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Belief, Religion and Spirituality: A global perspective

TOPIC: BOKO HARAM AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL PEACE

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, new forms of religious fundamentalism have emerged posing profound security problems in many societies. The emergence of the religious fundamentalist group in Nigeria known as Boko Haram became a menace to Nigeria in 2009 and since then, has greatly impacted the country (Ntamu & Ekpenyong 2014, p.245). This terrorist group strikes with such ferocity targeting civilians in their operations and hereby disrupting the functioning of the society. In fact, ever since Boko Haram emerged in Nigeria, it has remained a threat to national peace and security as the government is yet to develop an effective approach to stop its operations. Fundamentalism in essence, denotes a religious movement or group that places emphasis on a particular ideology and usually opposes an alternative belief or practice (Rasak et al 2018, p.1). This paper critically discusses the problem of Boko Haram as a threat to national peace in Nigeria.

Firstly, this essay will provide a brief history of Boko Haram and introduce the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis. It will then examine the impacts of Boko Haram on society before discussing the counterarguments surrounding the issue. Finally, the essay will conclude by summarizing the key points and findings.

2. ORIGIN OF BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is an Islamist terrorist group that originated from North-Eastern Nigeria. According to Mantzikos (2013, p.10) the word “Boko Haram” is the combination of two words; “boko” derived from the Hausa language meaning “western education” and “haram” derived from the Arabic word meaning “forbidden”. Therefore, the term “Boko Haram” is often interpreted as “western education or civilisation is forbidden”. The sect seeks to resist everything western and aims to root out westernization from the north which it interprets as a tool for oppression, corruption, exploitation and undermines Nigeria’s development (Okoroafor & Ukpabi 2015, p. 251). Furthermore, this group originated as an offshoot of the Salafi movement, a branch of Sunni Islam and its primary purpose is to create an Islamic fundamentalist state with sharia laws (Felter 2018). Felter (2018) explains that sharia laws are the ethical and moral principles taken

from the Quran and according to believers they create a modest society with less poverty, exploitation and crime.

In the early 2000s, Mohammed Yusuf emerged as someone who openly criticized western education and condemned many Islamic scholars for combining western and Islamic teachings together (Okoroafor & Ukpabi 2015, p. 252). He strongly adhered to strict Islamic laws and violently criticized the Nigerian federal government. As a result of this, he was able to persuade people into joining his group, especially those who were found to be marginalized, uneducated or unemployed in the society. In 2002, Mohammed Yusuf became the founder of Boko Haram. As stated by Mantzikos (2013, p.11) as at 2009 the group became a threat to Nigeria's security, after the government launched a clampdown resulting in 800 deaths including the death of few members. This event also led to the government capturing and later on, assassinating the group leader Mohammed Yusuf. In response to this, in 2010, the group carried out its first terrorist attack killing four people in Maiduguri in an action to retaliate for the assassination of their leader (Mantzikos 2013, p.11). From that time on, Boko Haram has carried out many terrorist activities.

2.1 How it carries out its operations and how it is sustained

Many of their operations target both state and federal organizations such as the police stations, detention centers, bus terminals, market places, banks as well as educational and religious institutions (United Kingdom Home Office 2015, p.7). Furthermore, McCoy (2014) claims that Boko Haram has been sustained and gets its funding's through various means such as; "black market dealings, local and international benefactors and its link to other Islamic fundamentalist groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL)". Slave markets and kidnappings are also said to be one of their major sources of funding; as it is worth millions of dollars.

2.2 Local incidences of Boko Haram's menace

In addition, examples of attacks carried out include the June 2011 police headquarters bombing located in Nigeria's capital; Abuja. Two months following that incident, another atrocity was carried out at the UN Headquarters, killing 21 individuals and injuring dozens of people (Mantzikos 2013, p.11). In addition, in 2014 Boko Haram militants carried out one of their

biggest attacks that got both national and international attention. More than 250 school girls from Chibok Borno State were kidnapped and it was not until 2016 and 2017 that some of the girls were released (Zenn 2018, p.1). As of 2018 it was reported that Boko Haram had killed approximately 11,000 people since they began.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The conflict perspective explains that the societies tend to look functional but underneath these societies are tensions as a result of inequality and exploitation. In addition, this theory explains that terrorism is a response to prejudice, inequality and unfairness in the society, as these beliefs are often created by terrorists as a result of illiteracy or even manipulation (Lumen n.d.). In fact, violent activities are carried out by Boko Haram as a result of resentment towards the state; and the violence and willingness to fight against the status-quo. Therefore, the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria can be interpreted through the conflict perspective, explaining that many terrorists tend to express aggressiveness and aim to overthrow the status-quo as a result of frustration and a response to the injustice faced in the society.

3. SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In reference to the above section, it is evident that Boko Haram has been a threat to Nigeria's national peace over the years. It has led to national instability, the displacement of people, starvation, threatened the educational and health system, stalled development and weakened the power the federal government has over the nation (Felter 2018). This section will elaborate on the above points mentioned.

3.1 Displacement of families- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019) explains that the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria has resulted in more than 230,000 refugees and about two million individuals who have been internally displaced. In just two years, the number of refugees from Northeast Nigeria increased by 20 percent. As stated by Adebayo (2014, p.484) many people have lost their lives while several children have become orphans as a result of the terrorist attack that killed their parents or guardians. In addition to his point, many families have been internally displaced while others flee their hometowns due to

fear. In fact, economic activities in neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Niger and Chad have been severely affected by the influx of people who are seeking safety in nearby countries (The UN Refugee Agency 2017, p.6).

