

NIGERIA'S QUEST FOR NATIONHOOD AND THE CHALLENGE OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

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Abstract

Fifty four years after independence, Nigeria is still far from making significant progress in Nation building. Whereas the government has put in place structures and institutions to promote national unity, identity based agitations continues. This article appraises some of the contending issues militating against nation building, such as Boko Haram insurgency. Of particularly interest to this researcher are those issues behind the sect's ideology which challenges education that is known to be a bellwether in the quest for nationhood. It attempts to answer the followings questions: Why is their ideology against education which is one aspect of nation building that cuts across ethno-religious divide in the country? Or are they just agitating against marginalization? Is it an identity issue, where the sect identifies with international terrorist organization to further their interest? My argument is that the resurgence of violent challenges to the Nigerian post-colonial state project within the last four decades, especially the recent years following the return to democratic rule in the form of identity based conflicts is rooted in the generalized disenchantment with the failure of the state to provide for the livelihood of the citizenry. Indeed, agitations against marginalization was responsible for the formation of the Boko Harams sect, Northern leaders who fashioned it as a militant tool with which to wrestle power from Southern politicians, and for them to respect the political party arrangement or understanding within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for a rotational Presidency. Unfortunately, the members of the sect latter identified themselves with terrorist groups in the Sahel and Maghreb regions, which are contiguous to some Middle East states in the grip of Islamism. This activity by the sect has created a major setback in the quest nationhood.

Keywords: Nationhood, Insurgency, Quest, Terrorism and Identity.

Background to the Study

Nigeria like most African countries is multi-ethnic society, with populations that are sharply divided along cultural, linguistic, religious, and similar cleavages. Most are composed of several and some, of many different traditional societies, each with distinctive institutions to which members of other traditional societies are not only detached but also disinclined, if not actually opposed. In fact Awolowo (1949) pointed that Nigeria is “a mere geographical expression”, which implies that in terms of social relations and national identification, Nigeria was not yet a nation as at 1949.

Acknowledging this, both the military and civilian governments since gaining independence from Britain in 1960, have adopted various models of nation building. The problem is none of those leaders go beyond rhetoric to understand why Nigeria continuously plunged into violence, and sincerely and courageous work hard to build a strong foundation for Nigeria. Ritually they have tended to downplay the fact that there was no formal meeting, no genuine interaction between North and South from 1900 to 1950 when the first all Nigerian conference took place in Ibadan. By the same token, they overplayed the fact that Nigerian tribes have labored under a common British overlord according to whose dicta the country was supposed to have become a nation, full blown, requiring no special efforts of will of mind to change centuries old identities, like leaders of other African states, they have come a long way down the road of nation-building process, with many heterogeneous or multinational states having to resort to varying ways of resolving their inter-group relations (Elaigwu, 1997:58), However, many of the states still convulse from one shock after another resulting from those sociological and political divergence.

One such challenge posed to the Nigerian state is the Boko Haram insurgency. They are a religious sect, that is intent on rumbling down everything until everyone and everything in Nigeria accepts its version of the Sharia. Boko Haram may not be the only terrorists in the country today. We can point to attacks by militants in the Niger Delta as a certain kind of act of terrorism. But there is something different about the Boko Haram challenge. It is not just the indiscriminate killing of Nigerians and non-Nigerians. It is not just that the terrorists seem focused to attack places of worship in a multi-religious country. What sets Boko Haram apart as a repugnant terrorist group is that its form of terror undermines the very foundation of a nation-state, giving rise to a fundamental question.

To what extent does the attack on education by Boko Haram insurgency undermine the quest for nationhood, political stability and the deepening of democracy? In tackling these questions, the paper is divided into three related sections. In the section that follows, I attempt to outline a conceptual framework by elaborating on the terms Nation, Nationalism and Nationhood, and the obstacles posed by the sect on education by virtue of its ideology and the identity syndrome in the context of Nigeria's historical experience and to some extent the entire Africa.

