overtly Islam dominated Hausa-Fulani led Northern People's Congress.

Conflicts did arise, and what may have started as a marriage between an extreme ideology and politics blew out of the controlled environment in which it was contracted. Boko Haram went off at an extreme tangent. The blow-out was an extreme illustration of the possible disagreements that could occur as a result of attempting to merge politics and sectarian interests in Nigeria. A case in point here pertains to reports about some relations of sorts between the sect and a former governor of Bornu State in Northeast Nigeria, where the sect's activities have been most pronounced. The reports allege that the governor recruited Boko Haram elements into his administration, and appointed a member of the sect to preside over the state's department for religious affairs. Irreconcilable differences over sharia implementation in the state eventually terminated the relationship, and violent confrontations between the sect and security forces commenced soon after.[68] Eventually, even the ruling elite in Northern Nigeria came under increasing attacks from the sect. The attacks may have been exacerbated by the ruling elites' blatant corruption and participation in creating the harsh socio-economic conditions that became the lived realities of the sect's members.[69] However, probably the most significant pointer to the probable political dimensions of Boko Haram's transformation came when a former National Security Adviser tied security challenges posed by the sect to the outcome of the Nigerian presidential elections in 2011,[70] following which the sect upped the ante of its attacks. The National Security Adviser was relieved of the office not long after his comments.[71]

The other probable approach to discussing Boko Haram examines the sect through the historical prism of Othman Dan Fodio's theocratic legacy. As explained above, Boko Haram's message articulates a socio-political order that is rooted in that legacy. Cast in such terms, dissatisfaction with the present socio-political order assumes deep religious significance, which the sect commits to redeem – violently if need be – as a matter of religious obligation.[72] If the sect's evolution into an implacable threat can indeed be so explained, it becomes "misguided", as Neumann suggests, to separate religious terrorism from political terrorism, "as if the two categories were mutually exclusive."[73] It would appear then, however one looks at it, that Boko Haram is a political issue that requires far more political resources than the state has mobilised.

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[68] Idris I & Adebayo I "Boko Haram: How Senators Sherrif, Zanna clash on the truth" *Sunday Trust* (2012).

[69] See Neumann PR *Old and new terrorism: Late modernity, globalization and the transformation of political violence* (2009); Neumann's explanation of how radical religious movements morph into religious terrorism helps to explain possible factors behind Boko Haram's extreme radicalisation. As he explained, most terrorist groups in the world start as non-violent groups who commit to a lifestyle regulated by religious dictates. Frustrated by the moral lapses of secular society, by harsh socio-economic realities and their inability to influence society through the peaceful propagation of their religious ideologies, they resort to violence as a means of change.

[70] Addeh E "NSA blames PDP for Boko Haram Crisis" *The Punch* (2012). Of course, Boko Haram's attacks predate the 2011 elections. It does appear, however, that its attacks and intransigence increased significantly following the elections.

[71] Fabiyi O *et al* "North, Reps forced Jonathan to sack Azazi, Defence Minister" *The Punch* (2012).

[72] Forest (2012) at 9-13 and 74-7.

[73] Neumann (2009) at 95.

4 BOKO HARAM'S RELIGIOUS RADICALISM: TAKING THE ENQUIRY FURTHER

Terrorism appeals to culture and religion in ways that have been complex to comprehend. Culture and religion can be strangely related. On one hand, both confer social identity, and function as determinants of social cohesion and balance. Drawing on examples from classical and modern history, Furseth and Repstad wrote that religion plays a role in "unifying nationalism", fostering "social cohesion", "preserving … national identity and preventing [total] assimilation" into other cultural identities. Here, religion and its institutions safeguard social values".[74] In the Nigerian context, religion and culture are intertwined and almost indistinguishable values: a people's way of thinking, worldview and discourse, interpersonal relations within a culture, and relations with other distinguishable cultures, and such other features of social life that confer cultural identity are shaped by religious nuances. On the other hand however, these same features account for age-long traditions of social exclusion in Nigerian communities, for the country's divisive politics, and its many ethno-religious conflicts.[75]

