

Boko Haram: Leitmotif for Indiscriminate Killing of Human Beings

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Abstract

Like so many philosophers of all times, Aristotle (*Rhetoric, Bk. 1: Ch. 5*) upheld the view that a good thing can be defined as that which ought to be chosen for its own sake; or as that for the sake of which is sought after by all things, or by all things that have sensation or reason. The issue of the *leitmotif* of the indiscriminate wasting of human life in the society by various insurgent groups, acting most times in the name of religion, has become a burning issue. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has been at the centre stage of this kind of ideological homicide, fratricide, or even genocide for more than five years (2009-2015). It is the aim of the paper to examine the purported reasons adduced by the protagonists of the insurgency and make recommendations for a way forward.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Independence, Agitations, United Nations.

1. Introduction

Every society deserves and demands order to progress and develop in the right direction. Anything to the contrary leads to anarchy, which the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2006:47) defines simply as “a situation in a country, an organization, etc. in which there is no government, order or control”. A close watch at the activities of Boko Haram points towards this direction. They claim that they are not satisfied with the present order of things and issues in Nigeria. But no society, however, perfectly satisfies the wishes of the individuals and the various groups within it. This is why there is occasional misunderstanding and disaffection. This may be the situation in which the proponents of Boko Haram have found themselves in Nigeria. They have complained about poverty, the evils of western education in Nigeria, marginalization, and the corruption of Islamic religious ideals. Some of their complaints might be credible to reason. But the steps – *faux pas* - they have taken to redress the supposed grievances have raised eye-brows, suspicions, and doubts regarding their genuineness and sincerity, giving vent to the claim of some scholars that the protagonists are puppets in the hands of some religio-political warlords. This is why Umejesi (2010:319) argues that anyone conversant with African politics will be struck by the dense role religion plays in politics in the continent, as a macrocosm, and in the various countries of the continent, as microcosms. It is in this context that Boko Haram becomes very relevant in the politics of Nigeria and Africa in general. They might be correct in their observation about Nigeria but their method of realizing their goal of ‘purifying’ remains suspect. In fact, their method of bringing the grievances to limelight has caused Nigeria and Islam as a religion a huge embarrassment. From attacking security agents and government establishment in the North-eastern part of Nigeria, they degenerated into a crass destruction of life and property. Resorting to insurgency and murderous adventure as a way to solve the problem, is to say the least, a wrong option and alternative. There is more or less no moral basis for the degree of blood-letting experienced in Nigeria in the name of religious cleansing.

2. Boko Haram

Boko Haram, which is literarily a transliteration of the condemnation or prohibition of what is ‘false’ in Islam is an ideological umbrella erected by a group of disenchanting Muslims in Nigeria, especially from the North, to fight what they call different perceived ills in the society. In the course of the five years the group has made itself very prominent, Boko Haram has claimed that Nigeria should be rescued from the precipice of nose-diving into eternal damnation in hell. They have proposed that embracing Islam is the only solution to the ills of the society called Nigeria, and in alliance with other extremist Islamic groups around the world like Al-Qaeda, ISIS/ISAL, Al-Shabab, etc, Boko Haram is pursuing this goal with a relentless brutality and violence. There is hardly any day that the Mass Media does not report cases of murder, kidnapping, arson, looting, rape, etc perpetrated by Boko Haram in the course of fulfilling its self-acclaimed goal of doing God’s will in the Nigerian society.

3. Nigeria on the Precipice

According to Gbogun gboro (*The Nation*, 2013:21), “if we refuse to learn a lesson from India, Switzerland, Britain, etc (countries that make a policy of sensibly respecting their nationalities), we shall surely lose Nigeria – may be very soon...” Gbogun has made this observation in the wake of the development in the country where it has become clear that regional interests and religious sentiments are playing vital roles in the fast degeneration of the country into a disunited entity. Nigeria is sitting on a precipice because there is no team spirit in nation-building. Nigeria is full of individual, selfish, and parochial players. Richard Templar (2005:8) describes such a spirit of team work vividly: “A team doesn’t pull together well when each individual members focuses on their

own target". This is why many people are of the opinion that many players in the team of nation-building in Nigeria are pursuing their individual agenda, which might be religious, political, ethnic, economic, etc. In this limelight also, it is becoming clear that Boko Haram is simply used as a camouflage to cover up the intention of the majority of political game players and their allies in Nigeria. For instance, when some influential Nigerian leaders from the North tell the world that their sole and fixed objective is to get the presidency back to the North in 2015, and that when they achieve it, they will never let go of it, then one cannot really be surprised at the recent development hidden under religious insurgency. For Gbogun, "certainly, no perceptive Nigerian needs to be educated about the purport of such statements – namely, that certain sections of Nigeria religiously believe themselves to be the God-ordained overlords of Nigeria, that the rest of Nigeria must learn to submit to the overlords, and that the overlords will do anything to assert their will" (21).

