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BOKO HARAM *SHARIA* REASONING AND DEMOCRATIC VISION IN PLURALIST NIGERIA¹

ABSTRACT: In the decade since Al-Qaeda, led by the late Osama Bin Laden, attacked America, there has been a resurgence in the debate about the relationship between religion and politics. The global Islamic terrorist networks and their successful operations against various targets around the globe increasingly draw attention to what constitutes the core values of Islamic extremism: the logic of evangelistic strategy, the import and relevance of its spiritual message and consideration of the composite view of life that does not distinguish between sacred and temporal mandates. Suspicions have been fuelled that Islam is incompatible with modern democratic systems and pluralist outlooks. The real cause of Islamic militancy is at once universal and particular. The Nigerian experience of this radical Islamism–Boko Haram–brings home the once “distant” threat to global peaceful co-existence. While there exist arguments regarding the *raison d’être* and means or methods of the operations of Boko Haram, the end has been normative; to achieve a purely religious nationalistic system on the basis of the *sharia* code of ethics. This paper, therefore, critically analyses the historical and philosophical interpretations of Islamic history constructed as an infallible corpus, and how it has been impacted by the democratic vision in Nigeria. It concludes with a consideration of the possibility and practicability of a liberal system at once free and religious in a pluralist and global society.

KEY WORDS: terrorism, Islam, Al-Qaeda, education, jihad.

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Introduction

On September 11, 2001, America was shaken terrorist planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon killing thousands of people. Just as the world was trying to figure out what went wrong, it further experienced shoe bomber Richard Reid in 2001, the two Tel Aviv 'Mike's Place' bombers in 2003, the four July 7 London bombers in 2005 and the attempted Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalib in 2009. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram Islamic sect has been active since July 2009, with large numbers of casualties.

When one observes the trend of these actual and attempted attacks, it is noticeable that young Muslim people are involved and that Islam as a religion has received a negative public image leading to Islamophobia, radicalization of the religion and a reinforced, deliberate or inadvertent interest in the debate on the symbiosis between religion and politics as well as global insecurity. While these are true and global, they are at once local—as expressed in the Nigerian religio-political space.

The underlying principle has been identified as *sharia* reasoning, that is, the militants believe that the *sharia* code of ethics should guide the lives of Muslims wherever they live. Western liberal democratic values are believed to have corrupted the Islamic faith. The variants of this stringent position have been manifested in the inveterate attacks carried out with the aim of achieving a comprehensive Islamic global state. This essay will therefore discuss the historical and philosophical interpretations of Islamic history constructed as infallible corpus, which is believed to be equally relevant in the twenty-first century as in the sixth century. It will then detail how Boko Haram has keyed into this 'philosophy' as a guide to its operations in Nigeria. Then, it will be argued that the flawed hermeneutics of contextual and exigent history do not mean that Islam cannot be compatible with global, pluralist and democratic society, but there is the urgent need for mass education of the pool of people from which Boko Haram recruits.

Historical Basis for *Sharia* Reasoning

The one religion that has been largely misunderstood and mischaracterized in recent time is Islam. Its geographical provenance invites "intuitive, often condescending, comparison with its putative cultural cousins—Judaism and Christianity; the mode and pattern of its evangelistic strategy, especially at its incipient stage, is often cited by some to call into question the authenticity of its spiritual message" (Ilesanmi 27-36). Islam embraces a composite view of life, which

incorporates both the sacred and temporal spheres into a single and undifferentiated whole with a divine mandate or guidance. These strictures are perceived as incompatible with modernity and its pluralist values. The modern society's secular ethos is deemed to be antithetical to the Islamic code of ethics because God has been presumably removed from the schema of life. The removal of God therefore, as perceptibly done by the West, is an invitation to jihad in contemporary society, which Ilesanmi refers to as "jaundiced understanding of the Islamic tradition" (27).

The point in history being referred to is the Medina Order in which the religious cum spiritual, social, administrative and legal frameworks of the Ummah-Islamic community—were solely provided and adjudicated by Prophet Muhammad, and carried further by the caliphs who succeeded him. This provides the somewhat historical template for Islamic militants who believe that the Medina Order must be restored. Thus, the militants draw parallels between what transpired about 1400 years ago, that is, the struggles of the early Islamic community and the post-colonial Islamic struggles (Oh 50-58). As Kelsay argues, "the point of holy history is to answer religious questions; not simply or even primarily "How did these events transpire?" but "Why did they occur?" (Kelsay). Since the aim of the early Islamic community was to unite the growing community in religion, administration and legislation, around the historical figure—Prophet Muhammad; the militants find this historical need urgent in modern society because Islam is still growing and expanding although persecuted.