Understanding their role in fostering terrorism is therefore crucial. According to Whittaker, "culture shapes values and motivates people to actions that seem impossible to foreign observers." It confers identity through a set of shared values around which members develop a distinctly unique (and often exclusive) sense of community. These values, Whittaker explains, "include language, religion, group membership, and homeland or native territory", and they differentiate one culture or people from the other. In his words:

> A major cultural determinate of terrorism is the perception of 'outsiders' and anticipation of a threat to ethnic group survival. Fear of cultural extermination leads to violence which, to someone who does not experience it, seems irrational. All human beings are sensitive to threats to values by which they identify themselves. The possibility of losing any of these can trigger defensive, even xenophobic, reactions.[76]

How religion comes into a terrorist's purpose has attracted different opinions. For terrorists who use Islam as a premise, some have argued that their motivation stems from the religion's promise of eternal rewards for daring acts of martyrdom.[77] However, Eli Berman has argued that a terrorist's motivations do not fit into such simplistic characterisations. Using the Taliban, Hamas, and Hezbollah and other terrorist groups as case studies, and citing research, he maintained that religion figures much less as a motivation in a terrorist's psyche. Rather, a terrorist's motivation comes from some selfless belief in the rightness of his espoused cause (such as the liberation of his

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[74] Furseth I & Repstad P *An introduction to the sociology of religion: Classical and contemporary perspectives* (2006) at 151-2. The authors offer the example of Poland, where prior to the collapse of Communist USSR, Catholicism helped to reinforce Polish national identity, and prevent Poland's "full assimilation into … its neighbours' societies." Political movements drew on religious symbols to arouse feelings of nationalism.

[75] Furseth & Repstad (2006) at 163-4; Eguavoen ANT "Culture, religion and terrorism" in Imobighe TA & Eguavoen ANT (eds) *Terrorism and counter-terrorism: An African perspective* (2006) 29 at 31 and 35.

[76] Whittaker (2007) at 20.

[77] Whittaker (2007) at 26.

community or country), "an exaggerated view of the importance of the attack" and his deluded sense of importance "in the grand scheme of things".[78]

These factors are complemented by the terrorist's lack of empathy for his victims. Berman did not altogether dispense with religion as a factor, as he argued that religion provides an atmosphere that is quite readily conducive to radicalisation. Religion provides identity and organised avenues for sharing and cultivating mutual affinity and aspirations – which may sometimes be strong - and for organising collective action around charitable and other causes. Berman also identified a consistent pattern with such groups around the world; they typically start off as benign religious organisations, providing services that endear them to host communities, before evolving rather rapidly into extremely dangerous groups that infringe individual rights and pose existential threats to governments.[79] Dingley describes them as "small tight-knit … communities, often clustered around … towns that provide trading and local professional services." They easily become insular "religious societies" who cultivate passionate devotion to traditional religious values that define the world for them. Thus, it is possible that when Boko Haram started off as reclusive religious communities, it may have in some ways been playing to type, though this could hardly explain all about the sect's motivations. It is important to note however that the societies in Dingley's illustration are not peculiar to Islam or Muslim societies. Similar patterns were indicated in the conflicts in "Ireland, the Basques, Corsica and the Croat parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina", which are traditionally Catholic societies, as well as in Eastern Orthodox communities of "Nargano-Karabakh and the Serb regions of Bosnia-Hezergovina".[80] In the communities that Berman and Dingley portray, an event or series of events could radically trigger recourse to violence, especially "for those whose political activism is vibrant and frustrated".[81]

That such radical but benign platforms can rapidly evolve into potent security threats invites study. Determining when the transition occurs, and what factors precipitate it, are also fitting subjects for study. In Boko Haram's context, it would appear – even if reports of the charitable services it offered in host communities cannot be ignored[82] - that what started off as a call to strict piety may have had less than benign intentions from the outset. No sooner had the sect emerged in 2002 than it began to have brushes with the law, and to identify itself as the Nigerian Taliban. Between 2006 and 2007, three of its leaders or promoters were indicted for sponsoring or facilitating terrorism in Nigeria.[83] Berman's explanations of the terrorist's motivation therefore

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[78] See Berman E *Radical, religious and violent: The new economics of terrorism* (2009) at 2, 8 and 9-16. The cited research includes interviews with family and friends of Palestinian suicide attackers, and with captured suicide attackers.

