

Catch Them Young:

The Game Changer in the Fight against Religious Extremism in Nigeria

Bernard Tochukwu Chukwuma

A Thesis

Submitted to the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)

[August 2023]

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This study examined the "Catch Them Young" approach as a game-changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria with the aim of fashioning a Virtue Ethics-based framework for tackling and erasing religious extremism from Nigeria, especially in its violent forms. The study utilized the qualitative methodology, designed with the Almajiri Islamic system of education practiced in Northern Nigeria as case study. In data collection, the study utilized archival research and secondary data collection, using existing datasets from paperback and electronic books, academic journals, other academic works, newspapers, websites, electronic magazines, and other available media sources. The method of analysis was thematic. The study explored the theoretical frameworks through which the question of religious extremism has been studied. The study probed the approaches which the Nigerian government has applied in its response to violent religious extremism and terrorism in Nigeria. The key findings of the study showed that political interests, unemployment, poverty, deprivation, ignorance and inadequate education are the major factors contributing to religious extremism in Nigeria. The existing approaches of military means (hard power) in combating religious extremism have not worked, and a feasible, proactive, non-military (soft power) means is needed. Results equally showed the Almajiri system in its present state as counterproductive. Based on the success of youth programs with nearly the same goals as the catch them young strategy in other fields and/or in other places, the success of the "Catch Them Young" approach in virtue or character education of the Nigerian child is a feasible game-changing strategy to pursue in fighting religious extremism in Nigeria. One limitation of the study is the small sample size, the Almajiri of northern Nigeria, which may not be representative of the entire population of Nigeria. This study serves as a reference for creating virtue ethics-based frameworks in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. More research is needed to give traction to the

formulation and utilization of virtue ethics-based frameworks in the fight against religious extremism, and in every other field of human endeavor in Nigeria. This makes available more material to researchers, professionals and policymakers.

Keywords: Religious extremism, virtue, character, Virtue Ethics, character education, character formation, “Catch them Young,” Virtue Ethics-based framework, Almajiri, Nigeria.

Table of contents

CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	3
The Need for a New Approach	4
The Purpose of the Study	5
Focus and Scope	6
Existing Research	6
Relevance of the Research to the Problem of Religious Extremism in Nigeria	8
Overview	9
Research Questions and Objectives	10
Research Questions	10
Research Objectives	10
CHAPTER TWO	11
LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Historical Overview of Religious Extremism in Nigeria	11
Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Extremism	15
Poverty Theory	16
Relative Deprivation Theory	17
Social Identity Theory	17
Resource Mobilization Theory	18
Strategies for Preventing and Countering Religious Extremism	19
Hard Power Strategies	19
Soft Power Strategies	20
CHAPTER THREE	25
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	25
Key Concepts	25
Virtue Ethics	25
Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics	27
Exemplarist Virtue Ethics	29
Virtue	32

How Virtues are Acquired and Cultivated	33
Key Virtues in the Fight Against Religious Extremism	35
Prudence	35
Justice	37
Temperance	38
Fortitude	39
Charity	40
Character	41
Character Education	42
Applying Virtue Ethics to Religious Extremism	44
Theoretical basis for educating Nigerian youth in virtues	44
The Role of Virtue in the Fight Against Religious Extremism	47
Key Strategies for the Catch them Young Approach	49
Stakeholders and Their Functions	52
Programs, Policies and Funding for the Catch Them Young Framework	57
Programs and Policies	57
Funding Sources	58
Challenges and Limitations of Virtue Education in Nigeria in the Fight Against Religious Extremism	59
CHAPTER FOUR	61
METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS	61
Methodology	61
Reason for the Methodology	61
Data Collection	63
Evaluation of the Methodology	65
Results	68
The Key Findings	68
Factors Contributing to Religious Extremism	68
Existing approaches to combating religious extremism in Nigeria have not worked	69
The Need for a New Strategy	70
The Almajiri System in Its Present State is Counterproductive	70
Early years through adulthood character education can be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria	72

Research-based proof of feasibility for the advocacy of the “Catch Them Young” approach as a solution to the problem of religious extremism	73
CHAPTER FIVE	76
DISCUSSION	76
Summary of Key Findings	76
Interpretations and Implications	77
Factors Contributing to Religious Extremism	77
Failed Existing Approaches and the Need for New Approaches that Work	81
The Almajiri System in Its Present State is Counterproductive	84
Early years through adulthood character education can be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria	85
Research-based proof of feasibility for the advocacy of the “Catch Them Young” approach as a solution to the problem of religious extremism	86
Limitations	87
CONCLUSION	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY	90

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Religious extremism which is the belief, advocacy and or pursuit of extreme religious views and ideologies has devastated Nigeria, especially in its most violent forms. These extreme views or measures are generally antisocial and are exploited by politicians and political-minded religious leaders to “mind-control” their targets for power and wealth. Religious extremism, especially in its most violent forms has so devastated Nigeria that the country today looks like a failed system. Islamic terrorist groups run rampant daily and the state seems overwhelmed.

On 12 May 2022, Deborah Samuel, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto in Nigeria was stoned to death and then set ablaze by fellow students because, according to them, the Christian girl blasphemed against Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, with a voice note she posted on their class Whatsapp group. Two people were later arrested in connection with the killing, but “Muslim youths in Sokoto took to the streets to protest the arrest of the suspects.”¹ There was so much destruction of property belonging to Christians that the governor of Sokoto declared a curfew to quell the unrest. The suspects were hastily taken to court and released on bail; and that was the end of the case.

On Sunday, 5 June 2022, during the Pentecost Sunday celebration, Islamist gunmen attacked St. Francis Catholic Church, Owo, Ibadan in Oyo State, Nigeria, killing at least fifty people. On the night of 5 July 2022, one of the deadliest Islamic terrorist groups in Nigeria, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), attacked the Kuje Federal Prison in Abuja, the

¹ Maryam Abdullahi, “Deborah Samuel, Sokoto Student Killed for Alleged Blasphemy, Buried Amid Tears,” *The Cable*, May 14, 2022, <https://www.thecable.ng/deborah-samuel-sokoto-student-killed-for-alleged-blasphemy-buried-amid-tears>

country's capital, and took their time to release more than 600 inmates, many of whom were imprisoned terrorists.

All these terrorist attacks and killings are always carried out by young people below the age of thirty. In many cases terrorists recruit children to become combatants.

Religious extremism in Nigeria is not limited to Islam and Northern Nigeria. However, in its violent form, it is for now all about Islam.

When it comes to religious extremism, children are the most vulnerable. Children are impressionable and pick up what they are shown and taught very easily and grow with such, forming characters that could become impossible to abandon in later years. In Northern Nigeria, the Islamic Almajiri system of education has become the fodder feeding the fire of religious extremism and terrorism. In the Almajiri system of education, young boys and girls of three to twelve years old leave their families and hometowns and are entrusted into the hands of *mallams* (Islamic teachers of the Quran) who are themselves barely educated to learn the ways of Islam. They live in dormitories run by their mallams and graduate at the age of twenty or twenty-two. These teachers of the Quran do not receive salaries for their services. They therefore send these children who have been entrusted into their hands to go into the streets to beg for alms to take care of themselves and their mallams. These children are daily exposed to all sorts of dangers and abuses. They end up growing without parental care and love; no proper manners; no real moral values to live up to; no formal education; no real faculty development or value for industry. With this upbringing, these children end up becoming willing tools in the hands of their teachers and the rich politicians who throw them food occasionally during religious holidays.

Problem Statement

Through the years, the Nigerian government, religious organizations, civil society organizations, intellectuals, and stakeholders, macro and micro, have brought forward their ideas and strategies on how best to steer people away from religious extremism and solve the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria. All of these solutions have focused on identifying religious extremism only in its advanced stages, when the extremism has started rearing its head in the rhetoric of violence or in actual violence. At that point whatever solutions that follow are reactions from the government and the general public, which in many cases have turned out to be half-baked or half-hearted depending on which political interests are at stake. The next thing which follows, in some cases, becomes to sweep whatever findings that are made in investigations under the carpet in the corridors of power where they gather moss, or to face violence with violence which yields more violence that is in many cases misplaced. No solutions proffered have attempted to solve the issue from its very roots by focusing on the moral education and formation of the moral agent who in this case is the Nigerian child. Rather, what we see especially in Northern Nigeria, which is the epicentre of religious violence in Nigeria, is the adamant sustenance of the same Almajiri system of Education which has served as the primary source for the recruitment, radicalization and deployment of impressionable children for all sorts of religiously motivated violence and terrorism in Nigeria and West Africa. When Mohammed Yusuf started Boko Haram in 2002, his first set of adherents were his Almajiri students. By 2009 when the group started the insurgency, it had a ready array of child soldiers at its disposal. He taught that Western education was evil and, as such, is prohibited by God, hence the name Boko Haram, meaning, 'book is forbidden'. His teaching was simple and relatable to the children and to his young adult graduates. By 2010 Boko Haram had already been named "the world's deadliest terror group according to the Global Terrorism

Index. Boko Haram has contributed to regional food crises and famines.”² Their ferociousness has kept growing as the days and years go by and there seems to be no limit to the atrocities they are willing to commit even though they claim to be fighting for the holy cause of Allah.

There is equally and still the detestable problem of child soldiering. On February 14, 2022, while marking the international day against the use of child soldiers, the UNICEF Chief of Maiduguri (Northeast Nigeria) Field Office, Phuong T. Nguyen, remarked that “since 2009, more than 8,000 girls and boys have been recruited and used as child soldiers in different roles by armed groups.”³ As it stands today, the recruitment and deployment of children as active soldiers by non-state armed groups in northern Nigeria remains a frightening trend. They are fast spreading throughout Nigeria as sleeper agents and sleeper cells waiting to be called up for mayhem in the name of God.

The critical times which Nigeria finds itself with religious extremism and the ills of hate and terrorism that go with it pose the critical problem of identifying and implementing a game changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

The Need for a New Approach

Despite the efforts of the Nigerian government in partnership with the international community, traditional approaches to combating religious extremism have been largely ineffective. These approaches have focused primarily on addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of the problem. These efforts have been largely focused on security and military

² “Boko Haram,” in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., updated 13 February 2022, 08:30 UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram; retrieved 27 February 2022.

³ Maryam Abdullahi, “The United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund, (UNICEF) says over 8,000 Nigerian boys and girls have been recruited as child soldiers since 2009,” *The Cable*, February 14, 2022, <https://www.thecable.ng/unicef-over-8000-boys-girls-recruited-as-child-soldiers-in-nigeria-since-2009>

responses. They include increased policing and deployment of military forces in affected areas. While these measures have recorded a few successes in containing the violence for some time, they have not addressed the root causes of the problem. The benefits are always short-lived. As a result, the prevalence of religious extremism in Nigeria continues to pose an increasing threat to national stability and security. In light of this, it is imperative to explore alternative strategies that can effectively address the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria. Such approaches should focus on addressing the underlying ethico-cultural, psychological, social, economic and political issues that contribute to the growth of religious extremism and religious extremist groups. Such approaches should as well promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. There is the need to focus on forming and reforming the mind of the individual which is what informs the attitudes and actions of this individual in a pluralist community of humans.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential impact of the "Catch Them Young" approach as a game-changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. The study aims to explore the benefits and limitations of this approach, and to determine its effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of religious extremism in Nigeria. This study will contribute to the development of new and innovative strategies to combat religious extremism, and will provide valuable insights for intellectuals, policy makers, civil society organizations, individuals (especially caregivers and formators of children) and other stakeholders in the field and society.

Focus and Scope

In this study entitled “Catch Them Young: The Game Changer in the Fight Against Religious Extremism in Nigeria” I probe into the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria, its causes, and the game-changing strategy for ending it or at least reducing the likelihood of it being a problem in society. I explore how the problem plagues Nigeria currently, having eaten deep into the fabric of the social life of the country. Then I probe the moral perspective, looking into what Virtue Ethics is and how virtues are formed and cultivated. Here I describe the virtues which are pertinent in the treatment of religious extremism. Then I delve into the moral analysis of religious extremism, charting a way forward. My thesis is that only an early-years-through-adulthood focused character-based social value system will be the game changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. This early years through adulthood character-based value system is what I term the “catch them young” strategy in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

The main limitation of this study is that although religious extremism is a broad subject and can be seen in every religion in Nigeria, I have chosen to focus this study only on religious extremism in Muslim Northern Nigeria. This choice is because Islamist religious extremism in Northern Nigeria is one of the most violent and militant.

Existing Research

Researchers, writers, statesmen and other stakeholders have offered their thoughts on the utilization of the education of children as a way to fight religious extremism and terrorism in Nigeria and elsewhere. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia, in her foreword to Joanna Wedge’s *Where Peace Begins: Education’s Role in Conflict Prevention and*

Peacebuilding opined that “quality education is central to peace, and peace should be at the heart of education. We owe it to all our children to make both a reality.”⁴ In the few words of that foreword she stressed the undeniable role of education in reconciliation and peacebuilding in a nation. In his book, *The Socio-Cultural Politics and Religious Conflicts-Inter-Ethnic and Religious Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria*, Professor Isaac Olawale Albert, a professor of African History, Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, and a former UNDP Consultant for the design of the Peace and Development Studies Programme of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, writes that “Education is seen as one of the cornerstones of the peacebuilding process.”⁵ In a society where there has been so much violence and hurt, education can open up worlds which people never thought possible and foster lasting peace.

Omoluwa Olusegun, a lecturer of Educational Foundations and Counselling at Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria, notes that “Functional education could be a veritable instrument for providing alternative endeavours for the Almajiri youths that were usually enlisted as terrorist fighters.”⁶ He agrees that the Almajiri education should be brought into the mainstream Nigerian education system with a functional curriculum drawn up for them. But to what extent is that functional education system going to match the normal system for the rest of their mates with whom they will function in society today and tomorrow? What of a moral support base to equip them for a secular pluralist society?

⁴ Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, “Foreword” in *Where peace begins: Education’s role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding*, by Joanna Wedge (Save the Children, London: UK, The International Save the Children Alliance, 2008), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/where-peace-begins-educations-role-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding/>

⁵ Isaac Olawale Albert, *The Socio-Cultural Politics and Religious Conflicts-Inter-Ethnic and Religious Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria*, (Lagos: Evans Press, 1999), p. 5

⁶ Omoluwa Olusegun, “Functional Education: A Tool For Combating Terrorism In Nigeria,” *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*, Vol. 2, Special Issue 7 (Nov-Dec 2014), p. 36, <https://www.ijtra.com/special-issue-view.php?paper=functional-education-a-tool-for-combating-terrorism-in-nigeria.pdf>

While research studies so far have maintained that education is necessary in the fight against religious extremism, there needs to be much more than a well-packaged curriculum. The “catch them young” strategy needs deeper research into how best to raise the Nigerian child as a moral agent who cares and strives for the common good. What research do we have in Nigeria on how character formation in the formal and informal education settings can save the day in the fight against religious extremism?

Relevance of the Research to the Problem of Religious Extremism in Nigeria

This study treats how researchers, think tanks, policy makers, civil society organizations, the government, politicians, religious leaders, parents, authority figures and everyone in society can work together anew to defeat religious extremism and terrorism. It also serves to build on the research of other people and as well be a reference point for other researchers. Even at this level, this study can inspire people and organizations to start coming together to brainstorm, network and lay down blueprints of feasible road-maps to eliminate religious extremism and terrorism from Nigeria by exploring the creation of value systems even within the general education system to orient the education of children towards good character and virtuous living for the common good.

Since most of the efforts of the Nigerian government in fighting religious extremism and terrorism has been to attack the symptoms by military force and by paying terrorists to stop attacking rather than going to the root of the problem, this study brings something new, long-term, effective and efficient to the table.

This study serves as a beacon of light and a starting point for my ministry for the youth, and my journey into the world of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in my country Nigeria.

Further, this study is an improvement on earlier research and solutions to the problem of religious extremism and terrorism in Nigeria. While government policies have been to engage violence with violence and treat only the symptoms of the problem, this study lays down feasible, practical measures for growing our children away from vices and in formation of good moral character (in moral virtues) so as to achieve a pluralist society where the pursuit of common good, the love of self and neighbor, and tolerance reigns.

This study challenges current assumptions and creates a basis for further research.

