

# IS TERRORISM A PHENOMENON OF A PARTICULAR RELIGION? EVIDENCE FROM BOKO HARAM TERRORIST OF NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The aftermath of September 11, 2011 attacks on World Trade Centre, USA, has drawn the attention of many authors on the concept of terrorism. Many people and particularly Western media perceive terrorism as a Muslims phenomenon. In his response after the September 11 attacks, President Bush termed the attackers as terrorists and later 'Muslim terrorist', 'Muslim fundamentalists', 'Muslims fanatics'. Similarly, in Nigeria terrorism remains a Muslim phenomenon in the eye of Christians. In contrast to this popular perception, Boko Haram terrorist group of Nigeria postulates that terrorists cut across both Muslims and Christians. On this basis, this paper intends to explore several terrorist attacks where involved members of the duo religions. The paper uses secondary sources of data. The study consulted some published journal, reputable newspapers and other relevant sources. It is on this ground that this paper argues terrorism is not a phenomenon of a particular religion rather it is for religion fanatics.

**Keywords:** *Attack, Boko Haram, Fanatic, Religion, Terrorism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Centre, USA has drawn the attention of many authors on the phenomenon of terrorism. The then US President, George Bush termed the attackers as terrorists and later 'Muslim terrorist', 'Muslim fundamentalists', 'Muslims fanatics' [1] (Ogundiya and Amzat, 2008, p.176). In Nigeria many criminal activities especially in the Northern region are now taking advantage of Boko Haram (BH) as a cover. From the evidences explored it can be deduced that BH insurgency is no longer attributed to Muslims alone as widely proclaimed by the sect members, media and members of the community. Members of duo religions (Islam and Christianity) have been partaking in the activities of BH. Religious extremism plays an important role in the BH terrorist activities in Nigeria. Religion has vital and influential

roles with an intricate relationship with political development prior to the nation's independent to post-independent state. To an extent, Nigerian state rarely talks without referring to religion [2] (Bagaji *et al* 2012, p. 34). This paper attempts to examine series of happenings in which some were claimed by BH and some others confessed before the security officers during interrogation have proved to be active members of the sect despite religion differences. This paper deploys secondary sources data from different books, journals, newspapers and reports.

## **11. METHODOLOGY**

The present paper has been developed on the basis of qualitative content analysis by using secondary source data from textbooks, journals, seminar and conference papers and dissertations to elicit the issue of BH terrorist activities in Nigeria.

### **111. THE CONCEPT OF TERRORISM**

The diversity of the concept of terrorism across culture has created problems for a universally acceptable definition. The phrase "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, revolutionaries, rebels, resistance fighters, members of democratic opposition or national liberation soldiers" [2] (Bagaji *et al* 2012, p.35 and [1] Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008, p.167). The president of the National Conference Party in Kashmir, Omar Abdullah argues that "there are no well-defined or internationally accepted criteria to designate...an organisation as terrorist". On the basis of this account, the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan pointed that terrorism has unlimited manifestations. He further stresses that "the only common denominator among different variants of terrorism is the calculated use of deadly violence against civilians". While the terrorists are the violators of the "right to life, liberty and security" [3] (Venkatraman, 2007, p.130-1) upon on every civilian by the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Resolution: 217A (111). However, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the United Kingdom refers terrorism as an effort in which terrorists "directly challenge the authority of democratically elected government to manage their country's affairs peacefully, according to the rule of law and internationally accepted fundamentals of human rights" (ibid, p.230) to meet their objectives. On the other hand the US Department defines terrorism as the "threat or use violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, whether acting for , or in opposition to establish governmental authority, when such actions are intended to shock, stun, or intimidate a target from wider than the immediate victims". [4] (Pickard, 2001, p.5). Going by difference perception of the concept, terrorism remains a non-universal phenomenon.

