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NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER: UNDERSTANDING THE RELIGIOUS TERRORISM OF BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT   Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group from northeastern Nigeria, has caused severe destruction in Nigeria since 2009. The threat posed by the extremist group has been described by the present Nigerian President as worse than that of Nigeria's civil war in the 1960s. A major drawback in the Boko Haram literature to date is that much effort has been spent to remedy the problem in lieu of understanding it. This paper attempts to bridge this important gap in existing literaure by exploring the role of religion as a force of mobilisation as well as an identity marker in Nigeria, and showing how the practice and perception of religion are implicated in the ongoing terrorism of Boko Haram. In addition, the paper draws on the relative deprivation theory to understand why Boko Haram rebels and to argue that religion is not always a sufficient reason for explaining the onset of religious terrorism.

Key Words: Boko Haram; Nigeria; Religious terrorism; Identity; Relative deprivation theory.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2009, bombings and shootings by the Nigerian extremist group Boko Haram have targeted Nigeria's religious and ethnic fault lines in an apparently escalating bid to hurt the nation's stability. A spate of increasingly coordinated and sophisticated attacks against churches from December 2011 through July 2012 suggests a strategy of provocation through which the group seeks to spark wide-scale sectarian violence that will strike at the foundations of the country (Forest, 2012). The group killed more than 900 people in 2012 and about 250 people in 2013 (Ndujihe, 2013). Human rights organisations estimate that approximately 3,500 Nigerians have been killed in violent attacks related to Boko Haram over the past three years (*IRIN*, 22 February 2013). More recently, at least 187 persons including women and children were reported to have been killed by either gunshots or fire after Boko Haram gunmen engaged soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in a deadly shootout that left the commercial border town of Baga in Borno State completely burnt down (*Premium Times*, 22 April 2013; *Atlanta Blackstar*, 23 April 2013). At least 2,000 houses, 64 motorcycles and 40 cars were burnt in the wake of the attack.

In January 2012, the present Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan stated that, "[t]he situation we have in our hands is even worse than the civil war that we fought."[(1)] Former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria, Nuhu Ribadu, toed a similar line when he argued that if nothing was done about Boko Haram, "Nigerians will lose Nigeria to civil war" (*Codewit World News*, 25 March 2013). Unfortunately, numerous attempts at nego-

tiating with the group, including the recent amnesty offer extended to members of the group, have stalled due to distrust on both sides, and the factionalized leadership of the group's different cells (*IRIN*, 22 February 2013). In the latest violence, 53 people were killed and 13 villages burnt in central Nigeria's Benue State (*BBC News*, 15 May 2013). Following these deadly attacks by Boko Haram, the Nigerian President has declared a state of emergency in three northern states: Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. In a pre-recorded address broadcast on 14 May 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*, 15 May 2013). The President further noted that Boko Haram actions amount to a "declaration of war" (*BBC News*, 15 May 2013).

Although the problem of Boko Haram has elicited many studies in recent years, a major drawback in the literature to date is that much effort has been spent to remedy the problem instead of understanding it. This paper attempts to bridge this important gap by exploring the role of religion as a force of mobilisation as well as an identity marker in Nigeria, and showing how the practice and perception of religion are implicated in the current terrorism of Boko Haram. Specifically, the paper uses the theory of relative deprivation to understand why Boko Haram rebels and to demonstrate that religion is not always the sufficient reason for the onset of religious terrorism.

The rest of this paper is divided into four main parts. The first examines the role of religion as an identity marker in Nigeria. The second part reviews existing literature in order to glean an understanding of religious terrorism. The third part discusses the specific nature of religious terrorism and the emergence and evolution of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. The fourth part considers the role of relative deprivation in fuelling violence in Boko Haram members and supporters.

RELIGION AS AN IDENTITY MARKER IN NIGERIA

Given Nigeria's religious pluralism, the nation makes an interesting case study for exploring the role of religion as a force of mobilisation as well as an identity marker. The mélange of religions and ethnicities coupled with the complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability qualifies Nigeria as one of the most deeply divided nations in Africa (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005: 4). The religious demography in Nigeria is evenly split between Christians and Muslims with the latter having a slight edge in terms of population (Ekot, 2009). Muslims constitute 50.5% of the population while Christians constitute 48.2% of the total population. Other religious groups make up the remaining 1.3% (Okpanachi, 2009). Clearly, Islam and Christianity are the two dominant religions in Nigeria, and almost the entire scale of social, political and economic relations revolve around these two identity formations (Kukah, 1999: 99). Islam is the predominant religion in the north while Christianity has its stronghold in the south (Kukah, 1993: 6). The amalgamation of the north and the south of Nigeria in 1914 brought the two religions into closer contact as Muslims and

Christians began to participate in the affairs of the national state (Falola, 1998: 1). Based on the religious demography of Nigeria, it is not surprising that religion significantly shapes the identity of its citizens. In 2004, Nigerians were ranked "the most religious people in the ten nations polled, with 90% of the population believing in God, praying regularly, and affirming their readiness to die on behalf of their belief" (*BBC News*, 11 November 2005).

