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BOKO HARAM: THE NATION AS TERRORIST

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ABSTRACT

Political violence has become a significant “way of life” in the entire world today. In most cases, groups have emerged challenging perceived and actual wrongs and systems they considered unfriendly to their demands and aspiration in one form or the other. Violence and, in some extreme cases, wars have been fought as a way of “fighting back” and “correcting” such wrongs. In Nigeria for example, there are historical accounts of agitations against colonial subjugation and imperialism, as much as those of minority/tribal/ethnic/religious skirmishes that left in their wake tales of woes and loss recorded since independence. Series of bloody ethnic outbursts, especially in the northern parts of the county which led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 are examples. The “Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad”, known to the world as Boko Haram, a new group out of many of such, draws attention to the history of northern Nigeria, particularly noted for such violent extremism, in relation to resistance and clamour for certain ideals and goals. Through historical and dramatic exploration, this paper focuses on the north’s history of resistance struggle, and recent violent acts by the Boko Haram group against the backdrop of the nation’s shaky political and economic situation. This paper argues that Boko Haram is neither affiliated to Algeria’s al-Qaeda nor Somalia’s al Shaabab terrorists groups; that the activities of the groups are not religiously motivated, but political factors far outweigh other considerations responsible for such acts of extremism by the group.

Keywords: Boko Haram, caliphate, colonialism, heroism, politics, religion, slavery.
INTRODUCTION:
Political violence has become a major characteristic of most nations in the world today. Groups claiming to challenge wrongs and systems considered unsympathetic to their demands and “national” aspiration have emerged and resorted to violence and, in some extreme cases, wars in order to enforce their demands. Such extreme acts have not only succeeded in aggravating the fear people have about global politics, it has also drawn attention to the tragic reality of the imbalance resulting from the relationship between affluent nations and others groping in debt and squalor; between the privileged class and the embittered masses, a situation which often promotes mistrust, tension and unbridled vices. Foreign nations’ meddling in the affairs of developing countries and the insincerity of the governments of most of these nations are among other factors discovered to be promoting such brutal occurrences with attendant loss of lives and displacement of several in countries where there had been such eruptions.

In Nigeria for example, there are historical accounts of agitations against colonial subjugation and imperialism, as much as pockets of minority/tribal/ethnic/religious skirmishes that left in their wake tales of woes and loss. Boko Haram, as an emergent group clamoring for “justice and equity”, has given the extremity associated with such “(re)branding” the northern part of the country, where its activities are mostly concentrated, and further, if not demands a new kind of name, and dimension not known before now. It has also “finally” succeeded in battering its’ image and existing notoriety for religious agitation and violent extremism. The situation has equally succeeded in further denting the image of Islam, as a religion founded on truth and peace, under whose banner some of these fanatical and heretical groups supposedly perpetrate the dastardly acts, in the country and the world over, even though significant evidence has shown how local and foreign media, funded by political alliances and groups promoting these skirmishes, albeit as some forms of hegemonic control and assertion of specific agenda, play up the entire perception. Rather than toe this same line of thought, this paper looks at how and why Boko Haram as a group, out of many, pursues its aims (outside of the established Islamic tenets, which stand apart from the insanity that such groups) no matter how genuine its claims and demands to do so.

For those who truly read their history very well, northern Nigeria is not all about religious extremism; agitations for decency, good governance, fundamental rights etc, are not always for the wrong reasons. There have been heroic displays by some inspired northern individuals and the collective, against actual wrongs and violent conducts directed at the people, their faith and way of life by some elements. The concern of this paper is to draw attention to, on one aspect, the heroic steps taken by the people in order to assert their “selfhood”, against movements and acts which undermined them. Second, to examine such heroism in relation to the history of violence in northern Nigeria especially with regards to Boko Haram associated violence, side-by-side with unbiased view of the sociopolitical administrative arrangement and power structure of the country which fuel such extremism, as tellingly argued by some informed sources.