The prophet of Islam administered the early community with *sharia*. By the twelfth century, *sharia* had become an established process such that those professionally trained in Islamic religious and legal history could distinguish "between history and present circumstance, or between approved texts and new contexts" (Kelsay 125). It is within this prism that Kelsay defines *sharia* reasoning as an "attempt to forge links between the wisdom of previous generation and the challenges posed by contemporary life, in hopes of acting in ways consistent with the guidance of God" (Kelsay 4). In other words, instead of distinguishing the exigent historical texts and contextualizing them within the socio-political framework of modern reality, and consistent with their faith, Islamic extremists reject such negotiation and insist that present contexts must of necessity fit into the ancient texts. If "reasoning implies a movement, both dynamic and dialectical, in which one draws inferences or conclusions from known or assumed facts" (Ilesanmi 51) it stands to reason that the historical account upon which the militants draw inspiration must receive a cautious "balance between continuity and

creativity” (Kelsay 83). As Kelsay expatiates, their arguments are characteristic of “conscientious” form of movement:

between precedent and new contexts. One proceeds with due respect to other judgment articulated in approved texts. It must never be assumed that the sharia is closed, however. To take such a position is to deny the freedom of God. It is to render God static, whereas the voice speaking in the Quran, and to which prophet’s sunna bears witness, is very much dynamic and living. (177)

Since God is not static but dynamic and relevant to every political order, it is argued further that:

Sharia reasoning supports a political order in which persons and groups are free to hear the word of God, to accept it, and to worship according to their deeply held conviction. *Sharia* reasoning also supports the converse; in order to protect the right of believers to practice their religion, it must be possible for others, nonbelievers, to hear the word of God, to reject it, and to live according to the dictates of conscience. (Kelsay 169)

However, the moral latitude of this form of *sharia* reasoning incisively confronts the global, democratic and pluralist contours because it is an invitation to violate the freedom of others who may not share their belief and religious leaning. Above all, it seems to arrogate God’s right in matters of faith to human beings as well as abdicate the responsibilities attached to it, which militants have interpreted to mean that they are equipped to carry out as part of their religious duty—*jihad*.

James T. Johnson queries the arrogation by the militants of such interpretive and practical powers. According to him, three fundamental Islamic documents, as examined by Kelsay, provide a scintillating understanding and interpretation of *sharia* reasoning of Islamic radicalism. He argues that the authority vested on the *Ulema*—the learned jurists—has been usurped by modern *malik* [kings]. The documents are: creed of Sadat’s assassins, *The Neglected Duty*, from 1981, the charter of Hamas, from 1988, and the *Declaration on Armed Struggle Against Jews and Crusaders*, which is styled in the form of jurisprudential ruling issued by Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and three others, from 1998. According to Johnson, these documents obviously relied on a long history reaching back through the Mongol incursions and the crusades to the time of Prophet Muhammad and his successors, stretching to the Quran itself. But the crisis of practice noticeable in these documents is the expansion of “*Sharia* reasoning” beyond the small circle of elite scholars bearing the authority of “the learned” to a larger circle, in which literate and professional Muslims consider themselves qualified to engage in arguments about the guidance of God” (Johnson 45). Apart from that, the

crisis that followed the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate in 1928, which was the last caliphate, and of course, the crisis of western influence made the circle wider. The end of the Ottoman caliphate was a watershed. It opened up the contest about who could rightly interpret the *sharia* since “the political theory embodied in traditional reasoning [that] was framed in terms of the ideal of a universal Islamic community, ruled according to Islamic law by a single ruler” (Johnson 45) was rejected with the collapse of the caliphate.

These crises—*sharia* reasoning, political authority and historical understanding—correspond with the radical Islamists’ thinking that the West has been very aggressive to Islam, Muslim leaders have become corrupt, some are even apostates; and Muslims generally have not shown faithfulness to their faith. This self-understanding of Islam resonates in the modern concept of jihad as depicted in the three documents listed above. The thrust of these documents is that Islam is portrayed as a religion in a state of emergency, which requires all faithful Muslims to defend it. This call to duty supersedes all other loyalty to rulers and even families (Johnson 46).