Literature Review

The notion of nationhood and national identity is clearly close to the heart of modern Nigerian leaders. But the historical legacies of colonial rule create some challenges for nation-building in Nigeria. British colonial rule over the territorial area that is today called Nigeria united the autonomous ethnic and cultural entities that had no prior contact with each other in any form before then. These entities had their own political systems, social and religious values distinct from each other (Okafor, 1997, p.1). The creation of a unified entity was purely for economic exploitation and the administrative convenience of the British crown. The political system that was adopted had not taken into consideration the most effective means of reducing the differences in social, political and economic development of these disparate groups, namely the accommodation of ethnic differences

For instance before colonization and subsequent annexation into the British Empire, the Bornu Empire ruled the territory where Boko Haram is currently active. It was a sovereign sultanate run according to the principles of the Constitution of Medina, with a majority Kanuri Muslims population. The Bornu Sultanate emerged after the overthrow of the Kanem-Bornu Empire ruled by the Saifawa dynasty for over 2000 years. The Bornu Sultanate of the Kanuri is distinct from the Sokoto Caliphate of the Hausa/Fulani established in 1802 by the military conquest of Usman dan Fodio.(David, 2011) Both the Bornu Sultanate and Sokoto Caliphate came under control of the British in 1903. However, due to activities of early Christian missionaries who used Western education as a tool for evangelism, it was viewed with suspicion by the local population.(Farouk, 2012)

Thus many members of the Nigerian elite class in the 1950s and 1960s had their education and world outlook molded by their regional institutions. Some had little or no understanding of their neighboring regions. Under these conditions, it was easy for prejudice and fear to thrive. Consequently as independence approached, the fear of an over educated south instigated the North to delay independence.(Ofeimun, 2009) Thus under the impact of the imposed colonial boundaries, multiple ethnic communities were forced to share a new national collective identity.

During the period of the decolonization struggle, Nigerian nationalists from different regions fought each other as much as they fought the British colonialists. But a nationalist consciousness had evolved, which led to the formation of various national movements within the country to fight against colonialism. This saw the liberation struggle which finally led to independence in 1960. The idea of nationhood was fostered in the struggle that won the liberation as Nigerian people somehow identified themselves as a physical and psychological entity which existed in the form of a geographical location.

There are two contrasting schools of thought that explain the development and origin of the nation which will help to clarify the challenges to nationhood in Nigeria. The two schools are the modernist and ethnicist. Modernists see the concept of nation and nationalism as phenomena whose roots do not extend back beyond a period associated with the major socio-economic process of modernity such as industrialization, capitalism, the rise of the modern state and major related political changes, (Gellner, 1983). The foremost modernist, Ernest Gellner, hypothesized that the industrial age ushered in a need for new forms of identity to mend rifts in society brought about by major shifts in social mobility. According to Gellner, modern industrializing societies require cultural homogeneity to perpetuate economic success.

In contrast, ethnicists hold that nationalism has its roots in pre-modern ethnic identities. [John Breuilly 1993 summarized by Anthony D. Smith 1999 p7] Antony Smith (1991) maintains that while nations may be modern their origins are not, but can be traced to earlier ethnic (named human populations with shared ancestry myths, history and culture having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity). For Smith, the maxim is that the forces described by modernists transform these ethnic without destroying them. One view that all agree on is that nationalism is not necessary but only appears so, thus reinforcing its existence as a self-referential and self-reinforcing concept.

The discourse of nationalism helps determine the form in which nations are conceived. For example, according to Anderson (1991), they are thought of as bounded, sovereign and horizontally uniform regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each.. Regarding specific discourses of nationhood, Calhoun (1997) identifies ten distinctive properties. None of them are indispensable but together they form a pattern of interrelated concepts and assumptions that confer reality upon nations and people.

They include boundaries, indivisibility, sovereignty, legitimacy conferred by conformity with the interests of the people, popular mobilization and participation, direct individual membership, common culture, historic depth, common descent and territoriality.

Given the above therefore, did the early Nigerian nationalist quite understand what was at stake? Unfortunately the early struggles by Nigerian nationalist defy any grand narratives or any clear definitions such as nation, nationhood, nationality and so on. The indigenous people, which took over administration of the country after independence, did not do much to appease the demands of the various Nigerian groups into a positive pan Nigeria aspiration. Instead they continued with the colonial model of administration. Most of the policies undertaken were aimed at suppressing the development of ethnic consciousness perceived as challenging the

legitimacy of the state. Though this approach succeeded in keeping ethnic agitation at bay during the era of military rule in Nigeria, the return to democracy in 1999 enabled the ventilation of trampled ethnic demands in the country.