NORTHERN NIGERIA BEFORE COLONIALISM:
Basil Davidson (1968) writes that “History, in other words, is not a calculating machine. It unfolds in the mind and the imagination, and it takes body in the multifarious responses of a people’s culture, itself the infinitely subtle mediation of material realities, of underpinning economic fact, of gritty objective”. Perhaps Davidson meant to write about the historical and political reality of the northern part of Nigeria. He must also have meant to disagree with Nietzsche (1961)’s pessimism that “what we know of history is transposition of illusion” and agree with Yerima (2009) that it is best to “pay attention to [the] dialectic content”, of history. Historians and scholars notably Johnston (1967); Brenner (1993);Loimeier (1997); Kani and Gandi(1990); Falola and Heaton(2008) and Bunza (2004) among other several impressive scholars have written and variously chronicled the history of Northern Nigeria, especially its emergence as a formidable hegemony in the history of nationhood in the continent and among Black people. These scholars all agree that it is home to numerous ethnic groups and religious communities. These include historically important urban centres like Kano, Sokoto, Zaria, Maiduguri and Kaduna despite their rural landscape. These cities have been famous centres of learning in the Islamic world for centuries, with predominant groups such as the Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri among other roughly 160 smaller groups; the larger majority being Muslims, as well as a smaller number of Christians and animists. Since the British colonization in the early 1900s, these groups have crystallized into both the “majority groups” and the “minorities”, of which the Sokoto Caliphate is the capital and most prominent.
The Sokoto Caliphate traces its preeminence to the efforts of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio whose jihad, aimed at purifying Islamic practice in the region, ultimately led to the installation of a new righteous leadership. Under his leadership, the capitals and emirates witnessed the flourishing of trade, secured transport routes and the attainment of considerable wealth [1]. The Caliphate, according to Shehu Shagari, encompassed “the vast territories of the United Islamic States of West Africa which extended from Goa on the River Niger in the west to Garoua near the source of River Benue in the East and from the fringes of the Rainforest south” (Shagari, qtd in Yerima, 1998:10). This was the background while colonial penetration of the hinterland was underway thereby providing a ready and juicy target for Imperialist manipulation and subsequent attack due to its resistance.

In the late nineteenth century, the British government established its control of Southern Nigeria as a protectorate with Lagos as a colony. In 1900, it began extending its control northward proclaiming that region also a protectorate. Frederick Lugard, the High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria gradually negotiated and actually forced and manipulated some of the emirs to accept colonial rule. Some whose kingdoms were already weakened by the internal crises resulting from the end of the once lucrative Atlantic slave trade quickly agreed. But those who resisted were defeated, starting from Bida in 1901 to Sokoto in 1903[2]. However, Sultan Attahiru’s confrontation with colonial forces has remained a significant watershed in the history of the region. Though defeated like Ovonramwen Nogbaisi of Benin, Jaja of Opoboland and Nana of Itsekiri, his bold resistance continues to be celebrated by the people, who find in such history of heroism a strategic rallying point to campaign for the need to forge a common front in spite of varying degrees of challenges they are faced with.

Also, in the history of the Igala people, an originally predominantly Muslim community of people in present-day Kogi state in the Lokoja region, Ameh Oboni’s ‘tragic encounter’ with British brutalizing colonial machine equally adds to the picture of the North as a society whose history holds a lot of promise for national cohesion, integration and survival if the lessons leading up to that historic encounter are revisited, thought over and the gains harnessed. One specific drama text, *Attahiru* (1998) by Ahmed Yerima explores with vividness the violence and crisis ever since created by the displacement of that existing sociopolitical structure, replaced by foreign hegemony through methods that were once deceptive and overwhelming in their impact, resulting in “disruptive and cataclysmic consequences” (Fanon 1983), on the lives of the people, and especially “the structures and values of their societies” (Olorunleke 1999).

**COLONIALISM: IMPERIALISM AND THE AGENDA OF DIVISION:**

In Africa as in much of the rest of the Third World, the colonial enterprise not only undermined the sociopolitical reality of the people, but also truncated their cultural and religious values. In their words, Ilyin and Motylev (1986) argue that “for nearly a century in Africa, two centuries in Asia, and three to four centuries in Latin America, the colonial countries were plundered of all their wealth, their most fertile lands were used to produce a single type of crop for the colonialists, and the obtained products were exported to the imperialists states”. Fanon (1983) also writes that “colonialism was not a thinking machine, not a body endowed with reasoning faculties [but] it is violence in its natural state”.

