

# THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: FRESH INSIGHTS FROM THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

*Although the on-going terrorism of the 'Nigerian Taliban' from northeastern Nigeria, commonly known as 'Boko Haram' ('Western education is sin'), has elicited numerous works, there is yet to be a more constructive analysis that adequately accounts for the social dynamics of the group's identity and belonging in the Nigerian polity. This paper is the first systematic attempt to draw on the social identity theory (SIT) to develop a conceptual discourse that explains the causal relationship between religion in Nigeria as a force of mobilisation as well as an identity marker, and shows how its politics, practice and perception are implicated in the escalating terrorism of Boko Haram. Along the way, the paper considers the social dynamics of poverty and relative economic deprivation in northern and especially northeastern Nigeria, and their contributions to the spiralling violence of Boko Haram.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Religion, Boko Haram, Poverty, Northern Nigeria

## Introduction

It was Patrick Chabal (2005: 1) who once said that ‘conflict seems to be a hallmark of African societies.’ Indeed, various forms of violent conflict have engulfed Africa, exacting a heavy toll on the continent’s human and natural resources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). But how can we explain the logic of violence in Africa? Fanon (1963: 40) revealed how colonial violence influenced the colonised to be violent. Firstly, he noted that the colonised people ‘manifest the aggressiveness which has been deposited in their bones against their own people.’ Secondly, he showed how the colonised person’s confrontation with the ‘colonial order of things’ placed him/her in ‘a permanent state of tension’ (ibid: 41). This pattern is evident in the anti-colonial and anti-Western stance of extremist Islamist groups like Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Thirdly, Fanon demonstrated the colonised native was ‘an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the prosecutor.’ In an insightful article on ‘Coloniality and Violence in Africa,’ Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012: 421) similarly locates the logic of violence in Africa in ‘coloniality’ and the reproduction of African subjectivities where race is used not only to denigrate the black population in what Fanon called the nation of the damned (‘the wretched of the earth’), but to rob them of their very humanity, so as to justify the use of violence against them. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that this form of colonial violence and authoritarianism was reproduced by African nationalism, which bequeathed it to postcolonial Africa as a mode of governance (ibid). In the postcolonial African context, ‘the violence [is] justified in the name of national identity, security, and postcolonial development seen as necessary to secure a postcolonial modernity’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012: 421). Another shortcoming of the colonial era, which the African leaders willingly reproduced, was the entrenchment of particularistic new forms of identity and consciousness, often structured around religion and ethnicity (Hutchful and Aning, 2004: 203). Both the logic of violence and particularistic forms of identity are evident in Nigeria where the state relies heavily on the use of violence to quell internal disputes and where disgruntled politicians and other sinister actors, far from building a coherent nation, adroitly cash in on religious or ethnic identity to incite wars (Agbiboa and Maiangwa, 2013). Nowhere is this more evident than in northern Nigeria, a region that has been in the throes of escalating Boko Haram terrorism and state counter-terrorism.

Since July 2009, Boko Haram, the ‘Nigerian Taliban’<sup>1</sup> from northeastern Nigeria, has stepped up its violence against the Nigerian state and its citizens, unleashing a systematic campaign of bombings, kidnappings and drive-by shootings on diverse government and civilian targets. In May 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the worst hit northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. But such emergency measures have failed emphatically and woefully to turn the tide of the insurgency; instead, they have strengthened the group’s resolve to impose its will on Africa’s most populous country. Of particular concern are the growing sophisticated arms and weapons used by Boko Haram fighters in recent attacks, as shown in the seizures made by state security forces in northern Nigeria. Following an intensified state offensive against Boko Haram, thousands of Nigerians are fleeing into neighbouring countries fearing retaliatory attacks and general insecurity. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently announced that up to 10,000 Nigerians have fled to Niger’s Diffa region. Cameroon<sup>2</sup> is currently hosting some 44,000 Nigerian refugees; another 2,700 have fled to Chad. The vast majority of those fleeing are women and children. Meanwhile, some 650,000 people remain internally displaced in northeastern Nigeria due not only to Boko Haram’s acts of domestic terrorism but also the counter-terrorism and indiscriminate killings of the state-led Joint Military Task Force (JTF) (Baiyewu 2014). In an October 2014 report, the Human Rights Watch noted that Boko Haram kidnapped over 592 persons (mostly girls, boys and women) in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

Although the on-going terrorism of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has elicited numerous publications (see, for example, Adesoji 2010; Isa 2010; Umar 2011; Onuoha 2012; Agbiboa and Maiangwa 2013), there is yet to be a more constructive analysis that adequately accounts for the social dynamics of the group’s identity and belonging in the Nigerian polity. This paper is arguably the first systematic attempt to draw on the social identity theory (SIT) to develop a conceptual discourse that explains the relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Boko Haram first referred to itself as the ‘Nigerian Taliban.’

<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations, the population of Nigerian refugees (displaced by the terrorist activities of Boko Haram) in Cameroonian camps tripled in two months (Baiyewu 2014).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.punchng.com/news/boko-haram-abducts-592-in-2014/>

between religion in Nigeria as an identity marker and a force of mobilisation, and to show how its politics, practice and perception are implicated in the Boko Haram insurgency. Along the way, the paper considers the social dynamics of poverty and relative deprivation in northern (especially northeastern) Nigeria as important proximate factors fanning the flames of Boko Haram's violent campaign.

The rest of the paper is divided into four parts. The first provides a conceptual discourse that revolves mainly around the social identity theory. The second part reviews the nexus between religious identity and terrorism. The third part looks closely at the combustible relationship between religious identity and politics in Nigeria's pluralist context. Particular attention is paid to the politics of Sharia implementation in the presumably Muslim north of Nigeria. The fourth part focuses on the religious terrorism of Boko Haram, including discussions about the group's emergence, ideology, modus operandi, radicalisation, and non-monolithic nature. The section also seeks to understand why Boko Haram rebels. The fifth and final section summarises the key points of the paper and draws some useful recommendations on how to turn the tide of the Boko Haram insurgency that has raged on since 2002.