The Neglected Duty expresses this emergency as one that calls for urgent mobilization because Muslim rulers have become apostates by innovation and adoption of western paradigms and code of conduct to the neglect of strict Islamic law. These rulers have also been accused of persecuting genuine Muslims, especially Anwar Sadat of Egypt whose assassination was justified on the basis of his romance with the West, and allowing non-Muslims to dominate Muslims (Johnson 41). It has also been argued that the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hassan al-Banna in 1928, which was responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Began Menachem and President Sadat of Egypt, revolutionized Islam, and reinforced radical Islamism. It was a reaction to the limiting of the roles of the *ulema* [Muslim legal scholar] in public life by modern government, and secularization of public institutions. The Muslim Brotherhood resisted the development that brought religious institutions under closer state control, and ultimately assumed the duty of practice of *sharia* (“Islam in Egypt”). Irene Oh illustrates that the interpretation of the *sharia* by the *ulema* was a “historical accident” caused by the high level of illiteracy and non-availability of the text to most Muslims (Oh 54). However, the situation changed in the twentieth century when more Muslims could read and also have access to the texts as a result of the development in print technology. So the respect for the *ulema* waned considerably. Nevertheless, while the Muslim Brotherhood and its South Asian counterpart, the Jama ‘at-i Islami led by Abu’l a’la Mawdudi continued to have respect for the *ulema*, they “effectively reserve judgment on matters of practice for themselves” (Oh 54).

The charter of Hamas approves “armed resistance as a matter of imposed war” (Kelsay 133) to reclaim land believed to belong to the Muslims, and acts in the order of the crusades, and in contrast with *The Neglected Duty*, which fights apostasy. Herein, the world is uncompromisingly divided into two unrelated parts: *dar al-islam* (the house of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the house of war), meaning the non-Muslim world.

The *Declaration* is an extrapolation from *The Neglected Duty* and the Charter of Hamas in its expression of the state of emergency. It argues that the whole of the Muslim world and Muslims themselves are under severe attack, especially from the West and America. These attacks are led by Americans and “the satanically inspired supporters allying with them” (Johnson 44). So the declaration that America and all its allies should be destroyed as agents of Satan who want to annihilate Muslims and Islam becomes a duty of every able Muslim worldwide (Mandel 103). With the *Declaration*, the deference for the *ulema* seemingly ended because “for Osama bin Laden and those who stand with him, the *ulema* are nearly as irrelevant as the leadership of historically Muslim states. At best, they are focused on splitting hairs; at worst, they publish opinions that identify *Sharia* reasoning with the policies of acquiescence to Europe and the United States” (Kelsay 153). So people like Bin Laden “consider themselves qualified to issue a formal *Sharia* opinion on the duty of Muslims, including the learned” (Kelsay 153) and also mobilize resistance against European and American ‘invasion’ of Islam.

Radicalization of Islam in Contemporary Society

The events of recent history now popularly referred to as 9/11 and 7/7 are hinged on the instigation of Al-Qaeda (AQ) then under the command of the late Osama Bin Laden. In February 1998, Bin Laden and his associates, under the aegis of the World Islamic Front, issued a statement accusing America and its allies of unpardonable crimes against God and Muslims. According to the statement, “All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims” (Mandel 103). This means a direct declaration of holy war against America and its allies. The statement reads further:

On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it. We—with God’s help call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and

plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We all call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youth, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson. (Mandel 103)

As noted above, *sharia* reasoning has been taken over from the *ulema* in that they have been so summoned to join the armed forces of the house of Islam against the house of war by the militants. The usurpation of the role of the *ulema* in *sharia* reasoning is at once religious and political. Not so many researchers think about it this way. Rather, many of them tend to focus on the psycho-political implications of the effects of what ordinarily has a deep religious history. Whether or not it is rightly interpreted, such social science researchers as Niza Yinay, Kien S. Lee, among others, tend to downplay the critical historical impetus of Islamic religion as the summoning factor to radicalization and "new terrorism" (Yanay 131-142). However, Benjamin Zablocki and Anna Looney recognize the crucial and urgent need to appropriate religious paradigm to global social science investigation especially with the events of 9/11. As they put it:

The social movement aspect of these entities was sometimes noted but rarely emphasized. The quantum leap in global consciousness precipitated by 9/11 has propelled us into seeing that our field of research can benefit from being looked at as a part of the larger field of social movements. At the same time, we have come to recognize that there is nothing particularly new or exclusively religious about many of the ideologies driving these movements. Distinctions among ideologies that are purely religious, those that are purely political, and those that are purely cultural are difficult and often impossible to draw. (Zablocki and Looney 314)

The taxonomy of this complex admixture of religious, political and cultural paradigms can only be difficult to dissect from the western binary conception. However Islam does not separate them. They are part and parcel of faith and guided by *sharia*. Understood from this prism, the *Declaration* insists that the forced distinction of these paradigms by the West and America is a considered policy to exterminate Islamic culture hence the various terrorist attacks.

