RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Ongoing Campaign of Terror in Nigeria: Boko Haram versus the State

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Boko Haram remains arguably the biggest problem confronting Nigeria today, with consequences going beyond security into the political and socio-economic aspects of governance. This Islamist group from northeastern Nigeria has killed at least 3,500 people since 2009 when it first launched its Islamic insurgency to wrest power from the Nigerian government and create an Islamic state under the supreme law of sharia. The group's active gnawing at the religious, ethnic, and regional fault-lines of Nigeria not only threatens the country's peace and unity, but holds serious transnational implications. The objective of this paper is to answer three fundamental questions about the extremist group: Who is Boko Haram? Why does the group rebel? How has the Nigerian State responded? The paper also touches on Boko Haram's growing connection to transnational terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab as a form of survival strategy.

Introduction

There is an ongoing campaign of terror in Nigeria. Since July 2009, Boko Haram, an extremist Islamist group from the northeastern part of Nigeria, began a violent campaign that has resulted in the deaths of 3,500 people, with the death toll rising on an almost daily basis (Agbiboa 2013a). The group has carried out frequent attacks and bombings, in some cases using suicide bombers. Target locations have included police stations, military facilities, churches, schools, beer halls, newspaper offices, and the United Nations building in Abuja (Uzodike 2012: 91). In addition, the group has assassinated Muslim clerics and traditional leaders in the north for allegedly cooperating with state authorities (Agbiboa 2013b; HRW 2012). Boko Haram's increasingly sophisticated and

coordinated attacks have targeted Nigeria's ethno-religious fault lines and security agents in an attempt to wrest power from the Nigerian government and create an Islamic state governed by strict sharia (Forest 2012; Mustapha 2012). Since January 2013, Boko Haram has taken control of Marte, Mobbar, Gubio, Guzamala, Abadam, Kukawa, Kala Balge, and Gamboru Ngala local government areas in northern Borno, chasing out local government officials, taking over government buildings and imposing its will (Premium Times 2013). So critical is the threat posed by Boko Haram that in January 2012 Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan lamented, 'The situation we have in our hands is even worse than the civil war [1967–1970] that we fought' (Agbiboa 2013c: 65). Unfortunately, numerous attempts at negotiating with the Islamist group, including the recent presidential amnesty offer extended to its members, have stalled due to gross distrust on both sides, and the fac-

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tionalized leadership of the group's different cells (ibid).

The central goal of this paper is to understand who Boko Haram is, why the group rebels, and how the Nigerian state has responded. The paper also seeks to briefly explore Boko Haram's growing connection to transnational terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab as a form of survival strategy. The paper is divided into four main sections. The first provides a historical background to religious militancy in northern Nigeria. The second section seeks to answer the question: Who is Boko Haram? This involves exploring Boko Haram's origins, ideology, demands, *modus operandi*, and sources of funding. The third section looks closely at why Boko Haram rebels. The fourth section explores how the Nigerian state has responded to the threat of Boko Haram; this section involves a critical examination of the soft-handed and heavy-handed approaches of the Nigerian state.

Background: Militant Religiosity in Northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria, a region with a predominantly Muslim population, has a well-documented history of militant religiosity dating back to the highly successful holy war (jihad) fought by Sheik Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817) in the early 19th century (Hickey 1984: 251). Usman dan Fodio launched a jihad against what he saw as the hopelessly corrupt and apostate Hausa ruling elite of the time and established the sharia-governed Sokoto Caliphate – one of the largest and most powerful empires in sub-Saharan Africa – across much of northern Nigeria, although it is important to note that much of the area now known as the middle belt or North Central State resisted the jihadists (Marchal 2012: 2; Agbiboa 2013c). What began as a search for religious purification soon became a search for a political kingdom (Crowder 1978; ICG 2010), with the outcome being that 'Islam has remained the focal veneer for the legitimacy of the northern ruling class', and consequently, 'its poli-

ticians have always prided themselves as soldiers for the defense of the faith' (Udoidem 1997: 156).

Some authors have argued that the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903, and its subsequent dealings with colonial and post-colonial states, opened it up to the corrupting influence of secular political power (Agbiboa 2013b; Falola 1998). Ever since, 'there has been resistance among the area's Muslims to Western education' (Marchal 2012: 2). For example, in the first two decades following Nigeria's independence in October 1960, northern Nigeria experienced a violent confrontation between a radical Islamist sect known as Maitatsine and the Nigerian Police Force in Kano (December 1980) and Maiduguri (October 1982). Hickey (1984: 251) argues that the Maitatsine uprisings had their roots in the 'deeply conservative practice of Islam' which has been dominant in the region since Usman Dan Fodio's holy war. Muhammed Marwa (also known as Maitatsine/'the one who curses'), leader of Maitatsine, was an Islamic scholar who migrated from the town of Marwa in northern Cameroon to the city of Kano in 1945. In Kano, Marwa became an Islamic zealot preoccupied with the purification of Islam. He believed that Islam had come under the corrupting influence of modernization (Westernization) and the formation of the modern state (Agbiboa 2013d). The Nigerian historian Toyin Falola (1998: 146) describes Marwa thus:

> He was a Qur'anic teacher and preacher. Forceful, persuasive, and charismatic, he rebelled against many popular opinions among Kano Islamic circles, denouncing certain parts of the Holy Qur'an and even criticizing Prophet Mohammed…He was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence. He decried such technological commonplace as radios, wrist watches, automobiles, motorcycles, and even bicycles. Those who use these things or who read

books other than the Qur'an were viewed as hell-bound 'pagans'.