Colonial attitude towards African natives was nothing but abhorrence of their ways, intellect and beliefs---attitude carried over even where foreign values are concerned and, by some natives themselves, many years after colonialism [3]. Rather, the wealth of the colonies was sought with greed and annoying audacity and eternal fracture of social cohesion, has been created in countries that once enjoyed relative peaceful coexistence despite their minimal levels of development at the time [4]. Conflicts arising from the encounter continue to plague the societies. Colonialists, such as Lugard actually tried to justify the “need” for colonialism, by an argument that reeks of arrogance and self-righteousness. Lugard (1923) writes; “The tropics are the heritage of mankind, and neither on the one hand has the suzerain power a right to their exclusive exploitation nor on the other have the races which inhabit them a right to deny their bounties to those who need them”. The tension arising from this kind of attitude has remained perpetual. The creation of the colonial states (a direct result of the introduction and imposition of Indirect Rule by Lord Frederick Lugard) brought about disharmony in pre-colonial Nigerian polities that were, according to Olorunleke, once “heterogenous societies with their respective endocentric engines of growth coupled with corresponding politico-cultural institutions” (Olorunleke, 1999:126), and, in the case of Northern Nigeria, a very well-established religious structure under the leadership of the emirs and the Caliph in Sokoto all governed by Islamic tenets. If anything, the policy of “Divide and Rule” as a strategy ensured that an effective form of disunity was created among the people through which colonial authorities were able to plunder their resources. Unfortunately, this also served to sow seeds of discord among the people. Isichei’s remark that Nigeria’s “confrontation with an alien culture, its
conquest, and the experience of an alien rule, created crises” (Isichei, 1973:180), captures the reality of this overbearing colonial agenda in the area and continent as a whole. Northern Nigeria appears to be the worst hit by this historic encounter considering the spate of contemporary tribal and religious conflicts recorded in that region, all of which resonate with the fact of the tragic reality Cesaire (1972) paints that; “wherever there are colonizers and the colonized face to face, I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict”. Such successfully created divisions among the people ensured that a gulf existed between the once law-abiding northern citizens and their rulers whose authority, derived essentially from the Holy Qur’an and Hadith as well as other guiding principles from Islam was opposed. Ward writes that “the three years’ campaign which Lugard fought over the great spaces of the north against the Fulani emirs, who were not supported by their Hausa speaking subjects, was part of the old humanitarian tradition that runs through from Gransville Sharp through Wilberforce and Livingstone” (Ward, 1965:389). Lother Bucher also expresses such colonialist’s sentiment, which can be construed to be a summation of the 1884/85 Berlin Conference agenda. He says; “Colonies are the best means of developing manufactured export and import trade, and finally a respectable Navy” (Bucher, qtd in Ake, 1981:9).

**ATTahirU: Martyrdom to Protect the caliphate:**

When playwrights use history, according to Yerima (2013), “a new type of signification is given to the incidences of the past, a form of refreshing and a relook at the past within a new framework” [emphasis mine]. The use to which such materials are put not only stands as an embodiment of a certain specific and germane reality that the society can draw knowledge from, but also as he further argues, it becomes “a blend of aesthetics with history [that] gives it new importance and expands the old meaning with new sensibilities”. Yerima’s penetrating opinion is further highlighted by Paul Hamilton who argues that:

“The new significance of the redeemed event revises present modes of understanding, empowering them to make still historical discoveries. And so the dialectical historicity of the past and present generates its own momentum” (Hamilton, 1996:207)

This attempt, a “redemptive” exercise as Yerima explains it, taking his own idea from Hamilton’s, often finds expression in a kind of “an alternative universe which is refract(ed) from the historical reality” (Yerima, 2013:63) in order to offer new opinion and provide fresh insights into an existing one. He does this well with the historical play, **Attahiru**, which focuses on the Sokoto Caliphate’s historic encounter with colonial penetration of the northern part of Nigeria. Recalling such history, at a time like this, bothers on the question of responsible leadership as shown by Sultan Attahiru in his confrontation with the colonial penetrating machine led by Lord Lugard on a British Empire’s mission of expansion and assertive control. Sultan Attahiru’s ascension to the Caliphate in November, 1902 as the twelfth Caliph of Sokoto and Sarkin Musulumi was according to Yerima, overshadowed by a major development in the history of Nigeria, notably the British military penetration of the hinterland in the North with its Imperial might already felt by the defeat of indigenous resistance movements in Ijebuland (1892), Brass (1895), Ilorin and Bida (1897), Benin (1897), Arochukwu (1901-2) among others. Sultan Attahiru was not unaware of this development—a fact he expresses at his coronation amidst the euphoria of celebration and hope for prosperity from the people.

**caliph**: I am becoming the Caliph at a time when the history of our lives is at a delicate balance. At a time when the Whiteman is determined to upset the peace of our lives. But it is too early to dare enemies, or to look for one. I shall await their moves. But let us pray to Allah’s hand in the matter. Let us pray for peace. Let us pray for our children. Let us pray for the growth of our lives and position in the Islamic world. Thank you all (21).