[79] Berman (2009) at 2, 8 and 9 – 16.

[80] Dingley J "Terrorism, Religion and Community" *Defense & Security Analysis* (2011) 329-330. –

[81] Whittaker (2004) at 50 and 54.

[82] Umara & Mohammed (2012) at 365; the authors explain that Boko Haram became popular because the poor benefited from its programs, which included funding bankrupted businesses, donating cars and motorcycles for commercial purposes and providing accommodation, etc.

[83] In December 2006, Mohammed Yusuf was charged with six counts of illegally receiving foreign currency; Mohammed Ashafa was charged with receiving funds from Al Qaeda operatives to identify and

may not fully explain this sect. However, his and Dingley's views that there is often a tipping point into radical extremism is pertinent. It is beyond doubt that Mohammed Yusuf was a politically active cleric whose frustrations with the Nigerian state spilled into the extreme postures he adopted for his Salafi-Wahabbi discourses.[84] The obvious tipping point for these frustrations came with the 2009 clampdown on the sect, in which Yusuf and several of his followers were extra-judicially executed. Other brutal clampdowns on the sect, in the course of which Muslim communities were ransacked, and indiscriminate killings occurred (of innocent citizens in some cases) rendered the sect even more implacable in its vengeful quest.

That said, it is indeed possible to also contemplate Boko Haram's emergence through terrorism trends that depict corresponding movements in the renewal and politicisation of radical religious fervour, on the one hand, and the rise of "religiously inspired terrorism" on the other.[85] When the Obasanjo administration came into office in 1999, the Hausa-Fulani ruling class was confronted with a threat to its political hegemony. It responded by adopting Shari'a in twelve states, in what Ali Mazrui describes as "a cultural assertion by Northern elites at the state level to compensate for their political decline at the federal level".[86] It proved to be an ill-thought political strategy; by adopting Shari'a, the governors whetted their constituents' appetite for puritanical observances of religious law, and set in motion a course of events that would give birth to religious agitation like that of Boko Haram.

Two probable reasons are offered here to explain why Boko Haram has used religion to advance its cause: first, religion offers an outlet for expressing discontent with the political order, a discontent the sect has made clear; secondly, organising resistance with religion as the rallying point confers advantages. It appeals to a ready audience of people with shared affinities, who have, or can be easily led into endorsing, a common vision of what the social order ought to be, and are displeased enough to want immediate radical changes to the extant order. For them, religion renews hopes for a morally regenerate society and a social economy reconstructed according to the dictates of religious dogma. It offers or reinforces identity, offers new choices, and provides affirmation and some meaning with which the terrorist can connect.[87] Incidentally also, such religiously imbued hopes are capable of inspiring a quest to reset the social order, through violence if need be. As Whittaker explained:

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carry out terrorist acts on American residences in Nigeria, and for being a courier for messages from Al Qaeda operatives in Pakistan to the Nigerian Taliban on how to launch terrorist attacks on American interests in Nigeria. In January 2007, Mohammed Bello Ilyas Damagun was arraigned on charges of sponsoring the Nigerian Taliban and for receiving foreign currency for acts of terrorism. Nothing came of the indictments, and Mohammed Yusuf continued to mobilise recruits. See US Department of State "Country Reports on Terrorism" (2008).

[84] See especially, Unknown Author (2012) at 127-131

[85] Neumann (2009) at 83 and 115.

[86] Mazrui A "From the Sharia movement to Boko Haram" *Al Arabiya News* (2012). Mazrui argues that the Sharia movement was a cultural assertion by Northern elites at the state level to compensate for their political decline at the federal level.