Marwa attracted the urban poor in the northern city of Kano with his message that 'denounced the affluent elites as infidels, opposed Western Influence, and refused to recognize secular authorities' (HRW 2012: 22; see also Lubeck 1985). The urban Muslim poor were attracted to Marwa because 'he condemned the hypocrisy and ostentation of the *nouveau riche* and promised redemption and salvation to God's righteous people' (Hickey 1984: 253). Among the groups attracted by Marwa were the '*Almajiris*' - that is, a group of young itinerant students of the Qur'an who had a very simple lifestyle and earned their daily bread begging on the city streets (ibid). Maitatsine extremists, rejecting Muslims who had, in their eyes, gone astray, lived in secluded areas to avoid mixing with mainstream Muslims and rejected material wealth on the grounds that it was associated with Western values.

The Maitatsine uprisings led to eleven days of violent confrontations with state security forces in Kano in December 1980. A tribunal inquiry set up by the federal government in 1981 found that 4,177 people were killed in the violence, excluding members of the police force who also lost their lives (Agbiboa 2013c). Although the Nigerian government used its military might to crush the Maitatsine uprisings and kill its leader, hundreds more people lost their lives in reprisal attacks between remnants of the Maitatsine movement in the north and government security forces over the next five years (HRW 2012).

Sheik Abubaka Mahmoud Gumi (1922–1992) was another noteworthy Muslim that promoted militant Islam during the 1980s. He was renowned as the most distinguished Islamic scholar in Nigeria of the 1980s (Agbiboa 2013c; Falola 1998). Sheik campaigned against sorcery and witchcraft and promoted Islamic education for women (Marchal 2012: 3). He further promoted the implementation of Sharia courts in Nigeria's Christian south, arguing that Nigeria should be brought under sharia law (Agbiboa 2013a). He once openly declared that 'once you are a Muslim, you cannot accept to choose a non-Muslim as a leader' (Aguwa 1997: 338). Sheik's speeches and ideas radicalized many Muslims in Nigeria and led to increased tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially in northern Nigeria. The burning of eight prominent churches in Kano by Muslims in October 1982 signaled the beginning of a religious war. According to a government tribunal, the violent act was caused by two factors. First, Kano was predominantly an Islamic city where the growing influence of Christianity was a constant source of worry for Muslims. Second, the tribunal argued that the radical Islamic literature imported from Iran motivated Muslims to begin fighting (Falola 1998: 169).

Notably, since the early days of Nigeria's political sovereignty in 1960 power has shifted from the Muslim north to the Christian south. The Iranian revolution of 1979 resulted in growing demand for sharia law to be adopted across Nigeria. In addition, Saudi-sponsored missionaries from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Pakistan, and other countries were sent to Nigeria to promote *Wahhabi*[1] doctrine and orthodoxy beginning in the 1990s. This helped lead to the adoption of sharia law in twelve northern states between 1999 and 2001, beginning with Zamfara State. The then-Zamfara governor, Ahmed Sani, once said, 'Whoever administers or governs any society not based on Sharia is an unbeliever' (Agbiboa 2013a). Following his example, many northern governors also introduced Sharia, reinforcing the movement of restoration pioneered by Usman dan Fodio's Sokoto Caliphate two centuries earlier. However, there was a strong resistance in Kaduna State, where half of the population is Christian. In February 2000, protests by Christians against Sharia in the ancient city of Kaduna resulted in clashes that resulted in over 2,000 deaths (Ekot 2009).

In light of the above facts, this paper argues that extremist Islamic movements in northern Nigeria should be considered a

movement of restoration since their over-riding goal continues to be the enforcement of Sharia in the spirit of earlier times as inspired by Usman dan Fodio and the sharia-governed Sokoto Caliphate. Boko Haram, which this paper considers next, is the latest and most violent manifestation of this restoration movement.

Who is Boko Haram?

> We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out Jihad (religious war) in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that the Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system which is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, capitalism, socialism and whatever. We will not allow the Nigerian Constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Qur'an, we will not allow adulterated conventional education (Boko) to replace Islamic teachings. We will not respect the Nigerian government because it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and the police because they are not protecting Islam. We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities.
>
> -Boko Haram statement
> (Leadership 2011)

Mohammed Yusuf, born on January 29, 1970, in the village of Girgir in Yobe State, founded Boko Haram in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the goal of establishing sharia government in Borno State under then-Senator Ali Modu Sheriff (Adesoji 2010). As a student of Sheik Gumi, Yusuf received instruction in Salafi radicalism and was greatly influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar (*alim*) born 1263 CE in the town of Harran in Upper Mesopotamia, into an Arabophone family. Boko Haram was led by Yusuf until he was killed by Nigerian security forces following sectarian violence that broke out in July 2009 and during which over 700 people were killed. At the time of his death, Yusuf was the commander-in-chief (*Amir ul-Aam*) of Boko Haram. He had two deputies (Na'ib Amir ul-Aam I & II) and each state and local government where Boko Haram existed had its own commander (*amir*). Yusuf established a religious complex in his hometown that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighboring countries enrolled their children. However, the center had ulterior political goals and soon it was also working as a recruiting ground for future jihadists (Agbiboa 2013c). Boko Haram thus includes members who came from neighboring Chad and Niger and speak only Arabic. The sect was able to attract more than 280,000 members across northern Nigeria and these two countries (Umar 2011; Agbiboa 2013c).