A number of studies have explored the relationship between religion and identity (Comstock, 1984; Blanco-Mancilla, 2003). The term, identity, has different connotations. In his study on the impact of religion on identity in northern Nigeria, Blanco-Mancilla (2003: 1) defined identity as "an ensemble of 'subject positions,' e.g., 'Muslim Hausa,' 'Christian female,' and 'northern Nigerian'; each representing the individual's identification with a particular group, such as ethnicity, religion, [sic] gender." This definition captures the way people view themselves in Nigeria where identity is defined by affiliation to religious and ethnic groups in lieu of the national state. In Nigeria, it is falsely assumed by many that a Hausa man, by virtue of his ethnicity, is a Muslim. Similarly, it is assumed that every Igbo person is a Christian. This close link between religion and ethnicity holds serious implications for religious converts in Nigeria. For instance, is a Hausa man more of a Muslim than an Idoma[2] man who converts to Islam?

A more embracing definition conceptualises identity as "a combination of socio-cultural characteristics which individuals share, or are presumed to share, with others on the basis of which one group may be distinguished from others" (Alubo, 2009: 9). In this sense, identity is not only limited to how I see myself, it is simultaneously a fusion of how I see myself and how I believe to be perceived by others. As the defining feature of people's perception of the other, identity has a deep political undertone since it frequently serves as the "basis for inclusion and exclusion" (Harris & Williams, 2003). This construction of identity has repercussions for the links among identity, citizenship, and group rights in a deeply divided country as in Nigeria, where citizenship is tied to group rights and thus, inextricably connected to identity. Consequently, religious affiliation tends to override citizenship.[3]

Furthermore, the role of religion as a legitimizer of power has serious implications for a pluralist country such as Nigeria. This derives from the views of the dominant religious groups in the country who see God as the source and summit of power. This perception of power leads to the contestation for political leadership along religious identities. This partly explains why elections and political appointments are areas where the interplay between religion and politics often comes to the fore in Nigeria. Followers of religious groups strongly canvass for one of their kin to be elected into political office. In many instances, "these contestations result in violence. In such conflicts, holders of particular identities as defined by the attackers are singled out for liquidation, forced to relocate and their properties destroyed. The collective nature of the violence is perhaps serving to strengthen geo-political solidarity" (Alubo, 2009: 6). For instance, the appointment of a Christian as a local council chairman in Jos in September 2001 triggered violence, which led to the death of over 160 people (Agbiboa & Okem, forthcoming).

More recently, following the April 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, *Human*

Rights Watch (2011) reported that over 800 people were killed, and close to 65,000 people were displaced in three days of violent protests in 12 states in the north. The violence started with popular protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change Party, following the re-election of the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the minority south, who was the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party. Indeed, the Boko Haram insurgency is not unrelated to the fact that a Christian from the largely Christian-dominated south is in power. As one of their pre-conditions for peace, Boko Haram has called on President Jonathan to embrace Islam or resign from office (*Nigerian Tribune*, 6 August 2012).

The comingling of religion with politics in Nigeria is portentous for the stability of the country and the emergence of a true national identity. Unfortunately, government complicity in religious matters has often fanned the flames of religious tensions. During his tenure as president (1985–1993), for example, Ibrahim Babangida unilaterally registered Nigeria as a full-fledged member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).[4] Anchored on the core values and goals of the OIC, membership of the organisation is underpinned by a commitment to the advancement of Islam (Kenny, 1996; Ekot, 2009). Toeing a similar line, President Sani Abacha, who succeeded the Interim National Government set up when Babangida was forced out of office, again unilaterally registered Nigeria as a member of the D-8 (Developing-8), an organisation for development cooperation among major Muslim developing nations, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

These decisions caused much consternation and anxiety among Nigerian Christians who saw the government moves as an attempt toward the Islamisation of Nigeria. Following a chorus of disapproval by Christians, the issue of Nigerian membership in the OIC was put on hold. This decision, however, precipitated a series of religious disturbances in the north, beginning with the March 1986 clash in Ilorin between Muslims and Christians (Udoidem, 1997: 172) and the May 1986 clash between Christian and Muslim students at Uthman Dan Fodio University in Sokoto (Ekot, 2009: 57).

