THE IDEOLOGIES OF BOKO HARAM
AND EVOLVING INSECURITY IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

Haliru Dogondaji BELLO, PhD student*

Abstract: Social Constructivist theorists argue that identity determines (among other things), interest and set goals within a society. They also argue that ideas are at the center of every action and are privileged. However, in contrast to this thesis and in accordance to the Liberal Strategy for Global Peace and Security, Nigeria must be secured as a unitary entity and sole referent object without regard to threats posed by liberal ideas, values and principles to local identities within the state of Nigeria.

Consequently, since 2009, The State of Nigeria has been violently confronted by a notably Islamist Terrorist network popularly known as Boko Haram. Within a span of 7 years (2009 - 2016), the violent campaign of Boko Haram is estimated to have cost more than 20, 000 lives and displaced over 3,000,000, while affecting over 6,000,000 in one way or another. The UN Security Council listed the group among other international terrorist networks in May 2014. The gravity of their actions also earned the group the title of being the 'world's deadliest terrorist group', by the global terrorism index in 2015. In this article therefore, we aim to uncover the ideologies at the center of Boko Haram Terrorist action against the state of Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Similar to other members of the great alliance of liberty, Nigeria's National Security Strategy is fashioned solely for the survival of Nigeria as a unitary entity. The Country's Security strategy encapsulates the basic tenets of the liberalists' view of order and security; to respect global norms and international law while remaining a responsible member of the international community. The vision was as stated, to make Nigeria a violence-free, safe, peaceful, self-reliant, prosperous and strong nation. Accordingly, the Nation's security strategy protects the fundamental values outlined by the liberalist equation. They include democracy within a sovereign secular state, security and welfare of the citizens, sovereignty and defense of its territorial integrity, peace, democracy, economic growth, and social justice. Other areas of interest include sub-regional security and economic cooperation and international cooperation in Africa and the world. This indicates the subservice of Nigeria's unique

issues to the grand security order in the international system.

The Liberal Security Strategy favors the adoption of liberal ideas, values and principles to guide the priorities established by states and other actors within them, thereby enforcing new ideas, values and principles and protecting their entrenchment within the domestic environment of modern states. Similarly, the liberalists developed an international security regime, encompassing all states and defining their objectives and methods of interacting with other members in the International environment. This effort is aimed at substituting anarchy with cooperation in the international system. On the strength of this belief, the liberal strategy prescribes and as revealed by Patrick Morgan in Collins.[1]

Accordingly, it seems deductive to argue that with respect to the current global arrangements, being responsible invariably means organizing and running state affairs in accordance to liberal ideas, values and principles. In this regard, States that adopt the prescribed system are assigned global legitimacy and given access to international power

"Carol I" National Defence University
e-mail: halibello@yahoo.co.uk

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[1] Patrick Morgan, *Liberalism*, in Allan Colins (ed), *Contemporary Security Studies*, Second Edition. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 3.

in cases where internal or external aggression occurs. Similarly, those states that do not adhere to the idea and adopt the attendant liberal democratic identity are considered pariah, pirate or recluse states, for example North Korea, Iran and Cuba during the reign of Fidel Castro. Their governments are termed illegitimate, sanctioned and scolded by the international community.

Contrary to this view, Social Constructivist theorists such as Alexander Wendt, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever among others argue that, national security must be conceived in a duality i.e. in respect of both state and society. They recognize the political significance of ethno-national and religious entities and argue that while National Security is concerned with state the protection of its sovereignty as prompted by liberalism, society is concerned with the protection of its cultural identity. They explained that maintaining the state as a sole referent object emanates from the view that society refers to population as unit within a state. From this perception of the meaning of society they argue, it becomes obvious that the modern state system may impinge on societal rights and negate the progression of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion and other elements that determine the self-conception of individuals and societies found within states. Liberalism therefore becomes consequential to the ability (of such societies) to sustain and develop within acceptable conditions for maintenance and evolution of their collective identity.