### **Conceptual Approach: The Social Identity Theory**

The role of identity is a potentially important but overlooked aspect of terrorism. Yet studies on homegrown terrorism and radicalisation show that identity is an important element in the process (Al Raffie 2013). At the outset, it is critical to clarify the meaning of identity and how it is understood in this study. In his study of the impact of religion on identity in northern Nigeria, Blanco-Mancilla (2003: 1) defines identity as 'an ensemble of "subject positions," e.g. "Muslim Hausa," "Christian Female," "northern Nigerian;" each representing the individual's identification with a particular group, such as ethnicity, religion, gender.' This definition captures the way people view themselves in Nigeria, where identity is defined by affiliation to ethno-religious groups rather than the national state (Agbibo and Okem, 2011: 98-125). In Nigeria, for example, it is erroneously assumed by many that a Hausa man, by virtue of his ethnicity, is a Muslim – a classification that distorts the Hausa-Fulani dichotomy in that region (Agbibo 2012). In a similar vein, Ikelegbe (2005: 73) argues that most southerners are seen as Igbos thereby submerging numerous other minority ethnic groups such as the Ibibios, Efiks, Ijaws, and many others. In this paper, identity is understood as 'a combination of socio-cultural characteristics which individuals share, or are presumed to share, with others on the basis of which one group may be distinguished from others' (Alubo, 2009: 9). Ikelegbe (2005: 73) identifies identity as a 'subsisting sense of belonging and attachment to a group or institution, or such other social, cultural and political entities.' Going by this definition, 'identity' acquires meaning when it is used as the only platform for the articulation of common interests or the pursuits of shared beliefs and culture (ibid; see also Agbibo and Okem, 2011). In this sense, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc. are all key components of social identity. However, my overriding focus in this study is on the religious component of social identity and its link to acts of domestic terrorism. I focus on religion because one of the more powerful cultural forces contributing to 'us versus them' thinking is the presence of absolutist religious belief systems. Religions are absolutist in nature when they advance the view that they have precise and complete understanding of truth, and that therefore all other religions are in error. Religious concepts contrasting believers and unbelievers, such as 'infidels', 'sinners', and 'heretics,' can provide justification for attacking out-group members (see Schwartz *et al.* 2009: 541).

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides valuable insights into understanding the combustible issue of religious identity in a pluralist country like Nigeria. The SIT 'emphasizes the significance of the subject's social situation, the group member's internally constructed social identity, and the context in which a cohesive group consciousness is installed in the minds and hearts of the members' (Brannan *et al.* cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006: 26). The SIT was first systematically developed by Tajfel and Turner (1985) and used to explain the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. This perspective purports that membership to social groups forms an essential aspect of a person's identity; indeed, 'people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organisational membership, religious affiliations, gender, and age cohort' (Tajfel and Turner 1985). A social category gives the member a structure of self-reference, thus an identity. According to Tajfel and Turner (1985: 7), the group is 'a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social

consensus about the evaluation of their group and membership of it.’ Jeffrey Seal (1999: 553) defines group identity as ‘members’ shared conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values, its strengths and weaknesses, its hopes and fears, its reputation and conditions of existence, its institutions and traditions, its past history, current purposes, and future prospects.’ The SIT asserts that a person has not one ‘personal self’ but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his personal, familial or national ‘levels of self’ (Turner 1982). In sum, the SIT states that (1) social identification is a perception of oneness with a group of person; (2) social identification involves the forming of in-groups and out-groups; and (3) social identification leads to activities that are congruent with the identity, support for institutions that embody the identity, stereotypical perceptions of self and others, and outcomes that traditionally are associated with group formation, and it reinforces the antecedents of identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner 1982; Agbiboa 2013b).

In her work entitled *Social Identity and Conflict*, Karina Korostelina (2007) describes SIT as a ‘feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social category, and as an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behaviour.’ One can apply this definition to the Boko Haram Islamist movement which has a group identity that includes shared experiences, attitudes, beliefs and interests of in-group members, and is described through the achievement of a collectively professed aim to rid Nigeria of its corrupt and abusive government and institute what it describes as religious purity (Agbiboa 2013).<sup>4</sup> In addition, a key aspect of terrorist movements (like Boko Haram) and, by extension, ordinary political or religious movements, is the centrality of psychological processes to collective identification (De la Corte 2007). Typically, terrorist organisations present themselves as bastions of the values and interests of an ethnic or religious community. As predicted by the SIT, the self-identification of terrorists as members of a much larger community will help them to fulfil their avowed goals (Turner 1982; Agbiboa 2013a; see Table 1). The SIT has been used to understand intergroup relations between social groups who frequently employ the techniques of terrorism. Cairns, for example, used the SIT approach to intergroup relations as a framework for conducting a social analysis of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Arena and Arrigo, 2006). The SIT has also been applied to Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, revealing the degree to which individuals and groups will defend cherished social identities (Gosh and Kumar, 1991: 93-112). In this study, I draw on the SIT to make sense of the unholy alliance between religion, terrorism and political violence in northern Nigeria. I also show how the Boko Haram terrorism seems to be intimately connected with religious identity, and how a perceived assault on this identity is an important instigator of terrorism.

**Table 1: Psychosocial effects and relationship to social identity explanation**

<b>EFFECT</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
<i>Depersonalisation</i>	Terrorists tend to perceive themselves as interchangeable members of an organisation. This (partly) motivates terrorists to give preference to the interests and goals of the organisation.
<i>Social cohesion</i>	The collective identity shared by members of terrorist organisation promotes positive relationships among them, which increases intragroup cohesion and co-operation.
<i>Conformity, obedience</i>	The greater identification with terrorist organisation, the greater identification with the norms which rule the member’s behaviour. Therefore, a reduction in disobedience and challenging the orders of their leaders.
<i>Bipolar worldview</i>	Identifying with their organisation and reference community motivates terrorist to develop negative prejudices about people from other communities. The world is divided between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The responsibility of problems and injustices suffered by the terrorist’s reference community may be attributed to another community who could play a scapegoat role.

Source: Agbiboa (2013b: 6).