### **IV. OVERVIEW OF BOKO HARAM**

The word B-H is a combination of two Hausa language words. "Boko" means Western education and "Haram" means sinful or forbidden. Summing together means Western education is sinful or forbidden. However, the name BH was labelled to the sect on the basis of their ideological manifestations, but the official name of the sect is *Jam'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's teaching and Jihad) [2] (Bagaji, 2012, p.37). The Islamic fundamentalist group claims that the evils in society are the aftermath of embracing of Western education as manifested by Nigerian elites.

The ideology and philosophy of BH were stressed by its founder, Mohammed Yusuf as expressed by Tell Magazine:

The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where *orthodox Islam* is practised. Orthodox Islam according to him (Yusuf Mohammed, leader of the sect) frowns at Western education and working in the civil service because it is sinful. Hence, for their aim to be achieved, all institutions represented by government including security agencies like police, military and other uniformed personnel should be crushed [5] (Tell, August 10, 2009, p.34)

Yusuf further stresses that Western education ‘boko’ had brought nothing rather than poverty and untold suffering to the region and was therefore forbidden, or ‘haram’ in Islam. The sect ideology is challenging not only Western education in particular but Western culture as well as modern science. Yusuf states that, “the belief that the world is spherical in shape is a sharp contradiction to Islamic thought and therefore should be rejected along with Darwinism and the theory that rain comes from water evaporated by the sun” [6] (Ekanem, Dada and Ejue, 2012, p.190). Consequently, many members of the sect destroyed their degree, Higher National Diploma (HND) and other educational certificates and renounced Westernization as a sign of their faith [7] (Nmah, 2012, p.111).

The ideology of BH is to Islamise Nigeria society through radicalism. In a statement issued by the temporary leader of the sect, Sani Umar after the extra-judicial killing of the sect’s founder (Mohammed Yusuf) stressed: “That we have started a Jihad in Nigeria which no force on the earth can stop. The aim is to Islamise Nigeria and [to] ensure the rule of the majority Muslims in the country. We will teach Nigeria a lesson, a very bitter one” [8] (Cook, 2011, p.15). However, later in the year, during the first anniversary of the murder of the sect’s founder, the sect spokesman, Abu Zayd stressed that:

..... This is the government that is not Islamic. Therefore, all its employees, Muslims and non-Muslims, are infidels. This is a Government which naturally fights Islam because Muslims were killed in Zangon-Kataf (Kaduna state), in Jos and Southern Kaduna but the perpetrators have never been prosecuted by the so-called existing laws of the land. Mosques were destroyed and punishment for this is death. Therefore, we have the right to kill them all. But if there are people who profess Islam and do not take part in Government or Western education, their blood and wealth are sacred unless otherwise [sic] (ibid, p.19).

Whether right or wrong the sect claimed that their extremism was to protect their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters’ lives and property that they said the government of the country failed to do. This assertion was clearly stated by the sect’s leader, Abubakar Shekau as the reason behind the December 2011 Christmas day attacks on the Jos branch of the Mountain of Fire Church and the suicide bombing of the St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla was in vengeance against the massacre of Muslims at their praying ground during Eid congregational prayer. In his statement made shortly after the attacks, he alleged that the flesh of Muslims was roasted and eaten publicly by the Christian Berom in Jos without condemnation by the Christian Association of Nigeria

(CAN) [9] (Ahmed and Akins, 2012). However, according to [10] Leadership Newspaper, May 21, 2012 “neither was there anything done to apprehend those who committed such barbarism” ,

Due to lukewarm attitude of the Nigerian government on many issues of security concern, made some people perceived that those people in power have special interest on the menace. That means they want to use the country's unrest as a yardstick to fumigate their hidden agenda.

## **V. ISLAMIZATION OR POLARIZATION AGENDA?**

Since the extrajudicial killing of the Yusuf (1<sup>st</sup> BH leader) together with hundred members of the sect members, BH insurgency has taken various dimensions which culminated into widespread suspicion in the country that is this true BH activities translate the ideology of Islamizing of the country as claimed by the sect. If so, how can Christians partake in the activities of the sect?

