

Colonial Construction and Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Relating the Present to The Past

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's political history has been marred by various forms of crises that have continued to retard the political and economic development of the country. The latest being the Boko Haram insurgency which has compounded an already critical security situation in Nigeria. Utilizing the secondary form of data collection, the paper argues that the Boko Haram insurgency is a reflection of the north-south dichotomy and the attendant problems arising thereof. It opines that the separatist policy of the colonial administration helped to keep the ethnic consciousness of the people alive and this has grown stronger with time. The paper traces these current problems to the foundation of the Nigerian state as evident in the 1914 amalgamation. The paper identifies bad leadership as a major reason why the country has not been able to overcome the problems created by the colonialists in 1914. The paper concludes that the inability of successive Nigerian governments to address the various socio-political issues culminated in its escalation. The Boko Haram insurgency is thus one of such logical outcomes of cumulative governmental negligence and the foundation created by the colonial construction.

Keywords: Insurgency, Boko Haram, Nigerian-state, Crisis, Security

INTRODUCTION

Since the attainment of independence in October 1960, the Nigerian state has been beset with series of problems and challenges. These problems which are economic, social and political in nature have continued to threaten the unity and corporate existence of the Nigerian state till date. The issues of social identity, fear of domination amongst others are some of the problems that have plagued the Nigerian state from its early years of independence in the first republic to the present fourth republic. The first, second and third republics could not stand the test of times due to the fact that the Nigerian state lacked the capacity to address lingering issues that kept resurfacing

The fourth republic began with high hopes that the country had finally overcome the problems of the early years of its independence but little had Nigerians relaxed to enjoy their new democracy that the same problems and issues resurfaced. The fear of domination by one zone over the others, national integration, social identity, security, power struggle, minority question, devolution of powers, resource control etc. which were problems of the past republics re-emerged. For example, the issue of resource control intensified under the military regimes and the poor handling of the issue led to emergence of militants in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. There have been series of kidnappings and killings in the region and the activities of the militant groups affected the exploration of crude oil, which is the major source of revenue generation for the government of Nigeria.

Lately, the Boko Haram insurgency particularly in the north eastern part of Nigeria has resulted in the death of many people. Never in the history of Nigeria, with the exception of Nigerian civil war, has the country recorded such number of deaths within a short period of time. Apart from rejecting western education and their desire that Sharia laws be imposed in all northern states of the federation, their desires and demands have remained relatively baffling. The dichotomy between the north and south and the subsequent problems that have emanated from it have once again made political analysts, commentators and scholars of Nigeria Government and Politics to question the rationale for the bringing together the separate protectorates by the British in 1914. Blame has been placed on the constitution. Scholars, political analysts and social commentators have insisted that the Nigerian constitution is a military constitution and as such it does not represent the views, wishes and aspirations of the citizens of Nigeria. This has engendered the constitutional review process currently in the National Assembly and Constitutional Conference in Nigeria. Today, the Nigerian political system is so tensed that the security situation in the country has become a subject of national discourse. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in May 1999, armed non-state groups, largely young men as foot soldiers, have significantly undermined the country's internal security environment (Onuoha, 2014). The Boko Haram sect in the north has embarked on a

string of reckless, needless and mindless killings and bombings in the country. Lives have become so cheap that on regular interval, suicide bombings and attacks by the Boko Haram sect has left thousands of people dead.

The paper examines the activities of the Boko Haram sect linking it to the undercurrent national division as manifested in the politics of exclusion that has promoted a sense of relative deprivation among the marginalized communities in northern Nigeria. Attempt is made to draw a nexus between the Nigerian state, Boko Haram's activities and the sense deprivation felt by the marginalized communities. The genesis, strategies, arguments and targets of the Boko Haram sect are also highlighted. Finally, an attempt is made to establish a link between the existence of Boko Haram with the politics of the present and that of the past.

THE NIGERIAN STATE, BOKO HARAM AND THE RELATIVE DEPRIVATION CONCEPTION

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state consisting of more than 250 groups, many of which speak distinct primary languages and are concentrated geographically (Oladele, 2004). The amalgamation of 1914 did not result from any agreement between the various ethnic and religious groups that make up the Nigerian society. This diversity has continued to reflect in the polity of the country with the north always wanting to have control of political power. The country is violently divided along regional, ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. There are three majority ethnic groups, namely the Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Christian Igbo in the Southeast and the Yoruba, which has almost an equal population of Christians and Muslims in the Southwest. These ethno-religious identities have constituted instruments of mobilization and contestation in the struggle for power and resources (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012).