The politics of religion in Nigeria is evident in the Sharia law debate, which has always pitted the Muslim-dominated north against the Christian-dominated south. The issue engulfed Nigeria shortly after her return to democracy in 1999 (Ekot, 2009). Zamfara State was the first northern state to introduce Sharia as the supreme law of the land. The then Zamfara governor, Ahmed Sani, was quoted as saying: "Whoever administers or governs any society not based on Sharia is an unbeliever" (*The Post Express*, 15 July 2000). Following his example, many northern governors also soon introduced Sharia law, but in the case of Kaduna State with half of its population being Christians, there was a strong resistance. This led to violent religious confrontations in February 2000 between Christians and Muslims as attempts were made to implement the Sharia law. "In this conflict, hundreds of people were killed, property worth billions of Naira was destroyed and thousands of people were rendered homeless" (Ekot, 2009: 63). "From the onset," wrote Ekot (2009: 54), "the Muslims had never given up their quest for

Nigeria to be an Islamic state…"

It is important to note that the ethnic factor has a significant role to play in most of the religious conflicts that have engulfed Nigeria. Specifically, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 enabled people to vent their pent-up anger and express themselves more freely. As Duruji (2010: 92) aptly noted, "[democracy] opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethno-religious demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule." In particular, the Jos crisis illustrates this fact. Over three thousand people were killed and more than 250 thousand people displaced in Plateau State in November 2008 because of the results of local government election that were viewed by the voters as unfavourable to some people in Jos North Local Government Area (Meredith, 2005: 587). According to Ostien (2009: 1), local conflicts in Jos arose "primarily out of ethnic differences, pitting Hausa 'settlers' against the Plateau 'indigenes' groups of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom."[5] He further argued that the underlying problem was "the alleged rights of indigenes … to control particular locations." Ojie & Ewhrudjakpor (2009: 7–8) argued: "the battle for supremacy between Hausa and Fulani settlers and indigenes … has been largely exploited by religious bigots and political jobbers."

Such is a brief background to the combustible issue of religious identity in Nigeria. The next section gleans an understanding of religious terrorism from existing literature and shows how this understanding is implicated in the ongoing Boko Haram terrorism in northern Nigeria.

UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

The link between religion and violence has a long genealogy in western scholarship (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000; Cavanaugh, 2004). Specifically, the concept of "religious terrorism" goes back to David Rapoport's (1984) paper analysing the use of terror in the three monotheistic religions. This influential paper inspired many subsequent studies on the subject, primarily in the field of terrorism studies, which sought to explain "why violence and religion has re-emerged so dramatically at this moment in history and why they have so frequently been found in combination" (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 121; cf. Ranstorp, 1996; Laqueur, 1999; Lesser et al., 1999; Hoffman, 2006). In this particular literature, "religious terrorism" has been raised above a simple label to a set of descriptive characteristics and substantive claims which appear to delineate it as a specific "type" of political violence, fundamentally different to previous or other forms of terrorism. As argued by Bruce Hoffman (2006: 88, 272), this new type of terrorism produces "radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimation and justification, concepts of morality and, worldview"; [consequently, religious terrorism] "represents a very different and possibly far more lethal threat than that posed by more familiar, traditional terrorist adversaries."

The claim about the specific nature of religious terrorism rests on a number of arguments, three of which are discussed here. The first of the three arguments is that religious terrorists have anti-modern goals of returning society to an idealised version of the past and are therefore necessarily anti-democratic and

anti-progressive. Audrey Cronin (2003: 38), for example, argued that "the forces of history seem to be driving international terrorism back to a much earlier time, with echoes of the behaviour of 'sacred' terrorists … clearly apparent in the terrorist organisation such as al-Qaeda." For his part, Juergensmeyer (2003: 230) contended that religious terrorists worked to "an anti-modern political agenda." In his words:

> They have come to hate secular governments with an almost transcendent passion … dreamed of revolutionary changes that would establish a godly social order in the rubble of what the citizens of most secular societies have regarded as modern, egalitarian democracies.… The logic of this kind of militant religiosity has therefore been difficult for many people to comprehend. Yet its challenge has been profound, for it has contained a fundamental critique of the world's post-Enlightenment secular culture and politics. (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 232)

This argument is further expanded to propose, that religious terrorists have objectives that are absolutist, inflexible, unrealistic, devoid of political pragmatism and hostile to negotiation (Gunning & Jackson, 2011). As Matthew Morgan (2004: 30–31) noted: "Today's terrorists don't want a seat at the table, they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it." Daniel Byman (2003: 147) wrote of Al-Qaeda: "Because of the scope of its grievances, its broader agenda of rectifying humiliation, and a poisoned worldview that glorifies *jihad* as a solution, appeasing al-Qaeda is difficult in theory and impossible in practice."