Basia Spalek argues that new terrorism, which is now associated with Al-Qaeda (AQ) is facilitated by globalization forces and is a response to them. Whether or not AQ is best classified as 'old' or 'new' terrorism, the fact remains that since 9/11 the thinking about new terrorism has filtered into policy, security, policing, and media at global level. According to him,

'New terrorism' constitutes a set of rationalities and technologies in relation to a so-called new form of terrorism that is global and indiscriminate, linked to groups

associated with or influenced by AQ. Importantly, this new form of terrorism . . . is linked to Islam as a religion, . . . the 'new terrorism' is said to be unbounded and uses indiscriminate targeting, and interpretations of Islamic texts and concepts are said to be used not only as a moral foundation, but as sacred motivators and legitimisers. (Spalek, "'New Terrorism' and Crime Prevention Initiatives" 194)

Spalek, Lambert and McDonald further argue that even though 'new terrorism' is a contested concept, it is nevertheless the case that it is related to AQ, which presents Islamism in the context of violence; "violence as intrinsically linked to Islamic theology, and thus as an extreme articulation of Muslimness" (McDonald 77-189). The concept also underscores "a new phase in terrorist practice, one in which terror is an indiscriminate and unrestricted end rather than a bounded, pragmatic means" (McDonald 178). Clive Field notes that Islamism is more or less a political rather than religious Islam, and it is also on this political thought that it easily radicalizes the youth (Field 171).

Since 'new terrorism' is linked to AQ, it is apt to underscore that AQ in its *sharia* reasoning tries to legitimize violence. The 'ideological strategy' it employs is to bring to the front burner the idea that all Muslims are members of the *ummah*-the global Islamic community-and as such deserve to be protected and defended. AQ believes that members of the *ummah* face difficulties in western states, which make it almost impossible for them to practice their faith. "AQ ideology is reflective of a homogenous Muslim group identity and standpoint" (McDonald 184) hence it laboriously constructs a borderless loyalty to the cause of Islam through jihad.

The radicalization of jihad of the sword is instructive. Although it appears in early Muslim history, it is ostensibly not a concept found in the Quran. The root word, *jhd* denotatively means "striving to follow the path of God" (Johnson 40). Although it appears in the *hadith* (the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad) literature with the connotation of fighting against non-Muslims, McDonald recognizes that it is "a noble and complex set of duties, incorporating physical defense that is bound by a set of explicit and uncompromised principles" (McDonald 185). In effect, *jihad* of the sword as a collective duty is only authorizable by the caliph, the head of the *ummah*, rather than an individual, even though there is a provision for individual jihad under the construct of personal defense. The caliph or his designee assumes the position of commander in chief in the jihad of collective duty. But this is only operational in the context of caliphate, which perceptibly ended with the Ottoman caliphate. Johnson argues that:

So long as there was a caliphate, the juristic conception of the jihad of collective duty could remain the normative form of welfare. The fundamentals of this understanding

of war were not undermined by empirical fragmentation of the Muslim world, by the coexistence of multiple rival caliphates each of which claimed universal jurisdiction or by the coming into being of effectively independent local rulers so long as they claimed to be acting in fealty to one or another of the caliphs then existing. (Johnson 41)

With time, the authorization of the jihad of the sword could not be guaranteed by the juristic conception; it lied with the *malik*, but progressed to incorporate the “ability” to demonstrate “divine blessing by success in warfare,” (Johnson 43) which has come to be the propelling authority AQ depends upon. Broadly speaking, AQ noticeably acts on the basis of individual duty translated as collective, even though *The Neglected Duty* and the *Declaration* reject present Islamic rulers as unjust and apostate. This stance of AQ raises the question whether or not its members are Muslim in the true sense, a question which snowballs into identity crisis.