<sup>4</sup> Although Boko Haram will be presented in this paper as a non-monolithic entity (i.e. many splinter groups like Ansaru have emerged in northern Nigeria), it is important to keep in mind the point made by Al Raffie (2013: 71) that, ‘the spectrum of Islamism is large and spans many movements and “sub-ideologies” that together agitate for similar goals but reserve disagreements on the means and methods of implementing them.’

## The Nexus between Religion and Terrorism

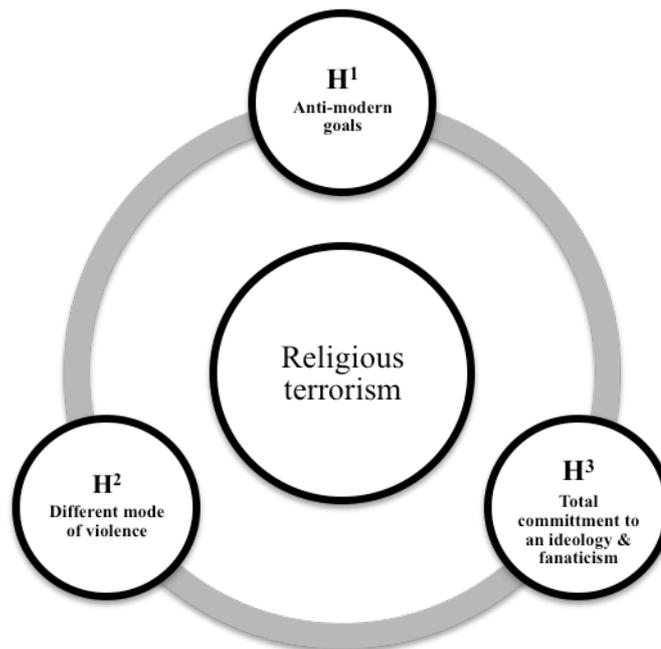
Religion remains a powerful source of individual and group social identity. Meredith McGuire (1992: 3) argues that, 'religion is one of the most powerful, deeply felt, and influential forces in human society. It has shaped people's relationships with each other, influencing family, community, economic, and political life... Religious values influence their actions, and religious meanings help them interpret their experiences.' Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn (2010: 487-520) identify three core aspects of religion. First, religion is a social construction: 'it is created by people and is a part of culture.' Second, religion is an 'integrated set of ideas by which a group attempts to explain the meaning of life and death.' Third, religion is a 'normative system defining immorality and sin as well as morality and righteousness.' Sociologists identify two fundamental reasons why the study of religion is important: (1) religion is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has a profound impact on human behaviour, and (2) religion influences society and society impacts on religion (see Agbiboa and Okem 2011: 102). In this paper, religion is understood in line with Clifford Geertz (1968: 3) as '(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.' According to Seul (1999: 558), religion 'serves the identity impulse more powerfully and comprehensively in a way that no other repositories of cultural meaning does.' Moreover, '*no other repositories of cultural meaning have historically offered so much in response to the human need to develop a secure identity...*' (ibid; emphasis added). For many people, involvement in a religious group satiates their need for stability, safety, affection, belonging, and self-esteem. Indeed, as Little notes, religion contributes to the construction of individual and group identity by transmitting 'myths of common origin, doctrines of chosenness and holy struggles, claims of primacy with respect to values that arise from a particular tradition's worldview, actors who sanction individual and group behaviour with a sacred authority, and memorials and rituals that commemorate the sacrifices of group members' (cited in Arena and Arrigo 2006: 32). It is thus hardly surprising that appeal to religion and religious identity has repeatedly served as a mobilising factor for acts of terrorism and political violence. But why does religion seem to need terrorism, and terrorism religion? Why is a divine mandate for destruction accepted with such certainty by some believers? (Appleby, 2000: 7).

The nexus between religion and terrorism dates back to David C. Rapoport's (1984: 658-677) seminal paper – entitled 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions' – which analyses the use of terror in three religious traditions: Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. As the pioneering comparative study of religious terror groups, Rapoport's paper provides 'detailed analyses of the different doctrines and methods of the three well-known groups: the Thugs, Assassins, and Zealots-Sicarii' (Rapoport 1984: 658). Despite a primitive technology, Rapoport argues that these groups 'each developed much more durable and destructive organizations than has any modern secular group' (ibid). Rapoport's influential paper inspired many similar works, primarily in the field of terrorism studies, which sought to explain 'why violence and religion has re-emerged so dramatically at this moment in history and why they have so frequently been found in combination' (Juergensmeyer 2003:121). In this particular literature, religious terrorism has been raised above a simple label to a set of descriptive characteristics and substantive claims which appear to delineate it as a specific 'type' of political violence, fundamentally different from previous or other forms of terrorism. As argued by Hoffman (2006:88), this new type of terrorism produces 'radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimation and justification, concepts of morality and, worldview', and 'it represents a very different and possibly far more lethal threat than that posed by more familiar, traditional terrorist adversaries' (ibid: 272). The claim about the specific nature of religious terrorism rests on a number of arguments, three of which are discussed below (see Figure 1).

First, it is argued that religious terrorists have anti-modern goals of returning society to an idealised version of the past and are therefore necessarily anti-democratic and anti-progressive. Audrey Cronin (2003:38), for example, argues that 'the forces of history seem to be driving international terrorism back to a much earlier time, with echoes of the behaviour of 'sacred' terrorists... clearly apparent in a terrorist organisation such as Al-Qaeda'. For his part, Juergensmeyer (2003: 230) contends that religious terrorists work to 'an anti-modern political agenda'. In his words: 'They have come to hate secular governments with an almost transcendent passion... dreamed of revolutionary changes that would establish a godly social order in the rubble of what the citizens of most secular societies have regarded as modern, egalitarian democracies... The logic of this kind of militant religiosity has therefore been difficult for many

people to comprehend. Yet its challenge has been profound, for it has contained a fundamental critique of the world's post-Enlightenment secular culture and politics' (Juergensmeyer 2003: 232). It is further argued that religious terrorists have objectives that are absolutist, inflexible, unrealistic, devoid of political pragmatism and hostile to negotiation (Gunning and Jackson 2011). As Matthew Morgan (2004:30-31) notes: 'Today's terrorists don't want a seat at the table, they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it'. Daniel Byman (2003:147) notes of Al-Qaeda and its franchises: 'Because of the scope of its grievances, its broader agenda of rectifying humiliation, and a poisoned worldview that glorifies jihad as a solution, appeasing Al-Qaeda is difficult in theory and impossible in practice'.