Overview

This study is structured in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the concern, setting up the background and context for the study. I establish the scope of the study wherein I offer my thesis that only an early-years-through-adulthood targeted character-based social value system will be the game changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. This early years through adulthood targeted character-based value system is what I term the “Catch Them Young” strategy in the fight against religious extremism.

In chapter two I present discussions on the topic through a review of relevant literature.

In chapter three, I present the theoretical framework for the treatment of the “Catch Them Young” approach to the solution of the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria. I discuss Virtue Ethics as the moral theory that informs my research. I discuss the virtues pertinent in the discussion of “Catch Them Young” as a game changer in the fight against religious extremism. I define key terms and explain relevant concepts.

In chapter four I present the qualitative methodology and the results of my findings. As this research is qualitative, I structure my results around my research questions.

Chapter five is where I delve into the discussion of the results. Here I present my interpretations and implications of the results of the study, citing relevant sources to contextualise my results. Here I wrap up my thesis, summarize my main findings and make recommendations.

Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions

- A. What is religious extremism and why is it a problem in Nigeria?
- B. What background information is necessary to fully understand the problem?
- C. What approaches to the problem have others attempted?
- D. What were the results of these solutions?
- E. Can early years through adulthood training be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria?
- F. Based on the study, why is the "Catch Them Young" approach advocated as a way to help solve the problem of religious extremism?

Research Objectives

- 1. To define religious extremism and its causes in Nigeria.
- 2. To evaluate the existing approaches to combating religious extremism in Nigeria.
- 3. To create a Virtue Ethics based theoretical framework for the "Catch Them Young" approach to the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.
- 4. To provide recommendations for the implementation of the "Catch Them Young" approach in Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews relevant literature in the discussion of the “Catch Them Young Strategy” in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. In this chapter, I provide an overview of current knowledge of the research in religious extremism in Nigeria. This move paves the way for me to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the existing research which will be later applied to the thesis.

For clarity in this literature review, I undertake a historical overview of religious extremism in Nigeria. This review leads into the discussion of the theoretical perspectives on religious extremism in Nigeria discussed in literature. The chapter ends with the identification of the strategies that have been put forward for preventing and countering religious extremism in Nigeria.

Historical Overview of Religious Extremism in Nigeria

Religious extremism in its violent form in Nigeria dates back to 1980 when a militant Islamic group known as Maitatsine emerged in the northern part of the country. The leader of the group was a self-proclaimed prophet named Muhammad Marwa nicknamed Maitatsine. He rejected mainstream Islamic teachings, seeking to establish an Islamic state. The violent clashes of the group with the Nigerian government and other religious groups came to a head in December 1980 when the group started a violent uprising in Kano, resulting in the death of around five thousand people. On the Maitatsine uprising and the religious violence that broke out around Northern Nigeria within the following few years, the prolific author and Jos University professor of History, Professor Elisabeth Isichei, writes:

In December 1980, [Maitatsine's] followers in Kano revolted; the city was convulsed by what was virtually civil war, and 4177 died, among them Maitatsine himself. In October, 1982 a new rising broke out at Bulumkutu, 15 kilometres from Maiduguri, far to the east. 3,350 were killed. Fighting also broke out in Rigasa village, near Kaduna, which spread into the city. In March, 1984 there was an outbreak of violence in Yola, the capital of Gongola State, which left between 500 and 1,000 dead. In April, 1985, there was yet another rising in Gombe, in Bauchi State, when over a hundred were killed. His followers are usually called "Maitatsine;" the movement is also known as Kalo Kato.⁷

From 1980 to the present day, Nigeria has witnessed a proliferation of extremist groups and the violence associated with them. In the early 2000s, a group, which “prefers to be referred to as *Jama’atul Ahlus Sunnah Lid daawati wal Jihad*, which means ‘People committed to the propagation to the prophet’s teachings and jihad’”⁸ emerged in the northern city of Maiduguri. The group, which later came to be known as Boko Haram, initially placed its focus on promoting a puritanical version of Islam and opposing Western education. “The term ‘Boko Haram’ is derived from a combination of the Hausa word *boko* meaning ‘book’ and the Arabic word *haram* meaning ‘sinful,’ ‘forbidden,’ or ‘ungodly.’ Thus, Boko Haram implies that Western education is sinful, and should, therefore, be forbidden, and rejected outright.”⁹ The activities of the group later escalated into a full-blown insurgency, leading to the death of thousands of people and the displacement of millions. Presently, this full-blown terrorist organization is based in north-eastern Nigeria. Boko Haram adheres to the Wahabi sect of the Sunni version of Islam. It is also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon. This group has turned out to be the most disaster-wrecking group among all the terrorists in Nigeria. They kill Christians, whom they call infidels. They kill Muslims,

⁷ Elizabeth Isichei, “The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A Revolt of the Disinherited,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Oct., 1987), p. 194, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1580874>.

⁸ Emeka Eugene Dim, “An Integrated Theoretical Approach to the Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (August 2017), p. 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48603165>.

⁹ Ibid.

whom they claim are not Muslim enough. They claim to be fighting for the total institution of the Sharia law in Nigeria while at the same time fighting for the removal of Western education from Nigeria. Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf and started its insurgency in 2009.

Since the insurgency started in 2009, Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands of people, in frequent attacks against the police, armed forces and civilians. It has resulted in the deaths of more than 300,000 children and displaced 2.3 million from their homes and was during part of the mid 2010s the world's deadliest terror group according to the Global Terrorism Index. Boko Haram has contributed to regional food crises and famines.¹⁰

Among the killings perpetrated by Boko Haram, two shook the world in unimaginable ways. The first was the February 25, 2014, Buni Yadi Massacre in which the Boko Haram terrorists invaded the Federal Government College in Buni Yadi, Yobe State and killed at least fifty-nine male students and set all the buildings of the school on fire. The students were all aged between eleven and eighteen. The terrorists abducted some female students and were still threatening that if the remaining girls who they could not abduct did not forsake Western education to get married, they would return for them and slaughter them all. The second most alarming onslaught was the abduction of two hundred and seventy-six schoolgirls from their school dormitory in the early hours of April 15, 2014, by Boko Haram. The then leader of the terror group, Abubakar Shekau, even threatened that he would sell the girls into slavery. This particular abduction led to the then First lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama, to raise the #BringBackOurGirls placard in protest of the happenings in Nigeria, while stressing

¹⁰ "Boko Haram," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., updated 10 December 2021, at 20:36 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram

that she and her husband were “‘outraged and heartbroken’ over the abduction of more than 300 girls from a school in Chibok on 14 April (2014).”¹¹

Apart from Boko Haram, there is another sect known as the Islamic State’s West African Province (ISWAP). ISWAP is a breakaway terrorist group that split from Boko Haram in 2016 and was led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi until he was allegedly killed either in internal skirmishes or by local security alliances in August 2021. ISWAP, a Salafist jihadist terrorist group, operates in north-eastern Nigeria, Cameroun, Niger, and Chad. Its activities have also stretched as far as Mali and Southern Libya. While ISWAP does not use women and children as suicide bombers, it still carries out terrorist attacks on Christians, non-Salafist Muslims and on government installations.

There is also the intrareligious violence which is on-going among Nigeria’s Muslims. This religious violence is between the Sunni Muslims who pledge allegiance to Saudi Arabia and the Shia Muslims who pledge allegiance to Iran. The Shiites (Shia Muslims) receive all sorts of inhuman persecutions from their Sunni brothers and sisters in Nigeria. On July 25, 2014, the Nigerian Army opened fire on Shiites who were celebrating the Quds Day, killing thirty-five adherents including three sons of the Shiite leader Sheik Ibraheem El Zakzaky. That day became known as the Zaria Quds Day massacres. On Saturday, December 12, 2015, in what is known as the Zaria massacre, “348 Shia Muslims were killed by the Nigerian Army.”¹² Shiites constitute at most only five percent of the entire Nigerian Muslim population. The Muslim politicians in power in Nigeria are for the most part Sunni and they use their connections to Saudi Arabia to clamp down on the Shiites in Nigeria, often deploying the full

¹¹ The Guardian, “Michelle Obama raises pressure over kidnapped schoolgirls,” The Guardian, 14 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/10/michelle-obama-nigeria-presidential-address>.

¹² “Shia Islam in Nigeria,” in *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., updated 4 December 2021, at 22:17 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam_in_Nigeria.

might of state security apparatus to exert mayhem on these blood relatives of theirs for simply subscribing to a different version of the same religion.

The religious extremist views and body language of the present President of Nigeria is well-documented. In an event in 2001, fourteen years before he became the President of Nigeria, Buhari made public his intentions for Nigeria to become a full Sharia state.

In 2001 at an Islamic seminar in Kaduna, Buhari was given an opportunity to choose between Nigeria's secularism and fundamentalist Islam, this is what he said; "I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria," he then added that: "God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country." Buhari an advocate of sharia was chosen to address that seminar in Kaduna because of his advocacy and he did not disappoint because he is one of the boardroom voices of Sharia.¹³

Many people including highly placed politicians and service people in the present government led by President Mohammadu Buhari have been accused of having links with terrorism. Many have had their past comments expressing pro-Islamic extremist sentiments dredged up from social media platforms.

Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Extremism

Religious extremism is a complex phenomenon which has been examined from various theoretical perspectives. There are several theoretical frameworks that have been applied by writers in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. Below are some examples.

¹³ Babatunde Oyewole, "Insurgency and Buhari's call for full Sharia," *Vanguard*, December 24, 2014, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/12/insurgency-buharis-call-full-sharia/>

Poverty Theory

Intellectuals have posited the theory that poverty plays a prominent role in making people susceptible to be recruited for radicalization and violent religious extremist actions. Emeka Eugene Dim, a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, writes that “The level of poverty, illiteracy, ineptitude, political instability, corruption, and poor infrastructure embedded in these societies indicates that socio-economic conditions provide the requisite framework for terrorist activities.”¹⁴ Dim holds that the ability for a terrorist organization to recruit depends on the poverty level and underdevelopment of a locality. American journalist, and CNN correspondent, Josh Campbell echoes the same thought that “The revolt's foot soldiers likely are drawn from unemployed youth in Northern Nigeria, a region of profound poverty. Many of them attended Islamic schools where they learned little other than to memorize the Quran. Often, they are children of peasants, rootless if not homeless, in a big city. They can bond through a common radical Islamic sensibility, inchoate rage, and the prospect of earning a little money as terrorists.”¹⁵

Critical assessment reveals that even though poverty may explain the motivation to join a violent religious group, impoverishment does not explain how such a group, as in the case of Boko Haram, sustains itself even to the extent of utilizing superior firepower in engaging the Nigerian military.

¹⁴ Emeka Eugene Dim, “An Integrated Theoretical Approach to the Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (August 2017), p. 40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48603165>.

¹⁵ Josh Campbell, “Should US Fear Boko Haram?,” CNN, 1 October, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/01/opinion/campbell-boko-haram/>

Relative Deprivation Theory

Another prominent theory used in explaining religious extremism is the deprivation theory. According to this theory, individuals who feel deprived or marginalized in their societies are more likely to engage in extremist behaviors. This theory holds that the sense of deprivation may be economic, political, or social, creating a sense of frustration, anger, and alienation, which leads to extremist behaviors. Dim holds that a mutual sense of deprivation and victimhood brings people together, giving them a sense of community and a cause to pursue together.

D.E. Agbibo is not satisfied with the relative deprivation theory as an explanation for engaging in religious extremism. Dim references Agbibo saying that “relative deprivation theory has been criticised for its simplistic explanation of terrorism because it fails to explain why some underprivileged people do not participate in radical groups.”¹⁶ He gives an example with the Niger Delta militants, asking why, with their perceived sense of relative deprivation, they never took recourse to religious extremism.

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory, developed within the circles of social psychology by H. Tajfel and J.C. Turner is used to explain the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination and suggests that people tend to form their identities based on the social groups of which they are part. In the context of religious extremism in Nigeria, this theory can be applied to understand how individuals may become radicalized through a process of socialization and group identity formation. According to this framework, efforts to combat religious extremism should focus

¹⁶ Ibid.

on disrupting the processes of socialization and group identity formation which lead to radicalization.

This theory suggests that individuals are motivated to enhance their self-esteem and positive social identity by belonging to social groups that they perceive as superior to other groups. According to this theory, religious extremists seek to create a sense of superiority over other belief systems based on their religious identity and belief system, which they perceive as being superior to other systems.

“The Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides valuable insights into understanding the combustible issue of religious identity in a pluralist country like Nigeria.”¹⁷ Religion tends to create the absolutist bubble of identity, which encases the individual and can inform the idea of an “us versus them” frame of mind under which an individual could engage religious-based violence in a bid to defend what one stands for.

Resource Mobilization Theory

The resource mobilization theory is another perspective that has been used to explain religious extremism. This theory suggests that extremist groups mobilize resources, such as money, weapons, and human capital, to achieve their goals. The theory posits that extremist groups utilize various strategies to mobilize resources, such as recruiting members, fundraising, and networking with other groups.

Resource mobilization theory is another theoretical framework that Dim employs to analyze Boko Haram's persistence. The theory suggests that social movements, such as Boko

¹⁷ Daniel E. Agbibo, “The Social Dynamics of Nigeria’s Boko Haram Insurgency: Fresh Insights from the Social Identity Theory,” 2015, http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/110_-_Agbibo_-_ABCA.pdf.

Haram, rely on resources such as money, people, and organizational structures to sustain their activities. According to Dim, Boko Haram's persistence can be attributed, in part, to the group's ability to effectively mobilize and utilize resources, including funds from illicit activities and support from sympathetic individuals and organizations.

Strategies for Preventing and Countering Religious Extremism

Various strategies have been proposed and implemented to prevent and counter religious extremism in Nigeria. These strategies can broadly be classified into two categories: hard power and soft power.

Hard Power Strategies

Hard power strategies are strategies that involve the use of force and coercion to neutralize and eliminate extremist groups. *Moscow-based Dr. Ilesanmi Abiodun Bakare of the Department of Theory and History of International Relations at the Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia* writes that "Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country's military and economic might."¹⁸ This strategy is also known as the kinetic means or the kinetic response strategy. Examples of hard power strategies include military intervention, targeted killings, and drone strikes.

The use of military force in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism intensified and grew in prominence after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States of America. The United States and their allies hit Iraq, then Afghanistan, and a number of other

¹⁸ I.A. Bakare, 'Soft Power As a Means of Fighting International Terrorism: A Case Study of Nigeria's "Boko Haram",' *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016), p. 287, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/soft-power-as-a-means-of-fighting-international-terrorism-a-case-study-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram.pdf>.

hot zones for terrorism. While hard power strategies can be effective in weakening extremist groups, they can also lead to collateral damage and the alienation of local populations, which can fuel further extremism.

The hard power strategy has been largely criticized in recent years as not being effective and not being efficient in financial and human costs in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism. As can be seen in the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, after protracted years of resisting violence with intense violence, religious extremism and terrorism are still on the steady rise. This is the reason for the change in tactics and the favouring of the soft power strategy as we see today. Bakare quotes Hassan Amillat of Morocco as saying in an interview on deradicalization that “There is no military solution to terrorism.”¹⁹ He further references David Miliband, a former British Foreign Minister as saying that “‘the war on terror was wrong,’ and it brought ‘more harm than good.’ It has also undermined the search for alternative, more successful approaches to countering violent extremism by giving the impression that only a military solution exists to counter violent extremism.”²⁰ The carnage witnessed so far in the use of force is mind-boggling, and seems to harden the criminals, and in some cases turn bystanders caught in the crossfire into enemies. Hence, Bakare seeks soft power as a means to fight international terrorism by means of education and other non-violent responses.

Soft Power Strategies

Soft power strategies are strategies that aim to address the root causes of religious extremism and prevent its spread through non-violent means. Bakare writes that “Soft power lies in the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. Soft power is about influence, example,

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 286

²⁰ Ibid.

credibility, and reputation.”²¹ Examples of soft power strategies include community engagement, education, and economic development. Bakare references Professor and Dean Joseph Nye of Harvard’s Kennedy School as having defined Soft Power as “the ability to attract and persuade revolutionary groups and to prevent them from recruiting.”²² This persuasion does not include kinetic means (the use of military force). Soft power strategies are aimed at and rely on building social trust and cohesion, which can assist in preventing the spread of extremist ideologies.