AQ has been variously described as “not really Muslim,” “irrational agents,” “insane,” “monsters” (Oh 50). Such glib characterizations have been presumably turned into a positive or sympathetic posture for the organization. The leaders believe that being vilified is an attestation to the fact that Islam is being persecuted, and they must rally support to defend it. For instance, instead of Muslim youths, especially in UK, seeing AQ in that light, they tend to believe that it consists of “sons of Islam,” the suicide bombers are martyrs, and the British and American war against terror is actually “a war against Islam” (Field 166). Identity is crucial to the radicalization of Islam, because it is “rarely innocent of power” and it is shaped in response to the “ruling apparatus of society” (McDonald 182). It is suggested that a more positive construction of the image of Islam must be a good beginning rather than widespread Islamophobia. This entails critical creation of “the sense of citizenship and shared values” (McDonald 183). “Preventing terrorism requires effective interventions to build and reinforce social, inter-cultural and community cohesion . . . Participation of citizens should be also promoted at all times” (McDonald 183).

However, the dialectic between prevention of terrorism through deterrence and continued violent radicalization of Islamism has yet to find a consensus. In other words, AQ and its allies continue to fund, sponsor, instigate and recruit young people to carry out heinous terrorist operations wherever they can. Violent radicalization securitizes Islam “where securitisation might be thought of as the instigation of emergency politics” (Spalek 192). Within this premise, it is argued that the security policies, legislations and other measures are in themselves exclusive rather than integrating. The “otherization” of AQ, Muslim Brotherhood,

Salafi, etc. representing violent extremism to be exterminated has articulated Islam into a binary of moderate and radical. The notion that the former can be tolerated while the latter must be fought to a standstill dominates the argument. Blears captures the political rhetoric this way:

Our strategy rests on the assessment of firstly whether an organization is actively condemning, and working to tackle, violent extremism; and secondly whether they defend and uphold the shared values of pluralist democracy, both in their words and their deeds. By being clear what is acceptable and what isn't, we aim to support the moderates and isolate the extremists. (McDonald 182)

David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, did not mince words when he authoritatively declared as follows: "Governments must also be shrewder in dealing with those that, while not violent, are in some cases part of the problem. We need to think much harder about who it's in the public interest to work with" (McDonald 182). This clarifies the reason for the hunt for Bin Laden and his allies. In spite of this, violent radicalization in the form of new terrorism has continued to spread across borders. The same *sharia* reasoning about texts and contexts is still a potent tool of mobilization toward new terrorism. Whether or not it resonates in political ostracization or marginalization, a decisive level of resistance has always followed its trail. And Nigeria is having its share as we witness in the violent radicalization of Boko Haram.

Boko Haram on *Sharia* Reasoning

Boko Haram, one of the Islamist sects in Nigeria, has a complex mix of identities which it strives to idealize. Spalek underscores the intricacies of identities within Islamist reasoning and emphasizes its pertinence in trying to deal with them. According to him, "it is important to highlight here that the problematisation of Muslim identities goes beyond the problematisation of Muslim ethnic and cultural identities . . . to the problematisation of Islamic *religious* identities within wider discussions regarding citizenship and cohesion" (Spalek 195). In Nigeria, these complexities of identities are at once cultural, ethnic, political and religious. This is why some have argued for true secular state-formation, an idea Boko Haram finds to be anti-God and obstructive to the full realization of Muslimhood or Muslimness (Igboin).

Many attempts have been made to understand the ideological bent of mind of Boko Haram. Such attempts have led to one conclusion: the sect is anti-western in its entirety. However, it is significant to note that in its etymological rendition, *Boko*, an Hausa word, roughly translates

to education in its descriptive rather than definitive sense. *Boko* might have got its derivative root from, or be a corruption of, *boka*, which associates with witchcraft. In a deft analysis of it, it has no theological conceptualization. *Haram* on the other hand is an Arabic word, meaning impermissible, the opposite of which is *halal*, meaning permissible. In its historical contextual meaning, *ilimi* means education while *ilimi boko* was actually used to derogate western education during the colonial period, being different from *ilimi islamiyya*, Islamic education. In its conceptual analysis, Muslims think that Islamic education is in all ramifications superior to western education. Just as *boka* [witchcraft] is inimical to the wellbeing of the people so is western education thought of as being fake and counterfeit. The strange and suspicious notion about western education defines contempt for the latter, the reason for the incredibly high rate of 'illiteracy' in northern Nigeria (Kukah, "Boko Haram: Some Reflections on Causes and Effects" 1-6).