Boko Haram's membership comprises university lecturers, bankers, political elites, drug addicts, unemployed graduates, *almajiris*, and migrants from neighboring countries. Members are drawn primarily from the Kanuri tribe, which makes up roughly 4 percent of the Nigerian population, and is concentrated in the northeastern states of Nigeria, including Bauchi and Borno, as well as from the Hausa-Fulani 29 percent of the population, who are spread throughout most of the northern states (Agbiboa 2013c).

Recent reports have also revealed that some members in the Nigerian security sector have strong links to Boko Haram. In February 2012, the commissioner of police in charge of criminal investigations in Abuja, Zakari Biu, was dismissed from the Nigerian police force for his role in the escape of Boko Haram suspect Kabiru Sokoto. Sokoto is believed to be the mastermind of the bombing of St. Theresa's Catholic Church in

Madalla, Niger State, in which over 40 people died. Sokoto's escape also led to the sacking of the former Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Ringim (Elombah 2012).

Like the Maitatsine movement, many of the members attracted by Boko Haram are motivated by deep-seated socio-economic and political grievances such as corruption and poor governance (Kukah 2012). Already, Campbell noted, 'Boko Haram, once an obscure, radical Islamic cult in the North, is evolving into an insurrection with support among the impoverished and alienated Northern population' (Campbell 2011).

Boko Haram's main affiliation is the *Jama'tIzalat al Bida'aWaIqamat as Sunna* (Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna). This movement is a *Wahhabi*, anti-Sufi movement established in 1978 in Jos by Sheikh Ismaila Idris (1937–2000). It was one of the fast-growing Islamic reform movements in Nigeria, shaped by the teachings of Sheikh Abubakar Gumi (Marchal 2012: 3). Boko Haram's ideology is embedded in deeply traditional Islamism and is but one of several variants of radical Islamism to have emerged in northern Nigeria. Its adherents are reportedly influenced by the Qur'anic phrase: 'Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors' (Thurston 2011). As its name suggests, Boko Haram (which in the Hausa language means 'Western education is unlawful') is strongly opposed to what it sees as a Western-based incursion that threatens traditional values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria. Mohammed Yusuf told the BBC in 2009, 'Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam' (Boyle 2009). Elsewhere, the charismatic leader argued, 'Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* (infidel) land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs' (BBC MIR 2009). In an audiotape posted online in January 2012, a spokesman for the group, Abubakar Shekau, even accused the US of waging war on Islam (Agbiboa 2013b:

19). *Tell* magazine (Nigeria) describes the ideology and philosophy of Boko Haram thus:

> The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where 'orthodox Islam' is practiced. Orthodox Islam according to [Muhammed Yusuf] frowns at Western education and working in the civil service because it is sinful. Hence, for their aim to be achieved, all institutions representing the government including security agencies like police, military and other uniformed personnel should be crushed (Thurston 2011).

The Boko Haram Revolt

Boko Haram became a full-fledged insurgency following confrontations between the group and Bauchi State's security agency, charged with enforcing a newly introduced law that required motorcyclists in the entire country to wear crash-helmets (Uzodike 2012; USIP 2012). Members of Boko Haram refused to obey this law. This led to a violent clash between the state's enforcement agency and the group which left 17 Boko Haram members dead. The group's hideout in Bauchi State was also ransacked and materials for making explosives were confiscated. Following this crackdown, the group mobilized its members for reprisal attacks which led to the deaths of several policemen and civilians (Agbiboa 2013c). The riot was temporarily quelled after Nigerian forces captured and killed the Boko Haram leader, Yusuf. Following the death of Yusuf, and the arrest of several of Boko Haram members, the group retreated for a while, but only to recuperate. According to Marchal, 'this major blow [the killing of their founder] pushed the movement to transform itself into a network of underground cells with a hidden leadership – a situation that today makes any military solution illusory' (2012: 3). Boko Haram soon announced its re-emergence with more advanced tactics and devastating attacks, e.g. the bombing of police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011 and the UN Headquar-

ters in August 2011. In the first ten months of 2012 alone more than 900 people died in attacks perpetrated by the group - more than in 2010 and 2011 combined (Reuters 2011).

Boko Haram's *modus operandi* has involved the use of gunmen on motorbikes, assassinating policemen, politicians, or anyone critical of the group, including Muslim clerics who disclose information regarding their whereabouts to state security services (HRW 2012). Increasingly, suicide bombing has become a major strategy for Boko Haram. For many members, the extrajudicial killing of their founder served to foment pre-existing animosities toward the Nigerian government and its security forces. In the group's bid to avenge the death of its founder, almost every individual and group outside Boko Haram's network was impacted, particularly the Nigerian police and army. Boko Haram's most frequent targets have been police stations, patrols, and individual policemen at home or in public including those who were off-duty or retired (Agbiboa 2013d). They have used petrol bombs, improvised explosive devices, and armed assaults in these violent attacks (Forest 2012; HRW 2012). From early 2012, Boko Haram began targeting telecommunication infrastructure, especially around Mubi, Gongola State. The group believes that GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) companies are aiding security agencies by providing them with call information (HRW 2012). In 2012, Boko Haram launched several attacks against police officers, Christians, and perceived moderate or liberal Muslims who allegedly cooperated with the government or opposed the group (Forest 2012).