Alexander Wendt, Max Weber and Gidden to mention a few also share a common opinion regarding the relevance of culture and identity in relation to security. They argue that beyond state power and its interests (which are in material terms), identity matters because it determines interest, which informs behavior and set goals. Similarly, Fredeking and Alder argue that unique particularities that make up identity are constructed through a historical process made up by collective beliefs, interpretations, assumptions and social rules that make truth claims about life in general.[2] Alexander Wendt asserts that the ontology held by a people forms their unique ideas, values and principles, which matter in relation to security because they are at the center of their every action

and are privileged.[3]

Similarly, referring to the broadest form of Identity, Samuel Huntington postulated the Clash of Civilization theory to proffer explanations to arising and evolving patterns of conflict witnessed in the post-cold war era. He argued that in real terms, people are divided along cultural blocks and not by modern identities attached to nation states. The reason for his assertion he argued was because code of ethics i.e. rights and wrongs of a cultural entity are constituted through centuries of interaction between people, their environment and the objective realities of their being.[4] He further explained that each cultural block may function only within the limits of its unique set of ideas, values and principles. He predicted that the continuing attempt to entrench western ideas around the globe may cause conflicts owing to contradictions in the meaning, relevance and application of concepts like prosperity, human rights, freedom, morality, role of religion in state affairs and many other vital concepts in human endeavour.[5]

Barry Buzan, with reference to the sustained application of repressive measures against the expression of identity, argues that the action of state, naturally fuels fear and mistrust against the principal mechanisms for restructuring of societies. In this respect, Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre argue that since any action towards security is carried out on behalf of a collectivity, society must be conceived as a referent object in its own right as doing otherwise may be challenged by strong identity and loosen the link between the state and society.[6] In this regard, this study is concerned with issues that remain sources of conflict in modern states, where the state is the entity that must be secured without regard to how the state itself becomes a security threat to domestic forces' identity and their natural preferences. Consequently, it becomes compelling in this article, to reveal that, at the onset of the phenomenon, the term 'state' was used

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[2] E. Adler, Seizing, *The Middle Ground; Constructivism in World Politics.* Cambridge University Press 1997, p. 234.

[3] Patrick Morgan, *Liberalism*, in Allan Colins (ed), Contemporary Security Studies, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 49.

[4] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996, p. 22.

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Patrick Morgan, *Liberalism,* in Allan Colins (ed), Contemporary Security Studies. Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 49.

to refer to an independent political entity, with sufficient authority and power to govern a clearly defined territory and the population that identify to that power, from which it derives legitimacy in accordance to the Peace of Westphalia treaties of 1648.[7]

1. The Case of Nigeria

In the case of Nigeria, from 1914 when the British unified the two protectorates and formed the colony of Nigeria, the amalgamation constitution reserved supremacy to secular legal order and made many aspects of the Caliphates structure, including some parts of the Islamic Legal System disenfranchised. The native courts proclamation act of 1900 gave legitimacy to judgments passed by the *shari'ah* courts which were hitherto autonomous to the dictates of the State of Nigeria.[8] Consequently, the contradictions inherent in the down-grading of Native cum religious authorities, dismembered traditional power hierarchy particularly in the north of Nigeria and caused disharmony and resentment against the state. This scenario dominated socio-political activities and became compelling immediately after independence. It is believed that both covertly and overtly, the northern Muslims have since 1900 continued to assert their identity in the legal and political environment of the country. The rise of radical elements in Northern Nigeria and other violent ethnic and religious conflicts seems feasible from the above situation. The role of Islam in the routine socio-political and economic aspects of life in Nigeria especially as it relates to the secular federal government of the country (among other factors) seems to create a conducive environment for the rise of radical elements who question both the legitimacy and efficacy of the government.

The Islamists and indeed the general Muslim populace of the north, have persistently wished for an Islamic state and have considered illegitimate and irrelevant, the dictates of the secular federal government. It is revealing to note that at independence in 1960, the British handed power to a democratically elected government despite the attendant contradictions and disharmony expressed in northern part of Nigeria – a caliphate of the Islamic civilization. The sovereign state of Nigeria as executed, prompted conflicts between the new secular law and Islamic law hitherto operated in northern Nigeria.[9] The concerns generated regarding secularism within Islamic societies i.e. the Islamic North as a cultural entity questioned the Western call to embrace the ideas, values and principles of its unique ontology, as did other Islamic Civilizations around the globe. Apparently, the frustrations created by this attempt, became evident in the imbalance between legitimacy; which remains with the religious leaders and power, which is entrusted to the sovereign state of Nigeria. Consequently, the Muslims in the territory till date, have remained inherently sensitive to western perceptions of freedom, morality and human rights. There was from the onset therefore, disdain to adopt the liberal democratic identity prescribed by liberalism. This indication summarizes the incompatibility of the "new liberal identity" assigned to the citizens of Nigerians and the religious discontentment of the Muslim-North. It also affirms the notion that norms, culture and identity matter in relation to security because these elements guide the interest and set goals of the Muslim northerners.