Following the amalgamation of North and South by the British, divisive tendencies were created and it existed alongside the colonial state (Otoghile, 2012). Despite Lugard's amalgamation of 1914, the colony and protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria continued to be administered separately. According to Iyekekpolo et al (2011),

“The colonialist in their intra-European struggle for the soul of Africa ended up creating entities with diversity of languages and cultures and the attendant problems which later bedeviled post-colonial Africa. In the case of Nigeria, the foundation of this unfortunate malady was formally laid in 1914 when Frederick Lugard amalgamated the two separate territories of North and South. Even long after the amalgamation, the two territories were separately administered thereby creating disparities in their level of socio-political and economic development. In other words, it could be reasoned from this background that Nigeria as at 1914 had been implanted with enough seeds of discord that would mar its future political stability and consolidation.”

Also, the ‘Sabon Gari’ phenomenon which the colonial administration adopted helped to keep the ethnic consciousness of the people alive. This was a situation whereby migrants (people who moved to the north) were made to live in Sabon Gari (an area designated for foreigners only) while the natives lived in Tudun Wada. Attoh and Soyombo (2011) posited that colonialism introduced the concept of ethnicity through the policy of segregation which engendered mutual distrust and acrimony. According to them, it was the policy of the British to separate the Hausa-Fulani from their southern brothers and sisters. They concluded that the colonialist reinforced regional politics through the policy of ‘Sabon Gari’ in the north to ensure that the North had no closer interaction with its Southern brothers and sisters. The approach used by British administrators in administering the young Nigerian state which were part of the policy of rule by proxy (Indirect rule) further helped in keeping the North and South apart. This assertion is validated by Osaghae (2002:5). According to him,

“While most part of the North were shielded from Western influences, especially education and Christian missionary activities, in accordance with a pact Lugard was said to have signed with emirs, they were allowed free rein in the South”.

The North/South dichotomy which pervades the present day Nigerian political system has its root in the colonial government in which the ‘rule by proxy’ system was adopted to administer the new creation. The rule by proxy system although recorded relative success in the north, failed woefully in the south due to the lack of understanding of the social and political structures in the southern states. In spite of its failure, British administration continued to use it, not minding its impact on the social order of the host communities and

societies as long as it was economically imperative and expedient for Britain (Alao, 2013). This shows that the amalgamation by the British was not borne out of the desire to create a political entity by bringing the two provinces together but solely for maximum exploitation. From thence, series of political, economic, ethnic, regional, social and cultural issues began to emerge in Nigeria. This is so because according to Otoghile (2012), each protectorate had a distinct colonial bureaucracy which fought zealously to retain its own autonomy. The officials of the two different bureaucracies spoke different official languages. The above feature and the subsequent national issues such as power group, resource control etc. that emanated from it led scholars to assert that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression. According to Alao (2013:464);

The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation that distinguishes those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. Since the amalgamation of the southern and northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper; it is still far from being united.

The reason for the decision of the British Government to amalgamate the two incompatible territories was purely financial or economic in nature. The Northern Protectorate was not economically viable. It had become a great drain on the British tax payer. On the other hand, the Southern Protectorate was not only economically buoyant; it was producing surpluses every year. The British design was, therefore, to remove the Northern financial burden from its own neck and hang it on the neck of the hapless Southern Protectorate (Sagay, 2001). According to Alao (2013), the bringing together of the two provinces was because the economically rich south was needed in a union with the impoverished north to enable the British govern the two disparate entities at the least cost to the imperial purse. This action appeared to have sowed the seed of discord between the north and south. The north aware of their disadvantaged situation in terms of economic power have sought to cling on to political power at all cost; or at least not allow political power be out of their 'hands' for too long. The north, specifically the northeast is pervaded by state deprivation which has resulted in a frustration-aggression approach and resistance against corporate misgovernance in the state. This has made brutality, violence and insecurity commonplace in the region.