One soft power strategy that has been successful in countering religious extremism in Nigeria is community policing. Community policing involves working closely with local communities to proactively identify and prevent extremist activities. The reason for the effectiveness of this approach has been its reliance on the trust and cooperation of local populations, which helps to build resilience against extremist ideologies. It is like a public-private partnership for security and peace. Soft power strategy is equally cost effective in relation to an all-out military response (hard power strategy), respects human rights, and limits to the barest minimum the chances of collateral damage resulting from civilian casualty, the destruction of property, and the displacement of persons. Within the broader sense of the soft power strategy, we can factor other effective strategies for countering religious extremism in Nigeria such as de-radicalization programs. These programs are aimed at rehabilitating former extremists and reintegrating them into society. De-radicalization programs often involve counselling, education, and vocational training, and they have been successful in reducing the number of people joining extremist groups in Nigeria.

²¹ Ibid. 287

²² Ibid.

Bakare advocates for the government and private sectors to consciously commit in the short-term and in the long-term, to a strategy of the soft power approach composed of ends, ways and means. “It may exist in many ways and means; such as rehabilitation programs, financial aid, educational reform, reforms in religious instruction, and public information Campaigns.” The short-term according to Bakare could include but not be only entertainment, communication, and campaigns. The long-term could include education, skills acquisition, international cooperation and other means and ways.

Omoluwa Olusegun calls for ‘Functional Education’ as a tool for combatting terrorism in Nigeria. Olusegun explores the role of education in preventing and countering terrorism in Nigeria. He argues that functional education is critical in addressing the root causes of terrorism, including poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. Olusegun suggests equally that education can promote critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diversity, thereby reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies. Olusegun notes further that functional education can equip young people with skills and knowledge that can help them gain employment and contribute positively to society.

Olusegun focuses the article on the Almajiri of Northern Nigeria. “The Almajiri system has become an agent of threat instead of building the pious citizenry. The Almajiris were freely used by terrorist insurgents such as the Maitasine, Zangokataf and the current terrorist Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Almajiri schools have become breeding grounds for religious fanaticism, political thuggery and terrorism.”²³ They serve the political whims and caprices of their teachers, preachers, and the local politicians.

²³ Omoluwa Olusegun, “Functional Education: A Tool for Combating Terrorism in Nigeria.” *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*. Vol. 2, Special Issue 7 (Nov-Dec 2014), p. 35.
<https://www.ijtra.com/special-issue-view.php?paper=functional-education-a-tool-for-combating-terrorism-in-nigeria.pdf>

Olusegun provides a comprehensive overview of the potential of functional education to combat terrorism in Nigeria. The overview is well-researched, drawing on a range of academic sources to support the author's arguments. Olusegun's analysis is well-structured, and provides a clear theoretical framework for his argument. The article is well-written and accessible, making it a useful resource for policymakers, academics, and practitioners working on issues of terrorism and education. Chief among Olusegun's recommendations for functional education as a tool for combatting and reducing terrorist activities and violence in Nigeria is "the need to integrate into school curriculum at all levels, an articulated programme of violence resolution and prevention."²⁴

One significant weakness of the proposal is that it fails to provide empirical evidence to support its claims. For example, he does not demonstrate how integrating into school curriculum, at all levels, an articulated programme of violence resolution and prevention that could make our youths their brothers' keepers. While Olusegun cites several studies that demonstrate the links between education, poverty, and terrorism, he does not provide evidence to show that functional education can prevent or counter terrorism in Nigeria specifically. The article also neglects to consider some of the challenges and limitations of implementing functional education in Nigeria, such as inadequate funding, infrastructure, and the training of teachers.

Functional education, as proffered by Olusegun, has no bearing on character and, as such, cannot ensure peace even after all the children have been reunited with their parents, trained in financial skills, and educated. Character formation and virtues are still needed. Parents who themselves were products of the Almajiri system cannot offer the moral character

²⁴ Ibid. p. 38.

and training they do not possess. School curricula should therefore include instruction in the virtues to build the children up in virtues and good character.

To strengthen Olusegun's argument, future research could include empirical studies which investigate the impact of functional education on preventing and countering terrorism in Nigeria. Additionally, research could explore the feasibility of implementing functional education in Nigeria, considering factors such as funding, infrastructure, and teacher training. Finally, future research could examine the roles of other factors, such as religion, culture, and politics, in shaping attitudes towards education and terrorism in Nigeria.

From the literature review, we have seen that the theoretical perspectives and strategies available for the understanding, prevention and tackling of religious extremism in Nigeria have not considered the virtue ethics perspective. Virtue Ethics as a framework for proactively preventing and tackling the scourge of religious extremism and terrorism is the framework to which Chapter 3 looks. The Virtue ethics framework as applied to this thesis concentrates on the child as the moral agent who, if well-formed, will build such a moral character that the common good will be their goal and they will uphold the common good in a pluralist Nigerian society.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is essential to establish a theoretical framework for any research project, as it serves as a guide for understanding and analysing data. The theoretical framework provides a lens through which the researcher can interpret their findings and draw conclusions.

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study based on the moral theory of virtue ethics. The chapter discusses the concept of virtue ethics and its relevance to the catch them young strategy in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. By using virtue ethics as our framework, I aim to explore the role of virtues in combatting religious extremism and the importance of education in cultivating virtuous character. I will consider how virtue education programs can be used to instill positive values and behaviors in young people, ultimately leading to a reduction in religious extremism in Nigeria. The chapter equally presents the key virtues necessary for the success of the proposed catch them young strategy.

Key Concepts

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, written in the 4th century BCE, is a seminal work in virtue ethics.

Virtue Ethics, alongside deontological and other teleological ethics, is one of the three main systems in Normative Ethics. “Such an approach that focuses on a purpose, on individual and collective responsibilities, and on the cultivation of character, is that of virtue ethics or

virtue theory.”²⁵ Virtue Ethics is a unifying term for the theories which “emphasize the role of character and virtue in Moral Philosophy rather than either doing one’s duty or acting in order to bring about good consequences.”²⁶ Its starting point is virtues, or moral character, while the other two normative systems, Deontology and Consequentialism have their starting points as duties or roles, and consequences or outcomes of actions respectively. A consequentialist looks at a moral action from a utilitarian perspective which has its end as the maximization of wellbeing. A deontologist considers moral actions from their reference to the fulfilment of rules or moral codes, for example, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ A virtue ethicist considers moral actions from the standpoint of the moral agent and the virtues, for example, being charitable or being courageous, that will instantiate prudent and rightly ordered action.

This explanation does not mean that the orientation of each of these three systems is exclusive to it. Each of these systems takes off from these specific standpoints in considering what ought “I” to do in this or that need to act.

Proponents of virtue ethics argue that the virtues provide a robust and comprehensive framework for ethical decision-making that take into account the complexity and particularity of moral situations. Virtue Ethicists have taken various theoretical thrusts; below are the two that are relevant to this study, the eudaimonist virtue ethics and the exemplarist virtue ethics.

²⁵ Surendra Arjoon, “Virtue Theory as a Dynamic Theory of Business,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, **28**, (November 2000): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006339112331>.

²⁶ Athanassoulis, Nafsika. “Virtue Ethics,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ISSN 2161-0002)*; <https://iep.utm.edu/virtue/>.

Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics

Eudaimonism (equally spelt eudemonism) is from the Greek word “eudaimonia,” a term that Aristotle used for “happiness.” Aristotle theorized that eudaimonia (happiness) is the ultimate end (goal) of all actions. Aristotle believes that actions are not aimless. Every action has an aim. From the simple to the complex, every action is engaged with a goal in mind. Every action aims at some good. A mother lets the doctors take her child into the emergency room for surgery because she wants the child to live a long, pain-free, happy life. Some actions may be carried out for their own sakes and become ends in themselves. Yet some actions are carried out for the sakes of other things, and therefore become means to other ends. Aristotle is of the belief that all things which are ends in themselves aim at a greater good which is the greatest good of all. This greatest good of all is eudaimonia (happiness). The greatest goal of life for Aristotle is happiness. Aristotle observes that:

where a thing has a function, the good of the thing is when it performs its function well. For example, the knife has a function, to cut, and it performs its function well when it cuts well. This argument is applied to man: man has a function and the good man is the man who performs his function well. Man’s function is what is peculiar to him and sets him aside from other beings—reason. Therefore, the function of man is reason and the life that is distinctive of humans is the life in accordance with reason. If the function of man is reason, then the good man is the man who reasons well. This is the life of excellence or of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is the life of *virtue*—activity in accordance with reason, man’s highest function.²⁷

Eudaimonist virtue ethics is one of the oldest and most well-known versions of virtue ethics. The theory is based on the idea that the ultimate aim of human life is eudaimonia, or happiness. Virtues are seen as necessary for achieving this ultimate goal, and are therefore valuable in themselves. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is a classic standard of eudaimonist virtue ethics. The Thomistic or scholastic tradition following from the Aristotelian tradition holds the eudaimonist view of virtue and ethics. The ultimate end of virtue is perfection. For Christians,

²⁷ Ibid.

the ultimate end of man is happiness in the beatific vision of God who is the greatest good, perfection, the true happiness. We strive to live virtuous lives, that is, the rightly ordered life, for the perfection that comes with virtue in order to achieve the beatific vision of God in the end.

Irrespective of religion, virtue is a prerequisite for a fulfilled life of happiness or flourishing (eudaimonia). According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is achieved by living a life of virtuous activity, which is characterized by the proper use of reason and the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues.

Aristotle's eudaimonist virtue ethics has had a significant influence on the development of the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas, his presentation of the cardinal virtues, and subsequently on contemporary virtue ethics, particularly in its emphasis on the cultivation of virtues through habituation and practice.

Eudaimonism as a theory of virtue ethics has several key tenets. First and foremost, it emphasizes the importance of virtues in achieving a good life. Virtues are not simply individual traits or characteristics, they are habits or dispositions that are cultivated over time through practice and reflection. Second, eudaimonism emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development in the pursuit of eudaimonia. This includes not only the cultivation of virtues, but also the pursuit of meaningful activities that promote overall well-being. Third, eudaimonism emphasizes the importance of reason in ethical decision-making. Rather than relying on rules or principles, eudaimonism instructs and encourages individuals to use their own judgment and reason to determine the best course of action.

Eudaimonism as a theory of virtue ethics has several contemporary applications. One area in which eudaimonism has been applied is in the field of positive psychology. Positive

psychology emphasizes the importance of positive emotions, meaning, and engagement in promoting overall well-being. Eudaimonism provides a framework for understanding how virtues and meaningful activities can contribute to overall well-being. Further, eudaimonism has been applied in the field of business ethics. Eudaimonism emphasizes the importance of virtues such as honesty, integrity, and compassion in business practices. This has led to the development of ethical frameworks which emphasize the importance of values and virtues in decision-making.

Eudaimonism as a theory of virtue ethics has faced several criticisms and challenges. One such challenge is the question of whether there is a single concept of eudaimonia that applies to all individuals. Critics argue that what constitutes a good life may vary from person to person, making the pursuit of eudaimonia subjective.

Eudaimonism faces the challenge of the question of how virtues are cultivated. Critics argue that the cultivation of virtues may be difficult or even impossible for some individuals and easier for others. There is equally the argument that eudaimonism may place an undue burden on individuals to achieve a state of flourishing.

Even with these criticisms, striving for virtue by practicing them leads to happiness and the satisfaction of a rightly-ordered life, that is, a life characterized by right reason and right willing.

Exemplarist Virtue Ethics

Exemplarist virtue theory is a sub-category of virtue ethics which emphasizes the importance of role models or exemplars in the development of virtues. This theory bases the judgement of good and bad ends, and good and bad states of affairs on the motivational and dispositional states of exemplary agents. “There are a variety of human traits that we find admirable, such as benevolence, kindness, compassion, etc. and we can identify these by

looking at the people we admire, our moral exemplars.”²⁸ Exemplarist virtue theory posits that exemplars are individuals who embody the virtues we admire and seek to cultivate in our own selves. Exemplars can be historical figures, fictional characters, or individuals in our own lives. They could be our parents or teachers or friends. By observing and emulating exemplars and replicating their ways of life in our own lives, we can develop our own virtues and become better people.

The roots of exemplarist virtue theory can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle, for example, believed that individuals could learn to be virtuous by observing and emulating virtuous individuals.

Exemplarist virtue theory lays emphasis on the importance of emulation or imitation in the development of virtues. Emulation involves more than just copying the actions of the exemplar. It equally and critically involves understanding the underlying values and principles which motivate those actions. By understanding the underlying values and principles, we are able to develop our own internalized dispositions or character traits which guide the way we behave.

The exemplarist virtue theory has several applications in contemporary times. One major area in which the exemplarist virtue theory has been applied is in the field of moral education. Exemplarist virtue theory highlights the importance of personal growth and development in the cultivation of virtues. Moral education programs or character education programs can effectively apply this theory in teaching students how to develop virtues such as honesty, compassion, courage and tolerance by way of imitating people and communities that have successfully engaged them for the common good of all.

²⁸ Ibid.

The exemplarist virtue theory has equally been applied in the field of leadership development. Leaders who embody virtuous characteristics such as integrity, humility, and compassion can serve as positive role models for their followers. By observing and emulating virtuous leaders, followers can develop their own virtuous characteristics and become better leaders themselves.

The exemplarist virtue theory has faced several criticisms and challenges. There is the challenge of how to identify appropriate exemplars. Critics argue that some individuals or groups may have an undue influence on the selection of exemplars. Critics argue that some virtues may be overemphasized at the expense of others. There is equally the question of whether emulation can be a reliable method for the cultivation of virtues. Critics argue that emulation may be limited by factors such as cognitive biases, social pressures, and personal limitations.

Exemplarist virtue theory is a sub-category of virtue ethics that emphasizes the importance of role models or exemplars in the development of virtues. While exemplarist virtue theory has faced criticisms and challenges, it remains a valuable framework for understanding the impressions of role models in the ethical decision-making and personal growth of others. It is valuable as a framework to employ in the “catch them young” strategy in eradicating religious extremism in Nigeria.

One of the main strengths of virtue ethics is that it provides a comprehensive framework for ethical decision-making, which takes into account the complex and diverse nature of human experience. Virtue ethics theory recognizes that moral behavior is not always clear-cut or easy to define, and that moral dilemmas often involve conflicting values and goals. Therefore, virtue ethics places emphasis on the development of practical wisdom (prudence), which is the ability to make ethical decisions in complex and uncertain situations.

Overall, virtue ethics theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how ethical behavior is influenced by character traits, rather than simply rules or codes of conduct. By emphasizing the development of virtuous character traits, virtue ethics provides a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to ethical decision-making, which is especially relevant in the context of the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

Virtue

“According to Aristotelian virtue ethics, virtue is defined as a desirable character trait, such as courage, that lies between two extremes of brashness and cowardice. The virtuous agent is involved in a continual quest to find balance in ethical decision-making.”²⁹ In the context of the virtue of courage, therefore, courage is the mean between the two extremes of brashness and cowardice.

Aquinas explains that virtue is an operative habit which is “a good habit, productive of good works.”³⁰ An operative habit is ordered to doing, not to being. Because of this, physical characteristics, such as being tall or fat, are not qualified as virtues. Tallness and fatness are entitative (habits of being) and not operative (habits of acting). In the case of moral virtues, such good habits of doing make the person performing the actions good. Along that Thomistic line, the Catholic Church teaches that virtue is “an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself.”³¹ Virtue is an excellent disposition, deep-rooted in its possessor which conditions them to act consistently

²⁹ Pratik Patel, “Applying Virtue Ethics: The Rajat Gupta Case,” *Seven Pillars Institute for Global Finance and Ethics*, 11 February 2013, <https://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/applying-virtue-ethics-the-rajat-gupta-case/>.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 55, a. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, ed. Kevin Knight (2017), <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2055.htm>

³¹ Catholic Church, “The Virtues,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCCB, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1803, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/443/>

in the right way. To possess a virtue is to be such a person who possesses the trait of character to behave in a certain desirable way, *and actually behaves* in that desirable way consistently and adequately as required (habitually, with knowledge and freewill).