The reality expressed in the previous paragraph, presents a practical demonstration of Nigeria's inability to ensure its citizen's habitual identification with post-colonial structures within its (colonially dictated) boundaries. According to Amitav Acharya's contribution on 3rd World Security found in a reader on Security Studies edited by Christopher W. Hughes and Lai Yew Meng, the reality expressed earlier leads to conflict on national identity. Amitav further asserts that, this leads to the inability of third world states to uphold viable structures for development programs against poverty and resource scarcity, these being prerequisites for domestic stability.[10] The next chapter reveals the most prominent ideas at the center of Boko Haram terrorist action against the state of Nigeria i.e. those ideas that make the state of Nigeria a socially constructed threat to Islamic identity.

[7] Henry A. Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Group, 2014, p.7.

[8] S. Isaac Terwase, *Religion and the Nigerian State*, Oxford Journal of Law and Religion, Vol. 3, No. 2.

[9] S. Isaac Terwase, *op.cit.*

[10] Amitav Acharya in Christopher W. Hughes and Lai Yew Meng (ed), *Security Studies*, Routledge, 2011, p. 54.

2. *Boko Haram* and its Ideology

Boko Haram is a notably Islamic terrorist organization that refers to itself as *Wilayat GharbIfriqiyyah* meaning Islamic state of West Africa province, (ISWAP). The group was formerly known as *Jama'atAhl as-sunnah li Da'wahwalJijad.* (Group of the people of sunnah for preaching and Jihad), It operates within the borders of Nigeria and adjoining Chad and Cameroon republics. Their terrorist actions have attracted international attention especially with the abduction of over 250 schoolgirls in the northeastern part of Nigeria in 2014. It was declared international in 2015 following proven links with Al-Qaida, ISIS and other Islamist terrorist groups around the globe.

The name *"Boko Haram"* is typically translated as "Western Lifestyle is forbidden'. Haram is from the Arabic "forbidden" and the Hausa word Boko Meaning secular Western Education and life style. *Boko Haram* has also been translated as Western influence is a sin and westernization is a desecration. Until the death of the founder Mohammed Yusuf, the group was also repeatedly known as Yusufiyya Northern Nigerians have commonly dismissed Western education as *Ilimin boko* and secular school as *makarantar boko*.[11] Accordingly, *Boko Haram* seeks the restoration of an Islamic state in Nigeria. It opposes the Westernization of Islamic Societies in Nigeria, in the same way it decries the domination of the country's resources by a small number of political elite.[12]

The ideological basis of the violent revolution recommended by Shekau (the current group leader) is to a large extent reflective of the ideas of Syed Qtub; an Egyptian scholar and a major figure in the Muslim Brotherhood organization founded in 1928, whose ideas serve as a reference guide to most Islamist terrorist networks around the globe.[13]

Boko Haram advocates the reinvigoration

of Islamic order in the northern part of Nigeria especially. The group also presents violence as the only way of bringing the northern Muslims out of the current order, which it understands as "decades' long persecution". The group sees western institutions as damaging to the very essence of Islam. *Boko Haram* in essence calls for rejection of western ways through violence as the ultimate means to emancipation and restoration of Islamic values in society.[14] Similarly, the group calls on Muslims to show their devotion to the faith of Islam and to give up their life while fighting evil in the name of Allah. The group also advocates offensive *Jihad* as a means to freeing the Muslims from worshiping leaders and their ideologies and also to live by laws provided in the *Qur'an*. The group maintains that the emancipation of man and the liberation of the Islamic societies would come only under the *Shari'ah*.

In a You Tube video, Abubakar Shekau encouraged any action taken in the defense of the fundamental values of Islam. It assures that only through *Jihad* could the Muslims be freed from servitude and destruction by the *infidels*. Qur'anic verses such as Q 12:40 - "no one rules but God" and Q 5: 51 - "Ally with them, become one of them", are quoted severally to support their claim. The group also emphasizes that offensive *Jihad* is permitted by Allah; a duty which they assign to all Muslims in Nigeria, in order to rid it of injustice and corruption.