Kukah argues that the success of Boko Haram depends on a number of factors. The lack of formal education for many children has provided space for itinerant teachers to promote a form of Quranic literacy. Such education is usually given to children for between five and six years. The teachers are not paid but depend on the proceeds from begging by their pupils. It is these thoroughly indoctrinated pupils that constitute the reservoir for recruitment into Boko Haram. The curriculum of the Quranic schools is purely on recitation of the Quran and hatred for the western style of education (Kukah, "Boko Haram: Some Reflections on Causes and Effects" 13).

It is, nevertheless, difficult to delineate a systematic *sharia* reasoning in Boko Haram. The leaders of this sect are articulate in western knowledge and demonstrate skill in utilization of its technology. It will therefore be a performative contradiction to insist that their ideology, if it qualifies to be so defined, is purely to exterminate western education and its influences in Nigeria. But the socio-political reality is that a limited and strict adherence to Quranic education is counterproductive in a fast moving world. As a consequence, those who have not acquired the requisite knowledge of contemporary education will inevitably have to contend with what they perceive as corrosive effects of modernization. Modernization challenges the values which define their humanity and may result in an identity crisis. The argument is that since society, just as human beings, is dynamic rather than static, values and ideologies must compete intensely within the context of dynamism.

Situated within the house of Islam and house of war, Boko Haram's belief that western education and democracy violate *sharia* reasoning becomes somewhat ideological. According to this sect:

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out jihad in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will not accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system and that is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, socialism and whatever. We will not allow Nigerian Constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Quran. We will not allow adulterated conventional education (*Boko*) to replace Islamic teachings. (Agbo, 46-7)

In fact, the former leader of the sect, Mohammed Yusuf said: "Democracy, and the current system of education must change otherwise this war that is yet to start will continue for long" (Umejesi, "Rule of Law as a Panacea to Religious Crises in Nigeria" 237). No less a person than the President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar affirms the importance of education within Islam. In tracing the historical legacies of Islam in West Africa, he notes that the famous universities of Timbuktu and Birni Gazargamo are products of Islamic intellectualism. These universities and many other higher institutions do not solely focus on Islamic education but rather of other disciplines as well. He further insists that Uthman Ibn Fodio, Abdullahi Ibn Fodio and Muhammad Bello held on to intellectual commitment and integrity that put them above their contemporaries, a hallmark Muslims are enjoined to strive to achieve. He cites Uthman Ibn Fodio to counter Boko Haram's position thus:

A man without learning is like a country without inhabitants. The finest qualities in a leader in particular and in people in general, are the love for learning, the desire to listen to it and holding the bearer of knowledge in great respect . . . If a leader is devoid of learning, he follows his whims and leads his subjects astray . . . All that requires outstanding learning, keen insight and extensive study. How would he get on if he had not made the necessary preparations and made himself ready for these matters . . . (Abubakar)

He adds that Uthman Ibn Fodio insisted that women must necessarily be educated. He frowned at the traditional practice that confined women to janitorial duties and being child-bearing machines, serving the selfish interest of their husbands. Thus, he summoned them to reject men's fixated agenda when he said: "O Muslim women, do not heed the calls of those misguided folk who deceive you into obeying your husbands rather than the messenger of God" (Abubakar). This seems to be a call to Muslim women to revolt against their husbands who deprived them from being educated.

Abubakar argues that developments in every field of human endeavor have made it easy to acquire vast knowledge. "Scientific breakthroughs have also made it possible to achieve human development at an unprecedented scale and to enhance the welfare and wellbeing of each and every one of us" (Abubakar). He recalls that the first anti-modern sect was Maitatsine, which was a distinctly anti-Boko group prior to Boko Haram.

However, Ojo argues that such a simplistic view of history can be counterproductive as it betrays intellectual integrity, particularly with regard to the interpenetration of religious, ethnic, political, socioeconomic realities amongst Nigerians. The truth is that Uthman Ibn Fodio's jihad of the first decade of the nineteenth century has continued to be a reference point and inspiration on how best to utilize violence in Nigeria. According to him, "the aggressive nature of this episode [jihad] undermines its claims for universal appeal" (Ojo 1-8), this perceptibly disconnects faith from spirituality. By and large, the jihad did not only seek to purify the existing 'peaceful' Islam from all forms of traditional and syncretistic beliefs and rituals and restore Muslims to orthodox and undiluted faith, which was the religious conception of the jihad, but also brought a political revolution, which overthrew the Hausa dynasties by the immigrating Fulani; an act that has continued to spread suspicion and hate, because of the domination of the aborigines and their religion and culture (Umejesi, "Rule of Law as a Panacea to Religious Crises in Nigeria" 94-5).