The north, especially northeast Nigeria feels dissatisfied; they feel they have less than what they should and could have. This dissatisfaction has led to frustration and the rebellion against the Nigerian state by insurgents. According to Gurr (2005), cited in Agbiboa (2013), structural poverty and inequality within countries are breeding grounds for violent and political movements in general and terrorism in particular.

The finding of a study carried out by CLEEN Foundation in Nigeria (2013) cited in Onuoha (2014), revealed that the causative factor of group extremism are economic, social and political in nature. In Borno state, the birth place of Boko Haram, 83% of young people are illiterate; 48.5% of children do not go to school. Also, literacy level is much lower among states in the north; and 72% of children between the ages of 6 and 16 never attended school in Borno state, where Boko Haram was found (Agbiboa, 2013). There is high level of poverty in the north with the northeast recording 64.8%, northwest 61.2%; while on the other hand, southeast recorded the lowest rate of 31.2% and 40.2% in the southwest (NBS, 2010 cited in Agbiboa, 2013).

The above data show that some level of deprivation is quite visible northern Nigeria. Onuoha (2014) postulated that "unemployment and poverty (which are outcome of the deprivation) make youths vulnerable to radicalization. Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that the country's unemployment rate in 2006 averaged 14.6% until 2011 when it got to 23.9%. NBS figures released in early 2013 revealed that poverty rate increased from 54.7 % in 2004 to 60.9% in 2010. In 2011, 100million Nigerians lived in absolute poverty and 12.6million more were moderately poor and the worst hit by this problem are the young people, especially in northern Nigeria (Onuoha, 2014). In the opinion of Forest (2012), cited in Agbiboa (2013), the situation is further compounded by the predominant perception in northern Nigeria that the wealthy elite throughout the country tend to be Christians while the most impoverished communities in the country are found among the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and other northern groups- all primarily Muslims.

In Borno state, unemployment and poverty is the second most important reason why youth engage in religious based violence (Onuoha, 2014). As Komolafe (2012) argued "even if unemployment and poverty are not the main factors responsible for radicalization in Nigeria, the tendency to produce suicide bombers is greater in a country defined by mass misery and joblessness than one in which basic needs of food, education, health,

housing and sanitation are met for majority of the people. According to Onuoha, (2014) Illiterate people are more easily manipulated because their state of social deprivation denies them the capacity and knowledge to critically question the narratives and doctrines of extremist groups. He went further to state that while illiterates do not manufacture the bombs that the Boko Haram uses, arrest records suggest that the real armies of suicide bombers and terrorists' foot soldiers are drawn from such dissatisfied (in other words deprived) population. Boko Haram leverages on the vulnerability of the deprived youths to deepen their process of recruitment and radicalization.

Part of the arguments of the Boko Haram is that it is fighting for social justice. The root cause of the Boko Haram is said to be poverty and unemployment driven by bad governance and corruption (Osumah, 2013). Many of the members attracted by Boko Haram are animated by deep-seated socioeconomic and political grievances, such as poor governance and elite corruption (Agbibo, 2013). Having seen that the north is playing catch up to the south due the economic and social deprivation occasioned by structural and grinding poverty, educational backwardness, mass unemployment etc. the northern may have decided to pitch the Boko Haram against the Nigerian state. The attacks by the sect left the prospect for human security in Nigerian to be grim (Agbibo, 2013). Their level of sophistication and the trajectory of their approach is a function of dwindling fortunes. Isa (2010) posited that Boko Haram had been wrecked by poverty, deteriorating social services and infrastructure, educational backwardness, rising number of unemployed graduates, massive number of unemployed youths, dwindling fortunes in agriculture and the weak and dwindling productive base of the northern economy.

Boko Haram has deployed political violence as a strategy of resistance against the Nigerian state in reaction this deprivation, exclusion and inequity. Political violence is a pervasive phenomenon particularly in Africa's political processes. It is an instrument of social construction or deconstruction of power in terms of inequity or equity hegemony and counter hegemony, representation or exclusion and incorporation or opposition (Ikelegbe, 2004). Boko Haram has unleashed mayhem on the political system in an attempt to draw the attention of the world to the corporate misgovernance in the Nigeria state. The north comprises of a set of marginalized, impoverished, alienated and disillusioned people. The struggle for resource opportunities and the failure or delay in attaining them results in frustration and subsequently, aggression against the state. It has been asserted by northern elite that the insurgency in the north is attributable to the unequal distribution of Nigeria's oil wealth which is shared on the basis of derivation instead of population which is the north comparative advantage (Fabiya, 2012).

BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: GENESIS, ARGUMENTS, STRATEGIES AND TARGETS.

The inability of the Nigerian state to set up lasting and viable structures that can reasonably accommodate the divergent interests of the different ethnic groups has placed the Nigerian state at the risk of disintegration. The various groups are struggling for one form of attention or the other. Some are fighting for recognition, others for relevance while some others for resource control (Oronsaye & Igbafe, 2012). There are different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups in Nigeria; but this paper focuses on the Islamic sect, Boko Haram. This section explores the genesis of Boko Haram, its arguments, its adopted strategies/methods and targets.

Genesis

Boko Haram is an Islamic religious sect found in northern Nigeria. Although there are conflicting reports as to the exact time the group was formed and who founded it, this conflict has however not undermined the content of the character of the group and what it has turned out to become. According to Mohammed (2009), cited in Udo (2012), Boko Haram was founded by one Abubakar Lawan from Kano in the mid-1990s as a religious group that preached the opposition of Western education and values in northern Nigeria. Another school of thought stated that Boko Haram was formed by Muhammad Yusuf in early 2000s. According to Salihi (2012), cited in Ibrahim (2012), Boko Haram's original name was 'Jama' at Ahlis Sunnah Liddaiawati Wal Jihad (literally translated as the movement for call and striving in the way of God). They are also called 'Yusufiyya' which was adopted from the name of the leader Muhammad Yusuf. According to Ibrahim (2012), Yusufiyya emerged from among the youths that used to congregate at the Muhammad Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno state for Qur'anic exegesis that was conducted by the late Islamic scholar, Sheikhja'afar Mahmud Adam, during the month of Ramadan. The attitude of Muhammad Yusuf which presumably was deviant in nature put him at loggerheads with Sheikhja'afa and the Mosque management. His (Yusuf) deviant behaviour made him relocate to another Mosque within the town which could not also tolerate him. Upon his failure to pitch his tent in either of the Mosques, he decided to set up an Islamic centre called Ibn Taymiyya which was to serve a dual purpose of

being a learning centre and a rallying point for the struggle and nurturing of the group (Salihi, 2012, cited in Ibrahim, 2012). From thence, the group attracted followership from within and outside northern Nigeria. The membership of Boko Haram is drawn largely from the teeming unemployed, poor and uneducated youths in the region, and also illegal aliens recruited from sister countries in Africa such as the Republic of Benin, Chad, Niger, Sudan, Somali and Mauritania (Osumah, 2013).

Generally, Boko Haram is widely translated to mean ‘Western education is forbidden’. The emergence of Boko Haram is related to the political and economic hardship including the incapacity of the government to meet the expectation of many which resulted in frustration (Ibrahim, 2012). The group parades religious extremists pushing for the enthronement of Sharia laws and abandonment of Western education in the region. Their activities have sent jitters down the spines of the old and young in the northeast states of Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba (Oronsaye & Igbafe, 2012). But lately, their actions have shown that what the group seeks is beyond just the enthronement of Sharia laws and abandonment of Western education in the region as they have attacked cities and killed innocent people outside of the northeast region of Nigeria. The Boko Haram sect went wild after their leader/mentor was killed in 2009. Prior to this, the group was engaged in armed struggle and attack on police formations in Yobe and Borno state in 2004 and 2005. Today, the Boko Haram sect has been labeled a terrorist group.

The Boko Haram sect has carried out series of terrorist attacks which have called to question the efficacy of the nation’s security agencies. According to Global News Reel, cited in Odu (2012), Boko Haram is an Islamic religious sect and terrorist group that believes Nigeria is run by non-believers because of its dissent for democracy and opposition to Western education and insistence on Sharia laws across the country.