**Figure 1: Three hypotheses (H) of religious terrorism**



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

Thirdly, it is argued that religious terrorists have the capacity to evoke total commitment and fanaticism from their members; they are characterised by the suspension of doubt and an end-justifies-the-means view of the world – in contrast to the supposedly more measured attitudes of secular groups (Gunning and Jackson 2011). Juergensmeyer (2003: 220) argues that 'these disturbing displays have been accompanied by strong claims of moral justification and an enduring absolutism, characterised by the intensity of the religious activists' commitment'. Moreover, it is suggested that in some cases the certainties of the religious viewpoint and the promises of the next world are primary motivating factors in driving insecure, alienated and marginalised youths to join religious terrorist groups as a means of psychological empowerment. As Juergensmeyer (2003: 187) argues, '[t]he idea of cosmic war is

compelling to religious activists because it ennoble and exalts those who consider themselves a part of it... it provides escape from humiliation and impossible predicaments... They become involved in terrorism... to provide themselves with a sense of power'. It is further argued that such impressionable, alienated and disempowered young people are vulnerable to forms of brainwashing and undue influence by recruiters, extremist preachers or radical materials on the internet (Hoffman 2006: 197-228; Agbiboa 2013b). Romero (2007: 445), for example, argues that Islamist terrorist connections can provide 'social backing, meaning to life (to compensate for the spiritual emptiness felt), and a social or collective identity mainly based on the pride of forming part of the jihad as the only way of reaching the power and glory of Islam.' Already, Knuston identified three important factors in the formation of a terrorist identity. First, there is one's socialisation toward a basic set of beliefs, attitudes, sociocultural/political values, and favoured perspectives in which to see the world. Second, identification is influenced by the psychological needs intensively pressing [on the individual] for actualisation through behaviour and commitment.' Third, some catalytic event must transpire (cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006: 20-21).

It is important to note that the seismic rise of Islamist terrorism, starting in the 1980s and 1990s, has significantly contributed to the frequency and lethality of attacks perpetrated by religious terrorist groups (Rapoport 1998; Juergensmeyer 1997; Agbiboa 2013a). Available empirical data show that over the period 1968 to 2005, Islamist groups (especially groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) were responsible for 93.6 percent of all terrorist attacks and 86.9 percent of all casualties inflicted by religiously-oriented terrorist groups (Terrorism Knowledge Base, cited in Piazza, 2009: 66). Piazza (2009: 66) explains the higher frequency and intensity of terrorist activity among Islamists in the light of the (mis)interpretation of certain doctrines and practices within Islam, including the concept of 'lesser jihad,' the practice of militant struggle to defend Islam from its perceived enemies, or the Muslim reverence for 'Tishhad' (the practice of martyrdom). Piazza also shows how Al-Qaeda type groups fit a typology defined as 'universal/abstract' while other Islamist terrorist groups are more properly categorised as 'strategic' (Piazza 2009: 65). For Piazza, 'the primary difference between universal/abstract groups and strategic groups is that the former are distinguished by highly ambitious, abstract, complex, and nebulous goals that are driven primarily by ideology ... in contrast, strategic groups have much limited and discrete goals: the liberation of specific territory, the creation of an independent homeland for a specific ethnic group, or the overthrow of a specific government' (ibid: 65). According to this view, extremist Islamist groups like Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram, among others, fall into the universal/abstract category on account of their global jihadist appeal, their absolutist and inflexible objectives, and their rigid ideological stance against Western missions and perceived (or real) enemies of Islam.

Before examining the religious terrorism of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, particularly its emergence and reach, it is expedient to locate the radical Islamist group within a Nigerian polity that is dotted with religious identity conflicts, sectarian violence and political instability.

### **Unholy Alliance: Religious Identity and Politics in Nigeria**

Given its religious pluralism, Nigeria presents an interesting case study of the relationship between religious identity and conflict. Indeed, 'by virtue of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability, Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided state in Africa' (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005: 4). The religious demography in Nigeria is evenly split between Christians and Muslims with the latter having a slight edge in terms of its size. Muslims constitute 50.5 percent of the population while Christians constitute 48.2 percent of the total population. Other religious groups make up the remaining 1.4 percent (Falola, 1999; Okpanachi, 2009). Based on Nigeria's religious demography, it is not surprising that religion dominates the daily affairs of its citizens. For example, a survey of people's religious beliefs carried out in 10 countries in January 2004 suggests that Nigeria is the 'most religious nation in the world.' 10,000 people were questioned in the poll for the BBC programme 'What the World Thinks of God.' Over 90 percent of Nigerians said they believed in God, prayed regularly and would die for their belief. The highest levels of belief were found in some of the world's poorest countries. In most of the countries covered, well over 80 percent said they believed in God or a higher power. In Nigeria the figure was 100 percent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BBC 2004. 'What the World thinks of God.' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/wtwtgod/3490490.stm>