The second important argument on the nature of religious terrorism suggests that religious terrorists employ a different kind of violence to the previous terrorists. For example, it is argued that for the "religious terrorist, violence is … a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand" (Hoffman, 2006: 88), as opposed to a tactical means to a political end. Furthermore, it is suggested that, because religious terrorists have transcendental aims, are engaged in a cosmic war and lack an earthly constituency, they are not constrained in their pedagogy of violence and take an apocalyptic view of violent confrontation: "What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle—cosmic war—in the service of worldly political battles" (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 149–150). For this reason, acts of religious terror serve not only as tactics in a political struggle, but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation. Thus, religious terrorists aim for maximum causalities and are willing to use weapons of mass destruction (Gunning & Jackson, 2011). As Magnus Ranstorp (1996: 54) observed, they are "relatively unconstrained in the lethality and the indiscriminate nature of violence used," because they lack "any moral constraints in the use of violence" (cf. Hoffman, 2006: 88). Similarly, Jessica Stern (2003: xxii) argued: "Religious terrorists groups are more violent than their secular counterparts and are probably more likely to use weapons of mass destruction."

Thirdly, it has been argued that religious terrorists have the capacity to evoke

total commitment and fanaticism from their members, and are characterised by the suspension of doubt—in contrast to the supposedly more measured attitudes of secular groups (Gunning & Jackson, 2011). Juergensmeyer (2003: 220) pointed out that "these disturbing displays have been accompanied by strong claims of moral justification and an enduring absolutism, characterised by the intensity of the religious activists' commitment." Moreover, he suggested that, in some cases, the certainties of the religious viewpoint and the promises of the next world were the primary motivating factors in driving insecure, alienated and marginalised youths to join religious terrorist groups as a means of psychological empowerment. As Juergensmeyer (2003: 187) argued, "[t]he idea of cosmic war is compelling to religious activists because it ennobles and exalts those who consider themselves a part of it…it provides escape from humiliation and impossible predicaments.… They become involved in terrorism…to provide themselves with a sense of power." It has been further argued that such impressionable, alienated and disempowered young people are vulnerable to forms of brainwashing and undue influence by the recruiters, extremist preachers or material available on the internet (Hoffman, 2006: 197–228, 288–290).

THE TERRORISM OF BOKO HARAM

Radical Islam is not a new phenomenon in northern Nigeria. Following independence in October 1960, the rise of the radical Maitatsine movement in the 1970s led to clashes with the Nigerian Police Force in Kano in December 1980, and in Maiduguri in October 1982, leaving many hundreds dead (Agbiboa, 2013). Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa, known as the *Maitatsine* ("One who curses"), championed these intra-religious riots (Ekot, 2009: 56). The uprisings had its roots in the "deeply conservative practice of Islam," dominant in the region that had its origins in the highly successful *jihad* (holy war) of Sheik Usman dan Fodio of Sokoto (1754–1817) in the first decade of the nineteenth century (Hickey, 1984: 251). What began as a search for religious purification soon became a search for a political kingdom (Crowder, 1978: 71), with the outcome that "Islam has remained the focal veneer for the legitimacy of the northern ruling class, and consequently, its politicians have always prided themselves as soldiers for the defence of the faith" (Udoidem, 1997: 156; Ekot, 2009: 52).

Since 2009, however, Boko Haram, yet another religious terrorist group from north eastern Nigeria, has been responsible for more violence than any other armed group in Nigeria (Forest, 2012). The nomenclature, "Boko Haram," is derived from a combination of the Hausa word, *boko* (book), and the Arabic word, *haram* (forbidden). Put together, Boko Haram means "Western education is forbidden," as it is important here to clarify that the Hausa word, "*boko*," originally had implications of "falseness" and "duplicity." This certainly has increasingly become the case in recent times, but only with regard to books of Western provenance, as they were deemed to contain material antithetical to Islam and, therefore, "*boko*." In any case, Boko Haram has even rejected the designation, "Western education is forbidden," and instead, the group now prefers the slogan,

"Western culture is forbidden." The difference, as one of the senior members of Boko Haram noted, is that "while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West…which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education" (Onuoha, 2012: 1–2).

Boko Haram officially calls itself *Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and *Jihad*). Across northern Nigeria, Western education continues to be linked to attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims who fear the southern economic and political domination. As Isa (2010: 322) contended, the term, *Boko Haram*, implied a sense of rejection and "resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organisation, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the *jihadist* state." Isa (2010: 332) further argued that:

> Islamic scholars and clerics who once held sway in the caliphate state and courts assigned the name *boko* to northern elites who spoke, acted, ruled and operated the state like their Western colonial masters. It is not uncommon to hear in discussions among Islamist scholars and average northerners that poverty and collapsed governance—the bane of the region—can be blamed on the failures and corrupt attitudes of *yan boko* (modern elites trained at secular schools) who have acquired a Western education and are currently in positions of power. As such, the system represented by the *yan boko* is unjust, secular and has no divine origin. It is therefore un-Islamic, which in turn accounts for its ineptitude and corruptness.