3.2 Development is stalled- As stated by Ntamu & Ekpenyong (2014, p.244), the security of every country is vital; given that for meaningful development to take place there has to be peace and security. This is because terrorist activities affect all sectors of the society directly or indirectly. For instance many schools, hotels, financial corporations and other business sectors have witnessed a major decline since the insurgency began. In addition, the activities carried out by the group have also affected the mutual level of trust in the society required for national development. Economic developments in states like Kaduna, Kano and Plateau have severely declined. In Kano state for example, approximately 126 manufacturing industries have been shut down. Kaduna on the other hand was once an industrial hub in Northern Nigeria with many industries in textile designs; now most textiles industries are out of business (Adebayo 2014, p.484). Furthermore, the insurgency has also discouraged international investors. As stated by Felter (2018), “foreign direct investment inflows to the country have plummeted since 2011, falling from a high of almost \$9 billion to \$3.5 billion in 2017”. It is therefore evident that Boko Haram has not only created fear in the society but has also affected development making the society stagnant.

3.3 Regulatory laws suspended- Many regulatory laws and economic activities have also been suspended. Kashim Shettima, the governor of Borno State has imposed a curfew that restricts citizens movements after 6pm; in an attempt to increase security measures throughout the state (Zenn 2018, p.1). In fact, some states imposed an indefinite curfew to allow security forces in the state restore the status quo. In addition, not only are people restricted, the transportation of goods across the nation has also been restricted in order to ensure maximum security. As a result, many traders have been affected with reduction in profit and consumer activities (Opoku et al 2017, p. 230).

3.4 Financial implications and burden- Boko Haram has also been a financial burden to the nation. It has been recorded that the government has spent more money on ensuring maximum security and also to amend facilities that have been damaged by Boko Haram. As stated by a recent report from the Human Rights Watch (as cited in Adebayo 2014, p.485) the nation lost

more than 935 of its human capital in the space of three years. Adebayo (2014, p.485) also added that, “in terms of finance and investment, though direct and indirect losses are unquantifiable as the World Investment Report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimated that the domestic economy lost a whopping N1.33 trillion”.

3.5 Impediment on human right

Finally, as a result of the insurgency taking place, people’s rights have been affected, undermining their ability to enjoy fundamental freedom, right to life and liberty (Opoku et al 2017, p.222). Also, many children have been deprived of their right to education because of the insecurity Boko Haram poses to society. However, their lack of education can possibly affect their outlook on life as well as opportunities. An example of this can be seen when the sect kidnapped the Chibok girls while they were in school.

4. COUNTERVAILING ARGUMENTS

Although Boko Haram has had devastating consequences for Nigeria's security, economy and social cohesion, some scholars argue that its continued existence can be partly explained by the incentives it offers to certain individuals. These perspectives do not justify the group's actions but instead seek to explain why some people are drawn to the insurgency. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and weak state institutions have created conditions that make Boko Haram an attractive alternative for some marginalized members of society. The following section examines one of the key arguments advanced in this regard.

4.1 Boko Haram provides support to its members

People who join this sect are often found to be marginalized, uneducated or unemployed individuals who feel alienated from society. For members of Boko Haram, being part of this sect offers them social, financial and psychological support. In fact, the unequal distribution of wealth in Nigeria has led many individuals from poor backgrounds to join a community of people who identify with their struggle (DeAngelis 2009). They are able to gain lots of money

from kidnapping, black market dealings and international sponsors (DeAngelis 2009).

4.2 Boko Haram fights corruption and inequality in the society

Boko Haram has claimed to be leading a revolution against corruption, abusive security forces and economic inequality in the North (Felter 2018). According to Opoku et al (2017, p.224), the existence of inequality and underdevelopment in the Nigerian society, explains why frustrated and hopeless people who have been alienated by the state, turn to their religion in search of alternative means of survival. The inability of people to meet their daily needs explains the frustration and aggression demonstrated by Boko Haram in the past years (Opoku et al 2017 p.224).

As mentioned previously, Boko Haram rejects existing colonial ideologies and lifestyles. This is because before colonization, Northern Nigeria was governed by the Sokoto Caliphate which had its own currency, Islamic practices and official language being Arabic, Fula and Hausa.

Nevertheless, when Nigeria became a colony of Britain the Sokoto Caliphate of Northern Nigeria was defeated and overtaken by the British government who changed major features of the society (Celso 2014, p.6). Therefore, the group believes that the existing socio-economic condition in Nigeria since colonization has been immoral and exploitative. Thus, Rasak et al (2018, p.13) explains that “in order to get rid of this condition of repression and wrong doing, Boko Haram seeks to establish an Islamic state”. Therefore as self-proclaimed Sunnis, they want to return Islam to what they view as the ‘holy’. Finally, Boko Haram fighters believe in the attainment of fairness and impartiality for the poor through Sharia. They argue that an Islamic system of governance would address corruption, inequality and the perceived injustices of the existing political order by ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources and justice. This belief serves as a powerful ideological motivation for many members, despite the group's violent methods and extremist interpretation of Sharia.

In conclusion, this essay has critically discussed the threat of Boko Haram to national peace in Nigeria, as it is very alarming. The ongoing security challenge in Nigeria provides a safe haven for this sect to continually carry out its attack in the society (Okoroafor & Ukpabi 2015, p. 258). And according to them, they have proclaimed that any resistance to achieving their goal of an Islamic state with Sharia laws will be met with serious confrontational attacks.

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