The place of religious identity in politics is very important since it serves as the 'basis for inclusion and exclusion' (Harris and Williams, 2003: 205). This has serious implications in a pluralist country like Nigeria where citizenship is tied to group rights and thus, inextricably linked to identity (Agbibo and Okem 2011; Agbibo 2012). Not infrequently, religious identity tends to override citizenship.<sup>1</sup> As a major determinant of group's rights, identity delimits who have access to 'opportunities, entitlements, and participation are based on the religion of the seeker' (Abah and Okwori, 2002: 24). It is against this backdrop that some respondents in Blanco-Mancilla's (2003) study in Kaduna state believe that non-Muslims who are better qualified get menial jobs vis-à-vis Muslims. In September 2001, the appointment of a Christian as a local council chairman in Jos metropolis, the capital of Plateau State, triggered violent reactions, which led to the death of an estimated 160 people (Agbibo and Okem, 2011). Also, the election of the late Patrick Yakowa as Governor of Kaduna state in 2011, sparked unrest and protest from some sections of the Muslim population who were embittered that a Christian had become governor in a state that has long been governed by Muslim politicians and generals (ibid). More recently, following the April 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, the Human Rights Watch (2011) reported that over 800 people were killed and roughly 65,000 people displaced in three days of violent protests in 12 northern states. The violence started with vehement protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change, after the re-election of the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the South, who was the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party (Aniekwe and Agbibo, 2014). This incidence of electoral-related violence not only reveals the north-south divide in Nigeria but also partly explains the callous activities of radical Islamist sects who might have been incited by some embittered northern politicians to challenge the electoral results (Agbibo and Maiangwa 2013: 383). Drawing on the argument of Seul (1999), what the foregoing examples demonstrate is that religion per se is not the cause of religious violence in Nigeria; rather for many, religion frequently supplies the fault line along which inter-group competition for power and resources occurs. Indeed the deepening of poverty, social inequalities and political instability in Nigeria, has pushed many individuals into taking solace in religion, which reinforces their potency in society and gives them alternative sites for political expression and struggles that often fuel tension and conflict in the country (Agbibo and Okem 2011).

The divorce of religion from politics may be characteristic of the more developed countries, but religion remains a pervasive force in Africa. Specifically, in Nigeria, religion and politics are intricately linked. Indeed, the encroachment of religion into the political realm in Nigeria precludes the emergence of a true national identity and spirit of nationalism (Agbibo and Okem 2011; Agbibo, 2012; Solomon 2013). Said Adejumobi (2005: 19) has argued that, 'More than ever before, there has been an unprecedented denationalisation of the [Nigerian] state, with sub-national identities challenging and in many cases, unravelling the nation-state project.' To complicate matters, the actions of past leaders have either encouraged discrimination on the basis of social identity, or suggested that the country is under a single religion. Already, in 1952, the late Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, declared in a speech delivered in the Northern House of Assembly, Kaduna, that:

The Southern people who are swarming into this region daily in large numbers are really intruders. We don't want them and they are not welcome here in the North. Since the amalgamation of 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people are different in everyway including religion, custom, language and aspiration. The fact that we're all Africans might have misguided the British government. We here in the North, take it that "Nigerian Unity" is not for us' (*Vanguard*, May 18 2012).

During his time in office (1985-1993), President Ibrahim Babangida registered Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Anchored on the fundamental values and goals of OIC, membership of the organisation is underpinned by a commitment to the advancement of Islam (Kenny, 1996: 352). Notably, since the early 1980s, the Nigerian government has taken a number of constitutional, legislative and policy measures to manage the incidence of religious identity conflict and sectarian violence. These measures include: (1) the exclusion of religion as an index in the design, conduct and

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reporting of national population census; (2) the promotion of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue through the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in 2000; (3) the constitutional establishment of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) to prevent the predominance of one religious group in all government institutions; (4) the political application of the principle of power sharing between the north and south as well as Christian and Muslims; (5) non-registration of political parties with ethnic or religious overtones; and (6) prohibition of registration of banks with religious appellations (Kwaja 2009: 112). Despite these measures, religiously inspired violence has raged on especially in northern Nigeria and remains one of the biggest security challenges facing Nigeria today (Agbiboa 2012: 3-30). Nowhere is this more evident than in the politics of Sharia implementation in northern Nigeria.

### ***Social Identity Crisis in Nigeria: The Sharia Perspective***

George Ehusani (2005: 1) makes an important distinction between the politics of religion and the actual practice of religion in Nigeria, arguing that 'Nigerians have hardly had to fight over the practice of religion. It is the politics of religion that has brought upon us so much trouble.' According to Abogunrin (1984: 118), politics and religion in Nigeria are viewed as 'two inseparable institutions in the human social psyche and structure.' Arguing from the Muslim perspective, Abubakre (1984: 129) contends that 'Islam is a way of life, which dictates the political ideology and practice in any Islamic society.' He equally asserts that 'earthly governments are mere agents of God's theocratic governance of the physical and spiritual world.' The inseparable link between religion and politics in Nigeria creates deep suspicion when it is perceived that one religious group is dominating the political affairs of the country. Members of different religious groups want their religion to rule the affairs of the country. The resultant struggle for ascendancy and control puts Christianity and Islam at dagger-drawn opposition, one that has marked the history of Nigeria since independence (Agbiboa and Maiangwa 2013: 384). Nowhere is this identity struggle more evident than in the move for the institutionalisation of the Sharia legal codes in Muslim-populated states following Nigeria's return to democratic rule in May 1999.