Arguments

One argument of the Islamic sect is that it is fighting for social justice. In its view, this is due to the inability of the democratic government to meet the expectations of the people (Osumah, 2013). This can be understood within the context of failed social contract (governance failure). This is reflected in the chronic poverty, unemployment, large number of destitutes (Almagiris) that plagues the region. According to Human Rights Watch researcher Eric Guttchuss, cited in Osumah (2013), the root cause of Boko Haram is said to be poverty and unemployment driven by bad governance and corruption. The sect seems to be against bad leadership. The leadership since independence has essentially been corrupt, wasteful and insensitive to the genuine needs and aspirations of the populace, despite immense human and natural resources available in Nigeria (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Boko Haram’s claim that it is fighting for justice suggests that its violence against the government is on behalf of the economic destitute who are rarely granted the right guaranteed to them by the constitution. The question that arises at this point is, how does its action explain the killing of the innocent people on whose behalf they claim to be seeking justice? Boko Haram has launched attack severally on government institutions and establishments, security agencies, worship centres (particularly churches) and densely populated public places.

Another claim which is religion driven is that they are trying to protect Islamic values, traditions and teachings. They claim that ‘Western Education’ corrupts the Islamic values/traditions. The thinking of the fundamentalists’ sect is that “Western Education is sin” (Idowu, 2013). They consider anything Western as an aberration or completely un-Islamic while Western influence on Islamic society constitutes the basis of weakness of the Islamic religion (Chikezie, 2011, cited in Idowu, 2013). Following the death of Yusuf in 2009, Sanni Umaru who became the “acting leader” then issued a statement pledging to continue the fight to bring about an Islamic revolution in Nigeria (Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011). Their dissent for democracy is borne out of the fact that democracy is a product of Western education and according to them it is the root cause of corruption. They also opine that the secular nature of the Nigerian state sabotages their religion. What they want in essence is the abolition of democracy and Western education and making Nigeria an Islamic state.

Strategies/Methods

There is scarce data on the command and control structures of the Boko Haram (Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011). It has also not been fully established whether the Boko Haram sect has a coordinated structure or not but there have been instances indicating that they have splinter groups. What seems to be quite clear is the fact that there is a form of network existing between them. While the structure of the group is unclear, there has been a noticeable advancement in their skills and technology (Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011).

Boko Haram in its violent campaign against the Nigerian state deployed various strategies of resistance in drawing the attention of the world as a way of indicating its seriousness of its arguments and to compel actions from the state. Resistance according to Ikelegbe (2004) relates to political actions, in an essentially political arena, undertaken in struggles for political space and objectives. It captures groups, in diverse kinds of socio-political and economic relations, engaged in diverse political activities and essentially involves in different kinds of contestation, challenges and struggles. He also noted that resistance particularly is a critical element of group reactions to dominations, marginalization, exploitation and injustice. The bombings kidnappings/abductions, assassination, violent confrontations and attacks are strategies of resistance deployed by the sect.

For bombings, the sect makes use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The sect has used homemade bombs and electronically controlled explosives when targeting location where they can record mass casualty. Most times, bombs are planted at a strategic point or a vehicle is rigged with explosives and driven to a spot in the target area. On other occasions, they made use of motorcycles to facilitate easy escape. That is, while the motor cycle is in motion they throw the bombs into the crowd. The sect has also adopted suicide bombing as its strategy to unleash terror on the populace. The bombings of the Police Force Headquarters on 16 June 2011 and that of the United Nations building on 26 August 2011 (both in Abuja), the Kano car bomb in May 2014 and the bombing of a police highway patrol van in Maiduguri in March 2014 were carried out by suicide bombers. All aimed at frustrating the Nigerian government and intimidating and leaving people in a perpetual state of fear.

Lately, the sect moved from bombing to killing and kidnapping of defenseless school children. In February 2014, the sect invaded Federal Government College Buni Yadi in Yobe state in the dead of the night and killed over 20 students. In April 2014, members of the sect attacked a government secondary school in Chibok, Borno state and kidnapped over 200 young schoolgirls from their dormitory at a period when they were supposed to be writing the West Africa School Certificate Examination and took them into the Sambisa forest. And the sect threatened to sell the girls into slavery. The attacks on school children led to temporary shut-down of five government colleges in "high risk areas" in the north east of Nigeria (Premium times, 2014). The purpose for the abduction of the school girls was to broker a prisoner exchange (Onuoha, 2014). For example, in May 2013, the group released a video saying that it had taken women and children including teenage girls hostage in response to the arrest of its members wives and children. There was later a prison swap, with both sides releasing women and children (Chothia, 2014). After the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, Boko Haram proposed a prisoner exchange for the Chibok schoolgirls for its members held in the country's jails. The group maintains that the government must release the militant fighter detained in numerous facilities nationwide before it releases the girls they have held captive. Boko Haram maintains that the girls were taken for specific reasons and reiterated the conditions for their release, adding that the girls would be released once the federal government met the terrorist group's demand for a prisoner exchange deal (Newsi.ng, 2014). According to the group, the girls could be traded for 'Boko Haram's brothers in arm' who have being serving their prison time. The sect insisted that the girls will never be released until the federal government releases their brethren (Ejiofor, 2014).