The play opens in front of a mosque against the background of Muslim call to prayer—another fact which establishes the very pervading presence of Islam as the state religion and highlighting the level of the people’s devotion to their spiritual tenet. The conversation between Yakubu, the Islamic books and other religious items
seller and Abbas, a blind beggar is illuminating in providing useful hints regarding the Caliphate’s impending clash with Imperial forces led by Lugard. Considering that Kano’s war with the invaders had already claimed many lives; the same situation had been recorded in Kontagora, Bida and Yola, with Sokoto just bereaved of Caliph Abdulrahman, and yet appearing to be the next target of invasion, it was indeed sad news.

While the populace awaits the decision of the governing council regarding the choice of caliph between Mohammad Attahiru Ahmadu and Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu, the statement by Abbas captures the fear which overshadows the celebration. He fears “the fast shooting gun of the Whiteman (which) spits bullets of death”(17). The sense of trepidation is understandable knowing that the “poisonous arrows of our soldiers waddle when you compare them to the bullets of the Whiteman’s guns”(18). Attahiru eventually emerges caliph ending speculations and he soon gets busy with state affairs. However, while Sultan Attahiru, with the support of his council, engages in resolving domestic dispute over market control and authority such as the one involving Sarkin Zango and Sarkin Fatake and their members who are mostly peasants and traders, the enormity of the task ahead is not lost on him. He draws attention to the need to “like good Muslim brothers find common ground for peace”, because the times are not suited for “land and well problems”(25).

The news of the removal of the Caliph’s representatives (the emirs of Bida and Kontagora) by Lugard who accuses them of highhandedness is not as shocking as the undermining of the Caliph’s person and authority by Lugard, who sends the message to the Sultan to nominate new emirs whose choices can only be confirmed through colonial ratification. He ridicules the Islamic religion by referring to the deposed emirs as scoundrels and infidels. As Waziri laments; “the greatest irony is that the selector of these good Muslims, is himself a Whiteman, an infidel. A kafir!”(28). But giving the colonialist a name is not enough to quench his insatiable quest for Sokoto as part of his already conquered territories in what Rodney (1982:223) describes as its “incorporation into the economic structure of world capitalism”, which in the long run is intended to “usurp the colonized people’s historical process and equally disarticulate the economic, political and cultural structure in the dominated society”(Olorunleke,1999:123). What is needed is expedient action in order to forestall his every move, particularly as Abbas informs us that “the whitemen are marching towards Argungu and Gwandu already”(17), a piece of news which compounds the tragic tale of a heavy loss his family and several others had suffered after the defeat of Kano, just like in other parts where the Caliphate holds control.

Lugard’s victory in Bida and Kontagora opens bitter wounds and painful recollection bothering on strained relationship between the people of Sokoto and their neighbours. Anger and bitterness allow for council members to openly express their concern and fear. Ubandoma sees the “crack in the walls” as a factor. He explains to the Council.

**UBANDOMA**: Sokoto and Zaria have not been our friends. They were even ready to forget that the Zaria people are our Muslim brothers. They felt that as long as Ibrahim the former Emir of Kontagora attacked Zaria in order to feed his men, it was a Zaria problem. When the Emir of Zazzau sent to us for help it was in this very Palace that we decided not to interfere. The Emir of Zazzau was forced to call the Whiteman, who helped him chase away Ibrahim, a fellow Muslim, and now the Whiteman have refused to leave. They have become like the egrets, who help the cows to pick out bad worms and flies, but also peck at the wounds of the cows which sometimes kill the cows (31-32).

Madawaki equally makes one of the most memorable statements in the play. His anger is rightly directed, not at the colonial Imperialist, but at the people who have failed to see the need for unity in their conduct. He paints a global picture of disharmony when he retorts bitterly; “the black race makes me want to cry. The white men are only a handful, then how come [they are] such a big bad bully, that we all shiver? Because we all are to blame. We all created the big bad bully” (30-31). While the whole Caliphate trembles at the thought of likely brutal confrontation, Sultan Attahiru is himself undaunted by the looming shadow of Imperialism. He talks tough and sends a decisive message, stating in unequivocal terms the position of Sokoto under his authority as a true Muslim and leader of the Faithful.