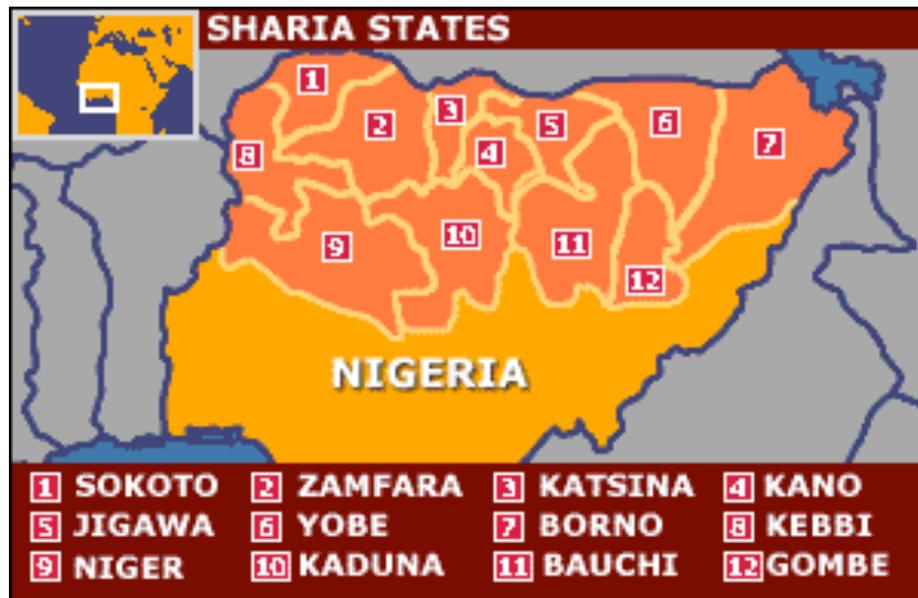
The transition from northern-dominated military rule to a southern-led civilian regime in 1999 revived fierce debates on what the status of Sharia should be in an independent state. Sharia proponents argued that it was their constitutional right to practice their religion within the tenets of the Sharia legal code. The agitation for the implementation of Sharia was combined with human rights language as it sought to justify its implementation through a constitution that protects religious freedom (Ilesanmi, 2001; Agbiboa 2014). As a result of the campaign for the enactment of Sharia, the battle line was drawn between the predominantly Muslim community and the minority Christians living in northern states (Falola, 1999). The issue attained new heights when Zamfara state became the first northern state to extend Sharia from mainly personal status issues into the domain of the criminal justice system. The then Zamfara State Governor, Ahmed Sani, was quoted as saying: 'Whoever administers or governs any society not based on Sharia is an unbeliever' (Cited in Agbiboa 2013a). Sharia courts were put in place by Zamfara and vested with jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters. Zamfara state arrived at these by way of five laws, including: '(a) Sharia Court (Administration of Justice and Certain Consequential Changes) Law No. 5, 1999; (b) Sharia Court of Appeal (Amendment) Law No. 6, 2000; (c) Area Courts (Repeal) Law No. 13, 2000; (d) Sharia Penal Code Law 1999; (e) Sharia Criminal Procedure Code Law No. 18, 2000' (Oraegbunam, 2011: 181-209).<sup>2</sup> Eleven other northern states soon emulated Zamfara (see Fig. 1). The adoption of Sharia coincided with the rise of the hisba (vigilante) groups which operated primarily in the cities against individuals or groups who were violating, or perceived to be violating, Sharia norms. In such situations, the issues that were being punished did not necessarily contradict the Nigerian law (Umar 2011). The point that Sharia law does not regard all citizens as equal before the law is supported by the distinction in Islam between 'house of Islam,' 'house of war,' and 'people of the book' (ibid).

Plans to extend Sharia law in the religiously diverse and volatile northwestern state of Kaduna led to bloody clashes that claimed some 2,000 lives in February and May 2000 (Suberu, 2009). There were subsequent outbreaks of religious violence, directly or indirectly related to Sharia, in the northern states of Bauchi, Gombe, Niger, Sokoto, Kano, Borno, Jigawa, Plateau, as well as Kaduna (Ekot, 2009). Aside from igniting lethal sectarian violence, the extension of Sharia has spawned an unprecedented debate regarding the constitutionality, political viability and social sustainability of Sharia implementation in northern Nigeria (Suberu, 2009). The adoption of Sharia by twelve northern states contradicts federal legislative prerogatives, particularly Section 10 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which clearly affirms

the secularity of the Nigerian state: 'The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion'. Section 3 of the 1999 Constitution states that:

If any other law is inconsistent with the provisions of this Constitution, this Constitution shall prevail, and that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void' (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999). Since this section of the Nigerian Constitution proscribes any State religion, it would seem that introducing religious rules as State laws will essentially contradict this section.

**Fig. 1**



The adoption of stringent Sharia codes was the high watermark of nearly four decades of Muslim pressures for the accommodation of Sharia within the judicature and general constitutional architecture of the Nigerian federation (Suberu, 2009). Cook (2011: 6) contends that the move to impose Sharia in northern Nigeria, following General Sani Abacha's death in 1998, was triggered by a 'messianic fervour and belief in the efficaciousness of Sharia as a panacea for Nigeria's problems, and most especially for the country's growing corruption and lawlessness.' Cook further identifies proximate causes like the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Southerner (1999 and 2003) and the consequent perception that the 'Muslim' north was conceding power grounds to the 'Christian' South (ibid). A more authoritative angle on the issue is provided by Adesoji (2010: 103) who argues that, '[t]he adoption of the Sharia appeared to be an effort to pacify a section of Muslims [the 'conservatives'] who had consistently agitated against the secular nature of the country and who perhaps were seen either as a threat to the tenure of the political office-holders or as a support base that could not be neglected on the basis of political calculation' (ibid). Furthermore, Adesoji maintains that 'the conservatives insist on a unitary view of society that recognizes no difference between state and religion, and they advocate making Nigeria an Islamic state administered according to the principles of Sharia Law. For them, all Muslims belong to the "Umma" [Community], and the idea of a secular state is atheistic or syncretistic' (ibid). For the conservatives, the imposition of Sharia amounts to 'a cultural affront' and relegates them to the status of 'second-class citizens.' However, this view does not enjoy popular support among 'Liberal Muslims' who insist that such an interpretation does not entail Islamizing Nigeria nor does it translate to the rejection of the constitutional provisions of the secularity of the Nigerian state (Ilesanmi, 2001).

It is against this backdrop that Boko Haram emerged in 2002 and gained international notoriety in 2009. Boko Haram represents yet another violent page in the book of militant Islam in northern Nigeria; it also represents the latest and most violent expression of the movement of Sharia restoration in northern Nigeria. As Adesoji (2010) argues, '... the full implementation of Sharia not only in the north but in the whole country remains the advertised cause of the Boko Haram jihad.'