Among the demands of Boko Haram are the release of its imprisoned members and the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of their founder. However, Boko Haram's number one aim is the overthrow of the Nigerian government and the creation of an Islamic state (Uzodike 2012).

It is important to note that Boko Haram is not a monolithic entity with a unified purpose. There are separate factions within the movement who disagree about tactics and strategic directions, competing at times for attention and followers (Forest 2012). According to a recent US House of Representatives report on Boko Haram, one faction of the group might be focused on domestic issues while another on violent international extremism (Agbiboa 2013c). Another report indicated that the group may have even split into three factions: one that remains moderate and welcomes an end to the violence, another that wants a peace agreement, and a third that refuses to negotiate, wanting instead to implement strict sharia law across Nigeria by force (ibid). In July 2011, a group calling itself the Yusufiyya Islamic Movement distributed leaflets throughout Maiduguri denouncing other Boko Haram factions as 'evil' (Agbiboa 2013d: 151). Invoking the legacy of founder Mohammed Yusuf, the authors of the leaflets distanced themselves from violent attacks on civilians and on churches (ibid). Against this backdrop, a jihadist splinter group, commonly known as Ansaru, has emerged in northern Nigeria, headed by a man that goes by the pseudonym Abu Usamatul Ansar. The group has pledged to defend the interests of Muslims in Africa, claiming a different understanding of Jihad. Ansaru, which officially calls itself *Jama'atu Ansarul Musilimina fi Biladin Sudan* (or Supporters of Islam in the Land of Sudan), has said in a video recently posted on the internet that they will not target non-Muslims except 'in self-defense or if they attack Muslims' (Al Arabiya 2013). Ansar noted that the 'rampant massacre of Muslims in Nigeria will no longer be tolerated' (ibid). Elsewhere, the leader stated that one of the group's main goals is 'restoring the dignity of the Muslims as it was in the time of the Caliphate…[and] the method of achieving these aims and goals is "*jihad*"' (ibid).

On February 17, 2012, Ansaru kidnapped, and later killed, seven foreigners from Britain, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, and the Philippines. According to a statement released by the group, the kidnappings were in response to alleged transgressions perpe-

trated against Islam by European countries in 'many places such as Afghanistan and Mali' (Roggio 2013). On November 26, 2012, 40 Ansaru fighters stormed the Special Anti-Robbery Squad prison in Abuja and freed senior Boko Haram commanders, an action praised by Shekau, Boko Haram's current supreme leader. According to Jacob Zenn (2013: 3–4), 'Ansaru's freeing of Boko Haram prisoners suggested that despite the circumstances surrounding Ansaru's formation, the two groups were capable of supporting each other's mutual objectives.' But these mutual objectives go beyond Nigeria to include global jihadist organizations like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab.

Indeed, one of Boko Haram's main ambitions is to become a key player in the global jihad. In one of its early statements, the group declared that 'Boko Haram is just a version of al-Qaeda which we align with and respect. We support Osama bin Laden, we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamized which is according to the wish of Allah' (Vanguard 2009). Members of Boko Haram are known to have fought in Mali alongside groups affiliated to al-Qaeda. Its members have also received training with Somali-based al-Shabaab. Boko Haram members were reportedly significantly involved in the April 2012 invasion of the Algerian embassy in the Malian city of Gao, which resulted in the hostage-taking of seven Algerian diplomats. A local official in Mali confirmed that 'there are a good 100 Boko Haram fighters in Gao. They are Nigerians and from Nigeria… they're not hiding. Some are even able to speak in the local tongue, explaining that they are Boko Haram' (The Punch 2012).

In the past, Nigerian officials have been criticized for being unable to trace much of the funding that Boko Haram has received. However, in February 2012, recently arrested Boko Haram officials revealed that while the organization initially relied on donations from members, its links with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) opened it up to more funding from groups in Saudi Ara-

bia and the UK (Agbiboa 2013b). Furthermore, the arrested officials divulged that other sources of funding included the Al Muntada Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. Additionally, a spokesman of Boko Haram claimed that Kano State Governor Ibrahim Shekarau and Bauchi State Governor Isa Yuguda had placed them (as members of the Boko Haram group) on a monthly salary (Aziken 2012). Boko Haram also self-finances by robbing local banks. For example, on January 12, 2010, four Boko Haram members attempted to rob a bank in Bakori, Katsina State, according to local Police Commissioner Umaru Abubakar (Leigh 2011). On December 4, 2011, Bauchi Police Commissioner Ikechukwu Aduba claimed that members of Boko Haram had robbed local branches of Guaranty Trust Bank PLC and Intercontinental Bank PLC (Ibrahim 2011). And on December 10, 2011, Mohammed Abdullahi of the Central Bank of Nigeria claimed that 'At least 30 bank attacks attributed to Boko Haram have been reported this year' (Onu 2011). Beyond bank robberies and individual financiers, some sources have linked Boko Haram to illicit weapon trafficking (Agbiboa 2013c). In August 2011, General Carter Ham, Commander of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), claimed that al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab were financing Boko Haram and also said that both global Jihadist terrorist groups shared training facilities and fighters with Boko Haram. He described it as 'the most dangerous thing to happen not only to the Africans, but to us as well' (IISS 2011: 3). This is all the more likely as Boko Haram has expanded its propaganda efforts to show solidarity with al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

In July 2010, Shekau reportedly released an online statement praising al-Qaeda and offering condolences to al-Qaeda of Iraq for its loss of Abu Ayyub al Masri and Abu Omar al Baghdadi, two top al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. In another video released in November 2012, Shekau said that he and his fighters supported the ongoing jihads in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria,