However, the seriousness of the tone of the letter is not lost on Lugard who meets with his lieutenants, Colonel Morland and Willcocks to strategize. Despite his readiness to match the Caliph strength for strength, he expresses his disdain for the way events are turning and would rather “be a peaceful infidel ruler than a sleepless conqueror”(35). One could be tempted to view his actions in good light, judging from such remark. But further discussion clearly
reveals that his real agenda and the underlying motive of transgression on African soil, is no doubt selfish interests of European powers. British incursion and frenzied desire to control the colony, by any means necessary is threatened by the presence of another colonialist adventurer, the French, which clearly shows how colonizers struggle among themselves in order to penetrate and plunder the resources of the colonies at the detriment of the natives. This conversation between the conniving trio, when they meet to strategize is most illuminating.

**WILLCOCKS:** My major worry is the French. They are moving closer to Sokoto through the north of Katsina.

**LUGARD:** I have studied the situation myself. It means that we either fight and take Sokoto now or the French would cross the Niger and join Sokoto and thereby cutting us off totally. This must never be allowed

**MORLAND:** Details Sir, I am hoping that if we have to take Sokoto, it will be swift and quick. We can’t allow a long war or defeat

**LUGARD:** Defeat? Never! Right now the morale of our men is high. With the spoils of Zaria and Kano, they will fight even their fathers for the glory of Britain (35)

But, with the drums of war sounding at the background, faith and devotion to the great cause of Islam find their way in. Sultan Attahiru’s meeting with his son Mai Wurno and the spiritual teacher Mallam is revealing. The spiritual perspective to the tragic occurrences (about a prophecy that would end the over a century reign of the Caliphate established by Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio) notwithstanding, Sultan Attahiru’s composure reveals a character of immense grace and poise. After series of revealing nightmares portending danger, he finds recourse in doing the bidding of Allah, choosing to stand and challenge the desecration of valued Islamic tenets by an unrelenting foe who “raises dust on all fronts around Sokoto”(38) and has succeeded in breaking up the unity of the Caliphate built by his (Attahiru)’s ancestors by installing his own loyalists who openly question the Sultan’s rulings. Naturally one would expect the diversity of opinion such as those from Warafa who asks that “if reason can prevail on an issue, why rush to spill blood?”(44). But the “colonial machine” as Fanon describes Imperialism, is not one given to reasons, however genuine in so far as it does not serve its interest.

With the fall of flag bearers under the Caliph, notably Yola, Zaria, Kano, Kontagora and Ilorin, resigning to fate is neither a luxury Sultan Attahiru can afford, nor the fear he chooses not to entertain. Rather, controlling the same fate becomes a duty, mixed with the determination to succeed like Atiku, Muazu, Umoru and Abdul-Rahman; all caliphs before his time. As the Imperialist’s final onslaught begins and Katsina surrenders, Sokoto under Sultan Attahiru continues to be steadfast and determined, who insists that “if Sokoto must fall, it will fall fighting, not with the Caliph and his people unravelling their Rawanis for the Whiteman to see their bald heads”(47). After the bloody confrontation at Bebeji noted for heavy loss of lives, Burmi soon becomes the fiercest battle ground and the place history will meet with resilience, faith with duty, honour with fate as the troop led by Sultan Attahiru clashes with Lugard’s well-equipped and trained soldiers unlike Hausa/Fulani peasants the Caliph has taken to the battle front.

Prior to this decisive clash, the colonial Imperialists’ have hurried enthroned Prince Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu as the new Sultan (a move to divide the Caliphate into clashing interest groups and finally destroy the last whiff of authority Sultan Attahiru wields) Muslim Faithfuls and loyalists still rally round in support of truth symbolized by Sultan Attahiru who prophetically notes that “it is not how long, but what you did while on the throne that people will remember”(61). Defeated by the superior forces of Lugard all right, Sultan Attahiru’s heroism is marked by the symbolism of the flag that was never allowed to fall; each wounded and falling Muslims defended it with his life and with their last heroic acts, “say no to colonial oppression at the cost of their lives”(61). Such was the fate of the region as Attahiru goes down clutching onto glory. Sokoto crumbles in the face of a more organized power, but heroism on the part of the defeated stands out very tall.

Sultan Attahiru’s courage and rare devotion is considered worthy of celebration. His stability of character in fighting a noble cause is reminiscent of Omar Mukhtar’s effort as the leader of the Bedoin Arabs in Libya during the Fascist government of Mussolini, the same way Algerian resistance movement is seen, as well as the Nelson Mandela led African National Congress (ANC) struggle against the Apartheid system in South Africa. Struggles against colonial penetration were in every way some noble endeavour; just and decidedly marked attempts to rescue a whole populace and nation from both territorial and politico-economic strangulation by foreign powers, which had little or no respect for the humanity of the natives [5]. From the literary/dramatic
According to Walker Andrew (2012) in the publication giving birth to a group like Boko Haram.