Boko Haram was led by Mohammed Yusuf until he was killed by Nigerian security forces just after the sectarian violence in July 2009 which left over 1,000 people dead (Umar, 2011; Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2012). Yusuf, born on the 29th of January, 1970, in Girgir village in Yobe State, Nigeria, received instruction in Salafi radicalism and was a protégé of Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar (*alim*) born in Harran, Turkey (Chothia, 2011). At the time of his death, Yusuf was the commander in chief (*Amir ul-Aam*) of the entire group. He had two deputies (*Na'ib Amir ul-Aam I & II*). With regards to state organisation, each state and local government where Boko Haram existed had its own *amir* (commander/ leader).

Boko Haram's membership comprises university lecturers, bankers, political elites, drug addicts, unemployed graduates, *almajiris*,[6] and migrants from neighbouring countries (Agbiboa, 2013). Members are also drawn primarily from the Kanuri tribe with roughly 4% of the Nigerian population, who are concentrated in the north eastern states of Nigeria including Bauchi and Borno, and the Hausa-Fulani with 29% of the population, spread more generally throughout most of the northern states (Forest, 2012). Boko Haram members distinguish themselves by growing long beards and wearing red or black headscarves. As was with the Maitatsine movement, many of the members attracted by Boko Haram are animated by deep-seated socioeconomic and political grievances such as poor governance and elite corruption. Already, John 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" (*The Atlantic*, 24 June 2011).

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 Koranic phrase: "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors" (cited in Thurston, 2011). As the name suggests, Boko Haram 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. The group's first leader, Mohammed Yusuf, told the BBC in 2009: "Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam" (*BBC News*, 31 July 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" (*Daily Trust*, 27 July 2009). In an audiotape posted on the internet in January 2012, a spokesman for the group, Abubakar Shekau, even accused the U.S. of waging war on Islam (Agbiboa, 2013: 19).

I. The Birth of a Full Insurgency

Boko Haram became a full-fledged insurgency following confrontations between the group and the state's security agency in Bauchi State charged with the responsibility of enforcing a newly introduced law that required motorcyclists in the entire country to wear crash-helmets. Members of Boko Haram refused to obey this law. This led to a violent confrontation between the state's enforcement agency and Boko Haram, killing 17 Boko Haram members in the crossfire (United States Institute of Peace, 2012: 12). 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 death of several policemen and civilians. The riot was temporarily quelled after Nigerian forces captured and killed the Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf. Following the death of Yusuf, and the arrest of several of Boko Haram members, the group retreated. But it was only *pro tem*, for the group resurfaced with more advanced tactics and devastating attacks, as was demonstrated in the bombing of the police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011 and the United Nations Headquarters in August 2011 (*Reuters*, 29 August 2011).

For many Boko Haram 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 their founder, almost every other person and group outside Boko Haram was antagonised, especially the Nigerian security forces. Boko Haram's most frequent targets have been police stations, patrols, and individual policemen at home or in public who were off-duty or even retired. They have used petrol bombs, improvised explosive devices, and armed assaults in these violent attacks (Forest, 2012; Agbiboa, 2013). Among the demands of the group are the release of all its prisoners and the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of their founder (Rogers, 2012). Such demands severely pitted the group against the Nigerian state and its security forces.

While the overriding goal of Boko Haram is to wrest control from the Nigerian state and to impose Sharia across the country, the cocktail of political corruption, chronic poverty, and youth unemployment in northern Nigeria continues to fuel members and supporters of Boko Haram (Mustapha, 2012). According to Isa (2010: 329), Boko Haram communities had been 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." According to Kukah (2012), Boko Haram is symptomatic of what happens when "the architecture of state are weighed down and destroyed by corruption." It has been argued that people living under poor socio-economic conditions may draw guidance from their religious identity, particularly because religious activists are commonly accessible at the most grass-roots levels (EWER, 2009).

II. Source(s) of Funding

In the past, Nigerian officials have been criticized for being unable to trace much of the funding that the group has received. However, in February 2012, recently arrested Boko Haram officials revealed that while the organisation 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 Arabia and the UK (Agbiboa, 2013). Furthermore, the arrested officials divulged that other sources of funding included the Al Muntada Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. Also, a spokesman of Boko Haram revealed that Kano State Governor Ibrahim Shekarau and Bauchi State Governor Isa Yuguda had been paying them monthly (Aziken et al., 2012).