Libya, and Mali. Shekau's speech, which was received and translated by the SITE Intelligence Group, was issued in Arabic, which suggests that the Boko Haram leader is seeking to appeal to both the wider jihadist community and al-Qaeda's leaders. The 39 minute-long videotape includes various clips of Boko Haram men in training, as well as video of weapons seized by the group during raids (Roggio 2013). Shekau also repeatedly refers to the fighters in the jihadist theaters as his 'brothers'. He directly addresses 'the soldiers of the Islamic State in Mali… our brothers and sheikhs in beloved Somalia…our brothers and sheikhs in Libya…our brothers and sheikhs in oppressed Afghanistan…our brothers and sheikhs in wounded Iraq…our brothers and sheikhs in Pakistan…our brothers and sheikhs in blessed Yemen…our brothers and sheikhs in usurped Palestine, and other places where our brothers are doing jihad in the Cause of Allah' (Roggio 2013: 4). Shekau warned the US that jihad is far from over and is quoted as saying: 'O America, die with your fury' (ibid). Early in its violent campaign, Boko Haram had warned that: '[The] United States is the number one target for its oppression and aggression against Muslim nations particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan and its blind support to Israel in its killings of our Palestine brethren' (Abubakar 2010).

Given the increased frequency of bomb attacks and shootings carried out by Boko Haram, the prospect for human security remains grim in Nigeria, with potentially serious ramifications for the international community. For one thing, Boko Haram provides al-Qaeda with an avenue to expand its operations in Africa, should the two groups become affiliated. Leaders of both organizations have publicly pledged mutual support (Uzodike 2012). Shekau, current head of Boko Haram, has linked the jihad being fought by Boko Haram with the global jihad. He has threatened attacks not only in Nigeria but also against 'outposts of Western culture' (Radin 2012). In association with al-Qaeda, Boko Haram could pose a major threat not only to Nigeria, but also transna-

tionally, since Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer. The increasing sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks and its adoption of suicide car bombings may be a sign that the group is indeed receiving tactical and operational assistance from a foreign militant group. Since AQIM has attacked UN targets in Algeria, and al-Shabaab has attacked UN targets in Somalia, Boko Haram's decision to attack the UN building in Abuja is unlikely to be a coincidence. According to Forest, 'this attack on a distinctly non-Nigerian target was a first for Boko Haram, and may indicate a major shift in its ideology and strategic goals' (2012: 81).

Awakened to the threat posed by Boko Haram to the international community, the US State Department in 2012 added Shekau, Boko Haram's most visible leader, to its list of specially designated global terrorists. Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kambar were also included in the list, because of their ties to Boko Haram and close links with AQIM. (US State Department 2012) The US also recently announced a USD 7 million bounty for the capture of Shekau, putting him in the top echelon of wanted jihadist leaders (BBC News June 5, 2013). Four al-Qaeda leaders in Africa where also included in the 'Rewards for Justice' list. The State Department noted that that Boko Haram and al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia are cooperating to 'strengthen Boko Haram's capacity to conduct terrorist attacks' (Roggio 2013).

Why does Boko Haram Rebel?

> Religion is not the cause of religious conflict; rather for many… it frequently supplies the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occurs (Seul 1999: 58).

The extent of relative poverty and inequality in the north has led several analysts and organizations to argue that socio-economic deprivation is the main factor behind Boko Haram's campaign of violence in northern Nigeria (Agbiboa 2013d, 2013b; Mustapha

2012; Kukah 2012; Agbiboa 2013b; HRW 2012; ICG 2010). Isa, for example, argues that Boko Haram communities are wrecked by 'poverty, deteriorating social services and infrastructure, educational backwardness, rising numbers of unemployed graduates, massive numbers of unemployed youths, dwindling fortunes in agriculture…and the weak and dwindling productive base of the northern economy' (2010: 329). Kwaja toes a similar line in arguing that 'religious dimensions of the conflict have been mis-construed as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and ine-quality are the root causes' (2011: 1). Sope Elegbe, research director at the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), argues, 'The increasing poverty in Nigeria is accom-panied by increasing unemployment. Unem-ployment is higher in the north than in the south. Mix this situation with radical Islam, which promises a better life for martyrs, and you can understand the growing violence in the north' (cited in Oxford Research Group 2011: 4). In his recent personal account of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), the late Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe described Boko Haram as a product of economic dep-rivation and corruption in northern Nigeria. In his words, 'economic deprivation and cor-ruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequities in a population, which in turn fuel political instability' (2012). In the final analysis, says A. R. Mustapha of Oxford University, 'Boko Haram is the symp-tom of the failure of nation-building and democratic politics in Nigeria. It is the mis-guided cry of a disgruntled youth crushed by the socio-economic system on the one hand and then repressed by the state on the other' (2012). Marchal highlights the issue of the divergent (and largely unequal) economic and social dynamics of northern versus southern states in Nigeria as a main factor in the Boko Haram rebellion: 'Boko Haram is an ultra-violent social movement that has deep roots in the social and eco-nomic marginalization of a large section of Nigeria's northern population' (2012: 2).