## **VI. BOKO HARAM ATTACK CHURCHES**

It is pertinent that BH claimed the responsibilities of so many attacks on Churches with a lot of casualties. For instance, the attacks on St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, near Abuja's on Christmas day, at least 32 people were killed. The attacks generated religious tension that many people especially the President of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) who claimed that it is a religious war launched against Christians [11] (Reuters News, December 25, 2011). However, on the other hand, the then President Goodluck Jonathan denied such allegation [12] (France 24 News, December 31, 2011). Furthermore, in a response to such allegation by the CAN, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, highest Muslim supreme leader, President of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) argued that it was impossible for an individual or groups to Islamize Nigeria, “...Muslims in Nigeria are not out to Islamize Nigeria because it is not possible...” [13] (Vanguard Newspaper, June 13, 2014, p.15). BH members bombed Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger state on July 10, 2011. The attack of the Christian worshippers in Kano and Maiduguri all on April 29 2012 caused at least 19 casualties. Again, attacks on congregation of a church in Biu town, Borno State in June 2012, and suicide bombing on Christ Chosen Church, Jos was claimed by sect. However, similar attacks were launched on various Churches but no one claim responsibility. A bomb attack on a church in Kaduna State in June 2012 had instigated a revenge attack by the Christians against Muslims which at least killed 90 people. Another suicide attack took place at the St. Andrew Military Protestant Church, Jaji barracks in Kaduna state killing 11 people and wounding 30 [11] (Reuters/Janes, 2012). Many Christians were killed and churches were burnt by the insurgents. However, the insurgency caused more casualties on Muslims than the Christians counterpart as stressed by the Nigerian former President Jonathan , “insurgents killed more Muslims than Christians” [14] (Daily Trust Newspaper, June 21, 2013, p.4).

## **VII. CHRISTIANS BOKO HARAM? ATTACK CHURCHES**

It is well known that BH claim as Muslims but from the various happenings it appear that a lot of Christians are deeply involved in the sect activities which make some people perceive it as a deliberate attempt to create insecurity in the country for the interest of few elites. Therefore, it could be a mixture of some Christians and Muslims just as there are gangs of armed robbers with membership cutting across religious and ethnic lines. In line with this, the former Governor of Ekiti State as well as Chairman, Security Committee Governors Forum,