The roles of the intellect and the will in the practice and eventual habit which become virtue is reflected in the further description of virtue given by the Church that “*Human virtues* are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good.”³²

How Virtues are Acquired and Cultivated

Alasdair MacIntyre defines virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."³³ In other words, a virtue is a learned, internalized, practised quality or habit which enables an individual to live a moral and good life. This definition highlights the acquired quality of virtue; the fact that it is learned and perfected with time by practice. “So, virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but nature gives us the capacity to acquire them, and completion comes through habituation.”³⁴ Habituation (making permanent by making a habit through consistent acting until it becomes second nature) is what makes a character trait stick and become a virtue. For

³² Catholic Church, “The Virtues,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCCB, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1804, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/453/>

³³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. II, ch. 1, trans. ed. Roger Crisp, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p23.

example, a person who wants to develop the virtue of honesty must consistently engage in truthful behavior until it becomes habitual. Over time, this habit becomes ingrained in the person's character, and the person becomes a habitually honest individual.

Furthermore, the cultivation of virtues requires self-reflection and self-awareness. Individuals must be aware of their virtues and vices, and they must be willing to take responsibility for their actions. They must also be willing to accept feedback from others and make changes to their behaviour to align with their moral principles.

Education (instruction) equally plays a significant role in the acquisition of virtues. Education provides individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to make ethical decisions and act virtuously. The community provides a social context in which individuals can practice virtues and receive feedback on their actions. This feedback enables individuals to reflect on their behaviour and make changes to their character.

Consulting moral exemplars is another way of cultivating virtue. Professor Daniel J. Daly provides three modes of consulting with moral exemplars, namely: “dialogue, emulation, and substituted judgment.”³⁵ In the dialogical mode, the moral agent in need of direction confers with the virtuous members of the community to seek counsel on how best to proceed in a certain circumstance. In the emulation mode, the individual in need of direction relies on their knowledge of the course of action the virtuous exemplar had followed in their own time (the exemplar’s actions, emotions, and intentions). In the substituted judgement mode, the agent imagines what the exemplar would have done and follows through.

³⁵ Daniel J. Daly, “Virtue Ethics and Action Guidance,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No.4, p.574 (December 2021), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00405639211055177>

Yet another way of cultivating virtues is taking counsel with the virtues. Here, the moral agent “takes counsel with the virtues themselves.”³⁶ Here the agent takes direct recourse to the virtues based on their descriptive and prescriptive meanings.

Key Virtues in the Fight Against Religious Extremism

Moral virtues, in the scholastic (Catholic) moral tradition, are ordinarily grouped into two categories: the human/moral virtues and the theological virtues. There are many human virtues, and they are all hinged and annexed to the class of virtues known as the four cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance. The theological or divine virtues include faith, hope and charity (love). The cardinal virtues and the theological virtues combine to form the seven virtues which, in the Catholic tradition, go against the seven deadly sins of pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth. The particular virtues we concern ourselves with in this discourse are the four cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance; and the theological virtue of charity.

Prudence

“Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it.”³⁷ Prudence is the ability to make practical and wise decisions. “Coming to know how one should act is a function of practical reasoning, which ideally is directed by the virtue of prudence.”³⁸ It is equally known as right

³⁶ Ibid. 575

³⁷ Catholic Church, “The Virtues,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCCB, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1806, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/446/>

³⁸ Daniel J. Daly, “Virtue Ethics and Action Guidance,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No.4, p.568 (December 2021), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00405639211055177>

reason and practical wisdom about what needs to be done. It involves assessing a situation and making decisions based on sound reasoning, moral principles and values. It is a virtue that enables individuals to use reason and intellect to make wise judgments, anticipate the consequences of their actions, and act accordingly. It is the foundation of all virtues, as without prudence, the other virtues cannot be properly exercised. Prudence is that disposition which enables us, at every given moment, to see what is virtuous and what is not, and how to arrive at a virtuous action and avoid a wrong or outright vicious action. Prudence perfects the intellect, not the will. It may rightly be called right reason put into practice. Prudence lights the way and measures the playing field for the other virtues.

Prudence is the virtue of and for discernment. “It has been called the ‘charioteer of the virtues’ since it helps control and moderate all of the other manly virtues we possess.”³⁹ It is the virtue which makes the other virtues possible because it directs our intellect in making wise decisions. It leads the way among the other virtues.

With the virtue of prudence, we are able to discern when we are about to fall into religious extremism or terrorism and flee from such an act of vice.

Among the virtues annexed to the cardinal virtue of prudence the following are relevant in the fight against religious extremism:

Memory of the past: the ability to learn from past experience what should be done and what should be avoided in a particular circumstance.

Understanding of the Present: the ability to judge whether a given action is lawful or unlawful, morally good or bad, right or wrong.

³⁹ Ibid.

Docility: the character trait which disposes us to accepting the good advice and good counsel of those who have adequate experience.

Shrewdness: the virtue that disposes us to act right in urgent cases when time or circumstances do not permit delay.

Reasoning Power: the trait by which, when time permits, we choose to act rightly after the required consideration and reflection.

Foresight: the ability to judge the immediate means in view of the end or goal which is sought.

Circumspection: the ability to rightly put into consideration the special circumstances which surround a particular act, as to persons, places, and every other parameter.

Precaution: the trait by which we take into consideration the possible external obstacles and threats, or our own weaknesses or incapacity with regard to a given action.

Justice

Justice is a cardinal virtue. Thomas Aquinas defines justice as “a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.”⁴⁰ It is the pivotal character trait or faculty which perfects the will and disposes it to render to each and every person what is due to them. “Together with charity it regulates man's intercourse with his fellow men. But charity leads us to help our neighbor in his need out of our own stores, while justice teaches us to give to another what belongs to him.”⁴¹ Justice and charity work hand in hand. By justice

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, “Justice” in *Summa Theologica*, 2nd rev. ed. and trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online ed. Kevin Knight (2017), II-II, q. 58, a. 1, ans., <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3058.htm>

⁴¹ Thomas Slater, “Justice,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, ed. Kevin Knight, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm>.

we give to other individuals and to God their due. By charity we help others get their due, especially when that which is their due is being denied them, or they are incapacitated to help themselves; this we do for the sake of God.

By justice we know and decide to be fair and to do unto others how we would want them to treat us.

Among the virtues annexed to justice, the following are necessary in the fight against religious extremism.

Religion: This is the character trait which regulates the moral agent in their relations towards God, disposing the individual to pay adequate worship to the creator, and to respect holy places, resisting the urge to desecrate other people's places of worship.

Piety: This virtue disposes us to staying committed to our parents and country and not do anything to upset the balance. This is the virtue of patriotism. Upholding the common good gives everyone their fair share and sustains the goodwill.

Temperance

The cardinal virtue of temperance is the virtue of self-control. It is the character trait for regulating the instincts and keeping them under control and honorable.

Among the virtues annexed to temperance, the following are relevant to the treatment of religious extremism:

Humility: It is by humility that we are able to restrain the inordinate desires of our own excellence. With humility, the superiority complex that drives religious extremism is put in check.

Meekness: This virtue puts a check on the inordinate urge or drive of anger, envy and hate.

Fortitude

Fortitude, equally known as courage, is the cardinal virtue which “ensures firmness in difficulties, and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even the fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes to even renounce and sacrifice his life in defence of a just cause.”⁴² By implication, fortitude means moral strength and courage. It is by the virtue of fortitude that one confronts dangers and perseveres against difficulties, remaining steadfast even in the face of death itself and, against all odds, is never deterred by fear from the pursuit of the good which right reason dictates.

A person who has acquired the virtue of fortitude and trained himself to be unfazed in the face of trials is able to reject the temptations of joining in religious extremist groups or acts and, when required, does everything necessary to make sure religious extremism and terrorism do not take root in or around him.

Fortitude is the mean against the deficiency of cowardice and the excess of recklessness or fearlessness.

Among the relevant virtues annexed to fortitude are:

Patience: Patience disposes us to bear present evils with equanimity; leading us to stay calm, composed and collected in the face of overwhelming evil. The patient man endures the evils that confront him in such a way that he does not let himself become inordinately cast down by them.

⁴² Catholic Church, “The Virtues,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCBC, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1808, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/446/>

Perseverance: Perseverance is the virtue which disposes the individual to persist and continue in virtuous works despite any attendant hardships. By perseverance, we are inclined to persist in the practice of good in spite of the difficulties attendant to this continued practice. Remaining unmoved and resolute in the practice of virtue daily requires that fortitude of spirit which is provided by the virtue of perseverance. Every virtue needs the assistance of perseverance because without it no virtue can be preserved and practiced, nor can any virtue ever attain its perfection in the moral agent.

Constancy: Closely related to perseverance but distinguished from it by reason of a special difficulty to overcome is constancy. Perseverance offers firmness of soul in the face of the difficulty which is connected with the prolongation of a virtuous life. Constancy strengthens the soul against the difficulties that proceed from any other obstacle that might come up. Constancy keeps us on the path in different situations, while perseverance provides stability and the inner strength to ride a particular path or situation to the end.

Charity

Charity is the virtue which disposes us to love God above all creatures for the sake of God, and to love ourselves and our fellow humans for the sake of God. This virtue is enkindled in our souls by the direct infusion of God Himself, it is a supernatural virtue. The love of God drives us to desire and strive towards the common good. Thomas Aquinas holds that the end of the virtue of charity is one, “namely, the goodness of God; and the fellowship of everlasting happiness, on which this friendship is based, is also one.”⁴³ Acts of charity for the sake of God

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, “Charity” in *Summa Theologica*, 2nd rev. ed. and trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online ed. Kevin Knight (2017), II-II, q. 23, a. 5, ans., <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3023.htm>.

endear us evermore to God and help us attain the beatific vision of God which is the ultimate end of man.

The virtue of charity is equally known as love. This is the virtue by which we cherish the common good and are able to resist thoughts, words and actions that will endanger others in the human community irrespective of their beliefs, color and any other situations. By this virtue, we cherish the love of God and accord respect to all.

The virtue of tolerance emanates more from charity than from justice since tolerance is tied to the common good. If everyone in Nigeria were to grow in the virtues of charity and tolerance, then religious extremism, religious intolerance, and terrorism would die a natural death without a shot fired.

Character

Character is sometimes used interchangeably with virtue, but they are not one and the same thing. Character is sometimes also used to mean personality both in common parlance and in academic circles (in Psychology for instance). The term character or human character refers to the set of personality traits, values, and beliefs that define an individual's behavior, thoughts, and emotions. The concept of virtue goes way deeper than that of character, especially in the field of Ethics.

The Britannica Dictionary defines character as “the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves: someone's personality.”⁴⁴ Another sense of the term character which applies in this

⁴⁴ “Character,” in *Britannica Dictionary*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., (2021), <https://www.britannica.com/character>.

study is the understanding of character as “the good qualities of a person that usually include moral or emotional strength, honesty, and fairness.”⁴⁵

For the purpose of this study, the terms character and human character refer to the sum quality of a person which informs the way they think and behave, and the way they are viewed in society and how they truly are in themselves; for example, if they are viewed as good or bad, virtuous or vicious, welcoming or repulsive in behaviour based on what they actually do. The character of a person and the way they are perceived in society stem from the way they think, talk act and relate with others in society; the way they carry themselves.

The concept of human character has important implications for ethical and moral decision-making. Virtue ethicists argue that individuals should strive to cultivate virtuous character traits, such as honesty, compassion, and courage, in order to lead good lives. From this perspective, ethical behavior is not just a matter of following rules or principles but rather a reflection of an individual's underlying character.

Character Education

Character education has been defined as "the deliberate effort to develop positive character traits and moral values in individuals."⁴⁶ This effort mainly targets school age children as they are at their most impressionable and malleable stages. “The term character education has also been discussed for years and refers to a planned, comprehensive, and systematic approach to teach values such as self-respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, and citizenship.”⁴⁷ It is a form

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach respect and Responsibility*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Stacey Edmonson, Robert Tatman, John R. Slate, “Character Education: An Historical Overview,” National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (2009), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068485.pdf>

of education which emphasizes the importance of developing desirable traits and dispositions such as honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, kindness, empathy, and citizenship, among others. Character education is an approach to education or character formation which helps students develop positive attitudes and behaviors, which will ultimately assist them to succeed in all aspects of their lives. Character education is often integrated into the curriculum in schools and can equally be taught in non-curricular settings such as in homes, communities, and religious institutions.

Character education aims at helping individuals become responsible, conscientious and caring members of society who make positive contributions to their communities and the world at large; people who value and promote the common good.

Historically, Character Education dates back to ancient Greece as the concept of character was closely linked to virtue. In the Middle Ages, character education was mainly the responsibility of the church, which emphasized moral values and virtues. With the advent of the Enlightenment, character education became more secular and focused on the development of individual character traits. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, character education was an integral part of the American education system, with schools emphasizing moral values such as honesty, hard work, and patriotism. American educationist and author, Denis P. Doyle backs this point by writing that “From the time of the ancient Greeks to sometime in the late 19th century, a singular idea obtained: education's larger purpose was to shape character, to make men (and later, women) better people.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Denis P. Doyle, “Education and Character: A Conservative View,” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 78, No. 6 (Feb., 1997), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20405818> p. 440

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in character education, driven by concerns about the decline of moral values and the need to develop well-rounded individuals who can make positive contributions to society.

Implementing character education requires a concerted effort from schools, parents, and communities. Schools can integrate character education into the curriculum by incorporating character education programs and activities. Schools can, for instance, use literature, role-playing, and group discussions to teach values such as respect, empathy and forgiveness. Parents can as well play a vital role in promoting character education by modelling positive values and virtues in their everyday lives for their children and other young ones in the community to emulate. Communities can support character education by providing opportunities for students to engage in service learning and other community-based activities which promote social responsibility.

Applying Virtue Ethics to Religious Extremism

Theoretical basis for educating Nigerian youth in virtues

The theoretical basis for educating the youth in virtues can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who believed that virtues are habits that enable individuals to act in ways that are good and ethically right. According to Aristotle, virtues are learned through practice and repetition, and they can be cultivated through education and training.

The theoretical basis for educating Nigerian youth in virtues, especially the Almajiri of Northern Nigeria, is similar to the general theoretical basis for character education practiced around the world. However, there are some unique cultural, social, and religious factors that need to be considered when designing character education programs for Nigerian youth,

particularly for the Almajiri.

In modern times, the study of virtues and character education has been influenced by various philosophical and psychological theories, including:

Virtue Ethics: This ethical theory emphasizes the importance of developing moral character and cultivating virtues as the key to ethical behaviour. It argues that virtues such as courage, honesty, compassion, and fairness are essential for living a good life and promoting the well-being of oneself and others.

Social Learning Theory: This theory suggests that individuals learn through observation and imitation of others. In the context of character education, social learning theory emphasizes the importance of modelling and positive reinforcement in shaping moral behaviour.

Positive Psychology: This field of psychology focuses on promoting well-being and positive traits such as resilience, gratitude, and optimism. Positive psychology has been applied to character education, emphasizing the importance of cultivating positive character traits and strengths in youth.

Moral Psychology: This field of psychology focuses on the development of moral reasoning and decision-making. Moral psychology has been applied to character education, emphasizing the importance of teaching moral reasoning skills and providing opportunities for ethical reflection and discussion.

Narrowing it down to the Nigerian context, there are factors which constitute the basis for educating Nigerian youth in virtues.

Cultural Factors: Nigeria is a culturally diverse country, with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own cultural values and traditions. Character education programs should take into account the cultural values and beliefs of the communities they serve. For example, in Northern Nigeria, respect for elders, hospitality, and courage are highly valued virtues.

Social Factors: The Almajiri system is a traditional Islamic education system that is prevalent in Northern Nigeria. The system involves sending young boys to live with Islamic teachers (Malam) to study the Quran and Islamic teachings. However, many Almajiri children are vulnerable to poverty, neglect, exploitation, and radicalization. Character education programs should address the social challenges faced by Almajiri children and promote virtues such as compassion, empathy, and social responsibility.

Religious factors: Nigeria is a religiously diverse country, with Christianity, Islam, and indigenous traditions being the dominant religions. Character education or virtue education programs should respect the religious beliefs and practices of the communities they serve. In the case of the Almajiri children, character education programs should draw on Islamic teachings to promote virtues such as prudence, temperance, humility, patience, tolerance, and courage.