Boko Haram also derives its finances from robbing local banks. For example, on 12 January 2010, four Boko Haram members attempted to rob a bank in Bakori Local Government Area of Katsina State, according to the local Police Commissioner Umaru Abubakar (Leigh, 2011). On 4 December 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 10 December 2011, Mohammed Abdullahi, Central Bank of Nigeria spokesman claimed that "At least 30 bank attacks attributed to Boko Haram have been reported this year" (Onu & Muhammad, 2011). Beyond bank robberies and individual financiers, there have also been rumours of Boko Haram's involvement in trafficking illicit weapons, albeit there has been no hard evidence to confirm such claims.

Given their large-scale attacks that have spread serious ripples beyond the shores of Nigeria, there is no doubt that Boko Haram's activities have generated a psychological impact that transcends the actual physical damage caused. In particular, using suicide bombers and explosives has intensified the ferocity of the sect and led to speculation in some quarters that the group might be linked to Al-Qaeda (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2012). Indeed, on 24 November a spokesman for Boko Haram, Abul Qaqa, stated: "It is true that we have links with Al-Qaeda. They assist us and we assist them" (Chothia, 2011). Boko Haram has

also admitted to establishing links in Somalia (Zimmerman, 2011). A statement allegedly released by the group read: "very soon, we will wage jihad.… We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable.… This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they have been" (*The Weekly Standard*, 18 June 2011). The need for a detailed study of the external dimensions of Boko Haram has become all the more important because of the recent alleged link between the group and the developments in Mali and the entire Sahel region.

It is instructive 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 (Agbiboa, 2013). A recent US House of Representatives report suggested that one faction of the group might be focused on domestic issues and another on violent international extremism. 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 and wants to implement strict Sharia law across Nigeria (Forest, 2012). In July 2011, a group calling itself the Yusufiyya Islamic Movement distributed leaflets widely in Maiduguri denouncing other Boko Haram factions as "evil" (Agbiboa & Okem, forthcoming). Asserting the legacy of founder Mohammed Yusuf, the authors of the leaflets distanced themselves from attacks on civilians and on churches. Today, "some local observers now discriminate between a Kogi Boko Haram, Kanuri Boko Haram, and Hausa Fulani Boko Haram" (Forest, 2012: 121).

WHY BOKO HARAM REBELS: RELATIVE DEPRIVATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

In his insightful article entitled "Ours is the Way of God," Jeffrey Seul (1999: 553) powerfully argued that religious conflicts are not always caused by religion. They are called religious conflicts because religion is the unifying and mobilising identity. In his words: "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: 558). This telling passage provides an entry into understanding the religious terrorism of Boko Haram as partly a consequence of much larger state problems in Nigeria.

The relative deprivation theory provides a useful insight into why Boko Haram rebels. The implications of relative deprivation can be gleaned from the works of its finest exponents. In his oft-cited book "Why Men Rebel," Gurr (1970) argued that people would become dissatisfied if they felt they have less than they should and could have. Overtime, such dissatisfaction leads to frustration and then rebellion against the (real or perceived) source of their deprivation. Elsewhere, Gurr (2005: 20) argued that structural poverty and inequality within countries are "breeding grounds for violent political movements in general and terrorism specifically." Drawing on his studies of relative deprivation and conflict in Northern Ireland, Birrel (1972: 317) contended that group tensions developed from a dis-

crepancy between the "ought" and the "is" of collective value satisfaction. In his article, titled "Towards a Theory of Revolution," Davies (1962: 5) argued that the occasion of political violence was due to the insurmountable gap between what people wanted and what they could get; the difference between expectations and gratifications: "this discrepancy is a frustrating experience that is sufficiently intense and focused to result in either rebellion or revolution." A key point in all these studies is that violent actions flourish within a context of grievances caused by relative deprivation.

It is no coincidence that one of the worst forms of political violence in Nigeria today originates in the most socio-economically deprived parts of the country. In the north where unemployment and chronic poverty are rife, radical Islamists groups have challenged the authority of the state. In the southeast, specifically in the Niger Delta where Nigeria's oil resource is located, environmental degradation caused by irresponsible oil practices has compromised the major source of livelihood of indigenous people. Angered by their poor conditions amidst plenty, a flurry of ethnic militia groups often consisting of unemployed youths have engaged in kidnappings, oil pipeline vandalisations, extortion, car bombings, and other forms of violent attacks against the Nigerian state and its oil industry (Omeje, 2004).