As noted by Abiye (2011) that domestic terrorism arose in Nigeria because emergent militant groups took advantage of government's inefficient action and inactions in dealing with the fundamental elements of nationhood. Such as internal security, resource control, injustice, corruption, ethnicism, sycophancy, favoritisms, overlordship, and marginalization. These factors have made terrorism to be ethicized in Nigerian. Currently the nation is witnessing high spate of insecurity especially in the northern Nigeria by a group of terrorists known as Boko Haram.

Therefore, a nation in the context in which we aspire to use, may be described as a group or groups of people knit together by a common ideal and propelled by a common sense of destiny, inhabiting a well-defined territory organized as a legal entity known as the State, and possessing sovereignty which they confer in trust on the government of their choice.

The concept of nationhood suggests that the citizens have surrendered their individual sovereignty to the State through a social contract that guarantees the provision of public goods. The individual citizen finds in the State an avenue to meet his/her need for provision, protection, peace, power, promotion and progress within acceptable norms that will ensure that the rights of other individuals are not trampled upon. These are manifest in the social, economic and political functions of the State, the basic of these being the provision of social amenities. When the institution of State lacks the capacity or the political will to provide these public goods then there is bound to protest.

Statement of Problem

The inability of systems of government in Nigeria to appease the demands of the various Nigerian groups into a positive pan Nigeria aspiration have led to violent conflicts or terrorism. Whereas both past and present leaders have come a long way down the road of nation-building process, none of those leaders go beyond rhetoric to understand why Nigeria continuously plunged into violence, and sincerely and courageous work hard to build a strong foundation for Nigeria. Ritually they have tended to downplay the fact that there was no formal meeting, no genuine interaction between North and South from 1900 to 1950 when the first all Nigerian conference took place in Ibadan. By the same token, they overplayed the fact that Nigerian tribes have labored under a common British overlord according to whose dicta the country was supposed to have become a nation, full blown, requiring no special efforts of will of mind to change centuries old identities. This article therefore seeks to unravel some of the contending issue that have given rise to the Boko Haram, insurgency with particular interest on the sect's ideology.

Research Questions

The key questions which this paper seeks to address are the following: what is the root causes of the recent resurgence of identity based conflicts, violent militia insurgency and in particular the Boko Haram sect? Does their action have anything to do with government's inefficient action and inactions in dealing with the fundamental elements of nationhood? Could their attack on education be justified on the ground that Western education, or ? boko,? had brought nothing but poverty and suffering to the region? Or is it just an identity issue?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to unravel issue in nation building that past leaders have failed to address and the subsequent rise in terrorism with particular focus on Boko Haram.

1. To identify the challenge that the ideology of Boko Haram poses to nation building.
2. To identify contending issue that surrounds the sect's deliberate attack on education.

An Explanatory Note on the Origin and the Challenge that the Sect's Ideology have on Education

The name Boko Haram is a Hausa statement, which upon translated into English mean “Western education is sinful”, This group is opposed to everything that is of Western origin, more especially Western education; its ideologies and systems. Basically “Boko in Hausa language means Animist, western or otherwise non Islamic education, and the Arabic meaning of Haram figuratively means 'sin'. Boko Haram opposes not only western education but western culture and modern science as well.

There is so much confusion about the exact date, and who the actual founder of the Boko Haram sect was. Adibe (2012), noted that, the popular belief holds, it was founded around 2001 or 2002. Madike(2011), traces the date to as far back as 1995, and argues that, one Lawan Abubakar, who later left for further studies at the University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, actually founded the Boko Haram sect. Elsewhere, these expositions are credited to Shehu Sani, a civil right activist in northern Nigeria, who helped broker the first peace deal with the sect with these revelations, which failed (Businessday, online, February 1, 2012). While the Gusau (2009) version, traced the origin to an evangelical group formed by Muslim students at the University of Maiduguri, Borno state, who reportedly felt dissatisfied with Western education (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012).

Muhammad Yusuf, to whom the formation is now generally ascribed, according to the competing narratives only assumed leadership after Abubakar's departure and “indoctrinated the sect with his own teachings, which he claimed were based on

purity” (Adibe, 2012: 50). Yusuf's notion of “purity” and teachings were inspired by the works of Ibn Taymiyya, a fourteenth century legal scholar who preached Islamic fundamentalism and is considered a "major theorist" for radical groups in the Middle East (Johnson, 2011). But just as the sect itself may be less concerned about whom to credit for its formation than waging its war against the Nigerian state, the state too may be less concerned with the origin than it is with the threat that the group now poses to society.