It is unfortunate that a section of the country is patronizing this divisive viewpoint regarding the mutual co-existence of the country without considering the implications of a possible conflict or disorder in the country. To cap this lopsided and arrogant posture of a particular section of the country towards others, Gbogun further writes, "In ways that did not exist at the time of independence, Nigerian nationalities are now inveterate enemies of one another, and the enormity and viciousness of the enmity and hostility are worsening in all directions across the face of Nigeria" (21). The situation has so much deteriorated that 'in general, the language of inter-ethnic communication gets more and more ugly all over Nigeria' (21).

Ethnic affiliation and loyalty has not ceased to form the bedrock of civil service practice in Nigeria since Independence. Special consideration is given to one or the other nationality within Nigeria among the top government functionaries. A close look and observation shows clear-cut animosity, spite and insults meted to people considered to be from other ethnic cleavages.

4. Pre-Independence Expectations

As colonialism and foreign dominion was coming to a close before Independence in 1960, expectations were very high that a new lease of freedom, justice, equity, and sense of responsibility would dawn on Nigeria. But anyone who is honest to the reality of things will certainly declare that it is like a dashed hope. We have not got it right. Or rather, it looks like we do not want to get it right in spite of glaring opportunities to do so. We have not got it right because we have squandered a lot of natural and human endowments and resources. The Oil Boom which started shortly after the cruel civil war has come and gone. Successive governments deliberately misused the revenue accruing from it. The pre-Agricultural boom was neglected without apologies. Other mineral resources such as coal and mine were treated with disdain in pursuit of oil money. Today all is a mirage. Nigeria seems to be poorer than it was before we assumed self-rule.

We should be honest and tell ourselves that all these tragedies were self-inflicted, either because of the so-called ethnic, political, or religious reasons, which regrettably also, we pretend not to notice. We refuse to accept the reality of these problems as coming directly from our deliberated effort to break-up the unity that was supposed to hold us together.

5. Agitations

Agitations have followed our parochial conception of Nigeria. The first major one led to the three-year civil war from 1967 to 1970. The South-east still nurtures the hope of self-rule through the resilience of the MASSOB. The next major agitation was the military dictatorship and the serious effort made to Islamise Nigeria. The country was registered as a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 and until today the religious/political Act has polarised sincere loyalty to the cause of Nigeria as a nation. The marginalisation of the so-called minority sections of Nigeria culminated in the total exploitation of the Niger Delta though it has remained the bedrock of Nigeria's well-being, at least from the economic point of view. The central government has so neglected the region that the multi-national oil companies see no other option than to degrade both human and natural resources. For decades, it was exploitation galore. The grievances of the Niger Delta Militants remain very strong despite the alleviation measures called Amnesty by the Federal Government. The Crux of the matter is the current bloody agitation from the North-East of Nigeria symbolised by the Boko Haram and its allies. Whereas the aforementioned agitators had sought for self-rule and recognition from the point of view of economic emancipation or political equality, the latest called Boko Haram seeks a complete religio-political domination of Nigeria based on the belief that Islam should be the yardstick for the continued existence of Nigeria as a country or united nation. Before the emergence of the Boko Haram, Nigeria witnessed a revolutionary movement by Muslim fundamentalists and radicalists from the North who introduced the Sharia in so many Northern states in the year 2000/2001 to drum it into the ears of other Nigerians that the Jihad of Islamization was far from over. In a hurricane-like agitation, many Muslims joined the train of religious warfare against the rest of their brothers and sisters all over Nigeria. Many lives were lost. The democratic dispensation ushered in 1999 was greatly marred. The scars were still clearly visible when Boko Haram reared its head heightening the fears and concerns of many schools of thought that the North is not ready to free politics in

Nigeria from the entanglement of religion characterised in Islam (cf. *Nwanaju*, 2007:171) .

6. Political Logjam

The question on the lips of so many people remains why the issue of religion should form a source of worry for the polity whenever a Christian takes over the rein of political leadership in the country. When Ebitu Ukiwe revealed to the Press that the issue of OIC membership was not discussed in the Military Council under Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, he was unceremoniously relieved of his position as the second in command. When Olusegun Obasanjo was elected the President of Nigeria in 1999, the Sharia debacle was brought into limelight. Similarly, when the circumstances of President Yara dua's death enthroned Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the President of Nigeria in 2009, Boko Haram – muslim religio-politically minded outfit – launched its own deadly offensive to destabilise the nation. There has not been peace in Nigeria for the past five years. Some claim that the North is the anointed overlords of Nigeria. Others claim that Muslims should either remain at the helm of affairs or there would be no progress cum development in the country. At the moment, therefore, Boko Haram represents the instrument of political logjam in Nigeria. Many lives have been lost. The North-East is almost devastated through kidnapping, arson, rape, and various kinds of threat. The neighbouring countries to Nigeria such Niger, Chad, and Cameroon are not left out in the current religious confusion.