The focus of this paper is, however, on northern Nigeria where the effect of poverty on health and education is particularly critical. In Borno State, the birthplace of Boko Haram, "Only 2% of children under 25 months have been vaccinated; 83% of young people are illiterate; 48.5% of children do not go to school" (Rogers, 2012: 3). Another recent report by the National Population Commission (2009: 118–120) found that literacy rates were much lower among states in the north, and that 72% of children around the ages of 6–16 had never attended schools in Borno State, where Boko Haram was founded (Forest, 2012). Also, the National Bureau of Statistics data on poverty in Nigeria shows that looking into each specific zone, the highest poverty rate of 64.8% is recorded in the North-East zone, followed by 61.2% in the North-West (NBS, 2010). On the other hand, the lowest poverty rate of 31.2% is recorded in the South-East, followed by 40.2% in the South-West.

Notably, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria as a whole has risen steadily from 0.425 in 1990 to 0.513 in 2008. Looking at the figures by zone for 2008/2009, as shown in Table 1, the highest HDI is found in the South-South zone (0.573) while the lowest is in the North-East zone (0.332) where Boko Haram operates. As for the poverty index in Nigeria, the poorest five states are all situated in the northern areas (UNDP, 2009). The southern states with a somewhat higher-level economy have high HDI, and the northern states with a lower-level economy have low HDI (UNDP, 2009). In addition, the trends in the two types of poverty presented in Table 2 shows that while a significant decrease in the core poor population and a decrease in the moderately poor population to some extent are observed in every southern zone,[7] the core poor increased in the north central zone, and the moderately poor increased in every northern zone (NBS, 2010).

Table 1. Human development index by zone in 2008

	South South	South East	South West	North Central	North East	North West
HDI [Nigeran National HDI: 0.513]	0.573	0.471	0.523	0.490	0.332	0.420

Source: UNDP (2009: 10).

Table 2. Trends in poverty rates by zone for two relative poverty lines (%)

Zone*	Core poor		Moderately poor	
	1996	2004	1996	2004
South South	23.4	17.0	34.8	18.1
South East	18.2	7.8	35.3	19.0
South West	27.5	18.9	33.4	24.2
North Central	28.0	29.8	36.7	37.2
North East	34.4	27.9	35.7	44.3
North West	37.3	26.8	39.9	44.4

Source: Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics (2010).
*South South: Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Delta.
 South East: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Adamawa and Imo.
 South West: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo.
 North Central: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and Abuja.
 North East: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe.
 North West: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara.

From the above, it is clear that the reality of relative deprivation in northern Nigeria is deep-rooted, demanding more attention than is currently the case. This situation is further compounded by the fact that "the wealthy elite throughout the country tend to be Christian, while the most impoverished communities in the country are found among the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, and other northern groups— all of them primarily Muslim" (Forest, 2012: 56). Thus, Thurston (2011) argued that, "Boko Haram has an entrenched sense of victimhood and now sees the state as both the main persecutor of 'true' Muslims and the major obstacle to 'true' Islamic reform." The emergence of violent extremists as seen in the groups including the Nigerian Taliban and Boko Haram can therefore be viewed as partly a response in northern communities to insecurities about their spiritual and socioeconomic future (Forest, 2012). According to Sope Elegbe, Research Director of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG):

> The increasing poverty in Nigeria is accompanied by increasing unemployment. Unemployment 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. Government statistics

show that the northern states have the highest proportion of uneducated persons. If you link a lack of education and attendant lack of opportunities to a high male youth population, you can imagine that some areas are actually a breeding ground for terrorism.
(cited in Rogers, 2012: 4)

Given the increased frequency of bomb attacks carried out by Boko Haram, the prospect for human security remains grim in Nigeria, with potentially grave consequences 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 organisations. Leaders of both organisations have publicly pledged mutual support (Agbiboa, 2013). Abubakar bin Muhammad 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 potentially pose a threat not only to Nigeria, but also transnationally, since Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer. Boko Haram's increasing sophistication of 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 (2012: 81), "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." Recently, the US State Department added Boko Haram's most visible leader, Abubakar Shekau, to the list of specially designated global terrorists. Khalid al Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamba were also included in the list, because of their ties to Boko Haram and close links with AQIM (US Department of State, 2012). However, it remains to be seen whether the attack on the UN building was an isolated event or whether Boko Haram has indeed embraced the tactics of global *jihadists*, targeting strategy and ideological imperatives.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian government has over the last few months indicated its disposition to resolving the Boko Haram insurgency through what may be described as a carrot and stick approach. The former involves political dialogue with all stake-holders. In this regard, the Nigerian state established a committee of inquiry led by Ambassador Usman Galtimari to "identify the grievances of the sect and make possible recommendations on how to improve security in the northeast region" (Onuoha, 2012). This carrot approach also included programs by the government to address deep-seated problems in northern Nigeria such as poverty, unemploy-ment, social injustice and public corruption—conditions that continue to galvanize extremist tendencies among northerners. More recently, President Jonathan offered to grant amnesty to Boko Haram members. However, Abubakar Shekau, the leader

of Boko Haram, responded to the president's amnesty entreaties by saying that his group had done no wrong, and that an amnesty would not be applicable to them. According to Shekau, it was the Nigerian government committing atrocities against Muslims. 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 [a] pardon" (*Atlanta Blackstar*, 23 April 2013).