With Rev. Fr. Kukah (2012: 3), a scholarly northern clergyman, we observe a somewhat nuanced analysis from the poverty-conflict nexus to the bad governance-conflict nexus. Kukah argues that religion is used to mobi-lize against modernity, which is seen as the root cause of social anomalies. In his words, 'The evil effects of bad governance, corrup-tion, total lack of security and welfare have all become part of our daily lives. Clearly, in the eyes of the sect members, the persistence of corruption, collapse of public morality, injustice and so on could only be attributed to those who govern. In their reasoning, those who govern us do so because they have acquired their tools by gaining Western edu-cation' (ibid). Kukah finds an ally in scholars like Clapham who argues more broadly that 'the breakdown of law and order in African states was basically the result of the legacy of bad governance' (2004: 200). During her visit to Nigeria in 2009, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated this same reasoning when she noted that '[t]he most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is the failure of governance at the federal, state, and local levels… Lack of transparency and accountabil-ity has eroded the legitimacy of the govern-ment and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the author-ity of the state' (Clinton 2009: 1).

Other scholars like Evans argue that 'a downward spiral of economic decline, often exacerbated by official corruption and mis-management, has created governments that are at or near the point of collapse and that are being challenged, often violently, by their own citizens. Economic decline has has-tened the process of national disintegration and vice versa' (1994: 3). Furthermore, he argues that 'it is no accident that those coun-tries whose economies are declining…should also be the ones experiencing the great-est amounts of violence and turmoil' (ibid). Similarly, in their book entitled *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, Collier et al. adopt an eco-nomic approach to the causes of intrastate conflict. They argue that, '[c]ountries with

low, stagnant, and unequally distributed *per capita* incomes that have remained dependent on primary commodities for exports face dangerously high risks of prolonged conflict. In the absence of economic development, neither good political institutions, nor ethnic and religious homogeneity or high military spending, provide significant defenses against large scale violence' (2003: 53). Explanations such as these often draw on the human needs theory of social conflicts which holds that all human beings have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and failure to meet these needs could lead to the outbreak of violent conflict (Rosati 1990). The human needs theory resonates with the frustration-aggression theory of violence which argues that the occurrence of aggressive behavior presupposes the existence of frustration (Pear 1950; McNeil 1959). The frustration-aggression theory, in turn, provides the psychological dynamic for the relative deprivation theory - the proposed nexus between the intensity of deprivation and the potential for collective violence (Gurr 1970; Birrel 1972). Drawing on his studies of relative deprivation and conflict in Northern Ireland, Birrel argues that group tensions develop from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction. According to Davies, 'this discrepancy is a frustrating experience that is sufficiently intense and focused to result in either rebellion or revolution' (1962: 5).

Despite the above socio-economic explanations, it is important to emphasize that the link between terrorism and poverty remains unclear and the debate unsettled. In fact, in recent years the poverty-conflict thesis has been criticized as overly simplistic. This is largely because it fails to explain why some poor people or places do not participate in violence, and because it offers very little in the way of clear recommendations for policy-makers (Agbiboa 2013a). In their work entitled 'What Causes Terrorism?' Krieger and Meierriek (2011) examine a host of possible influences on terrorism including global order, contagion, modernization,

institutional order, and identity conflict among other factors. Following a detailed review of the relevant empirical literature on what causes terrorism, they concluded that 'there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that economic deprivation causes terrorism…poor economic conditions matter less to terrorism once it is controlled for institutional and political factors' (2011: 3). Instead, they argue that 'terrorism is closely linked to political instability, sharp divides within the populace, country size, and further demographic, institutional, and international factors' (ibid).

In addition to the history of militant Islam and relative deprivation in northern Nigeria, this paper argues that the ultra-violent turn of Boko Haram must be traced back to the extrajudicial killing of its charismatic leader, Muhammed Yusuf, and the bloodletting of its members. One of the most important elements in understanding the psychology of why people become extremists is an appreciation of the psychology of vengeance. Catalyst events (violent acts that are perceived to be unjust) provide a strong sense of outrage and a powerful psychological desire for revenge and retribution. For many Boko Haram members, the killing (without trial) of their founder was the catalyst event that served to foment pre-existing animosities that stemmed from arbitrary arrests as well as the torture and killing of group members by state security forces. Until 2009 Boko Haram was seen as radical, but not ultra-violent (Onuoha 2012). The killing of the group's leader 'provoked a staunch reaction from Boko Haram members who primarily want to settle their scores with the police and army' (Marchal 2012: 2). In a video released in June 2010, Shekau vowed to avenge the deaths of its members at the hands of the Nigerian police and army (Agbiboa 2013b). In September 2010, a Boko Haram member told the BBC's Hausa radio service, 'We are on a revenge mission as most of our members were killed by the police' (HRW 2012). In November 2011, during the trial of six Boko

Haram suspects, one group member told the court that their mission was to avenge the death of their founder (ibid). Not surprising, since 2010 Boko Haram fighters have raided over 60 police facilities in at least 10 northern and central states, as well as in Abuja, and killed at least 211 police officers (Agbiboa 2013a). Between January and September 2012, at least 119 police officers lost their lives in suspected Boko Haram attacks, more than in all of 2010 and 2011 combined.

How has the Nigerian State Responded and How have Nigerians Reacted?