Be that as it may, what Abubakar's argument demonstrates is simple: Boko Haram is not truly fighting against western education, at least from the perspective of true Islam. If he has held on to this position, it means that the sect has no authority to declare jihad of the sword due to the intricate role of the *ulema* in *sharia* interpretation. The Sultan does not only spiritual authority, he also assumes the role of a jurist as the final arbiter of *sharia* 'statute', regardless of the plethora of schools of thought (Badaiki 17-8). As far as this is true, Boko Haram must be perceived as an Islamist sect or political Islam. This conclusion is incisive because though Islamists seem to rely on *sharia* as the only authentic law, which should apply to all facets of life, and radically reject western ideologies and institutions, particular education and its benefits, they "know more about new sciences and technology than their religion" (Mvumbi 121). In fact, when Bin Laden was accused of AQ trying to obtain chemical and nuclear weapons, he emphatically responded thus:

Acquiring weapons for the defence of Muslims is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then I thank God for enabling me to do so. And if I seek to

acquire these weapons, I am carrying out a duty. It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims. (Alanamu, Muhammed, Adeoye 426)

As Daniel Pipes sums up: “[f]undamentalist Islam is a radical utopian movement closer in spirit to other such movements (communism, fascism) than traditional religion. By nature anti-democratic and aggressive, anti-Semitic and anti-western, it has great plans” (Ogunbanjo 110). But John Esposito’s perspective insight is pertinent in order to determine how best to respond. He avers:

The challenge today is to appreciate the diversity of Islam actors and movements to ascertain the reasons behind confrontations and conflicts, and thus to react to specific events and situations with informed, reasoned responses rather than pre-determined presumptions and reactions. (Esposito 169)

This challenge will be viewed within Nigerian pluralist, democratic space.

Boko Haram and Democratic Vision

It should be recognized that *sharia* is fundamental to Islam. But it appears that it is used as a smokescreen for ends other than true religion. The compatibility of *sharia* in a pluralist, democratic society is problematic regardless of the fact that the Constitution recognizes the *sharia* court up to the appellate level. While conceptually it may be defended within a unitary Islamic worldview, recent empirical events indicate that such defense does not absolve it from caustic criticisms. This means the fear is real. The cases of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, among others, quickly point to the fact that *sharia* could be difficult to fully implement in contemporary society. These examples have not clearly demonstrated the political or moral rectitude that *sharia* envisions. Rather, these are as bad as, if not worse than countries with liberal democracies in matters of human rights, governance, corruption, poverty, intolerance, discrimination etc.

Perhaps we could be persuaded along with Kofi Annan, who argues that religion and its precepts can be exonerated from the negative consequences that confront the world today. Since “the problem is not with the belief system,” it is indisputably “with the believers” (Ukwuegbu 31). This point appears to be behind former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s reaction to the introduction of *sharia* in northern Nigeria in 1999 and 2000. For him, it was political rather than real or true

sharia. Even though he was heavily criticized for trying to bifurcate *sharia* into political and religious divides, (*Human Rights in Nigeria: Hopes and Hindrances* 24-7) later events justified his position on it. In spite of the euphoria that greeted its introduction and the seeming successes it achieved, the unceremonious abandonment of *sharia* has been adduced as one of the critical reasons for the rise of Boko Haram. Boko Haram members, as well as ordinary Muslims, have come to discover that “the apostles of *sharia* have been caught in the same web of corruption like their other contemporaries” (Kukah, “Boko Haram: Some Reflections on Causes and Effects” 17). The sect has foreign links and sponsorship, e.g. Al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

How does *sharia* fit into democratic vision? This question is complex. However, Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler observe that “about half of all Muslims live in democratic and semi-democratic states” (Oh 56). As such what needs to be investigated is how they have been able to negotiate their faith in the context of democracy. In doing so, it is crucial to understand that there are varying degrees of *sharia* such that what obtains in Jordan and Qatar differs from what operates in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In democratic and pluralist Nigeria, Abdullahi An-Na’im has argued consistently that full implementation of *sharia* is an invitation to civil war because non-Muslims would be regarded as second class citizens and the case of traditionalists would be worse than the Christians. However, he emphasizes that democracy does not obstruct Muslims’ fidelity to *sharia* as a personal law. (An-An’im)