Kayode Fayemi in his paper presented at Chatham House, London says BH has been divided into different dimensions because criminality pays in Nigeria. He further stresses “BH has many strands. There is political BH; there is ethnic BH; there is religious BH and there is economic BH” [15] (Daily Trust Newspaper, November 29, 2012). Clear evidences of this assertion are the score of suspects arrested by the security agents across the country. The arrested Christian suspect of Gombe Deeper Life Church attack on worshippers on Thursday January 5 2012 by an *Igbo* tribe had claimed the responsibility by BH [16] (New Nigerian Newspaper, September 6, 2012). In furtherance of the polarization agenda, [17] Leadership newspaper of January 15 2013, p.9 reported that another Christians (names withheld) were reported to have burnt down the Church of God Mission International in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Similarly, [18] Leadership Newspaper of February 26 2012 reports that two suicide bombers attacked COCIN Church Headquarters in Jos during service. However, shortly after the attack, the Nigeria Defense Headquarters identified Mr. Adams Joseph Ashaba, a member of the church “as the BH suicide bomber” who allegedly masterminded the bombing. Simultaneously, nine Christians were arrested attempting to bomb COCIN Church at Miya-Barkatai, Bauchi state in persons of Lambu Goma, Filibus Danasa, Joshua Ali, Danjuma Sabo, Joseph Audu, Simon Gabriel, Bulus Haruna, Yohanna Ishaya and Daniel Ayuba, [19] (Daily Trust Newspaper, February 27, 2012). In spite of these scenarios, the President, COCIN church, Rev Dachollom Datiri apportsions all the terrorist attacks against Muslims, who stresses that “BH is a child of Islamic fundamentalism nurtured over the years by radical Muslims youth groups, trained and indoctrinated both locally and internationally by extremists to hate and kill Christians” [20] (Thisday Newspaper, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.62). In Another related scenario the [21] Leadership Newspaper, February 22, 2012,p.10 reported that four persons were arrested while trying to detonate explosives at the St. Theresa’s Catholic Church in Makurdi, Benue State capital. The State Police Public Relations Officer stated that “those four persons arrested were Christians and not BH members as speculated by members of the public.” Additionally, another link between BH and Christianity was the November 11th, 2010 incident where a Christian woman named Lucy Dangana of Benue State arrested with 10 AK rifles and 9 magazines in Maiduguri, Borno State. During the interrogation, she confessed that, she was trying to deliver the arms to BH sect [22] (News+Rescue, March 10, 2012). Furthermore, Emmanuel King, a Christian from Edo State, who disguised as a Muslim wearing a turban and kaftan has been arrested while attempting to burn Redeemed Church in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State [23] (Daily Trust Newspaper, December 28, 2011). Further evidences that prove the Christians involvement in BH was the alleged relationship between the former Minister of Information and also Chieftain of the ruling party, People Democratic Party (PDP) Professor Jerry Gana, a Christian who was believed to be the godfather of the deceased BH leader (Yusuf). This assertion was proved by the Financial Secretary, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) of 19 Northern states in person of Reverend Joshua Maina while speaking to the [24] Sun Newspaper on November 4, 2012 stressed: “Who created BH? Accepted it was Mohammed Yusuf, but who sent Jerry Gana to bail Yusuf?...”. Furthermore, the arrest of a servicing police officer (a Christian) with explosive devices attempting to burn Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in Akwanga, Nasarawa state [25] (Sunday Trust, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.5) was another scenario on whom to be held responsible in terrorizing the country? Similarly, two Nigerians and an Israeli were arrested by South Africa securities with \$9.3m for arms deal in the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), President’s Jet. However, the Federal Government claims ownership of the money, “...the money belongs to the Nigeria government” says

by the then Chairman, National Assembly Defence Committee, Senator, George Thompson [26] (Leadership Newspaper September 25, 2014, p.41), but the names of the two Nigerians yet to be disclosed. Later, the CAN President, Oritsejafor claimed the ownership of the jet but denied his involvement in the arms deal [27] (Daily Trust Newspaper, September 17, 2014, p.3). Although the three suspects in the jet confessed before the South Africa's securities that they were there to purchase arms for Nigerian security services [28] (Thisday, September 15, 2014. This scenario came after \$1bn foreign loan requested by the former President Jonathan was approved by the Senate Committee to procure arms to curtail BH insurgency in addition to the approved N1trn for security in 2004 budget [29] (Daily Trust Newspaper, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.11). Here, to pose other questions: how can a personal jet which was purchased primarily for religion activities been involved in business activities and most worrisome arms deal? Why the Federal Government used private jet to carry the money, while the government has several airplanes? Why the money was not accompanied by the officials of National Security Adviser or Director of State Security? It is worthy of note that the aforementioned scenarios express the involvement of Christians in various crimes in connection with terrorism in the country.

#### **V111. BOKO HARAM ATTACKS MUSLIMS**

BH insurgency as earlier mentioned has remains a confusion phenomenon in Nigeria. The series of attacks on the fellow Muslims and their places of worships have contradicted the moral philosophy of Islamic religion which they claimed they are fighting for. The Holy Qur'an chapter 4, verse 93 says "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him". Further, in another verses of the Holy Qur'an revealed that:

O you who believe;....[do not]kill yourselves, for truly  
Allah has been to you most merciful. If anyone do that  
in rancour and injustice, soon shall we cast him into the  
fire of hell.....[ 30] (Q An-Nisa 4:29-30, p.111).