## The 'Nigerian Taliban': Boko Haram and Religious Terrorism in Nigeria

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out jihad in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy Prophet... We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities (Boko Haram's Mission Statement, Agbiboa 2013b: 59)

The nomenclature 'Boko Haram' is derived from a combination of Hausa word '*boko*' (book) and the Arabic word '*haram*' (unlawful). Combined, Boko Haram means 'Western education is unlawful.' Boko Haram was derived as a nickname given to the movement by outsiders by truncating a slogan repeated by the late Mohammed Yusuf on video discs, prohibiting not just the colonial European format of literacy but any collaboration with the neo-colonial state (Manfredi, 2014: 2). In any case, Boko Haram has even rejected the designation, 'Western education is unlawful', and instead, prefers the slogan, 'Western culture is forbidden.' As a senior member of the group explained, 'culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education' (cited in Onuoha, 2012: 136). In northern Nigeria a distinction is often drawn between *makarantan boko* (schools providing 'Western' education) and *makarantan addini* (school for religious instruction) or *makarantan allo* (school of the slate understood to be Koranic schools) (Danjibo, 2009: 8). Across northern Nigeria, *makarantan boko* continues to be linked to attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims who fear the southern economic and political domination. Isa (2010: 322) argues that Boko Haram implies a 'sense of rejection' and 'resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organisation, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the jihadist state [the Sokoto Caliphate]'. According to Isa (2010: 332),

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

There seem to be some consensus in the literature that the Boko Haram movement is an outgrowth of the Maitatsine uprising of the 1980s and the religious and ethnic tensions that followed in the late 1990s (for an excellent study of the Maitatsine uprisings in Nigeria, see Hickey 1984: 251-256). Mohammed Yusuf – born on January 29, 1970 in Girgir village in Yobe State, Nigeria – started Boko Haram in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the goal of establishing Sharia government in Borno state. Yusuf established a religious complex in his hometown, which included a mosque and a school, where many poor families from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries enrolled their children. However, Umar (2011) argues that the centre had ulterior political goals and soon it was also working as a recruiting ground for future jihadists to fight the state. The Boko Haram group, which initially called itself the 'Nigerian Taliban', adopted a 'live-off-the-land' lifestyle and set up a camp in a remote area of northeast Nigeria, which the group dubbed 'Afghanistan' (Agbiboa 2014). Like Maitatsine of the 1980s, Boko Haram 'strove for self-exclusion of its members from the mainstream corrupt society by living in areas outside or far away from society in order to intellectualize and radicalize the revolutionary process that would ultimately lead to violent takeover of the [Nigerian] state' (Umar 2011).

While accounts are disputed, there is evidence that around 2002, Yusuf was co-opted by the then Borno state gubernatorial candidate, Ali Modu Sheriff, for the support of his large youth movement, in exchange for full implementation of Sharia and promises of senior state government positions for his followers in the event of an electoral victory. As the group rose to prominence, the state religious commissioner was accused of providing resources to Yusuf, while the government never implemented full Sharia (Africa Report, 3 April 2014). Having used Yusuf's support as a vote-catching device, these politicians then discarded Yusuf. Feeling used, an embittered Yusuf went on to form Boko Haram in 2002 (Solomon 2013). To be sure, the hiring and arming of youths for political ends is a common phenomenon in Nigeria (Aniekwe and Agbiboa, 2014). More often than not, these jobless youths are used for political and economic gains and later dumped. For example, evidence from the 2003 elections in Nigeria shows how the incumbent state governor of Rivers, Peter Odili, through the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), subverted the electoral process by exploiting youths and later dumping them. In an interview with

Human Rights Watch, Tom Ateke, a leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), acknowledged the role he played in the 2003 elections when he noted: 'Governor Odili had promised cash and jobs in great quantities for me and my boys and in return any place he sent me I conquered for him' (cited in Aniekwe and Agbibo, 2014: 10). In Gombe state, a group of boys known as 'Kalare' have proven 'easy prey for politicians who offer them small amount of money, drugs, alcohol and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assaults or simply to accompany their campaign in a demonstration of muscle' (ibid). In 2003 elections in the Niger Delta, Gaskia noted that:

Politicians from the major political parties mobilized and surreptitiously armed groups of unemployed and disenfranchised youths, and deployed them to cause mayhem and manipulate the electoral process. In this contestation and competitive arming of young groups, the party, which controlled the State government, got the upper hand. These political elite rivalries, coupled with a struggle for turf, contributed immensely to the rise of armed militancy and inter-militant armed violence, which preceded the 2003 elections and became consolidated in the period between the 2003 and 2007 general elections in the Niger Delta (cited in Aniekwe and Agbibo, 2014: 10).

Moving on, Boko Haram draws its members from a diverse group of people, including migrants from neighbouring Chad and Niger, disaffected youths, unemployed high school graduates, politicians, and street children (the *almajiris*<sup>6</sup>) (Onuoha 2012). A recent analysis of 144 imprisoned Boko Haram members shows that the median age of the group's members is thirty years (ibid). This youthful membership is hardly surprising if we recall David Pratten's (2013: 3) point that 'In Nigeria, "youth" has come to occupy a category of risk, it labels a dangerous, insurgent and unpredictable force which threatens the social and political fabric.' In her research on the adoption of the 'negative identity' among incarcerated terrorists, Knutson argued that 'a young person who, for reasons of personal or social marginality, is close to choosing a negative identity, that young person may well put his [or her] energy into becoming exactly what the careless and fearful community expects him [or her] to be – and make a total job of it' (cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006: 20). Boko Haram members are also drawn from the Kanuri tribe, which makes up roughly 4 percent of the Nigerian population, and is concentrated in the northeastern states of Nigeria, including Bauchi and Borno, as well as from the Hausa-Fulani (29 percent of the northern population) who are spread throughout most of the northern states. Already, John Campbell (2013) argued that, 'The revolt's foot soldiers likely are drawn from unemployed youth in Northern Nigeria, a region of profound poverty. Many of them attended Islamic schools where they learned little other than to memorize the Quran. Often they are children of peasants, rootless if not homeless, in a big city. They can bond through a common radical Islamic sensibility, inchoate rage, and the prospect of earning little money as terrorists.' Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2012) argues that Boko Haram 'provides education, basic services and informal-sector jobs to its supporters, most of who are marginalized people with little education, or lower middle-class elements with some education but with few prospects in the oppressive competition and corruption of Nigerian society.' Governor of Borno state, Kashim Shettima, explains that despite its 'misguided ideology,' Boko Haram's slain leader Mohammed Yusuf

retained the loyalty of his supporters by providing one meal a day to each of his disciples. He also had a youth empowerment scheme, under which he helped his disciples to go into petty trading and wheelbarrow pushing. He also arranged cheap marriages between sect members, which enabled many of them to marry, which gave them personal dignity and self-worth (Shettima, cited in Mustapha, 2012).