Ideologically, Boko Haram was founded as an indigenous Salafist group, turning itself into a Jihadist group in 2009. It proposes that interaction with the Western world is forbidden, and also supports opposition to the Muslim establishment and the government of Nigeria. (Bartolotta, 2011) Because of this hard line posture, the members of the group do not interact with the local Muslim population and have carried out assassinations in the past of anyone who criticizes it, including Muslim clerics. Boko Haram therefore, emanated from an orthodox teaching slightly resembling that of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Late Sheikh Mohammed

Their school of thought considers anything western as an aberration or completely unislamic. The group viewed the western influence on Islamic society as the basis of the religion's weakness. Hence their declaration that western education and indeed all western institution is infidel and as such must be avoided by Muslims. Many young people dropped out of school, including university student to join them, workers including highly placed administrators and tertiary institution lecturers also joined them, many youths separated from their families, while many people abandoned their jobs for the group. Also, most people sold their belongings to contribute to the coffers of fighting the cause of Allah to save Islam from the clutches of western influences and domination

Yusuf argued that Western education, or ? boko, had brought nothing but poverty
and

suffering to the region and was therefore forbidden, or ? haram, in Islam. That
it is fighting to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria and has carried out

waves of

attacks across the region. The group is know today for attacking Christians,
government

targets, bombing churches, attacking schools, police stations, army barracks,
kidnapping

western tourists and also assassinated members of Islamic establishments that
criticized them

(Njadvara & Gambrell, 2011; brock, 2011; Olubode, 2011; Lobel, 2012; Campbell,
2013)

Discussions

From the foregoing therefore and other observations and posers, Boko Haram has raised more issues that have contradicted it in many ways. For example, while they detest western education and its values, they patronize western made cars, ammunitions and telephones. The use of maps and diagrams require an educated mind and hand to handle. The history of Islamic civilizations is replete with intellectual achievements and legacies that have sustained the pride of the faith for centuries. For Boko Haram therefore, to indoctrinate people against western education sparks off either ignorance of Islamic faith and history, or a deliberate indoctrination and brainwashing against the West, Or the Nigerian governments to which education is seen as a building blocks for unity. The abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in Nigeria highlights a new focus by Islamist militants on education.

Some have argued that it wasn't Boko Haram, who introduced mass illiteracy to northern Nigeria. Farouk(2012) noted that due to activities of early Christian missionaries who used Western education as a tool for evangelism, it is viewed with suspicion by the local population in the colonial era. That the region has always been proud of its aversion to Western education, and since independence, this has been a powerful political tool for their political elite. Their logic has been simple: the higher the levels of illiteracy, the better we're able to exploit our people for selfish political ends. The question that begs our attention is, are they terrorizing the nation for religious or political ends? In fact, the manipulation thesis of Yusuf Bala Usman becomes relevant for our further critical understanding and analysis of this phenomenon.

The point here is that, while the Boko Haram may not care about the earthly economy, the northern political elites do. Allegations of complicity of elements from among northern politicians with the Boko Haram sect have been rife (Daily Sun, January 23, 2012), but governors of the North's 19 states, out of which only two are Christians, denied the charge off any collusion with the sect or any plots to disintegrate Nigeria. Babangida words perhaps, sum up what could pass for the feelings of the Northern Muslim political cum economic elites to the threat to Nigeria's corporate existence: Babangida named what he called the 'Doctrine of Nigeria's Settled Issues,' which according to him cannot be compromised. They include the country's unity, her republican constitution, the states as federating units and the capitalist orientation of the economy. Babangida was a veteran of the Nigeria civil war fought to keep Nigeria as one Order (Turner, 1980: 74).