[87] Neumann (2009) at 93.

> What would otherwise be extra-ordinary acts of desperation become a religious duty in the mind of the religiously motivated terrorist. This explains the high level of commitment and willingness to risk death among religious extremist groups.[88]

Boko Haram's religious refrain demonstrates that it fully understands the instrumentality of religion, and deploys it to mobilise support among Muslim sympathisers. Already at odds with their impoverished circumstances, the sect's supporters needed little prodding to embrace extreme ideology and violence.[89]

5 THE POLITICISATION OF STATE RESPONSE TO BOKO HARAM

As explained earlier, some Hausa-Fulani politicians saw in Shari'a, and probably also in the sect, windows of opportunity to advance their political interests.[90] Unfortunately, the Jonathan administration also sailed, willy-nilly, into the turbulent winds of ethno-religious and regional politics in its attempt to find an answer to the sect. Over a protracted period of time, the administration claimed that the sect's sponsors were known political figures and that the causes were deeply rooted in political disagreements. Although it promised to publish a list of the sponsors, it never did, probably because the list did not exist, or there was no credible evidence against the alleged sponsors. But it may well be, also, that the alleged list had names that wielded significant political leverage that the presidency could not risk alienating. Unfortunately, the posturing served no good purpose, as it failed to address the ethno-regional and religious differences that underlie Boko Haram's emergence and intransigence, all of which the political class has attempted to ride, as one would ride an unruly horse. In consequence, Boko Haram increased in daring, picking bigger targets with such sophistication that it left security forces burrowing deeper in the trenches.

The critical issue, then, is what approach best tackles Boko Haram. It is beyond question now that the Nigerian government and Nigerians in general regard Boko Haram's menace as terrorism. Prodded by the sect's devilry, Nigeria's federal parliament railroaded a Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011 that fell short in a number of respects: it did not provide for the effective co-ordination of counter-terrorism efforts and intelligence, for extra-territorial application, and for adequately severe punishments for some offences. It also failed to ensure due process safeguards for human rights. Consequently, Parliament passed an amendment, the Terrorism (Prevention Amendment) Act 2013. For the purposes of this articles however, the more pertinent question involves the categorisation of violence, a sine qua non for the application of the provisions of the Act.

How a protracted violent phenomenon is categorised is critical to planning an appropriate response. In this respect, Morris et al aptly remark that it may be more

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[88]Whittaker (2007) at 21.

[89]Nwachukwu & Uzoigwe (2004)

[90] This point can be illustrated by the cageyness of Hausa-Fulani elites, who refrained from denouncing the sect until speculations became rife that they tacitly approved of its activities, for political reasons. See Badmus A "Boko Haram and Northern leaders' silence" *The Nigerian Tribune* (2012). Oke G "Why Northern leaders are silent over Boko Haram" *Vanguard* (2012).

helpful to "focus on grievances or cause" rather than tactics when interrogating what stands at the core of violent eruptions.[91]   This requires asking, for instance, whether reasonable grievances are discernible in the agitations of Boko Haram. As much as is possible, deliberate care ought to be taken to not conflate the motivations of a cause with the violent eruptions that it may subsequently cause, for somewhere between the two may lie not so salient elements that will mark the difference between a peaceful resolution and a resort to armed hostilities. A related question is whether the violence is such that should be visited with the full weight of the state's counter-terrorism apparatus or whether it is best dealt with by political solutions, or both. Responding to these questions may produce different – and no doubt contestable – answers, because the questions probe intensely conflicting interests in which the political stakes are high. The answers they yield may ultimately revolve about perception, and whose perception matters,[92] but failure to adequately clarify the questions can precipitate very flawed responses. Clarification and proper categorisation are essential for understanding the root causes, crucial to the state's own sense of direction, and helpful in "minimizing the frequency and intensity" of the political tensions that precipitate terrorism.[93]

Nigeria failed to address these questions at a critical time in the sect's early days, and has paid dearly for it. While it is obvious that Boko Haram's intentions were not so benign from the outset - at least as far as its extreme ideology is concerned - it may be argued that its radicalisation was, in the course of time, hastened by three factors that were external to it. The observation must first be made though, that the more important factor in Boko Haram's radicalisation lies within the sect's extreme ideology, which, without question, is very disturbing. The external factors may not have succeeded had the sect not idealised violent change in the first place.[94] Boko Haram's deep plunge into extremism may have been averted, and its populism contained, but for the external factors.