...thereby disillusioned and so many others have lost total confidence in the ruling class who, unfortunately, continue to played up beyond control. Most importantly, insincerity in government offices has left several people...the people under his rule; faith in true Islam, which propagates brotherhood and common good for all against an opposition that rises to undermine all of these (the colonial imperialist venture that encourages division, employs callous method of penetration and brutal destruction of a/the people’s religious and political structure) certain facts stand out; namely, honesty and the sincere commitment to serve the people and submit to the will of the higher power represented by the Supreme. Also, some other factors come to the fore, namely, that colonial imperialism and subjugation have not been without some attendant sociopolitical tribulation as witnessed in the North and the entire country till date.

In the first instance, the history of distrust between the North and South as well as the East, which was the stimulating factor for the crisis and violence leading to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) can be traced to the bitterness of the North against other regions, which were blamed for providing the needed troop by the colonial authority in the successful suppression of Northern resistance during that colonial period [6]. Also, the rise of religious conflicts in the North had its antecedent in the colonial presence which caused division and conflict between the two major Sufi brotherhoods, namely the Qadiriyya which had established its presence as the official and dominant order of the Caliphate since the fifteenth century and the Tijaniyya with its strong base derived from the newly rich traders and bureaucratic class that formed its membership. This is similar to what Ameh Oboni regards as double-standard in the treatment of religious adherents in the North. According to him, “the White men trust the core Hausas. We in the middle belt are a problem of Geography”(26). The allegations of collaboration with colonial authority often levied against the Qadiriyya by the Tijaniyya gradually degenerated into brutal clashes in the 1940s. It also had direct and catastrophic effects on the political situation, especially those involving the two major political parties in the region of that era, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC)[7]. Also the resistance posed by the Madhi group, which had the reputation of being feared by the colonial authority, is also remarkably relevant in understanding colonial midwife of religious crisis in the northern region [8].

BOKO HARAM AND THE NIGERIAN NATION:

The African, nay Nigerian inheritors of power from colonial masters have not done well to justify the sacrifice put into achieving independence. Persistent political turbulence and outright outbreak of war, stemming from differences (that are not in the interest of the populace, but of a few group constituting the political class) have left several impoverished, wealth of the nation plundered and ethnic, tribal and religious misunderstandings played up beyond control. Most importantly, insincerity in government offices has left several people disillusioned and so many others have lost total confidence in the ruling class who, unfortunately, continue to recycle the same set of people, and ideas that have practically failed to move the country forward, thereby giving birth to a group like Boko Haram.

According to Walker Andrew (2012) in the publication Special Report, by the United States Institute of Peace; “Boko Haram has grown at a time when there are many national issues that draw anger and feed the group”. Government’s insincerity and failure to honestly stand up to national need and crises except those that appear set to ruffle the nest of the ruling can be regarded as a major factor in the emergence of Boko Haram and its threat to peace in the country. The fact that “the group [has] constructed a “state within a state”, with a cabinet, its own religious police, and a large farm [...] attracted more and more people under its roof by offering welfare handouts, food, and shelter. Many of the people the group attracted were refugees from the wars over the borders in Chad and jobless Nigerian youths”(Walker,2012:3) clearly buttress these points. This fact also stresses the point that the...
group is a local breed that feeds on the inadequacies of the government and shows its intent to take advantage of institutional weakness in order to negotiate both religious and political reforms in the country [9].

Aside this obvious weakness of the government, the fact that religion is always held up as a “scapegoat” whenever crises involving the north and south of the country erupt, has served to blur the line between the actual reason(s) for most crises that are outright politically motivated and those ethnically and/or religiously promoted. According to Walker, when “viewed from outside, it can appear that these conflicts boil down to religious differences, tensions between blocs of Muslim and Christian inhabitants [but] when one looks deeper, one finds that politics---more precisely, control of government patronage---is the primary cause of many of these conflicts”. The revelation that Boko Haram has within its rank children of influential politicians and that the group enjoys such patronage, with significant example being its ability to produce chemical weapons and explosives such as bombs, procure and use sophisticated ammunitions of military grades, also serve to buttress the speculation of heavy financial support that an ordinary angry and radical group, nurtured and living in deserted mosques, as it has initially been portrayed to the Nigerian people to be, can possibly afford and/or have access to. There is also the possibility of viewing Boko Haram as a reactionary group against certain actions by the government or its functionaries. Every political movement or action might not be unconnected to some relationship between government and the people, especially the minorities, or even those who feel marginalized in some ways. For example, the Ogoni crisis of the oil-rich Niger-Delta region of the country was left to snowball into a national “terrorist” act of hostage-taking, kidnapping and extra-judicial killings before what appears to be a meaningful step to control and possibly stem its tide was taken. There is a sense in drawing attention to this fact, for according to Walker, part of the likely reasons for the emergence of a group like Boko Haram seems to be directly related to the fact that it believes like “many other groups in northern Nigeria believe [that] some governors are responsible for a campaign of “ethnic cleansing” against Hausa and Fulani people”. This fact might be cited as the reason for series of violent clashes and the senseless killing of innocent people, especially in Jos, Plateau state.