The Nigerian state has responded to the Boko Haram crisis with what this paper describes as a both a soft-hand and a heavy-hand, two approaches best understood as running concurrently rather than sequentially. The soft-hand approach has involved an attempt to engage Boko Haram members in political negotiations or dialogue. At the state level, the soft-hand approach has involved overtures and rapprochements to Boko Haram insurgents. For example, the former governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff, allegedly paid the sum of N100 million, or USD 620,000, to mollify the anger of the group when their leader was killed in 2009. Current Governor Kashim Shettima called on Boko Haram to come forward for dialogue on July 16, 2011 (Aghedo 2012: 866). In 2012, Datti Ahmad, president of the National Supreme Council on Sharia, who is believed to have had the respect of Yusuf, attempted to reach out to the group. But contact was broken off by Boko Haram who accused the Nigerian state of bad faith after the media got wind of the talks (IRIN 2012).

Most recently, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan established a 26-member amnesty 'Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North' (headed by Nigerian Special Duties Minister Kabiru Tanimu) with a three-month mandate to try to convince Boko Haram to surrender its arms in exchange for a state pardon and social integration (IRIN 2013). According to a presidential statement, the committee 'has been given the task of identifying and constructively engaging key leaders of Boko Haram, and developing a workable framework for amnesty and disarmament of members of the group' (Agbiboa 2013d). The committee was composed of former and current government officials, religious authorities, and human rights activists (ibid).

However, Shekau responded to the amnesty entreaties by saying that his group had done no wrong and that an amnesty would not be applicable to them, arguing that it was the Nigerian government committing atrocities. In his words: 'Surprisingly, the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is we that should grant you pardon' (Chiles 2013; Agbiboa 2013c). In a video released on May 13, 2013, Shekau vowed not to cease his group's violent campaigns to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria (IRIN 2013). Barely a week after Boko Haram refused Nigeria's amnesty offer the group launched two devastating back-to-back attacks in the north of the country. In the first attack, members of Boko Haram, disguised in military uniforms driving buses and machine gun-mounted trucks, laid siege to the town of Bama, Borno State, killing 55 people, mostly police and security forces, and freeing over 100 prison inmates (Fox News 2013). In the second wave of attacks that came days later, Boko Haram members killed 53 people and burnt down 13 villages in central Nigeria's Benue State where violent confrontations between pastoralists and nomads had been commonplace (BBC News 2013).

The violent attacks led the Nigerian president to declare a state of emergency (on May 15, 2013) in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe – three northern states where Boko Haram has been most active – in an attempt to restore order and reclaim control of the territories (Agbiboa 2013a). In a pre-recorded address broadcast to the Nigerian public on May 14, 2013, President Jonathan said, 'What we are

facing is not just militancy or criminality, but a rebellion and insurgency by terrorist groups which pose a very serious threat to national unity and territorial integrity' (BBC News 2013). Jonathan further stated that 'it would appear that there is a systematic effort by insurgents and terrorists to destabilize the Nigerian state and test our collective resolve' (Fox News 2013). Jonathan's speech threw the ongoing Islamic insurgency into stark relief, at one point describing how fighters had laid waste to state buildings and 'had taken women and children hostage' (Agbiboa 2013c: 65). According to Jonathan, 'These actions amount to a declaration of war and a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of the Nigerian state and threaten [its] territorial integrity. As a responsible government, we will not tolerate this' (ibid).

Against this backdrop, the Nigerian president vowed to 'take all necessary action… to put an end to the impunity of insurgents and terrorists,' including the arrest and detention of suspects, assaults on Boko Haram hideouts, the lockdown of suspected Boko Haram enclaves, raids, and the arrests of anyone possessing illegal weapons' (IRIN 2013). This brings us to the second response of the Nigerian state - the heavy-hand. A heavy-handed approach has always been the preferred option, involving the use of state security forces to 'mount aggressive pursuit and crackdown of [Boko Haram] members' (Onuoha 2012: 5). To this end, the Nigerian government established a special Joint Task Force (JTF), known as Operations Restore Order (JTORO). In the biggest campaign to date against Boko Haram, President Jonathan ordered some 8,000 soldiers to the region in a direct military offensive against Boko Haram members (Agbiboa 2013a), the largest military deployment since Nigeria's Civil War.

However, far too often, members of the JTF have been accused of killing innocent people in the name of counter-terrorism. In Borno State, for example, the JTF resorted to extralegal killings, dragnet arrests, and

intimidation of the hapless Borno residents (HRW 2012). As noted by Solomon, 'Far from conducting intelligence-driven operations, the JTF simply cordoned off areas and carried out house-to-house searches, at times shooting young men in these homes' (2012: 9). In a series of interviews with residents in the city of Maiduguri, Human Rights Watch reported that,

> During raids in communities, often in the aftermath of Boko Haram attacks, members of the security forces have executed men in front of their families; arbitrarily arrested or beaten members of the community; burned houses, shops, and cars; stolen money while searching homes; and, in at least one case, raped a woman. [In addition] Government security agencies routinely hold suspects incommunicado without charge or trial in secret detention facilities and have subjected detainees to torture or other physical abuse (HRW 2012: 58).