Overall, the theoretical basis for educating youth in virtues is grounded in the belief that character can be developed and that virtues are essential for living a good and ethical life. Based on this study, educators can draw on Virtue Ethics to design effective character education programs that promote the development of virtues in youth, especially the Almajiri and other youth in Northern Nigeria who are the most vulnerable to religious extremism. I draw from Virtue Ethics to formulate my virtue-centric framework for a “catch them young” strategy as the game changer in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

The theoretical basis for educating Nigerian youth in virtues, including the Almajiri of Northern Nigeria, involves taking into account the cultural, social, and religious factors that shape their experiences and values. Effective character education programs should be culturally sensitive, socially relevant, and grounded in applicable religious teachings for each location, peoples and individuals. By promoting the relevant virtues such as tolerance, prudence,

temperance, compassion, and social responsibility, character education programs can help Nigerian youth become responsible and ethical members of their communities.

The Role of Virtue in the Fight Against Religious Extremism

Religious extremism is mainly characterized by a belief in the superiority of one's religion over others and the use of violence to promote and defend that belief. Religious extremism has been responsible for many acts of violence, including terrorist attacks and sectarian violence in Nigeria. The fight against religious extremism requires a multifaceted approach that includes military, political, and social interventions. Since military force on its own has not worked in the fight against religious extremism and religious terrorism in Nigeria, it has become necessary to look for alternatives that work in this fight. The Catch Them Young framework advocates for the use of character education or virtue formation and virtuous living in the fight against religious extremism because the problem is the problem of moral decadence. Virtue therefore is crucial in the fight against religious extremism.

Virtue is all about moral excellence or goodness which enables an individual to act in a morally responsible manner. Virtue is important in the fight against religious extremism because it enables the individual to develop a moral compass that guides their actions. Virtue allows individuals to distinguish right from wrong and to act accordingly. Religious extremism is often fueled by a lack of moral principles, which leads individuals into believing that they can justify their violent actions in the name of religion. Virtue, therefore, provides a counterbalance to the extreme beliefs which underpin religious extremism.

One of the key virtues in the fight against religious extremism is fortitude (courage). Fortitude enables individuals to stand up to the extremists and to resist their attempts at imposing their beliefs on others. Fortitude equally allows individuals to speak out against the

injustices committed in the name of God and religion. For example, the Pakistani activist for female education, Malala Yousafzai, has demonstrated great courage in speaking out against the Taliban's oppression of women in her country.⁴⁹ Her courage inspired millions of people around the world to stand up to religious extremism.

Another important virtue in the fight against religious extremism is compassion which is a virtue annexed to the virtue of Charity (love). Compassion enables individuals to empathize with fellow humans and with the victims of religious extremism and to work towards their welfare. Compassion equally helps individuals grasp the motivations of the extremists and to address the root causes of their violent actions. For example, the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, has advocated for compassion as a means of addressing the conflict between Tibetans and the Chinese government.⁵⁰ His teachings on compassion have inspired many people around the world to work towards a more peaceful and just society.

Humility is another important virtue in the fight against religious extremism. Humility enables individuals to jettison pride and a superiority complex in their relations with other people and cultures, and to acknowledge the perspectives and religions of others. Religious extremism often arises from a sense of arrogance and superiority, which leads individuals to view those who do not share their beliefs as inferior. Humility provides a counterbalance to this extreme view of the world. For example, Desmond Tutu, the South African Anglican bishop and anti-apartheid activist, demonstrated great humility in his efforts to bring about reconciliation between the black and white communities in South Africa.⁵¹ His humility

⁴⁹ Malala Yousafzai, M., and Christina Lamb, *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

⁵⁰ Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the new millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

⁵¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

enabled him to listen to the perspectives of both sides and to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Finally, the fight against religious extremism requires a framework that emphasizes the training of children in virtue because that is the surest way to fight this evil. The virtue of prudence offers practical wisdom for discernment in everyday lived experiences. The other virtues treated in this framework also have key roles to play as they translate the recommendations of prudence into action. These virtues enable individuals to resist the extremists, to empathize with their fellow humans and the victims of religious extremism, and to acknowledge the perspectives of others. It is in these moments of challenge and controversy that the virtues of discernment (prudence), courage (fortitude), temperance, compassion, humility and the other virtues treated in the framework become most important.

Key Strategies for the Catch them Young Approach

The cultivation of virtues in the young requires a deliberate and systematic approach that involves various key strategies and methods which include:

Policymaking: The first and most important strategy in the application of the “Catch Them Young” approach is policymaking. Respected intellectuals, religious organizations, civil society organizations, traditional rulers, and well-meaning stakeholders should come together with the government to brainstorm and craft policies for character education for different age levels of society. Policymaking should equally take care of values and virtues of importance in society both in the public and private sectors. For reference, they should use the outlined virtues of the Thomistic scholastic tradition because the common law has more affinity with the scholastic tradition than with any other philosophical tradition. Indigenous values and morals

of the different regions and peoples of Nigeria should be recognized to the extent that they agree with the more universal Thomistic scholastic moral tradition.

Modeling: The framework emphasizes the importance of positive role models in shaping young people's values and behaviors. It encourages the promotion of positive role models who embody the virtues that are essential for resisting extremist ideologies. Modeling, as expressed in the exemplarist virtue theory, entails providing good examples of virtuous behaviors and attitudes that young people can emulate. Adults, teachers, and religious leaders can serve as positive role models for the young by demonstrating virtuous behaviors such as honesty, respect, and kindness.

Instruction: Instruction involves providing explicit teaching and guidance on the meaning, importance, and practice of virtues. This can be done through formal lessons, discussions, and stories that illustrate the virtues in action.

In instruction, two forms of education are involved: formal and informal education. Formal education is the education or instruction given in schools. Informal education is the education or instruction given outside the schools. Formal education involves curricular instruction, while instructions given outside the school is non-curricular or extra-curricular. Academic institutions can still organize and oversee extra-curricular instruction and activities for their wards, students and for the public.

It is important that the Almajiri education system be incorporated into the mainstream Nigerian education system and a standard curriculum drawn up for the instruction of the children. Character Education should form a large percentage of the curriculum. This would help the children learn important values for living in a pluralist society and equally to become

virtuous in living. This would help them grow into responsible adults and who would in turn raise responsible children.

The mallams of the Almajiri system need standard education and re-education organized by the state in the mainstream education system so that they can better instruct the children in their care in the right way.

Instruction in the home and in the communities should incorporate values built on the virtues outlined in the framework. This instruction would help society raise virtuous people with a good sense of civic responsibility and value for common good.

The framework emphasizes the importance of cultivating positive character traits such as prudence (practical wisdom), courage, justice, temperance, love (charity), compassion, humility, and social responsibility. These virtues are essential for promoting ethical behavior and well-being and can help young people resist the temptation to engage in extremist activities.

Practice: Practice involves providing opportunities for young people to practice virtuous behaviors in various contexts. This can be achieved through structured activities such as role-playing, service-learning, and community service. The framework recognizes that religious extremism is often rooted in social and economic marginalization and injustice. It emphasizes the importance of addressing the root causes of extremism by promoting social justice, economic opportunity, and inclusive governance.

The framework recognizes and encourages the role of community in shaping the values and behaviors of individuals. It emphasizes the importance of building strong and supportive communities that promote positive values and discourage extremist ideologies.

Reflection: The framework emphasizes the importance of promoting moral reasoning and reflection in young people. This involves encouraging young people to reflect on their values and beliefs and to critically evaluate extremist ideologies and their potential consequences.

Reflection equally entails helping young people to reflect on their experiences and actions and to identify ways in which they can improve their virtues. This can be achieved through journaling, group discussions, and feedback from peers and mentors.

The fight against religious extremism in Nigeria requires a multifaceted strategic approach that involves various stakeholders, including educators, parents, religious leaders, and civic organizations. The Catch Them Young strategy is a promising approach that seeks to prevent the radicalization of young people by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and virtues necessary for active and responsible citizenship.

Stakeholders and Their Functions

The Nigerian Government: The Nigerian government is a crucial stakeholder in the "Catch Them Young" framework. At all three tiers (federal, state, and local) and three arms (executive, legislative, and judiciary) the government should do everything within its power to address the issue of religious extremism. The government's role includes creating policies, laws, and regulations that promote peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance based on the "Catch Them Young" framework. The government should equally do its best to provide adequate funding and resources to support programs that address religious extremism.

The National Orientation Agency (NOA): The National Orientation Agency is responsible for promoting national unity and integration, among other things. The agency's role in the "Catch Them Young" framework would be to educate young people on the dangers of religious

extremism and the importance of religious tolerance, bringing up programs and campaigns that encourage the inculcation and cultivation of virtues in Nigerians, especially the young ones. They should equally focus on the Almajiri program as a special case and sanitize it or make it non-palatable to the populace. The NOA can achieve this through various means, including workshops, seminars, and community outreach programs.

The Media: The media, including print, electronic, and social media, is a crucial stakeholder in the "Catch Them Young" framework. The media's role is to create awareness and educate young people on the dangers of religious extremism. The media can achieve this by reporting on the negative effects of religious extremism and promoting stories of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. A special focus should be given to the Almajiri system to put it into the consciousness of Nigerians at large and the promoters of the system that the system in its present state harms innocent children and the entire country. This would lead to a sanitization of the system or its ultimate scrapping.

Policy Makers: Policy makers, including lawmakers and government officials, are critical stakeholders in the "Catch Them Young" framework. They are responsible for creating and implementing policies that promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Policy makers can also allocate funding and resources to support programs that address extremism.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Civil society organizations are non-governmental organizations that work towards promoting social change. In the "Catch Them Young" framework, CSOs can support the government's efforts to address religious extremism. They can achieve this by creating awareness campaigns, providing education and training, and advocating for policies that promote religious tolerance and the training of children in virtues that promote the common good.

Multinational Organizations: Multinational organizations, including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and other international organizations, can also play a crucial role

in the "Catch Them Young" framework. These organizations can provide funding, technical assistance, and expertise to support programs that address religious extremism. They can also advocate for policies that promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Religious Institutions: Religious institutions, including churches, mosques, and other religious organizations, are equally critical stakeholders in the "Catch Them Young" framework. These institutions can promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence by providing education and training on the importance of these values. They can also create awareness campaigns and advocate for policies that promote religious tolerance.

It is equally the function of religious institutions to pay more attention in their teachings to cultivating virtues in people especially where it concerns common good. They should equally guide their members and followers in intercultural relations, honest religious dialogs and acts that promote unity.

Parents and Guardians: Parents and guardians are critically important stakeholders in the "Catch Them Young" framework. They can promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence by teaching their children and wards the importance of these values. They can monitor their children's activities and ensure that they do not engage in activities that promote religious extremism.

Youth Organizations: Youth organizations, including youth groups and clubs, are equally important stakeholders in the "Catch Them Young" framework. They can create awareness campaigns and provide education and training on the importance of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. They can also advocate for policies that promote these values.

Corporate Organizations: Corporate organizations can also play a role in the "Catch Them Young" framework. They can provide funding and resources to support programs that address religious extremism. They can also create awareness campaigns and advocate for policies that promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Citizens: They are important stakeholders in the "Catch Them Young" framework. They should be encouraged to promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence by actively participating in their communities and advocating for policies that promote these values. Citizens can report suspicious activities that may lead to religious extremism to the relevant authorities.

Northern Nigerian Elders and the Mallams of the Almajiri System: Northern Nigerian elders and the Mallams of the Almajiri system have a significant role to play in combating religious extremism. The Almajiri system, which involves sending children to Islamic schools to learn the Quran, has been criticized for being a breeding ground for religious extremism. However, Northern Nigerian elders and the Mallams who run these schools can help to prevent this by promoting a more moderate interpretation of Islam and discouraging extremist beliefs.

In addition, these stakeholders can work with government agencies and civil society organizations to address the root causes of religious extremism, such as poverty and lack of access to education. By providing support and guidance to the Almajiri children, they can ensure that they do not fall prey to extremist ideologies.

The Almajiri Children: The Almajiri children themselves are important stakeholders in the fight against religious extremism. Many of them come from poor families and have limited access to education and other resources. As a result, they are vulnerable to extremist ideologies that promise a better life or a sense of purpose. To prevent this, Almajiri children need access to quality education and other basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare. They need support from their families, religious leaders, and community members to help them resist extremist propaganda and ideologies. By empowering these children and addressing their needs, we can prevent them from being lured into extremist groups.

Young Individuals of Nigeria: Young individuals of Nigeria both in the country and in diaspora are important stakeholders in the fight against religious extremism. Many young

people in Nigeria are disillusioned with the status quo and are looking for a sense of purpose or belonging. This makes them vulnerable to extremist ideologies which falsely promise a better future.

To prevent this vulnerability, young people need access to quality education and job opportunities. They also need role models who can inspire them and help them to navigate the challenges they face. In addition, they need to be empowered to participate in the political process and make their voices heard. Instruction in the virtues outlined in this framework is of utmost importance if Nigeria is going to succeed in raising new generations of people who are virtuous and who value the common good of all in a pluralist Nigeria devoid of religious extremism and terrorism.

By working with civil society organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders, young individuals can help to promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. They can also contribute to the development of policies and programs that address the root causes of religious extremism and promote social and economic inclusion.

The fight against religious extremism requires the involvement of various stakeholders. The Nigerian government, the National Orientation Agency, the media, policy makers, civil society organizations, multinational organizations, religious institutions, parents and guardians, youth organizations, corporate organizations, and citizens all have crucial roles to play in the "Catch Them Young" framework. By working together and promoting religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, we can prevent religious extremism and build a more united and peaceful Nigeria.

Programs, Policies and Funding for the Catch Them Young Framework

The catch them young framework is an innovative approach that seeks to prevent young people from being lured into religious extremism. The framework involves providing young people with education, training, and other opportunities that will enable them to resist the influence of extremist groups. The idea is to empower young people to make informed decisions about their future and to contribute positively to their communities.

The funding of the catch them young framework is critical to its success. Governments and non-governmental organizations have a significant role to play in providing financial support for the programs and policies that will arise from the framework. This support will enable the framework to achieve its goals and make a significant impact in the fight against religious extremism.

Programs and Policies

Several programs and policies will arise from the catch them young framework. These programs and policies will focus on educating young people about the dangers of religious extremism, promoting tolerance and inclusivity, and empowering young people to make informed decisions about their future. Some of the programs and policies that will arise from the framework include:

Education and Training Programs: Education and training programs will be developed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to resist the influence of extremist groups. These programs will cover a wide range of topics, including the history and ideology of extremist groups, the dangers of religious extremism, and the importance of tolerance and inclusivity.

Youth Empowerment Programs: Youth empowerment programs will be developed to provide young people with the opportunities they need to succeed in life. These programs will

include vocational training, entrepreneurship, and mentorship programs that will help young people build their skills and knowledge.

Community Engagement Programs: Community engagement programs will be developed to promote dialogue and understanding between different religious and ethnic groups. These programs will involve the participation of community leaders, religious leaders, and other stakeholders who will work together to promote tolerance and inclusivity.

Funding Sources

The funding of the catch them young framework will come from various sources. Governments (the Nigerian government across its three tiers and arms: the federal, the state and the local government tiers; and the executive, legislative, and judicial arms respectively) and non-governmental organizations will play a significant role in providing financial support for the programs and policies that will arise from the framework. Some of the funding sources for the framework include:

Government Funding: Governments can provide funding for the Catch Them Young framework through their annual budgets. This funding can be channeled to relevant ministries, agencies, and departments that will implement the framework.

Private Sector Funding: Private sector organizations can also provide funding for the Catch Them Young framework. This funding can come in the form of corporate social responsibility initiatives, donations, and grants.

International Funding: International organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union can also provide funding for the Catch Them Young framework. These organizations can provide financial support for the implementation of the framework in different countries.

Finally, the Catch Them Young framework is a critical approach in the fight against religious extremism. The success of the framework depends on the programs and policies that will arise from it and the financial support that will be provided for these programs and policies. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders must work together to ensure that the framework is adequately funded, and the programs and policies that arise from it are implemented effectively. With adequate funding and effective implementation, the “Catch Them Young” framework has the potential to be the game changer and make a huge impact in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

Challenges and Limitations of Virtue Education in Nigeria in the Fight Against Religious Extremism

Virtue education can play a crucial role in combating religious extremism in Nigeria, but there are also challenges and limitations to consider. These include:

Cultural Diversity: Nigeria is a diverse country with different ethnic and religious groups. Different groups may have different views on what virtues are important and how they should be cultivated. It is important to recognize and respect cultural diversity while promoting universal values that can help combat religious extremism.