Minority and ethnic reaction and clamour of this nature in the Nigerian polity is as old as the nation itself. But the tragic reality is the not too encouraging attitude of successive governments in stemming the tide. For some that as much as tried in the past, bureaucratic procedures, insincerity and pseudo-communique which are run into the ditch by elements within the same government remain the only sign of feeble attempt and their kind of commitment, noticeable in such areas as “badly managed, foreign-dominated economy, an oppressive, philistine political regime, an ossified colonial bureaucracy” (Osunbade 2007:38). In a situation where the populace grapples with “irregular power supply, dry water taps, and an utterly poor communication system”, a dastard group like Boko Haram can as well lay claim to some fickle and utterly imaginary authority and power to negotiate “good governance” for the same people it massacres, or even ridiculously attempt to draw the line between sanity and absolute madness, fragile peace and over-fed lawlessness, particularly in a country that prides herself as the giant of the continent. In his prophetic work, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe draws a palpable picture of the nation’s everyday life. He observes that “the failure of this government [like every other ones before it] can’t be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn’t the subservience to foreign manipulation, degrading as it is; it isn’t the second-class hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed […] It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s everyday life”. For instance, that the government has not denied nor openly challenged the allegation of genocide against the North (which replays the events leading to the Nigerian Civil war); the claims that children of influential citizens’ are involved in Boko Haram activities, or that the group itself is fully sponsored by top politicians and government functionaries, and the view that the entire violent charade boils down to the North’s refusal to accept the legitimacy of the incumbent presidency aside government’s inability to address burning national issues among other related failures, all suggest that the root cause of the terrible state of fear the nation has been pushed in the last three years or so, is actually politically motivated, rather than religious as the people have (always) been made to believe.

Having people swayed towards this line of thought has helped to sustain the grip of a certain hegemony that favours only a privileged few fortunate enough to parade the corridors of political power. Not just political power as it were, but every sphere of control over a throng already emotionally emasculated and psychologically saturated with emptiness of failed promises and dashed hopes that has become so familiar at every stages of their lives to the point of their almost getting used to it. Hegemony in this particularly case does not however follow in the line of Thwaites and Males (1994:128) opinion that “it is a social process of
This is extremely obvious in the case of northern Nigeria. The organization more so than state organized; and finally, active consent, not passive apprehension" discourse, not dictatorial rhetoric; construction of ideological and political consent, not voting; self and civil behavior of a powerless, rudderless and disoriented majority. Further, the situation establishes a connection with dominant group such as the Northern region in Nigeria is itself under siege by a powerful “minority” who uses religion to control such, the idea of “persuasive consent” works perfectly for the “powerful” minority who uses religion to control it; “tactics employed by government security […] have been consistently brutal and counterproductive”(1). As such, the idea of “persuasive consent” works perfectly for the “powerful” minority who uses religion to control.