In a firefight between the JTF and Boko Haram in Baga, a village on Lake Chad near Nigeria's border with Cameroon, reportedly up to 187 people were killed, and 77 others were injured (Premium Times 2013). At least 2,000 houses, 64 motorcycles, and 40 cars were burnt in the wake of the attack (ibid). Baga residents have accused the JTF, not Boko Haram, of firing indiscriminately at civilians and setting fire to much of the fishing town (Chiles 2013). According to Marchal, the Nigerian state apparatus 'kills even more civilians than Boko Haram does' (2012: 1). Recently, US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a strongly-worded statement saying: 'We are…deeply concerned by credible allegations that Nigerian security forces are committing gross human rights violations, which, in turn, only escalate the violence and fuel extremism' (Al Jazeera 2013). Yet some have argued that the US is in no credible position to be 'deeply concerned' about

the use of violence and disrespect for human rights in Nigeria since the US itself continues to apply an arguably similar (or even worse) strategy in its self-declared 'global war on terror' in regions like Africa and the Middle East, especially since the epochal 9/11 attacks (Gow 2013). In the final section, this paper argues that a declared war on terror has only a limited capacity to make a real difference because it can never address the underlying conditions that shape groups like Boko Haram and al-Qaeda who reject the prevailing order and develop radical positions, or opt to use extreme violence in the first place. It is therefore necessary to appreciate the broader context in which radicalization occurs.

It is important to note that the soft and heavy-handed approaches of the Nigerian government have divided Nigerians into two groups: those who support the use of coercion on the one hand and supporters of conciliation on the other. Advocates of a coercive approach to tackling terrorism argue that force rather than dialogue is more effective in dealing with terrorist organizations. Some argue that the Nigerian government had no choice but to take military actions against Boko Haram. As argued by a prominent Nigerian constitutional lawyer, Yahaya Mahmud, 'No government anywhere will allow a group to usurp part of its territorial sovereignty. The declaration of a state of emergency was necessitated by the constitutional obligation to restore a portion of Nigeria's territory taken over by [Boko Haram] which involves the suspension of constitutional provisions relating to civic rights' (IRIN July 16, 2012). Other observers, however, worry that the stick response of the Nigerian government will force Boko Haram to shift their bases, with grave consequences for Nigeria and neighboring countries. As Nigerian political scientist Kyari Tijani argues, 'Boko Haram cannot face Nigerian troops in conventional war; the troop deployment to northern Borno means they will move out to other towns and cities with less military presence

and launch guerrilla war, which is deadlier' (ibid). Tijani's statement seemed prophetic when, on July 6, 2013, alleged Boko Haram fighters attacked a boarding school in Potiskum (a small city in northeast Nigeria) before dawn, killing 41 people (29 students were burned alive) and torching university administrative blocks and hostels. The alleged Boko Haram gunmen were reported to have emerged from caves in rocky mountains (Adamu 2013). Following this latest strike, Shekau released a 15-minute video on YouTube expressing 'full support' for the violent attacks, denying that Boko Haram fighters killed children. Wagging his finger, Shekau warned, 'School teachers who are teaching Western education: We will kill them! We will kill them!' In the video, received by the Associated Press through intermediaries, Shekau also denied he is negotiating a ceasefire with the Nigerian government, 'We will not enter into any agreement with non-believers or the Nigerian government,' he said, speaking in his native Hausa language. Shekau added that 'The Qur'an teaches that we must shun democracy, we must shun Western education, and we must shun the constitution.' At the end he speaks in English to denounce the West, accusing it of trying to destroy Islam and working 'to tactically make the Qur'an insignificant and unimportant' (Elombah 2013).

Conclusion

This paper has addressed three fundamental questions regarding Boko Haram's ongoing campaign of terror in Nigeria: Who is Boko Haram? Why does the group rebel? How has the Nigerian state responded? The paper has also touched on Boko Haram's growing connection with transnational terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab and the transnational ramifications. In addition, the paper showed that the emergence of Boko Haram is not *sui generis* but rather a reflection of a long history of militant Islam in northern Nigeria which forms a core part of the movement of restoration. Boko Haram

remains a major security problem confronting the Nigerian state today, stretching its security apparatuses to their limits. Already, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has announced that over 6,200 refugees have arrived in Niger from northern Nigeria fearing retaliatory attacks and the general insecurity plaguing the region as a result of the intensified military offensive against Boko Haram (Agbiboa 2013b). The frustration of the Nigerian government with the worsening security situation in northern Nigeria is evidenced in its declaration of a state of emergency and its 'flip-flop' approach from a soft hand (amnesty talks) to a heavy hand (deployment of troops and the declaration of outright war against Boko Haram) in less than two weeks. These factors have coalesced to further complicate the task of the Amnesty Committee - that is, winning the trust of Boko Haram, crucial in bringing them to the negotiating table.

At present, the questions facing the Amnesty Committee are serious: How will the new Committee on Dialogue identify credible interlocutors? Can anyone speak for Boko Haram particularly if the group is proving increasingly fragmented and prone to splinter groups? If Boko Haram has already rejected the Amnesty offer, what conditions would induce a change of mind? Will the state of emergency and efforts towards amnesty prove mutually reinforcing, constituting a soft-hand and heavy-hand approach to Boko Haram, or does the state of emergency signal that Nigeria lacks a clear response strategy? While military crackdowns on Boko Haram have the potential to significantly degrade the group's operational capability to mount devastating attacks on a large-scale, it must be considered that such an approach may increasingly force ultra-radical elements within Boko Haram to establish terrorist networks with AQIM and al-Shabaab as a form of survival strategy, with serious ramifications for the international community. Moreover, as Edmond Keller argued three decades ago, 'an overreliance on intimidation techniques not only presents the image of a [Nigerian] state which is low in legitimacy and desperately struggling to survive, but also in the long run can do more to threaten state coherence than to aid it' (1983: 274).

Notes

[1] An ultra-conservative branch of Sunni Islam, with aspirations to return to the earliest fundamental Islamic sources of Qur'an and Hadith (Umar 2011).

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