Inadequate Resources: There is a lack of resources, including funding, curriculum development, and teacher training, which can limit the implementation and effectiveness of virtue education programs.

Inadequate Implementation: Even when there are resources, implementation of virtue education programs can be a challenge. There may be insufficient commitment from teachers, parents, and the community to support virtue education programs.

Political Instability: Nigeria has faced political instability, which has affected the education sector. Political instability can affect the implementation of virtue education programs and undermine efforts to combat religious extremism.

Lack of Assessment: There is a need for effective assessment and evaluation of virtue education programs to determine their effectiveness. The lack of assessment can make it difficult to determine the impact of virtue education on reducing religious extremism.

While there are challenges and limitations to virtue education in Nigeria, it is still essential to prioritize virtue education in the fight against religious extremism. Addressing these challenges and limitations will require collaboration among stakeholders, including the government, educators, parents, and communities, to ensure that virtue education is effective in promoting moral character and combating religious extremism.

The Virtue Ethics framework is the best suited for interpersonal relations and social cohesion in a multicultural and pluralist society like Nigeria. In this chapter, I have laid down a Virtue Ethics framework for applying the “Catch Them Young” strategy in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Methodology

In the course of this study, “Catch Them Young: The Game Changer in the Fight Against Religious Extremism in Nigeria,” I utilized a qualitative research methodology. This involved collecting and analysing non-numerical data in order to understand terms, concepts, opinions and experiences. The goal was to gather valuable in-depth insight into the never-ending problem of religious extremism and religious terrorism in Nigeria: the efforts which have been made as a lasting solution; the current state of and the research into the fight; and to generate new ideas for a solution and for further research into the problem based on a relatively new framework, the Virtue Ethics based framework of “Catch Them Young.” This method is different from a quantitative research method which would rely on the collection of numerical data for statistical analysis.

Qualitative research methodology is a commonly used research methodology in the humanities and social sciences such as Anthropology, Sociology, Education, History, and Ethics. In my research design, I used the Almajiri Islamic education system of Northern Nigeria as a case study for the most part in researching religious extremism in Nigeria.

Reason for the Methodology

I chose to utilize the qualitative research methodology because the concern of my research in the first place did not require statistical data or statistical analysis. My research sought to gather valuable thematic insight into the ever-increasing threats posed to Nigeria and Nigerians by religious extremism (especially in its violent forms). This involved the collection and analysis

of non-numerical data in order to understand terms, concepts, opinions and experiences relating to the topic of religious extremism in Nigeria and suggesting how the “Catch Them Young” strategy would be the game-changing direction to follow in the fight. I set down the “Catch Them Young” strategy as a Virtue Ethics framework which prioritizes character education in curricular and non-curricular settings in order to raise up holistically formed, socially responsible Nigerians who would cherish the common good and peace in a pluralist society.

The need for utilizing a qualitative research methodology is evident in the research questions of the study. The research questions and the objectives of the study are as follows:

Research Questions

- A. What is religious extremism and why is it a problem in Nigeria?
- B. What background information is necessary to fully understand the problem?
- C. What approaches to the problem have others discovered?
- D. What were the results of these solutions?
- E. Can early years through adulthood training be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria?
- F. Based on the research, why is the "Catch Them Young" approach advocated as a way to help solve the problem of religious extremism?

Research Objectives

- A. To define religious extremism and its causes in Nigeria.
- B. To evaluate the existing approaches to combating religious extremism in Nigeria.
- C. To create a Virtue Ethics based theoretical framework for the "Catch Them Young" approach to the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

D. To provide recommendations for the implementation of the "Catch Them Young" approach in Nigeria.

Based on the research, there is no literature specifically setting down a virtue ethics-based framework for combatting the scourge of religious extremism in Nigeria. Extant academic material on the education of children as a way to fight religious extremism or terrorism in Nigeria do not touch on the subject of character formation as a main focus. Omoluwa Olusegun, in his article, "Functional Education: A Tool for Combating Terrorism in Nigeria," advocated for the integration of the Almajiri system of education into the mainstream education system with a standardized curriculum, writing that these children should be taught skills that will help them build strong economic bases for themselves and stay out of poverty and consequently out of any dangers of being recruited by religious extremist and terrorist groups. Omoluwa Olusegun did not treat character education or training in virtuous living.

The creation of a virtue ethics framework entitled "Catch Them Young" is necessary as a novel tailor-made framework of character education for the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria.

Data Collection

In data collection, I sourced my material from existing data, relying on archival research and secondary data collection. Here I sought and utilized existing datasets from library books and available repository. These resources included paperback and electronic books, academic journals, other academic works, newspapers, websites, electronic magazines, and other available media sources. My approach to the research sources was thematic analysis.

My lived experience as a priest who was born and bred in Nigeria, and equally worked in Nigeria, albeit in South-eastern Nigeria, contributed immensely to my collection, processing and interpretation of the resources utilized in the study.

The selection of case study materials was based on materials which treated the themes of religious extremism in Nigeria; Almajiri; catch them young; virtue ethics (especially works by or related to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Beauchamp, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Fr James F. Keenan, S.J.); and character education. Google Scholar came in handy, being the easiest way to access academic journals, reviews, and books.

After downloading my source books, journals and other materials, I sorted them into folders according to file types and themes. Then I began the reading with a view toward an analysis of the texts and materials.

I carried out content analysis, putting the resources in categories and discussing them based on the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. I equally conducted content analysis of what I read based on themes and patterns.

In the collection and utilization of data for this research, I took great care in observing all necessary and applicable ethical rules. Sources utilized were duly cited. I did my best to put forth information with due respect.

In order to ensure validity and reliability of information and the avoidance of unnecessary bias in the research and its results, I based my ethical orientation on the Catholic scholastic philosophical and theological traditions.

Evaluation of the Methodology

During the collection and interpretation of data and the organizing of themes, I strove to avoid observer bias that might arise from the fact that I had witnessed Islamic religious extremism play out in my native country, Nigeria. The daily news and the topic on everybody's lips nearly all the time gravitated around security, religious extremism and terrorism. I strove to avoid any form of bias that might arise from what I had witnessed in Nigeria, which could, potentially, taint the process and outcome of my research. "Observer bias happens when a researcher's expectations, opinions, or prejudices influence what they perceive or record in a study. It often affects studies where observers are aware of the research aims and hypotheses. Observer bias is also called detection bias."⁵² Observer bias can occur irrespective of whether one applies a qualitative or quantitative method.

My success in overcoming the observer bias in this study came from applying necessary precautions. My main strategy was to use multiple sources for the data gathering. An example is in the case of the murder of Deborah, the Christian student who was stoned to death in Sokoto by fellow students of the Islamic faith for allegedly speaking ill of the prophet Mohammed on social media. I collected data from social media, blog posts and news media before synthesizing and utilizing the case in a balanced manner in my study.

Another problem I encountered was the lack of literature on the application of virtue ethics or character formation as a framework in the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. I found literature advocating for the application of soft power strategies, however, none emphasized virtue ethics withing that framework, or as a stand-alone framework. In Oluwaseun Tella's opinion on winning the fight against religious extremism and terrorism, he writes:

⁵² Pritha Bhandari, *Observer Bia: Definition, Examples, Prevention*, Scribbr, (Last Revised 13 March 2023), <https://www.scribbr.com/research-bias/observer-bias/>

“While hard power is important to decimate the group, soft power is essential to prevent new recruits.”⁵³ Yet, what are the components of the soft power he advocates? He borrows a leaf from J. Reineheart to explain that soft power “entails people-oriented strategies including capacity building, economic development and counter-radicalisation.”⁵⁴ It involves the use of non-military means to tackle religious extremism and terrorism. Tella, therefore, advocates a balance between hard power (military means) and soft power (non-military means). Yet this non-military means, as advocated by Tella and others, does not include character formation in virtues. This need for a proactive strategy of building the human person in character from an early age had to be formulated as a framework in and of itself. I therefore set out with the project to design a framework I termed “Catch Them Young: The Game Changer in the Fight Against Religious Extremism in Nigeria.”

In order to accomplish the task, I had to apply a qualitative research method in exploring the themes of virtue ethics, virtue, character, character education, the Almajiri, religious extremism, and religious extremism in Nigeria. I explored the feasibility of the virtues and character education in Nigeria.

The design of the framework was successful because the methodology is such that it gives room for the interpretation of available data. The qualitative research method preserves the voice and perspective of both participants and sources, and is easily adjustable as modifications take place in the research questions. It allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis processes even as changes occur with the research questions. The framework is not rigid or decided beforehand. The collection of data takes place in real-world settings. It is all about the lived experiences of the subjects. The data is naturalistic. Meaningful insights are

⁵³ Oluwaseun Tella, “Boko Haram Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: The Soft Power Context,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 6, p. 826, (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909617739326>

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 822.

gained from the observed and detailed descriptions of the experiences of people, their emotions and perceptions which can be applied in designing, testing or improving systems or products. The qualitative method allows for open-ended responses with the implication that the researcher can recognize new problems or opportunities which they would otherwise not have thought. These advantages make the qualitative method more suited for my research than the quantitative method or the mixed method.

There are however practical limitations of the qualitative research method which I effectively handled in the research. Qualitative research is often rendered unreliable by real-life settings due to the presence of uncontrolled factors which affect the data. To address the issue of unreliability, I ensured that I put in place credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable methods. Reliability can be achieved through methods such as comparative sourced articles from peer-reviewed journals. I utilized Google Scholar as my gateway to sources. As for the blogs and newspapers that I used, I made sure that their material regarding events and stories that trended on the mainstream news media were reliable, and I had discussions on those sources with people I trust. In the case where I utilized Wikipedia as my source of information, I made sure to verify that their cited sources were accurate, valid and reliable. I had personal knowledge of the events presented while I was in Nigeria. In the case of the 1980 Maitatsine uprising in Kano which for which I cited Wikipedia, I equally utilized information from the renowned historian Professor Elizabeth Isichei. These research protocols served as an audit trail for me which helped to establish the truthfulness, stability, consistency, neutrality, and transferability of the research findings.

Overall, the utilization of the qualitative method in the research was effective in this study and in creating a virtue ethics framework for the “Catch Them Young” strategy in the fight against religious extremism. It proved to be a flexible methodology in answering the research questions put forward in this study.

Results

The Key Findings

Factors Contributing to Religious Extremism

The research findings indicate that political interests, unemployment, poverty, deprivation, ignorance and inadequate education are the major factors contributing to religious extremism in Nigeria.

A public opinion study by Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo, and Eva Penar on the root causes of terrorism and the objectives of terrorists using Boko Haram as a case study was published in 2018. The study had 1079 respondents from eleven Northern Nigerian states. According to the authors, the survey respondents “essentially confirm many of these causes, with only a few surprises.”⁵⁵ The study showed the following results:

On the statement that terrorists were unemployed people and are easily recruited by sponsors, 80% agreed while 20% disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by poverty and economic problems, 72% agreed, 18% disagreed, while 10% neither agreed nor disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by dislike for the government of the day, 66% agreed, 18% disagreed, while 16% neither agreed nor disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by extreme political ideology, 63% agreed, 19% disagreed, while 18% neither agreed nor disagreed. On whether terrorism was a grand design by politicians to stay in power, 62% agreed, 20% disagreed, while 18% neither disagreed nor agreed. On whether democracy had given room for terrorists to operate, 61% agreed, while 39% disagreed. On whether terrorists

⁵⁵ Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo and Eva Penar, “Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (June 2018), p. 41, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453134>

were influenced by extreme religious feelings, 58% agreed while 42% disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by feelings of regional marginalization 42% agreed, 41% disagreed, while 17% neither agreed nor disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by dislike for democracy, 30% agreed, 46% disagreed, while 24% neither agreed nor disagreed. On whether terrorists were driven by ethnicity, 27% agreed, 50% disagreed, while 23% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Existing approaches to combating religious extremism in Nigeria have not worked

Another finding of the research is that existing approaches to combating religious extremism have not worked. Israel Nyadera, et al, concluded that “the military approach as a counterterrorism measure is not only costly but also inimical to the broader objective of addressing domestic terrorism especially in contexts where insurgent groups thrive as a result of a government’s failure to provide vital public goods and services.”⁵⁶ Nyadera, et al, then argued that the situation called for a mixed strategy of military cum non-military means. “It emphasises the need to utilise a combined approach that factors in military, economic, legal and non-lethal/soft measures. Addressing the root causes of the emergence of insurgent groups and addressing historical injustices does not make a government weak but works to build national cohesion and save the government from costly military operations.”⁵⁷

Echoing the finding that the old ways of responding that were dominated mainly by military means had failed, Aliu Shodunke wrote: “Much of the coordinated response to the violence by the Boko Haram terror group have over the years, been focused majorly on

⁵⁶ Israel Nyaburi Nyadera, Michael Otieno Kisaka, & Billy Agwanda, “Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria: a Nexus of Just War and Fragile State,” *The Round Table*, Vol. 109, No. 3, p. 312, (17 June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1760494>,.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

repressive instruments (airstrikes, ground operations, arrest and detention) and non-lethal mediums (community engagement, offers of amnesty, reintegration, de-radicalisation, demobilisation among others).”⁵⁸

The Need for a New Strategy

These research findings indicate a need for a new strategy of soft power in the fight against religious extremism.

Calling for a new strategy which embraced soft power I. A. Bakare argues that “Soft power lies in the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. Soft power is about influence, example, credibility, and reputation. Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country’s military and economic might. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.”⁵⁹

The Almajiri System in Its Present State is Counterproductive

Results show that the Almajiri system in its present state is counterproductive. Out of 100 Almajiri children interviewed by Omoluwa Olusegun in four states of Northern Nigeria, 68% did not want to live away from their parents until they were grown. 32% did not mind living away from their parents.⁶⁰ 53% were not happy that their consent was not sought before they

⁵⁸ Aliu Oladimeji Shodunke, “Expounding State Response to Terrorism in Northern Nigeria: The Expediency of Reintegrative Approach for Repentant Boko Haram Combatants,” *A Journal of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 14, (December 2021), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/41778-doc-African_Journal_on_Terrorism_V_11_N_2.pdf.

⁵⁹ I.A. Bakare, ‘Soft Power As a Means of Fighting International Terrorism: A Case Study of Nigeria’s “Boko Haram”,’ *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016), p. 287, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/soft-power-as-a-means-of-fighting-international-terrorism-a-case-study-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Omoluwa Olusegun, “Functional Education: A Tool For Combating Terrorism In Nigeria,” *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*, Vol. 2, Special Issue 7 (Nov-Dec 2014), pp. 36-38, <https://www.ijtra.com/special-issue-view.php?paper=functional-education-a-tool-for-combating-terrorism-in-nigeria.pdf>

were sent away to join the Almajiri system. 47% did not mind. 72% were of the opinion that children should only be sent to Koranic schools in town where their parents resided. Only 28% did not mind having their children being sent far away. Only 26% agreed to having feelings for family ties. 74% admitted to having no feelings for family ties. Only 26% agreed to having affection for their parents. 74% admitted to having no affection for their parents. 66% believed that parents should raise their children. 34% had no belief that parents should raise their children.

Questions were fielded in Omoluwa Olusegun's research to find out how vulnerable the Almajiri children were to being recruited for terrorism. 85% of the children agreed to liking economic freedom, which if they could attain, would free them from the shackles of poverty and monetary inducement which were among the major reasons for which many of them joined violent extremist groups. 15% did not like economic freedom. 76% agreed that they would join violent groups if they were given money. 24% disagreed. 88% said they would die for their faith. 12% disagreed. 92% of the children said they were scavenging for survival. 8% said they were not. 100% of the children held that they respected the positions of their Koranic teachers.

Quizzed if they knew that some Almajiri joined terror groups, 67% said they knew. 33% said they did not know.

On the attitude of the Almajiri to western education, their answers were as follows: 8% preferred western education to Islamic education. 92% preferred Islamic education. 73% wanted to learn a trade or vocation. 27% were not interested. 86% said they knew that trade would make them economically self-reliant. 24% did not know. 79% of the children said they did not like begging for food. 21% liked begging for food. 98% said they wanted to be prosperous. 2% did not want prosperity. 48% believed that western education was evil. 52% did not believe western education to be evil.