The disagreement between “Muslim militants” and Muslim democrats” borders on whether or not *sharia* should be a private law under democracy. This incongruity on the real kind of political structure to establish raises three fundamental issues: (1) “the identity of the political system (2) the inclusiveness of citizens’ participation in the system, and (3) the scope of rights enjoyed by the citizens.” The fact is that pre-modern Islamic law has not remained the same in modern nation-states, even in strictly Islamic states. The “modern setting” though has multivalent interpretations, offers ample opportunities to negotiate, “there is . . . a long narrative . . . in which Muslims try to negotiate between models involving a complete separation of religion and a complete conflation or convergence of these two dimensions of life,” and apart from Prophet Muhammad’s Medina Order that operated theocracy, such convergence “is an unrepeatable event” (Kelsay 180-1).

In Nigeria, the structure has not obviated Islam nor does it hinder Muslims from the practice of their faith. Rather it is the case that they are more favored constitutionally than non-Muslims in matters of religion, and even judiciary. As a result, the Muslim militants (Boko Haram) and

the Muslim democrats have a contest; “the contest has to do with the ability of participants to articulate a fit between past and present, and persuade others that this connection serves to enable the Muslim community to fulfill its mission of calling people to God” (Ilesanmi 34) rather than engaging in a titanic battle against God’s people created to live in a free pluralist society.

Conclusion

Is the Boko Haram sect Muslim? It is argued by some that it only claims to be Islamic, but in the true sense does not represent Muslims. Boko Haram on the other hand maintains that Muslims who have identified with western ideologies are apostates, therefore, not Muslims because they have abandoned *sharia*. Interestingly, these positions are at once existential and intellectual; they involve reasoning, and a hermeneutical method with its self-referential rules, which define pluralist, democratic society.

The instrument to sustain such intellectual engagement from degenerating into physical terrorist violence is education, the acquisition and application of knowledge. After all, the prophet of Islam enjoined Muslims to seek knowledge, even as far as China, a faraway place then considered *terra incognita* (unknown land) (1 Awoniyi 20). Kolawole Olu-Owolabi has noted the high price of ignorance as capable of destroying human development and society, and insists that knowledge is the *sine qua non* to end conflicts (Olu-Owolabi). Haroun Adamu, in fact, complained and blamed the British for their refusal to enforce western education in northern Nigeria. However, he acknowledged the selfishness of the leaders when he said that “the “backwardness” of northern Nigeria is due to the reluctance of emirs to introduce English from the beginning of colonial rule” (Osasona 193). The argument was that Islamic education was the best, and therefore sufficient for the administration of the conquered Hausa dynasties without foresight. This is the thought of the Muslim militants, whereas the Muslim democrats, who nevertheless are insignificant in number, understand that western education is a sure way to development and growth. Therefore, the continuous denial of western education to the region will effectively send it further ‘back to a state of retrogression and perpetual backwardness.’

With particular reference to Boko Haram, which seems to be averse to western education, we make bold to say that the sure way to curb it and others of such inclination is education. There must be massive investment in formal education to replace the *Almajiri* schools which

enroll about seven million children, a veritable reservoir for recruiting into fundamentalist sects. This large number of unschooled children is easily deceived into believing that what the sect leaders are saying is true regardless of the fact that they are rarely educated in their own right. "A way of dealing with the phenomenon of terrorism is to get the community from which these agents stem and learn to minimize the receptivity of people to recruiting organizations" through education (Ukpokolo). Such education should entail citizenship, liberal, civic and accommodative studies, and interfaith networking. This is urgent and incumbent on government and all well meaning groups and individuals. This is urgent because of the global nature of Islamism. Various countries are devising ways to arrest the situation according to their contexts.

Finally, the dividends of democracy must be seen to be deployed irrespective of political office-holders' religious affiliation. Government must re-invent itself because its failure at all levels has been an excuse for the inveterate terrorist convolutions. Where justice is lacking, an unjust means can attempt to right the wrong in an unjust way, which generally receives applause and approval from the deprived. Democratic justice will be a sure way to navigate out of the precarious situation instead of a "fire for fire" approach. As the leaders are true to the principles of democracy, so will the citizens be, irrespective of their religious leaning.

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