You shall spend in the cause of God, do not throw yourselves  
with your own hands into destruction...[31] (Q Al-Baqara 2:195).

On [32] July 13, 2012, BBC News Africa reported that, a suicide bomber targeted a renowned influential Muslim leader, the Shehu of Borno who is the second Muslims leader in a hierarchy during Friday congregational prayers at the mosque. Though, he was narrowly escaped, but five people were killed during the attacks. However, prior to this incident, the Shehu's younger brother was assassinated in Maiduguri in which BH claimed responsibility. The BH sect has little or no regard to Nigerian Muslims leaders. It is vital to note that not only the second Muslims leader, even the highest Muslim supreme leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, President of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and 18<sup>th</sup> among the 500 most influential Muslims in the world [33] (Daily Trust, September 12, 2014, p.8) was threatened for attack by the sect as stated by the sect spokesman, Abul Qaqa [34] (Pham, 2012, p.2). Similarly, the Emir of Fika in Potiskum, Mohammad Abali, and the top Muslim traditional leader in Yobe state escaped suicide bombing attack during Friday congregational prayers on August 3 2012. The attack left several people



wounded [35] (Vanguard Newspaper, August 3, 2012). Additionally, the members of BH invaded mosque and sporadically opened fire on the Muslims worshippers in Sheka, Kano metropolis and killed five people. The same incident happened on Friday April 13 2007 where gunmen entered the Dorayi central mosque during morning prayers and killed a renowned Islamic scholar, Sheik Jafar Mahmud Adam who was formerly a teacher to the first BH leader, Mohammed Yusuf before their dispute in an attempt to re-radicalize him (Yusuf) [36] (The Nation Newspaper, February 25, 2012). BH also claimed responsibility for killing some renowned Islamic scholars in Maiduguri: Bashir Kashara on October 9, 2010, Ibrahim Abdullahi Balori on March 13, 2011, Ibrahim Birkuti on June 7, 2011 and Mallam Dalu on September 4, 2011 [8] (Cook, 2011, p.17 and [37] BBC News Africa, June 17, 2011).

Moreover, the two suicide bombers attacked the former military Head of State and the incumbent President, General Muhammad Buhari and a prominent Islamic cleric who is a national leader of an Islamic sect, *Tijjaniyya Movement*, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi on July 23, 2014. Few days before the incident, the cleric was critical in commentary of verse 5 in chapter five of the Holy Qur'an which prohibits killing of any human being. The chapter states that it is un-Islamic for any individual or group to kill people [38] (Sunday Trust, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.6). This could be another incident that postulates BH members cut-cross both religion bodies. The sect also killed a famous Islamic scholar, Sheik Musa Misra and four others Muslims in a mosque in Nafada, Gombe state [39] (Daily Trust, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.6). Another tragic attack of the insurgents was at central mosque, Kano during the Friday congregation prayers. The three bomb blasts and sporadically shootings resulted to the death of over 100 people and injured another hundreds [40] (Vanguard Newspaper, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.5 and Thisday Newspaper, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, p.1). Involvement of both Muslims and Christians in the insurgency remained an outstanding question whether BH means to Islamise Nigeria or a hidden agenda to polarize the country.

## 1X. CONCLUSION:

The paper discussed on how BH terrorist attacks on the basis of waging Islamic war against non-Muslims in the country. The sect's uphold ideology to Islamize the country resulted to many attacks on both Muslims and Christians and their places of worshipping. However, some Christians were involved in various terrorist attacks claimed membership of the BH. It is common to hear that terrorism is a Muslims phenomenon. Contrary to this wider perception, the various attacked postulate that terrorist cut across both Muslims and Christians. The paper argued that terrorism in Nigeria is not a phenomenon of a particular religion rather is a tool for achieving polarization agenda.

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