2.1. On State Sovereignty

The first port of contention for the group similar to other terrorist networks around the globe, stems from the establishment of a modern state with the attributes ascribed to it by the Liberal Democratic Arrangements; sovereignty of the Nigerian state over Islamic legal and political institutions. Accordingly, *Boko Haram* proclaims that sovereignty belongs to Allah alone and should not be ascribed to the Federal Government of Nigeria. The sovereign status attributed to the State of Nigeria in this regard, led to the disavowal of the constitution, legislature and the entire democratic structure and institutions of the secular state system. *Boko Haram* considers other laws not

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[11] Alex Thurston, 'The disease is unbelief' Boko Haram's religious and political worldview, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World ANAlySIS PAPeR No. 22, January 2016. Available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf, accessed on 10th October 2016.

[12] Philip Ostein, Shariah Debate, Leiden Brill, 2006, pp. 220-225.

[13] Syed Qutb Syed, *Milestones,* Kazi Publications, 1964, pp. 16-17.

[14] Abubakar Shekau, *You tube video,* available at https//m.youtube.com/watch?v=qPS8PJeixM, accessed on 15th October, 2016.

of the *Shari'ah* as man-made. Consequently, the sovereignty attached to those laws is viewed as a machination made by man.

2.2. On Secularism

Secularism i.e. the separation of government affairs from religious biases is strongly condemned by *Boko Haram*. They consider it as a deliberate fragmentation of sacred authority aimed at destroying the very purpose of Islam.[15] For *Boko Haram*, secular ways of life are anti-ethical to the Islamic faith and if allowed to flourish, would destroy Islam. The leader considers its introduction as a deliberate machination by Western interests to dismember Islam around the globe not only in Nigeria. The group also considers secular forms of society to be ignorant; living in immorality and man-made machinations. On this basis, democracy, socialism, and secular Muslim societies i.e. those built on secular governance must be reformed. Shekau's call remains in tandem with the ideologies of Syed Qutb. It saw *Boko Haram* calling on all Muslims to be mindful of the degrading effect of secular influence.[16]

The perceived socially constructed threat expressed in the previous paragraph, led followers of the group to condemn all other forms of administration in Islamic societies by vilifying those individuals who (in *Boko Haram's* opinion) accepted to spread an un-Islamic ideology and uphold it beyond *Shari'ah.* They accuse those who participate in secular administration of elevating the people (in the case of democracy) to the status of God. They explain that, living according to *Shari'ah* requires total rejection and rebuttal of all man-made laws and value systems, and also accepting no compromise in any aspect of human life.[17] The outright condemnation of secular principles, allows *Boko Haram* to advocate for the destruction of the leadership and replacement of political power and authority all over Nigeria.

The group therefore invites all who believe in Allah to reject any form of allegiance to any law other than *Shari'ah law* in Nigeria. Political ideologies such as democracy, materialism, individualism ignored the need of spirituality in human beings as understood by the group. They posit that democracy allows for agreement of majority to be built on error and allows multiple social evils to flourish including apostasy and other social ills such as adultery, fornication etc. which form part of freedom in Western views of life.[18] They believe that democracy is the school of infidels and consider it as unbelief in all ramifications. They consider the democratic system as a disorder worse than killing and often quote the Qurán (2: 191) to support their claim.

Consequently, *Boko Haram* rejects not only the Western ways of life but also the religious leaders in the north. They refer to them as infidels and polytheists, dining with Western evil powers seeking to destroy Islam – their call.[19] They also accuse the religious leaders of desecrating their thrones by embracing corrupt politicians, therby causing a strong decline in their popular legitimacy. The hereditary Muslim rulers in the northern part of the country thus also became targets of *Boko Haram*.[20] They accuse the religious leaders of failing to discharge their fundamental duty of spreading Islam and urged them to stand up to their task of preserving Islamic moral order.[21] On this basis, they kill who so ever: religious leaders, scholars, etc.