Kidnapping/abduction by Boko Haram is primarily to facilitate hostage negotiations. The kidnapping of the Chibok school girls by Boko Haram is to put pressure on the Nigerian government to cede to its demand for the exchange for prisoners (Zenn, 2014). Another plausible reason for Boko Haram taking to abduction is to negotiate for ransom. These ransoms usually come in cash which the group uses in acquiring arms. According to Zenn (2014), the leader of a faction of Boko Haram which operates within Nigeria and Cameroon claimed to have released a seven member French family kidnapped in northern Cameroon in April 2013 for \$3.14 million and claims that he is in control of the group's arms and finances. Zenn (2014), concluded by asserting that if the demands are met in the Chibok kidnapping, all factions could see the release of dozens of prisoners and ransom payments for all leaders in exchange for the return of some or all of the school girls.

Assassination is yet another strategy of the sect. In October 2010 and March 2011, it was alleged that member of the Boko Haram sect killed Bashir Kashara a prominent Wahabi cleric and Imam Ibrahim Ahmed Abdullahi, also an Islamic cleric. They were critical of the group and spoke against the sectarian violence in the region (Thurston, 2011 cited in Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011). The sect was also responsible for the assassination of Alhaji Modu Fannani Gubio, a candidate of the defunct All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and brother to former Governor of Borno state, Ali Modu Sherrif. In May 2014, emir of Gwoza, Muhammadu Idrisa Timta was assassinated. While an attempt on two other emirs failed. The killing of the traditional leader and attempt on the other two was because the sect perceived that the traditional leaders/rulers are tied to the secular government

they (Boko Haram) oppose “accusing him them of selling out (Grossman, 2014). The attempted assassination attack on the emir of Kano in 2013 by the sect was because the masses had found out that emirs and chiefs are now stooges of the political class and must be stopped (Ross, 2013). They stated that the budgets of these rulers are largely paid by politicians and as a consequence traditional and religious rulers are caught up in politics and have lost their independence.

One other strategy the Boko Haram sect has adopted and which is very instructive to note is that at times when they attacked they come dressed in military uniform. This they did to deceive their targets pretending to give them a sense of security. The question that comes to mind is, how do they have access to such military outfit? This was the strategy the sect used when they attacked the Government Secondary School, Chibok and kidnapped the school girls.

Boko Haram has also deployed violent confrontation and attacks as a strategy of resistance. The sect has violently confronted the security agencies and institution in the country. They have attacked and killed army officers in their base camps, barracks and those on patrol. The attacks on barrack were primarily aimed at setting free members of the group who were being held in the guardrooms. The Giwa and Bama barrack in Maiduguri were attacked by the sect on different occasion where their members were being held. These violent attacks are also aimed at disorganizing the military and to create diversions. The tone of violent confrontation was set by the state through the militarization of the region following attacks on communities and innocent citizens. In November 2014, the sect confronted the military in Mubi town Adamawa state, overpowered the military, captured the Mubi, hoisted its flag and renamed it “Madinatul Islam” (city of Islam). Similarly, in August 2014, the sect had capture Gwoza in Borno state and momentarily declared the town as an Islamic Caliphate.

Despite the measures and attempts by the government to curtails the excesses of the Boko Haram sect and get them to dialogue, no result has been achieved. They have as a matter of fact become more daring in their approach, methods and strategies. They appear stronger, less fearful and more determined in the pursuit of their quest. Aghedo and Osumah (2012) were right in their x-ray of the measures taken by government to check the excesses of the sect and affirmed that “it remains doubtful if these measures can prevent the terrorist from attacking the state with devastating consequences ...”