Despite the above attempts by the Nigerian government to negotiate in a non-violent way with the northern extremist group, the stick response to the Boko Haram uprising has received greater attention, 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 "Operation Restore Order (JTORO)" to eliminate the threat posed by Boko Haram. The JTF has had modest successes, including the September 2011 arrest of a top Boko Haram commander, Ali Saleh, and five accomplices in Maiduguri (Roggio, 2012). However, JTF have been accused of killing innocent people in the name of counter-terrorism. In Borno State, for example, JTF resorted to extralegal killings, dragnet arrests and intimidation of the hapless Borno residents. As noted by Solomon (2012: 9), "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." In the most recent crossfire between 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. But Baga residents have accused the JTF, not Boko Haram, of firing indiscriminately at civilians and setting fire on much of the fishing town (*Atlanta Blackstar*, 23 April 2013). These excesses can only bring about further alienation of citizens towards the national state and its security forces. According to Keller (1983: 274), "an overreliance on intimidatory techniques not only presents the image of a 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."

The frequent "might-is-right" approach to conflict resolution in Nigeria is not surprising, if we recall the words of Claude Ake (1992: 16): "more often than not, the post-colonial state in Nigeria presented itself as an apparatus of violence, and while its base in social forces remained extremely narrow it relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority." While the arrest of major Boko Haram leaders and strategists has the potential to significantly degrade its operational capability to mount attacks, it has not yet resulted in the destruction of the group's capabilities. Moreover, it must be considered that the current stick approach by the Nigerian government may force ultra-radical elements within Boko Haram to establish terrorist networks with AQIM, Al Shabaab and Al-Qaeda as a form of survival strategy. In the event of this happening, the sect's operational base could expand beyond northern Nigeria and their target selection could change fundamentally to include attacks on Western interests (Onuoha, 2012).

If the Nigerian government is to douse religious tensions and extremist groups in the country, it must invest in inter-religious dialogues between leaders and followers of the two dominant religions in the country—Islam and Christianity. Furthermore, Christian and Muslim religious education should be tailored in such

a way as to promote mutual respect and amity. In addition, there is an urgent need for Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria to join together to denounce all forms of religious intolerance and sectarian violence. More importantly, addressing the current Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria must include a serious remedy for the deep socio-economic deprivation and sustained grievances felt by many in the north where Boko Haram originated. A swelling population amid economic despair not only creates an environment in which radical extremist ideologies can thrive but also legitimises their actions.

NOTES

(1)   The President was referring to the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), which killed over 1 million people. See "Boko Haram 'Worse than 1960s Civil War,'" http://www.afri-canoutlookonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3619%3Abo ko-haram-worse-than-1960s-civil-war-nigerian-president&Itemid=675 (Accessed April 20, 2013).

(2)   An ethno-linguistic group that lives primarily in the lower and western areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

(3)   This idea is well captured by one of the respondents of Blanco-Mancilla (2003) who stated that, "I consider a Malian or Chadian who speaks Hausa and is a Muslim more a citizen of Sabon-Gari than an Ibo or Yoruba who is not a Muslim."

(4)   The registration of Nigeria as a member of the OIC created a fissure between Muslims and Christians. While Muslims welcomed the move, the Christians were vehemently opposed to OIC membership. Despite the tension, Nigeria is still registered as a member of the OIC.

(5)   Officials in Nigeria tend to use the slippery term "indigene" to limit access to public resources, such as land, schools, and government jobs. In effect, the population of every state and Local Government Area (LGA) in Nigeria is divided into indigenes (defined as earliest extant occupiers or the recognised original inhabitants) and settlers (people who cannot trace their roots back to earliest times). Settlers can still be Nigerian citizens, and thus are not completely stateless. But discrimination against them can provoke serious violence.

(6)   This term describes children sent by their parents to Islamic boarding schools in northern Nigeria, where they receive little education beyond rote memorisation of the Koran. Etymologically, the term *Almajiri* is an Arabic word for someone who leaves his home in search of knowledge in Islamic religion under the tutelage of an Islamic scholar (Agbiboa, 2013: 26).

(7)   The core poor line in 2004 was calculated as 11,867 Naira (200USD). Persons whose expenditures fall between 11,867 and 23,733 Naira are considered to be the "moderate poor." The proportion of the "core poor" increased from 6.2% in 1980 to 29.3% in 1996, then decreased to 22.0% in 2004 (NBS, 2010).

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