However Boko Haram emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. Jonathan's electoral victory came barely three

years after power returned to the north, from an eight-year sojourn in the south, where the north grudgingly ceded it to in 1999 following the tumult that resulted from the annulled 1993 presidential election, which Moshood Abiola, a southerner was acclaimed to have won. Through ingenious political engineering by the Nigerian power elite, a power-sharing arrangement was devised which rotates central power between the north and south. After eight years in the south via Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency (1999-2007), power had returned to the north in May 2007 via the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's presidency and was supposed to remain there for another eight years. Despite the constitutional provision that guarantees his succession by his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, the north was sour for having 'lost' power again to the south by virtue of Yar'Adua's death in May 2010 barely three years into office. The sense of loss, which ensued from Yar'Adua's death manifested in the tension in which Nigeria was soaked in the pre-2011 general elections period. (Alozieuwa, 20013)

Professor Wole Soyinka view on the problem perhaps captures this scenario:

“Much play is given, and rightly so, to economic factors – unemployment, misgovernment, wasted resources, social marginalization, massive corruption – in the nurturing of the current season of violent discontent in Nigeria. To limit oneself to these factors alone, is an evasion, intellectual and moral cowardice, and a fear of offending the ruthless caucuses that have unleashed terror on society, a refusal to stare the irrational in the face and give it its proper name – and response. This horde has remained available to political opportunists and criminal leaders desperate to stave off the day of reckoning. Most are highly placed, highly disgruntled, and thus highly motivated individuals who, having lost out in the power stakes, resort to the manipulation of these products of warped fervor. Their aim is to bring society to its knees, to create a situation of total anarchy that will either break up the nation or bring back the military, which ruled Nigeria in a succession of coups between the mid-1960s and the late '90s [...] Again and again they have declared their blunt manifesto—not merely to Islamise the nation but to bring it under a specific kind of fundamentalist strain” (Newsweek, January 16, 2012).

Of course the ultimatum issued by the Boko Haram sect in early January 2012 to southern Nigerians residing in the north to return to their region, the contention that “Boko Haram is out to end 1914 amalgamation,” (Saturday Sun, online, January 21, 2012) of the northern and southern protectorates, which formally created the political entity known as Nigeria, approximates Soyinka's thesis that the perpetrators are indeed anarchists who, having lost power, are bent on dismembering Nigeria.

The issue of marginalization by the Hausa Fulani hegemony is patinent. A closer examination of the Boko Haram terror movement thus reveals it clearly as a Kanuri revolt – it is “dominated by Kanuri boys, despite the recruitment of volunteers from

areas outside Borno and Yobe States” (Tribune, online, June 27, 2012). This goes on to explain that the issue of identity has not been adequately addressed in the nation building process as a result the sect identifies themselves ideologically not with other northerners but to some old trade partners in the slave trade era, the troubled Sahel and Maghreb regions, which are contiguous to some Middle East states in the grip of Islamism.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Boko Haram insurgency is not the only Northern Nigeria phenomena that point to Nigeria's national question and the government's insincerity and failure to address the issue of nation building squarely. What sets Boko Haram apart as a repugnant terrorist group is that its form of terror undermines the very foundation of a nation-state i.e. education and the fact that the sect has refrained from articulating and formally presenting its grievances, apart from its declared desire for the strict interpretation of Islamic Law in Nigeria. This might explain their resentment to the shari'a coexistence with secular federal system to the view by many northerners that western education is incapable of stimulating meaningful development and prosperity in the region, and so shares the fallacy of western education being incompatible with Islam.

As an instrument of nation building, education builds the mass to build the nation Nigeria's pervading multi-ethnic vices such as allegiance to ethnic group, inter-ethnic antagonism, hostility, aggression and terrorism may have been promoted by the monoculture nature of most Nigerian school and absence of well-conceived and articulated multi-ethnic education programme. Multi-ethnic education is necessary in a country like Nigeria so as to enable students to understand other ethnic groups outside their own and in so doing, ethnic tolerance, understanding and mutual interrelationships across ethnic boundaries would be enhanced.

But regrettably, the education system in Nigeria has collapsed to the extent that nothing in the name of functional education goes on in the educational system (Mezieobi, Nkire and Ikwumelu, 1996). According to them Nigerian schools are empty of the right quality and quantity of human and material resources to make Nigeria's nation building a reality.

Given the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria and the dismal socioeconomic conditions in which many Nigerians live, it contends that Boko Haram terrorism is calamitous for Nigeria's fragile unity and, indeed, has a net tendency of further polarizing Nigerians along religious and regional lines by expanding literacy gap between North and South as was found before independence .

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