Targets

Christian groups in particular have been the major target of the Boko Haram sect (Osumah, 2013). A lot of churches in the north have been attacked and bombed. Notable amongst them is St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla, a suburb close to Abuja. The church was attacked on December 25, 2011 (Christmas day). The attack left many dead and several others injured. Besides Christians being the major target of the sect, it has occasionally targeted Muslims as well. For instance, in Konduga, a town in Maiduguri, about 44 worshippers were attacked and killed in a mosque during dawn prayers. Also, in November 2014, the Kano Central Mosque where the Emir of Kano leads usually prayers was bombed and over 200 people were killed. Amongst the target of the Boko Haram sect, royalty is not spared. In May 2014, the sect attacked three Emirs (traditional rulers) i.e. Emirs of Askira, Uba and Gwoza in the northeast zone of the country who were on their way to attend the funeral of Emir of Gombe. While the Emirs of Asikira and Uba managed to escape, the Emir of Gwoza, Muhammadu Idrisa Timta was killed.

Another target of the sect has been the security agencies. The sect has been engaged in armed struggle with the police and military troops deployed to check their excesses in the region. Prior to the deployment of troops, the sect in 2004 and 2005 engaged the police in Yobe and Borno state (Ibrahim, 2012). The group also targets any person or group of persons that speaks against it or is critical of its activities and methods. For example, the Thisday Newspaper building was attacked in 2012 by the sect and while claiming responsibility for the attack, they stated that it was because of their ‘biased reportage’.

COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION AND BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: RELATING THE PRESENT TO THE PAST

Over the years, there have been debates among certain social and political groups within the system that Nigeria is not a nation and as such has no basis for remaining as one. Those who hold this view hinge their arguments on the series of lingering ethno-cultural and religious; problems which seem to defile all possible solution yet continue to place the country on the path of disintegration. This paper has no intention of joining in that debate

but seeks to establish a link between very pressing national questions i.e. inter-ethnic intolerance of present day Nigeria politics with the colonial artificial creation and the issues of the past.

The formal struggle for political power in Nigeria began following the elective principle contained in the Clifford Constitution of 1922 (Olaniyan, 2007) which made provision for the emergence of political parties. Sadly, the political parties that developed in the colonial period were formed along ethnic and regional lines. The fear of sectional domination arose and has continued to hunt the Nigerian state till date. This has given rise to some policies like zoning or rotation of power all in a bid to ensure a balanced control of power amongst the geopolitical zones in the country. Another policy is the federal character principle which was enshrined in the 1979 constitution and reaffirmed in subsequent constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The essence of the federal character principle according to Agbodike (1998) cited in Iyekepolo et al. (2011), was to ensure social harmony among all Nigerians and promote stability and national integrity of the country.

Since the creation of the Nigerian state, the north appears to have continuously played the role of second fiddle in the socioeconomic sphere. This problem was created by the British colonial administration. British non-intervention policy in northern Nigeria and the founding of missionary schools in the south created a division between the provision and style of education between the north and south. This in turn affected access to employment, wealth, and social mobility. Across northern Nigeria, western education continues to be associated with attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims, and fears of southern economic and political domination (Hackett, 2001, cited in Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011). But the north has had control of political power for a longer period of time in post-independence Nigeria, particularly under the various military interregnums. With the return to democratic rule in 1999, there has been a shift of political power from the north to south or from Christians to Muslims to the disenchantment of many northern elites (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Issues were further complicated with the demise of President Umaru Yau'Adua and the ascension of then acting President Goodluck Jonathan to power. From thence the polity began to heat up and it has remained so till date.

The northern elites insisted that the north must complete the eight year term of office zoned to it. While those in the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) said that the zoning policy in force in the party must be respected and as such President Jonathan should not run for the position of president in 2011. Some of the northern elites stated that they would make the country ungovernable for President Jonathan should he run and win. According to Chilwa and Adegoke (2013), there is widespread speculation that Boko Haram must have been sponsored by certain interest in government, possibly the northern political elite, who are said to aim at destabilizing the country and discrediting the Jonathan government. Today, the spate of violence that has characterized the Nigerian political terrain as orchestrated by the Boko Haram sect has left tens of thousands of people dead and property worth millions naira destroyed. This has led political analysts and social commentators to posit that the Boko Haram insurgents are being sponsored by the elites in the north who want to frustrate the government of President Goodluck Jonathan and ultimately intimidate him into not seeking a re-election in 2015. Some northern elites have been linked with the Boko Haram. For example, Alhaji Buji Foi, a former commissioner in the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Borno state was alleged to be the sect's financier (Waldek & Jayasekara, 2011). Some police officers have allegedly joined the sect or support its activities due to fear or ethnic affiliations (Osumah, 2013). The Niger Delta Indigenous Movement of Radical Change (NDIMRC) has also accused prominent traditional rulers in the North of sponsoring the Boko Haram insurgency so as to make the country ungovernable for President Goodluck Jonathan. It has called on the Northern political and religious leaders to choose between the continued existence of Nigeria as a country and the extremist Islamic militant group, Boko Haram (Osumah, 2013).