The first factor dwells on the politicisation of Shari'a. The politicians who adopted state Shari'a laws used Shari'a to enhance their political interests, without delivering the promises that stirred northern Muslims into a religiously inspired electoral fervour. Their failures certainly had a cataclysmic effect, as it showed that they were less than sincere in their dealings with Shari'a, a fact that resonated with disappointment in their constituencies. The serious human rights abuses that have accompanied Nigeria's rather indiscreet use of repressive force in battling the sect have also been a radicalising factor. Empirical studies have shown that repressive measures against security threats are prone to trigger violence,[95] or could do so, in the face of

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[91] Norris P, Kern M & Just MR *Framing terrorism* (2003) 6.

[92] Norris, Kern & Just(2003) at 6. In the authors' words, the concept of terrorism "is essentially contested, value-laden, and open to multiple meanings located within a broader cultural frame, so that, to some extent, terrorism is in the eye of the beholder."

[93] See Ross JI "The primacy of grievance as a structural cause of oppositional political terrorism: comparing Al-Fatah, FARC, and PIRA" in Canter DV (ed), *The faces of terrorism: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (2009) at 76-7.

[94] Unknown Author (2012) at 133-134 and 139-140.

[95] Neumann (2009) at 101.

lingering grievances precipitate terrorism.[96] Unfortunately, even when it became obvious that armed response was failing, Nigeria continued to misjudge the role that aggressive military tactics should play in dealing with the crisis. As it transpired, several innocent civilians reportedly became victims of military counter-terrorism operations.[97] These offered Yusuf a propaganda tool to further portray the state as a figure of Western domination that corrupts Islamic values, and to cast his followers and himself as victims of state repression. In this way, Yusuf skilfully projected himself as the defender of Islamic values.[98]

The third factor does not appear so probable, but overlooking it may conflate the sect's ideology with why it enjoys a large following. Yusuf's ideology was very strenuously opposed by Ja'far Adam, a better educated Salafi cleric who described the former's followers as sincere Muslims who lacked sufficient knowledge of Islam.[99] It may not be strongly assumed therefore, that Yusuf's many admirers were capable of comprehending his ideology. Widespread economic frustrations, rather than ideology, may have featured more in their reasons for joining or supporting the sect. Therefore, the timing of Boko Haram's propaganda could not have been more opportune for its sinister objectives; the sect's leaders exploited these frustrations, blaming them on the corrupting influences of Western education and civilization. They created mental images in which every attack on the sect was viewed by its followers as an attack on Islam, and the promise it held of a welfare state that met their needs. It is important that this socio-economic dimension to Boko Haram's appeal to its followers is not allowed to displace what stands at the sect's ideological core.

6 CONCLUSION

At the time of writing, Nigeria had adopted a two-pronged strategy against Boko Haram. It commenced consultations for an offer of amnesty to members of the sect and declared a state of emergency in five states in Northeast Nigeria where the sect had been most active. The declaration made way for drastic military operations against the sect. Neither measures have worked at the desired pace, and both continue to be dogged by significant controversy.[100] Some have opposed the amnesty process, saying it further exposes the vulnerability of an already weak government, and reinforces the "Federal Government's ambivalence on national security".[101] Also, the integrity of the consultations became doubtful when government negotiators made claims of rapprochements that were subsequently contradicted by the sect. Some also criticised the declaration of an emergency, saying it belied the bona fides of the government's

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[96] Ross (2011) at 89-92. Ross also wrote that state repression and lingering grievances have been identified as precipitants in respect of other notable terrorist groups in the world.