Early years through adulthood character education can be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria

An important research finding is that the character education of children and youth plays a valuable role in the fight against religious extremism.

In April 2012 former president Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated what he called the new, reformed Almajiri schools in Gaji area of Sokoto state. During the inauguration of the modern schools, he stated that “Our administration believes that the time has come for the nation to build on the moral foundation of the traditional system by providing the Almajiri with conventional knowledge and skills that will enable them to fulfil their creative and productive potentials.”⁶¹

Omoluwa Olusegun called for a functional education curriculum as a strategic tool in reforming the Almajiri education system and modernizing it. “Functional education as a tool can re-focus the value of learners, so as to bring about sustainable peace in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society like Nigeria. Functional education will engender cooperation and mutual dependence in a diverse-religious society. The effective training of the potential source of recruits by terrorist will cease to exist, thus peace and tranquility will prevail. The overall success of functional education would translate Nigeria’s troubled region to a society where the human life and dignity is respected and preserved.”⁶²

In addition, the study reveals that the education and re-education of Nigerian imams under robust international cooperation programs like the Moroccan Sunni Maliki jurisprudence

⁶¹ Hilda Ifeyinwa Okonkwo, and Ibrahim Muhammad Alhaji, “Contemporary Issues in Nomadic, Minority and Almajiri Education, Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.5, No.24, (2014), p.24, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/15251>.

⁶² Omoluwa Olusegun, “Functional Education: A Tool For Combating Terrorism In Nigeria,” *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*, Vol. 2, Special Issue 7 (Nov-Dec 2014), p. 39, <https://www.ijtra.com/special-issue-view.php?paper=functional-education-a-tool-for-combating-terrorism-in-nigeria.pdf>

and Achaari theology can help in guiding Islamic teachers, especially the Almajiri mallams, on the right path and help curtail the growth of Islamic religious extremism. “The Moroccan authorities arranged the occasion for Imams to learn Sunni Maliki jurisprudence and Achaari theology, and also promoted a program arranging literacy classes in mosques nationwide in order to raise the general educational levels of her people.”⁶³

**Research-based proof of feasibility for the advocacy of the “Catch Them Young”
approach as a solution to the problem of religious extremism**

Results show that, based on the success of youth programs with nearly the same goals as the catch them young strategy in other fields and/or in other places, the success of the “Catch Them Young” approach in virtue or character education of the Nigerian child is a feasible game-changing strategy to pursue in fighting religious extremism in Nigeria. A 2016 survey publication of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) metrics in prevention, disengagement and deradicalization programs carried out by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism revealed results that programs targeting the wellbeing and development of the young actually work.

In Victoria, Australia, the program, Youth Service Project, which was a de-radicalization leadership program and pre-criminal space, held an online survey of 18 participants. They were asked what they learned from the program. “62% learned how to be a

⁶³ I.A. Bakare, ‘Soft Power As a Means of Fighting International Terrorism: A Case Study of Nigeria’s “Boko Haram”,’ *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016), p. 287, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/soft-power-as-a-means-of-fighting-international-terrorism-a-case-study-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram.pdf>

good leader; 68% learned how to be a good team member; other reported learned skills included: confidence, accountability, communication skills.”⁶⁴

In Colombia, a study was conducted in a program named the City of Medellin program. The program type was Disengagement/rehabilitation/reincorporation post-conflict space. The evaluation metric was recidivism rates. The evaluation statistics showed “the recidivism rates for the city of Medellin stand at 3%, with 43% of former combatants working.”⁶⁵ In Colombia too, the study by Horgan and Braddock in 2010 of the Reincorporation Program studied post-conflict space, where the evaluation metric was murder rates, the evaluation statistics read: “Colombia National Police Commander General Jorge Castro attributes the drop in murder rates since 2002 by 87% to the Reincorporation Program.”⁶⁶

The US Department of Homeland Security START survey showed more. In a study (by Krafchik in 2011) in the United Kingdom, the name of the program was Lamberth’s Young and Safe program. The program type was both a prison and pre-criminal space program. The evaluation metric was participants’ opinion of the program, an attitudinal survey to measure conformity with social norms, and general data on cooperation of participants. The evaluation statistics read: “66 individuals were referred to the program by the end of January 2011. More than 85% reportedly cooperated with the program organizers, while 7 declined to engage with organizers. Various commissioned projects were associated with the referral project of which overall positive changes in attitudes were reported by participants.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ START, “Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs: Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security,” pp. 16-20, (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence, Led by the University of Maryland: March 2016), https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_SurveyingCVEMetrics_March2016.pdf

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Equally in the United Kingdom, as recorded by START, a study by Hirschfield, et al, in a 2012 program named Youth Offending Team Projects (YOTs); the program type was identified almost exclusively as prison-based interventions; with evaluation metric identified as change in attitude, came up with evaluation statistics: “In 12 of 48 projects, pre and postintervention measures were used to detect changes in attitudes of participants. Positive provisional findings were found, with no more additional details.”⁶⁸

The START surveyed a study in Yemen (by Boucek, Beg and Horgan in Bjørge and Horgan 2009; Horgan and Braddock 2010). The program was Religious Dialogue Committee. The type of program was prison based deradicalization/disengagement program. The evaluation statistics read that: “According to one of the Judges, the program reformed about 40 percent of jihadists.”⁶⁹ Another study in Yemen (by El-Said and Harrigan 2013) in the same program, with the evaluation metric as release rate, recorded the evaluation statistics as follows: “87% of those prisoners that went through the program were later released and reports of a 90% success rate as determined by a judge involved in the program.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, another study (by Al-Hitar in Gunaratna, Jerard and Rubin 2011) with the same program in Yemen, with the evaluation metric as participation rate and release rate, recorded its evaluation statistics as: “In the four sessions held, the first phase involved 104 people, the second involved 120 people, the third involved 76 people, and the fourth involved 462 individuals with each phase receiving positive outcomes. In the third phase, all 76 individuals were released.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Until now, the focus of tackling religious extremism has only been on identifying its advanced stages, when it has started rearing its head in the rhetoric of or in actual violence. At that point whatever solutions that follow are reactions from the government and the general public, which in many cases have turned out to be half-baked and haphazard. No solutions proffered have attempted to solve the issue from its very roots by proactively focusing on the moral education and formation of the moral agent who, in this case, is the Nigerian child, especially the Almajiri child. Rather, what we see especially in Northern Nigeria, the epicenter of religious violence in Nigeria, is the adamant sustenance of the same Almajiri system of Education which has served as the primary source for the recruitment, radicalization, and deployment of impressionable children for all sorts of religio-politically motivated violence and terrorism in Nigeria and West Africa. The critical times which Nigeria finds itself in with religious extremism and the ills of hate and terrorism that go with it pose the critical problem of identifying and implementing a game changer strategy in the fight against religious extremism. This problem has necessitated this study with its thesis “Catch Them Young: The game Changer in the Fight Against Religious Extremism in Nigeria.”

Summary of Key Findings

The research findings indicate that political interests, unemployment, poverty, deprivation, ignorance and inadequate education are the major factors contributing to religious extremism in Nigeria. The existing approaches to combating religious extremism have not worked. The findings of the study indicate a need for a new strategy of carefully designed proactive soft power in the fight against religious extremism. Results show that the Almajiri system in its

present state is counterproductive. The character education of children and young adults plays a valuable role in the fight against religious extremism. Results show that based on the success of youth programs with nearly the same goals as the catch them young strategy in other fields and/or in other places, the success of the “Catch Them Young” approach in virtue or character education of the Nigerian child is a feasible game-changing strategy to pursue in fighting religious extremism in Nigeria.

Interpretations and Implications

Factors Contributing to Religious Extremism

Political interests, unemployment, poverty, deprivation, ignorance, inadequate education, economic problems, extreme political ideology and religious feelings were identified in Chapter 5 as the major factors contributing to religious extremism in Nigeria.

The study by Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo, and Eva Penar on the root causes of terrorism and the objectives of terrorists using Boko Haram as a case study made important revelations. The study had 1079 respondents from eleven Northern Nigerian states. Of 1079 respondents, an overwhelming majority (80%) identified the recruits of terrorists were generally unemployed (and desirous of work); similarly, 72% identified poverty as a principal reason to join the terrorist cause; 66% join for reasons related to dissatisfaction with the current government; 63% held political extreme ideology as the reason for terrorism; 62% believed terrorism to be rooted in some grand design by and for political power; 61% believed that democracy opens the door to terrorist operations; 58% find religious feelings at root; 42% hold religious marginalization for participation in terrorist activities; and 27% hold “unfavored”

ethnicity as a reason for participation, while a majority of 50% did not see “unfavored” ethnicity as the reason for participation in violent extremism.

Adesoji, et al state that according to their results, “unemployment, poverty and economic problems, dislike for government, extreme political ideology and religious feelings, and manipulation by politicians”⁷² were the root causes of terrorism in Nigeria.

The survey however did not confirm dislike for democracy and ethnic bias as causes for joining violent extremist groups. Rather, the desire for revenge against security forces formed an objective for Boko Haram. Less than the majority of the respondents believe that the terrorists fight for political equality, economic equality or the adjustment of regional imbalances as their objectives.

Writing on the reasons that compel the youth to join violent extremist groups in Northern Nigeria, Emeka Dim is not alone in his opinion that the “level of poverty, illiteracy, ineptitude, political instability, corruption, and poor infrastructure embedded in these societies indicates that socio-economic conditions provide the requisite framework for terrorist activities.”⁷³ This opinion perfectly mirrors what we see in real life in those areas in Nigeria which have become breeding grounds or ground zero for the recruitment of members into violent extremist groups in Northern Nigeria. Poverty and illiteracy especially combine in the worst ways possible to weaken people’s moral backbones to refuse monetary inducement and to do the things they would ordinarily not indulge. The ineptitude of political leaders, the corruption that oils that ineptitude, the poor infrastructure that is engendered by the ineptitude

⁷² Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo and Eva Penar, “Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (June 2018), p. 45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453134>.

⁷³ Emeka Eugene Dim, “An Integrated Theoretical Approach to the Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (August 2017), p. 40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48603165>.

and corruption, alongside illiteracy, the abject poverty, and political instability that the people are plunged into resulting from these ills provide a fertile ground for the proliferation of violent extremist groups.

Freedom Onuoha highlights the glaring unemployment and poverty in the North where “Unemployment and poverty are socioeconomic challenges that are not only intricately interconnected but glaringly evident in northern Nigeria.”⁷⁴ Respondents in Onuoha’s research in Borno and Kaduna pointed out that unemployment and poverty constituted the second highest reason that compelled the youth into joining Boko Haram and other violent extremist groups. This reason reflects the primary motivation of participation is for food to eat. According to Onuoha, “83 percent respondents reported that unemployment and poverty are important factors. In Kano, 92 percent cited them as important.”⁷⁵ But are poverty and unemployment enough to compel the youth in the North into joining violent extremist groups? Would unemployment and poverty compel the youth in the other parts of Nigeria to join violent extremist groups too? To this question, Onuoha responds that it is not enough “to argue that unemployment and poverty are direct causes of youth radicalization; rather, privation and other frustrating conditions of life render youth highly vulnerable to manipulation by extremist ideologues.”⁷⁶ The lies and half-truths of the ideologues become more easily believed by the poor masses, whose capacity for discernment has been badly eroded by their miserable socioeconomic situations. He continues that “the tendency to produce suicide bombers is greater in a community defined by mass misery and joblessness than the one in which basic needs of food, education, health, housing, and sanitation are met for the majority of the people.” This

⁷⁴ Freedom C. Onuoha, “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?,” Special Report 348, (The United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC., June 2014), p. 5, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

brings us to the issue of deprivation and how politicians can use it to render the masses poor, uneducated and lacking in capacity for industry. The Almajiri system of education comes to mind too with the fact that they are not trained to be industrious and/or morally sound. By the time they grow up, they have nothing to fall back on for social and economic support. They then become easy pickings to recruit as terrorists for politicians and immoral religious leaders.

Olojo writes that economic deprivation is one of the most important factors that have stimulated violent extremism, recruitment and support for Boko Haram.⁷⁷

Freedom Onuoha took a firm stance that “Ignorance of religious teaching opposed to violence makes youth more vulnerable and susceptible to recruitment.”⁷⁸ Based on his research in Nigeria,

. . . in all the states surveyed, there is unanimity that initial ignorance of religious teaching is the leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially among youth. The lack of deep knowledge of true religious teaching is partly related to three observable dangerous trends in the recent practice of religion in Nigeria: the proliferation of sects in both Islam and Christianity, the proliferation of independent preachers in both religions, and the increasing reliance on preachers rather than on the holy books themselves. As a result, young people are very vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by independent and roaming preachers, extremist groups, and religious ideologues, who often distort religious injunctions.⁷⁹

This state of affairs is where ideologues take advantage of the plight of unsuspecting youth to recruit them into violent groups. When a community is suffering from massive ignorance, and some respected religious teacher comes to perpetuate that ignorance by turning the people against education and enlightenment, as a result of their ignorance, they cannot acquire necessary skills for gainful industry. For these communities, unemployment and poverty are

⁷⁷ Akinola Olojo, “Nigeria’s Troubled North: Interrogating the Drivers of Public Support for Boko Haram,” ICCT Research Paper, (October 2013), <https://www.icct.nl/index.php/publication/nigerias-troubled-north-interrogating-drivers-public-support-boko-haram>.

⁷⁸ Freedom C. Onuoha, “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?,” *Special Report 348*, (The United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC., June 2014), p. 5, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

bound to be the order of the day. From this misery, these political miscreants masking as religious leaders utilize the people as willing tools for all sorts of ills in society.

The practical implication of this finding is that the plight of the subjects of the study fits some established frameworks and, as such, solutions to their situations can easily be proffered based on observable verifiable phenomena.

Failed Existing Approaches and the Need for New Approaches that Work

Meeting violence with violence has not really worked. We have relied on military response as the be all and end all of answers, believing in deterrence. How does a government, which has not provided the basic needs of its citizenry, hope that the barrel of the gun would keep citizens submissive at all times? Feelings of disillusionment and discontent stir people to band up in civil disobedience. That civil disobedience could easily lead to non-government actors forming parallel governments to satisfy the people and gradually eat into their hearts and take control of their loyalty. This situation threatens the government and the stability of the state.

While hard power strategies can be effective in weakening extremist groups, these strategies can equally lead to collateral damage with civilian casualties in numbers that are likely to breed discontent in sections of the populace. The use of military means can lead to feelings of alienation among local populations, which can fuel further extremism by turning the aggrieved against the state and to take sides with violent non-state actors.

This work calls for the government to apply a human face or what might be termed the stick and carrot strategy in dealing with people that claim to have grievances. Nyadera et al argue that a listening government does not mean a weak government. Insurgent groups might sometimes have valid points that need to be addressed, and that is where the government needs to give a listening ear to redress injustice that has been done to any section of the populace.

Having a listening ear is important and can rightly save the state and all stakeholders. Listening is part of the soft power. It equally entails avoiding waste in resources. When a government applies soft power, the resources that could have gone into military causes would be saved and in turn could be redirected to servicing the communities that really need them.

Hassan Amillat of Morocco, commenting on deradicalization, says that “There is no military solution to terrorism.”⁸⁰ He further references David Miliband, a former British Foreign Minister as saying that “‘the war on terror was wrong,’ and it brought ‘more harm than good.’ It has also undermined the search for alternative, more successful approaches to countering violent extremism by giving the impression that only a military solution exists to counter violent extremism.”⁸¹ The carnage witnessed so far in the use of force is mind-boggling, and seems to harden the criminals, and in some cases turn bystanders caught in the crossfire into enemies. Bakare seeks soft power as a means to fight international terrorism with education and other non-violent means.

“The government’s response to Boko Haram has largely focused on the need to stamp out the insurgency through strong military response and heightened activities of intelligence and security agencies. Others have espoused the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach of mounting strategies that at least recognize the root causes of the problem and the angst amongst citizens that contribute to their decision to support terrorist organizations. Our results at least suggest that the public recognizes the concept of grievances and may therefore expect greater socioeconomic intervention strategies as a tool for fighting insurgency.”⁸² There

⁸⁰ I.A. Bakare, ‘Soft Power As a Means of Fighting International Terrorism: A Case Study of Nigeria’s “Boko Haram”,’ *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016), p. 286, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/soft-power-as-a-means-of-fighting-international-terrorism-a-case-study-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram.pdf>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo and Eva Penar, “Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (June 2018), p. 45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453134>.

needs to be dialog for all stakeholders to air their views and communicate their grievances that have led them to take up arms and become violent.