The activities and actions of the Boko Haram are threatening the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. According to Osumah (2013), due to the panic created by the Boko Haram insurgency and for fear that the situation could spark off a religious conflict, there have been mass exodus of people from the north to their places of origin. The guerrilla war declared against non-Muslims is unhealthy and unhelpful to national integration. In 2011/2012, the sect issued a threat/ultimatum to all non-northerners residing in the region to leave. The mass exodus of non-indigenes from troubled states in the north lends credence to the claim that the colonial construction called Nigeria has no base structure. In other words, culture, tribe, language and religion which ought to be the basis for a coming together were never considered. The event of 1914 was only a joining without integration. The Nigerian state has consistently searched for answers to the question of national unity/integration without success. Even after amalgamation, contact between the two regions remained minimal.

As a result people from both regions could not understand one another properly before independence in 1960. Since independence, efforts such as the creation of unity schools, National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme and other federal instrumentalities to ensure national unity have not worked effectively as a result of the colonial 'seed' of discord that was earlier sown. The Boko Haram insurgency especially its clamour for Islamization and return of political power to the North are a reflection of the age-long North-South tussle.

Presently and like in times past, a National Conference has been convened to discuss the future of the colonial construction called Nigeria. The problems, issues and challenges in the polity of present day Nigeria are no different from primordial sentiments of the early days of its independence. It is sad to note that the various recommendations that arose from conferences and dialogues held in the past were never implemented.

Agbiboa (2013) and Onuoha (2014) have argued that Boko Haram's existence is due to the deprivation perspective which the north has experienced. And this is against the backdrop of the fact that poverty in the north is in sharp contrast to the more developed southern states. While this argument is tenable, it does not however sufficiently explain why the group has embarked on a violent campaign against the Nigerian state. It is the submission of the paper that the existence of Boko Haram is as political as it is structural. And this is hinged on the colonial construction which created divisive tendencies in the pre-independence Nigerian that have manifested up to the present political era. The fear of domination by the south has made Boko Haram embark on a string of violent attacks against the Nigerian state in an attempt to frustrate the government and impose the Sharia legal system in the country.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian state is a product of colonial act over a hundred years ago. The colonial policy of separation/segregation further aided in preserving ethnic and religious sentiments. Upon the attainment of independence in 1960 the country has had four republics, three of which were short lived and several military regimes. With the return to democratic rule in 1999, a lot of political and economic developments were envisaged. But to the dismay of many Nigerians, the country has had to move from dealing with one form of crisis to the other.

In this short discourse, attempt has made to trace the origin of the Boko haram insurgency, their argument, and the methods/strategies they have used in carrying out their attacks on their targets. The study observed that poor socio-economic condition resulting from bad leadership is the primary reason for the rise in the rebellious act of the Boko Haram against the state. The study also observed that the various problems that have continued to resurface in the polity of Nigeria lends credence to the assertion by scholars and non-scholars alike that Nigeria is a country existing only on paper. This is because such problems portray ethnic and tribal primordial sentiments. The skewed federal system practiced in Nigeria and the features arising from it have helped in sustaining these primordial sentiments. The inability of the Nigerian-state to fix the faulty political foundation laid by the colonialist meant that the country has had to move from dealing with one ethno-religious, political and sectarian crisis/conflict to another. And this to a large extent has hindered political and economic development as resources that could have been channeled to other productive ventures have been used to fight mini wars within the political system. No matter the arguments on the reasons for the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgent group, these reasons would not have been able to thrive but for the faulty foundation of the colonialists. This foundation of segregation created a conducive environment for the escalation of crisis as can be seen in the political annals of present day Nigeria.

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