The foregoing makes it obvious that the group targets all those who accept the Federal constitution, western education even if they do so out of ignorance.[22] *Boko Haram's* call for the rejection of all socio-political, cultural, economic and legal arrangements of the Nigerian Government and to reinstate the unity of religion, politics and government in conformity to Islamic ethics becomes a frantic rebuttal of the Liberal Democratic Identity assigned to the State of Nigeria. These views reflected a literal declaration of war against the Nigerian state. The continued assertion that they make no rules but only call others to imbibe the teachings of Islam also indicates their extreme

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[15] Abu Yusuf Muhammad, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-7.

[16] Syed Qutb Syed, *Milestones*, Kazi Publications, 1964, pp. 16-17.

[17] Abubakar Shekau, *You tube video*, available at https//m.youtube.com/watch?v=qPS8 PJeixM, accessed on 15th October, 2016.

[18] Abu Yusuf Muhammad, *op.cit.,* pp. 64-65.

[19] *Ibidem,* pp. 5-6.

[20] Mahmood Yakubu, *An Aristocracy in Political Crisis,* Avebury, 1996.

[21] JA'afar Mahmud Adam, *Siyasa a Nigeria,* 2003, Audio lecture.

[22] Abubakar Shekau, liveleak.com/view?i=1421362369.

conviction to the new Islamic vanguard suggested by Syed.[23]

Based on their exclusivist ideology, the *Boko Haram* publicly disowned the Nigerian National pledge, constitution and institutions and proclaims the Qur'an to be their constitution and source of legitimacy. They have joined the worldwide movement against Western Civilization owing to the Cultural Unity in Islam. The targets are therefore not any particular religious faithful but the collective entity and structures of the Western Civilization and also particular individuals, agencies and institutions perceived as instrumental to its agenda. Accordingly, their disdain for secular education and the repeated attacks on schools is built on the belief that the education system has a negative political impact on the teachings of Islam. They do not abhor Western education for its intellectual content; however, other teachings in secular schools that do not disavow social vices and polytheistic tendencies propagate shirk according to the group.[24]

In this respect it is no wonder that *Boko Haram* expressed willingness to kill all secular heads Nigeria had ever had including Ahamadu Bello: the first premier of Northern Nigeria and the *Sardauna* of Sokoto; joining them with the Western leaders whom they consider infidels. From northern Nigeria to Syria, Turkey even Saudi Arabian leaders are not left out by *Boko Haram*. They have all been termed enemies of Islam needing freedom from servitude and moral degradation[25].

CONCLUSIONS

Judging by the ideology of *Boko Haram*, it is constructive to assert that since the collective aims of every society determine the framework of its laws, the entrenchment of Secularism and Democracy (among other ideals of the Western ontology) in Nigeria and the supremacy of the state over religion, contradict the fundamental ideas, values and principles of Islam prevalent in Northern Nigeria. These evidently pose a complex imbalance between legitimate authority and power within Northern Nigeria.

The fundamental beliefs, which give Islamic

Civilization its unique identity, are to the Muslim (devout and sacrosanct) beyond the reams of political ideologies or regimes neither are they within the realm of gains of profit and power. Accordingly, it seems constructive to believe that *Boko Haram* is a radical element, arising from among the people of northern Nigeria, who question the purpose of Western enforcement of its ideas, values and principles, akin to its unique version of world order as adopted and enforced by the Government of Nigeria. *Boko Haram's* responses seem representative of larger trends around religion and identity that are increasingly seen worldwide.

In this regard, it becomes obvious that liberalism, by ignoring identity and suppressing its sensitivities, only creates insecurities. The Liberal Security Strategy also does not provide a solution to evolving threats such as Islamist terrorism and other ethnic and religious conflicts witnessed (and witnessing) in Nigeria. This seems obvious in the blatant failure of suppressive strategy adapted to combat terrorism and other identity-laden conflicts in the country.

This reality calls for a new approach in security strategies that will evolve to consider Nigeria's complex plurality, respect the peoples sensitivity through which it becomes conscious that Islamist terrorism and other ethnic cum religious conflicts are beyond ordinary acts of criminality and therefore cannot be muted by the brutal suppression of concerns eloquently presented in numerous media.

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[23] Abu Yusuf Muhammad, *op.cit.,* p. 75.

[24] Abu Yusuf Muhammad, *op.cit.,* p. 98.

[25] Abubakar Shekau, *op. cit.*

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