[97] A recent case in point was the military invasion of Baga village in Borno State, during which about 187 civilians were killed, and the village burnt. See Associated Press "Amnesty Int'l: Hundreds killed and in detention amid crackdown on Nigeria's economic Islamic uprising" *The Washington Post* (2013).

[98] Unknown Author (2012) at 130.

[99] Unknown Author (2012) at 138.

[100] Adeosun O, "Boko Haram: Is Amnesty Committee working?" *The Nation* (2013)

[101]Nwakanma O "The Dangers of appeasement" *Vanguard* (2012).

amnesty consultations. Unfortunately, the end to military operations is not in sight either, even as the sect remains an unresolved enigma. If recent reports about the involvement of foreign nationals (Islamists) in the sect's ranks are confirmed, the ongoing military operations will likely go on for a while.

The present military operations are to some degree inevitable. The sect has become quite intransigent in its quest to avenge the death of its members and to Islamize the country. It is almost palpable that the sect's intransigence (and the high toll that that has exacted) is overwhelming debates over whether the sect is an ideological response or a reaction to lack of development in Northern Nigeria. What has not been much acknowledged is that Nigeria's response may have unwittingly melded a radical ideology and popular displeasure over poor socio-economic conditions into one inseparable cause. This unfortunate pass could have been avoided if government had exercised better political judgment and courage from the beginning, and not contributed to the politicisation of the crisis. Nigeria's heavy-handed interventions apparently betrayed the government's failure to understand and engage the real issues that were at stake. The interventions only strengthened the sect, giving it a pretext to appeal to highly combustible religious sentiments. Ongoing military operations further harden positions between the government and the sect.

Be that as it may, it ought no longer to be denied that the mass of young people who fill Boko Haram's ranks have endured severe socio-economic hardships. In truth, similar situations have given rise to unrest in other parts of the country. However, socio-economic deprivations do not necessarily result in radical ideology, at least not the kind that Mohammed Yusuf propagated. They nonetheless provide a favourable environment for radical ideology to spread. Nigeria must adopt measures to be rid of that environment. An important element in Nigeria's counter-terrorism response must focus on countering Boko Haram's popularity, and depleting its recruiting pool. This may require fundamental shifts in current counter-terrorism strategy, to a new emphasis on socio-economic development and employment opportunities for the youths who fill Boko Haram's ranks. The critical question, no doubt, is this: given the level of insecurity in that part of the country, how can socio-economic interventions be safely made. Resolving the question will not come easy, but failing to do so will come at a price Nigeria cannot pay.

Improving socio-economic conditions may deplete Boko Haram's recruiting pool, and contribute to isolating the sect's leadership for a more targeted and precise military response. However, an ideological response to Boko Haram's ideology also needs to be recruited. The efficacy of such a response would largely depend on two things: the ability of the state to demonstrate a commitment to redressing underdevelopment (in Northern Nigeria especially), and its adoption of long-term measures that redress the grievances that perpetually underlie Nigerian politics and precipitate violence. Long-term measures should seek to accelerate national integration, minimise ethnic and religious divides, and foster popular participation in the political process.

The present level of animosity and distrust between government and the sect probably makes the path to achieving proposals of this nature less clear. A confidence building measure needs to be developed, and this could be achieved through measures that de-escalate extant tensions, and by the state's exercise of greater discretion in its use of force. This would help to avoid the human rights abuses that have been a contributing factor in the sect's popularity. Of course, intelligence capabilities would have to be significantly enhanced for a much more discreet use of force. It is however pertinent that the overall strategy engage a broader political discourse that transcends the extant parochial chatter regarding ethnic, regional and religious interests, which has replaced true political discourse in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the "march" ("plunge" may be more accurate) towards general elections in 2015 has shown every sign that the elections could quite possibly be decided by these interests. It is perhaps not too late to avoid that outcome, but it will take significant investment in political will to transform the chatter into meaningful discourse, and to create mechanisms that will both affirm tolerance and mutuality among the nation's diverse interest groups, and open the political space for meaningful participation.

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