consensus in which power relations follow the cultural leadership of a dominant group”; for, in this case, a dominant group such as the Northern region in Nigeria is itself under siege by a powerful “minority” acting on behalf of a powerless, rudderless and disoriented majority. Further, the situation establishes a connection with Gramsci’s who engaged this kind of hegemony we are interested in from the perspective of “principal constituent elements [that work through] consent and persuasion” (Fontana 1993:14); just the way Berry explains it; “as a process] achieved by a combination of coercion and persuasion, not force; hegemonic discourse, not dictatorial rhetoric; construction of ideological and political consent, not voting; self and civil organization more so than state organized; and finally, active consent, not passive apprehension” (2000:111)[emphasis mine].This is extremely obvious in the case of northern Nigeria. The Special Report has it: “tactics employed by government security […] have been consistently brutal and counterproductive”(1). As such, the idea of “persuasive consent” works perfectly for the “powerful” minority who uses religion to control the rudderless but angry majority, especially in the face of apparent institutional weakness to contain such insurgency and, in the opinion of the Special Report, by a government which uses “standard maneuver to blame problems on political enemies”(7) or even religion, which has always been the guilty flag waved whenever any crises of the sort we are discussing occur in this country. The fact that “Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims” that it wants to deal with, might also fit properly into Williams and Williams idea of “conscious[ly] interventionist thought” (1993;152) even though as it happens, it is not as pressing as the danger the group poses for the entire nation despite being dangerous enough. Yet, the strategy of squashing the group and possibly bringing the members to justice might appear rather difficult if not impossible, at least for now, considering the fact that the government’s “reliance on extrajudicial execution as a tactic in “dealing” with any problem in Nigeria not only created Boko Haram and other less-popular insurgent groups across the country as known today, but also sustains and gives [them] fuel to expand” (Walker,2012:1). Essentially as it appears, combating Boko Haram is obviously and definitely not as important as addressing the situation which gave birth to Boko Haram and other related groups in the first place.

Besides these points, major political crises including several others in the past, such as the El-Zakzaky led Muslim Brotherhood of the 1980s, the Maitatsine sect of the 2000s and the very recent Boko Haram attacks can be linked to the gradual, calculated and treacherous imbalance in the distribution of wealth and opportunities for the citizenry. This point alone speaks volume of a domineering power which has little, if any respect, for the right of its people as well as the need to provide equal opportunity for all, which is a priority condition that must not be determined by tribal, religious or ethnic consideration. Most especially, the fact that the conflicts continue to draw attention to the need to give more than passing attention to the needs and aspiration of the various groups, which form the polity, continues to foreground the necessity for the entire political arrangement in the country to be honestly addressed (not in any way in the way and manner of organized Constitutional Conference and other charades by the Obasanjo administration and the present government of Goodluck Jonathan) in the interest of the nation’s and people’s survival, if we truly want to remain as one united hegemony. Significant points stressed by the Special Report could become very important at this crucial stage. First, there is this summation that:

“Northern Nigeria as a whole has very deep development problems, perhaps deeper than the rest of the country. It has some of the worst maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. The level of poverty and deprivation is higher than the rest of the country, while active participation in politics, beyond fealty to a thin band of political and religious godfathers who hold power, is low. The only way to remove the threat of the group in the long term is widespread reform of northern Nigeria that improves the livelihoods of northern Nigerians, and gives them a bigger stake in their politics” [emphasis mine]

Second, there is the urgent need to pay attention to the fact argued by Walker that: “a weakness in the institutions of politics and the security services has created a political situation where such threats to stability are not dealt with until violence is a certainty”(Walker,2012:2). This point stresses the urgent need to change the perception often promoted by the media which, in every respect, is complicit by its immense contribution to misinforming the populace about the reality of national life by the unnecessary heaping of the blame of government’s failure to live up to its billing on religious fanaticism and unbridled fundamentalism. Such media
partisanship did not work to alleviate conditions in the past neither is it working now, except to aggravate the fear and heighten the confusion in an already messy affair.

CONCLUSION:

Against the widespread speculation about the real identity, true intentions and clear clamour or demands of the Boko Haram group as well as government’s double-standard cum call on the outside world for help in combating the whole bloody and troubling scenario, there is need to reiterate that; “extreme caution must be advised, as what might appear to be a little “local difficulty” might hide a growing rift between both north and south”(Walker, 2012:3). This very important submission by the Special Report also sums up the crucial need for government and those involved to take a decisive step towards addressing the situation, else the nation might have a repeat of the civil war. The signs are everywhere.

REFERENCES:

42. Yerima (2013) “Refracted Universe, Alternative Realities: The Artist as god”. Inaugural Lecture, Redeemer’s University, Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ENDNOTES:

9. Several conflicting reports have emerged, from the press circle and, most especially from the Federal Government. These reports have been debunked in many ways. Special Report has it that “Following the failed rescue of hostages Chris McManus and Francesco Lamolinara in north-eastern Nigeria in March 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan played up the connections between the group and international terrorism”, but that “Boko Haram is not in the same global jihadist bracket as Algeria’s al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or Somalia’s al-Shabaab. Despite its successful attack on the UN compound Abuja in August 2011. Boko Haram is not bent on attacking Western interests. There have been no further attacks on international interests since that time” (1).