Among the non-lethal means which have not really worked, we have community engagement, offers of amnesty, reintegration, deradicalization and demobilization. Affected communities and the general public do not trust the government. There are no proper consultations between the government and the populace before, during, or after any many decisions are made or put in place. Displaced communities languish in want while the government pampers and not only reintegrates terrorists into society, but equally enrolls them in the military. When the international communities release names of terrorism sponsors in Nigeria, the government does not do anything about it. A number of people in the present government have been revealed to have expressed solidarity with Boko Haram and other extremist movements, however there are no consequences. The current president, General Mohammed Buhari, a few months before he declared interest in running for the presidency in 2014, had volunteered to be the spokesperson for Boko Haram in talks with the Nigerian government and any foreign contractors. Buhari had equally declared that he would not rest until Nigeria had become a Sharia country. The people believe that there has to be meaningful dialog before the offer of amnesty, reintegration, deradicalization and demobilization can work.

Further, interreligious and intercultural dialogue has not really been put to work by the government or the religious organizations in Nigeria. The element of mutual distrust remains.

However, on the use of soft power to eradicate violent extremism one may ask if it would be wise to trust a murderous terrorist to keep their word. It would not be advisable for the state to go into pacts with terrorists and hope they would keep their word. Measures must be put in place to proactively checkmate recidivism. Furthermore, applying strategic soft power moves is the best course of action.

The implication of this study is that the hard power approach has been proven to be incapable of being a standalone approach in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism. It should be reserved as an option of last resort, and hard military power too needs to be complimented with the soft power approach. This finding is supported in the review of the soft power approach to the fight against violent religious extremism in the theoretical framework where Virtue Ethics was laid down as a novel framework for the fight against religious extremism in Nigeria. The Virtue Ethics framework matters because of its proactive way which takes the fight against religious extremism to the level of forming the individual into a morally sound person, who both does good and cares for the common good. The implication is that the soft power approach, education, and virtue ethics are very likely to result in new proactive ways yet to be discovered, developed and promoted in policies and promotions for fighting violent extremism.

The Almajiri System in Its Present State is Counterproductive

The Almajiri system in its present state is counterproductive. The results show that the Almajiri children are being robbed of their childhood and by implication their chances at fulfilled lives. The system by default grooms them and makes them fertile for radicalization and vicious living, deadening their human feelings and the proper functioning of their consciences.

The former Niger state governor and a former chairman of the Northern Governors Forum, Dr. Babangida Aliyu, admitted at a public forum that: “The system of Almajiri served a good purpose in the past... But we have passed that stage now. We have now reached a situation with respect to Almajiri where we have to be ‘wicked’ in order to be good to ourselves. We must say ‘NO’ to this system and then work out how to integrate them (Almajiris)

properly.”⁸³ His opinion echoes that of many Nigerians who have been calling for the Almajiri system to be reformed or scrapped. It is a system which has exploited little children for too long. There may have been times when the system served to educate and train Muslim children to become intelligent, responsible adults; but that time is long gone. The system has become exploitative to the children and destructive to society. The Almajiri children grow in the most deplorable ways possible and mainly serve as fodder to fuel religious extremism, terrorism and all sorts of crime. Most of the children who grow up in the system, as we have seen in the survey, lack empathy and any human feelings for family. If they get married, they are likely to continue that vicious cycle and grow children without good values and character. No one gives what he does not have.

Early years through adulthood character education can be successfully applied as a solution to religious extremism in Nigeria

Many countries in Europe and Africa have signed pacts to have Morocco replicate this success in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism in their respective countries. The Moroccan experience and the surveys cited earlier reveal that education in virtues and character education need to become part of the Nigerian curriculum from early years through adulthood. Curricular and non-curricular character education and virtue training is essential in the raising and training of people who will do good and avoid evil for the sake of being good and not only because of duties that must be fulfilled or laws that must be obeyed. Character education and virtue learning expressed in virtuous living are essential as soft power in the countering of violent extremism. “Character education is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts,

⁸³ Hilda Ifeyinwa Okonkwo, and Ibrahim Muhammad Alhaji, “Contemporary Issues in Nomadic, Minority and Almajiri Education, Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.5, No.24, (2014), p.25, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/15251>.

and states to instil in their students important core, ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others.”⁸⁴

“Education’s role is proactive and preventive rather than reactive to extremist ideologies. Thus, the potential of education to both counter and promote religious extremism reinforces the salient value and role of education overall. Hence, in order to counter violent extremist ideology in the long-term, in a preventive, and cost-effective manner, education must be considered in the discourse on terrorism. This form of education must promote a critical understanding of the world and develop the values and skills of critical and resilient citizenship.”⁸⁵ A well-laid policy leading to a well-structured curriculum for character education with meticulous implementation will see Nigeria win and thrive in a safe, peaceful country devoid of religious extremism and the problems that go with it.

Research-based proof of feasibility for the advocacy of the “Catch Them Young” approach as a solution to the problem of religious extremism

The huge successes recorded around the world with youth programs serve as proof that the “Catch Them Young” approach in the virtue or character education of the Nigerian child is a feasible game-changing strategy to pursue in fighting religious extremism in Nigeria. The 2016 survey publication of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) metrics in prevention, disengagement and deradicalization programs carried out by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism cited in the previous chapter of this study is

⁸⁴ Balraj Singh, “Character education in the 21st century,” *Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (2019), p. 2, doi:10.21831/jss.v15i1.25226.

⁸⁵ Ratna Ghosh, W.Y. Alice Chan, Ashley Manuel, and Maihemuti Dilimulati, “Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, (May 2016), DOI: 10.1080/11926422.2016.1165713

proof. The implications of the findings reveal that, if well-planned and well-executed, youth initiatives will work and impact real lives in the real world.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study is the small sample size, which may not be representative of the entire population of Nigeria. Additionally, the study was conducted using archival research and secondary data collection, paying more attention to the Almajiri of Northern Nigeria, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other states and youth in Nigeria. Another limitation is the possibility of observer bias which happens when a researcher's expectations, opinions, or prejudices influence what they perceive or record in a study, of which I have consciously worked to control.

CONCLUSION

This thesis, *Catch Them Young: The Game Changer in the Fight Against Religious Extremism in Nigeria*, is a study to fashion a Virtue Ethics-based framework for tackling and erasing religious extremism from Nigeria. It has explored the possibility of a radical, non-military, feasible, long-term framework for tackling the menace of religious extremism in Nigeria. The study established that religious extremism which is the belief, advocacy and or pursuit of extreme religious views and ideologies has devastated Nigeria, especially in its most violent forms. The study explored the theoretical frameworks through which the question of religious extremism has been studied. The study probed the approaches which the Nigerian government has applied in its response to violent religious extremism and terrorism in Nigeria.

The findings of the study showed that the condition of the Almajiri child needs salvaging, and that Virtue Ethics is the way to go. The application of the “catch them young” strategy is not limited to the Almajiri child. It is for every child in Nigeria and for every youth and every citizen across the globe.

The research demonstrated that early interventions through education and community programs can have a positive impact on reducing the likelihood of individuals becoming radicalized. The study has shown that religious institutions, schools, and community organizations, the family, and authority figures can play a critical role in providing young people with alternative narratives and opportunities to engage in positive activities that promote social cohesion and interfaith dialogue. Additionally, the government should provide adequate resources to support these programs and ensure that they are accessible to all communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is no single solution to the complex issue of religious extremism in Nigeria. It requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing the root causes of extremism such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

In light of the findings, this thesis recommends the following actions:

- Government should put in place policies and programs that utilize the “Catch Them Young” strategy with special focus on character formation.
- Government should reform the Almajiri system and make it mainstream with a balanced curriculum that pays equal attention to character formation.
- Government should make policies for the training and retraining of the Almajiri teachers ... or scrap the whole system altogether.
- Government should invest in education and community-based programs that promote interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and civic education.

- Stakeholders should strengthen the capacity of religious and community leaders to engage with young people and provide positive role models.
- Stakeholders, public and private, should provide opportunities for young people to participate in civic activities that promote social cohesion and interfaith dialogue.
- Stakeholders should encourage media organizations to report responsibly and objectively on religious issues and avoid sensationalizing extremist activities.
- Government, in conjunction with religious leaders, traditional rulers, think tanks, policymakers, educators and respected members of society should put heads together and utilize the virtue ethics framework provided by this research to create a common ground based on the virtues of the scholastic philosophical tradition to avert the subjectivism of which virtue ethics has been criticized.
- Stakeholders should foster international partnerships to share best practices and resources in combating religious extremism.

This study has developed a framework for the government, policymakers, professionals, educators, researchers, religious leaders, civil society organizations, parents, and citizens alike to utilize in planning policies, programs and curriculums for proactive soft power approaches to the problem of religious extremism in Nigeria. This study equally serves as a reference for creating virtue ethics-based frameworks in the fight against religious extremism and every other form of violent extremism. Further research is needed in the field to give traction to the formulation and utilization of virtue ethics-based frameworks in the fight against religious extremism, terrorism, and in every other field of human endeavor. This traction will help make available more material to researchers, professionals and policymakers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdullahi, Maryam. "Deborah Samuel, Sokoto Student Killed for Alleged Blasphemy, Buried Amid Tears." *The Cable*, May 14, 2022. <https://www.thecable.ng/deborah-samuel-sokoto-student-killed-for-alleged-blasphemy-buried-amid-tears>.
- Abdullahi, Maryam. "The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, (UNICEF) says over 8,000 Nigerian boys and girls have been recruited as child soldiers since 2009." *The Cable*, February 14, 2022. <https://www.thecable.ng/unicef-over-8000-boys-girls-recruited-as-child-soldiers-in-nigeria-since-2009>.
- Adelaja, Adesoji O., Abdullahi Labo and Eva Penar. "Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (June 2018), pp. 35-49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26453134>.
- Agbiboa, Daniel E. "The Social Dynamics of Nigeria's Boko Haram Insurgency: Fresh Insights from the Social Identity Theory." 2015. http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/110_-_Agbiboa_-_ABCA.pdf.
- Albert, Isaac Olawale. *The Socio-Cultural Politics and Religious Conflicts-Inter-Ethnic and Religious Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria*. Lagos: Evans Press, 1999.
- Aristotle. *Nichomachean Ethics*. Trans. ed. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Arjoon, Surendra. "Virtue Theory as a Dynamic Theory of Business." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 28, (November 2000), pp. 159-178. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006339112331>.
- Athanassoulis, Nafsika. "Virtue Ethics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ISSN 2161-0002. <https://iep.utm.edu/virtue/>.
- Bakare, I.A. 'Soft Power As a Means of Fighting International Terrorism: A Case Study of Nigeria's "Boko Haram."' *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016), pp. 285-295. <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/soft-power-as-a-means-of-fighting-international-terrorism-a-case-study-of-nigeria-s-boko-haram.pdf>.
- Bhandari, Pritha. *Observer Bias: Definition, Examples, Prevention*. Scribbr, (Last Revised 13 March 2023). <https://www.scribbr.com/research-bias/observer-bias/>
- "Boko Haram." In Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. (Updated 13 February 2022, 08:30 UTC). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram. Retrieved 27 February 2022.
- "Boko Haram." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. (Updated 10 December 2021, at 20:36 UTC). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram.
- Campbell, Josh. "Should US Fear Boko Haram?" CNN, 1 October, 2013. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/01/opinion/campbell-boko-haram/>.

- Catholic Church. "The Virtues." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCBC, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1803.
<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/443/>.
- Catholic Church. "The Virtues." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCBC, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1804.
<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/453/>.
- Catholic Church. "The Virtues." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCBC, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1806.
<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/446/>.
- Catholic Church. "The Virtues." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (USCBC, Washington DC: 2011), Pt. 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Art. 7, #1808.
<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/446/>.
- Character." In *Britannica Dictionary*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. (2021).
<https://www.britannica.com/character>.
- Dalai Lama. *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.
- Daly, Daniel J. "Virtue Ethics and Action Guidance," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No.4, December 2021, pp.565-582. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00405639211055177>.
- Dim, Emeka Eugene. "An Integrated Theoretical Approach to the Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (August 2017), pp. 35-50. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48603165>.
- Doyle, Denis P. "Education and Character: A Conservative View." *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 78, No. 6 (Feb., 1997), pp. 440-443. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20405818>.
- Edmonson, Stacey, Robert Tatman, John R. Slate. "Character Education: An Historical Overview." *National Council of Professors of Educational Administration* (2009).
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068485.pdf>
- Ghosh, Ratna, W.Y. Alice Chan, Ashley Manuel, and Maihemuti Dilimulati. "Can Education Counter Violent Religious Extremism?" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, (May 2016), pp. 117-133. DOI: 10.1080/11926422.2016.1165713.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. "The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A Revolt of the Disinherited." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Oct., 1987), pp. 194-208.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1580874>.
- Lickona, Thomas. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach respect and Responsibility*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).
- Nyadera, Israel Nyaburi, Michael Otieno Kisaka, and Billy Agwanda. "Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria: a Nexus of Just War and Fragile State." *The Round Table*, Vol. 109, No. 3, (17 June 2020), pp. 298-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1760494>.

- Okonkwo, Hilda Ifeyinwa, and Ibrahim Muhammad Alhaji. "Contemporary Issues in Nomadic, Minority and Almajiri Education, Problems and Prospects." *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.5, No.24, (2014), pp. 19-27.
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/15251>.
- Olojo, Akinola. "Nigeria's Troubled North: Interrogating the Drivers of Public Support for Boko Haram." *ICCT Research Paper*. (October 2013), pp. 1-18.
<https://www.icct.nl/index.php/publication/nigerias-troubled-north-interrogating-drivers-public-support-boko-haram>.
- Olusegun, Omoluwa. "Functional Education: A Tool For Combating Terrorism In Nigeria." *International Journal of Technical Research and Applications*, Vol. 2, Special Issue 7 (Nov-Dec 2014), pp. 35-39. <https://www.ijtra.com/special-issue-view.php?paper=functional-education-a-tool-for-combating-terrorism-in-nigeria.pdf>
- Onuoha, Freedom C. "Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?," Special Report 348, (The United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC., June 2014), pp.1-10
https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf.
- Oyewole, Babatunde. "Insurgency and Buhari's call for full Sharia." *Vanguard*. December 24, 2014.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/12/insurgency-buharis-call-full-sharia/>.
- Patel, Pratik. "Applying Virtue Ethics: The Rajat Gupta Case." *Seven Pillars Institute for Global Finance and Ethics*, 11 February 2013. <https://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/applying-virtue-ethics-the-rajat-gupta-case/>.
- Shia Islam in Nigeria." In *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc. Updated 4 December 2021, at 22:17 UTC. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam_in_Nigeria.
- Shodunke, Aliu Oladimeji. "Expounding State Response to Terrorism in Northern Nigeria: The Expediency of Reintegrative Approach for Repentant Boko Haram Combatants." *A Journal of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (December 2021), pp. 11-30. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/41778-doc-African_Journal_on_Terrorism_V_11_N_2.pdf.
- Singh, Balraj. "Character education in the 21st century." *Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (2019), pp. 1-12. doi:10.21831/jss.v15i1.25226.
- Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson. "Foreword." In *Where peace begins: Education's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding*. By Joanna Wedge (Save the Children, London: UK, The International Save the Children Alliance, 2008).
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/where-peace-begins-educations-role-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding/>.
- Slater, Thomas. "Justice," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 8, ed. Kevin Knight. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm>.
- Tella, Oluwaseun. "Boko Haram Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: The Soft Power Context." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 6, (2018), pp. 815-829.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909617739326>.

The Guardian. "Michelle Obama raises pressure over kidnapped schoolgirls." The Guardian, 14 April 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/10/michelle-obama-nigeria-presidential-address>.

Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. 2nd Rev. Ed. and Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Online ed. Kevin Knight (2017). <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

Yousafzai, Malala M., and Christina Lamb. *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013.