The effort of the Nigerian Military alone has proved abortive. Thus, the decision of the International Community represented by the United Nations' Peace-Keeping Force to launch a total war against Boko Haram with the cooperation of the Joint Military Action authorised by the African Union (AU).

7. The Intervention of the United Nations

Though belated, the United Nations officially backed a military onslaught against Boko Haram on Tuesday, February 10, 2015. It went further to support a very strong humanitarian assistance to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to ensure the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are adequately taken care of. The Special Representation of UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, for West Africa, Mohammed Ibn Chambers told President Goodluck Jonathan: "The UN stands firmly behind Nigeria in its legitimate fight against Boko Haram terrorists. Mr. President has the assurance of the Secretary General for the recent initiative whereby the Lake Chad Basin Commission will be the platform to anchor the multinational task force which is being put in place (*Daily Sun*, 2015:15)".

The United Nations' Department of Peace was empowered to effect the resolution of the UN to assist Nigeria and the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger to help to degrade and eliminate Boko Haram and its menace. To concretise the plan, a joint force of 8,700 troops was set up to battle the militant group, which presently represents and signifies a complete reversal of values, enthroning violence, criminality, corruption, and any other kind of imaginable vice (*Nwanaju*, 2012:33).

Before the resolution to give full support the cause of routing Boko Haram from Nigeria, there was a terrible situation of hunger and displacement in Diffa (Niger Republic) where more than 125,000 people, mostly Nigerians from the North-Eastern part of the country, were given temporary shelter as refugees.

8. The Need to Stop the Menace of Boko Haram

The combined action of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the regional military force, and the UN Peace-keeping force is a welcome idea because it would help to stop the destruction of human life and the degradation of the environment. God's creation needs to be preserved and conserved for the present generation and for the future. It can only be achieved by taking some hard and strong decisions to stop the current insurgency led by Boko Haram, though sponsored by invisible faces and personalities in government and in the private sector. According to Lucius Ugorji (1995:14), "Human beings are to preserve and care for the world because it is good, an object willed and loved by God; an object that proclaims God's splendour and glory, an object whose existence determines the continued existence of humanity".

The environment around the region occupied by Boko Haram has been confirmed to be littered with explosives. For instance, *Daily Sun* of Wednesday, February 11, 2015 reports that police has recovered 147 unexpended bombs in Borno. Such a development is neither good for human beings nor for the environment. The most disappointing thing about the discovery is that the bombs were hidden in the house of a senior Federal Government official. Timothy Olanrewaju writes, "...the second bomb cache was discovered in a boy's quarters of a house belonging to a senior Federal Government official in the city,..." (2015:5).

In another development, Boko Haram released astonishing video on military training of kid soldiers (*Daily Sun*, 2015:15). It would be unfortunate if the world community allowed such an anti-human sect to drive kids into violence instead of ensuring their proper education.

9. Observations/Suggestions

Boko Haram might be seen as the immediate cause of the problem in Nigeria. But going down the memory lane

of history in Nigeria, remote causes underlie the current situation and other malfeasance in the polity. As already indicated in the paper, Nigeria was not totally prepared to assume complete self-rule from the British Colonial Administration. This is because the events following the independence showed that people of different cultures, religious affiliations, and ethnic disparity were coerced – directly or indirectly – to form a government. It does seem that there was no serious orientation to the kind of amalgamation imposed on the peoples that today make up Nigeria. This is why veritable occasions to achieve developmental feats and strides have eluded the country at various phases of its life as a nation. One type of agitation or the other has always been used to disturb any articulated developmental plan. In the wake of all these ugly developments, therefore, there is need for a serious re-thinking and re-consideration of our priorities from all directions. Since religion forms a major bedrock of our national life, all major religions in Nigeria should collaborate and cooperate to achieve cohesion – African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. Sincere debate should be promoted on how to understand ourselves as a nation of different ‘colours’; varied ‘tongues’; plurality of religions and cultures; mentality, and endowments. Such a debate should provide serious and pragmatic answers as to how these differences can be coordinated to achieve a workable result for the development of the country. The outcome of the National Conference of 2014 should be integrated into the future planning of the co-existence of the different nationalities that make up Nigeria. This is why it should be further and deeply emphasised that our religious affiliations can be a source of enrichment and blessing. When this is achieved, the agitations of fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram, Niger Delta Militants, MASSOB, etc can be harnessed into a harmonious co-existence for the upliftment of faith, belief, and economic development. It should be clearly defined that the continued mutual co-existence of the different peoples of Nigeria can only be possible through the media of tolerance, acceptance, and justice. At no point in time can the religious belief of any particular group be allowed to form the leitmotif for the unnecessary waste of human life and other resources.

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