Thus, it would seem Shaw was right when he argued that, 'The terrorist identity offers the individual a role in society, albeit a negative one, which is commensurate with his or her prior expectations and sufficient to compensate for past losses. Group membership provides a sense of potency, an intense and close interpersonal environment, social status, potential access to wealth and a share in what may be a grandiose but noble social design' (cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006:23-24). Shaw further argues that, 'The powerful psychological forces of conversion in the group are sufficient to offset traditional social sanctions against violence... To the terrorists, their acts may have the moral status of religious warfare or political liberation' (ibid). Besides from this, some reports in 2012 strongly linked some senior members of

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<sup>6</sup> According to a 2010 survey, the *almajiris* in Nigeria number up to 9.5 million and are predominantly located in northern Nigeria (Agbibo & Okem, 2011).

the Nigerian security sector to Boko Haram (*Punch* 9 January 2012; *Vanguard* 22 February 2012). In February 2012, commissioner of police in charge of criminal investigations in Abuja, Zakari Biu, was dismissed from the Nigeria Police Force for his role in the escape of Boko Haram suspect Kabiru Sokoto. Sokoto is believed to have masterminded the bombing of St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, Niger State, in which over 40 people died. Sokoto's escape also led to the sacking of the former Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Ringim (Agbiboa, 2013a: 5). The sack of Ringim generally has to do with his inability to check the Boko Haram onslaught. In 2013, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan claimed that Boko Haram is an enemy within. In his words:

Some [members of Boko Haram] are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government, while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police and other security agencies (Jonathan cited in Agbiboa 2013a).

Boko Haram's ideology is embedded in deeply traditional Islamism in northern Nigeria which is inspired by the Koranic phrase that, 'Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors.' By its own definition, Boko Haram claims to be *Sunni-Salafist*, devoted to 'an austere and fundamentalist interpretation of early Islam' (Mustapha 2012). The Salafi doctrine holds that the 'temporal proximity to Prophet Mohammed is associated with the truest form of Islam' (Barkindo, 2014). Boko Haram is also *jihadist*, signifying a commitment to actively advance its cause. The following quote from Mohammed Yusuf supports the regressive and anti-democratic ideology of Boko Haram: "These European educated Muslims [*Yan Boko*] returned home only to confuse other Muslims, claiming that democracy is compatible with Islam, while jihad should only be for self-control... *We are for jihad, and our jihad is to put an end to democracy, to western education and western civilization. The jihad is intended to make us [Muslims] return to the original state of Islam* (cited in Zenn et al. 2013: 50; emphasis added)." The rejection by Boko Haram is based on the notion of 'the unity of God' (*tawhid*), which argues against the sovereignty of states and for the sole sovereignty of God's laws (*hakimiyah*) as the only legitimate form of governance; in this case the Islamic Sharia. Boko Haram's official name *Jama'at abl al-sunna li-da'wa wa-l-jihad* places the group within the context of a larger family of jihadist Muslim Jama'a groups that include the Jama'a Islamiyya of Egypt and the Jema'a Islamiyya of Southeast Asia (Indonesia). Boko Haram's approach may be deduced from the identity and behavioural pattern of these Jama'a type groups: 'establishment of small groups of a diffuse nature, which then infiltrate the parent non-Muslim or pseudo-Muslim society, with the ultimate aim of establishing the Muslim Sharia state through a final violent stage' (Cook 2011: 8). For these groups, 'violence is... a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand' (Hoffman 2006: 88; see also Juergensmeyer 2003: 149-50; Piazza 2009; Asal and Blum 2005). Boko Haram is opposed to what it perceives as a western-based incursion that erodes traditional values, beliefs and customs among Muslim communities. Mohammed Yusuf, the group's founder, told the BBC Hausa in 2009:

There are prominent Islamic preachers who have seen and understood that present western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam. Like rain. We believe it is a creation of God rather than an evaporation caused by the sun that condenses and becomes rain. Like saying the world is sphere. If it runs contrary to the teachings of Allah, we reject it. We also reject the theory of Darwinism (BBC 2009).

Elsewhere, Mohammed Yusuf noted that 'Western education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam... our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a "*kaafir*" [infidel] land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs' (Agbiboa, 2013b: 5). This statement seems to confirm Juergensmeyer's contention that religious terrorists have goals of returning society to an 'idealized version of the past,' and are therefore necessarily 'anti-democratic' and 'anti-progressive' (2003: 330). For Cronin (2003: 38), it is 'the forces of history' that seems to be 'driving [Islamist] terrorism back to a much earlier time.' This is illustrated by Boko Haram's tendency to view 'Western missions' and modernity as *jabiliyyat* (the 'ignorant' other). The *jabiliyyat* which displaced the pre-existing Islamic order in northern Nigeria is often seen as coterminous with widespread 'poverty and suffering' in the region (Zenn et al. 2013). As Yusuf's former deputy, Mamman Nur, stated prior to 2009: 'Dan Fodio [founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804] and other Islamic scholars carried out the jihad and ensured that Qur'anic law was implemented. Allah did not interfere with this situation until our Muslim leaders

accepted from the Europeans the secular constitution. Since that time, Allah took away the comfort and peace Muslims used to enjoy, and replaced it with suffering and poverty' (cited in Zenn *et al.* 2013: 50).

Boko Haram's ultimate objective is to overthrow the Nigerian government and to create an Islamic state under the supreme law of Sharia – a goal which the group claims is inspired by Dan Fodio's Caliphate (Zenn *et al.* 2013). In July 2013, Boko Haram Islamists stormed a boarding school in Yobe State in northeastern Nigeria and burnt 29 students and one teacher alive. Following the killings, Abubakar Shekau, the current leader of the group, stated that 'The Quran teaches that we must shun democracy, we must shun the constitution, [and] we must shun Western education' (Agbiboa, 2013b: 62). Akanji (2009: 60) argues that Boko Haram members believe that 'the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to "migrate" from the morally bankrupt society to a secluded place and establish an Islamic society [under a strict form of Sharia] devoid of political corruption and moral deprivation.' Adesoji (2010) argues that while the implementation of Sharia in twelve northern states appeared to have pacified some conservative Islamic elements in the north, 'its limited application was still condemned by the Boko Haram group.'

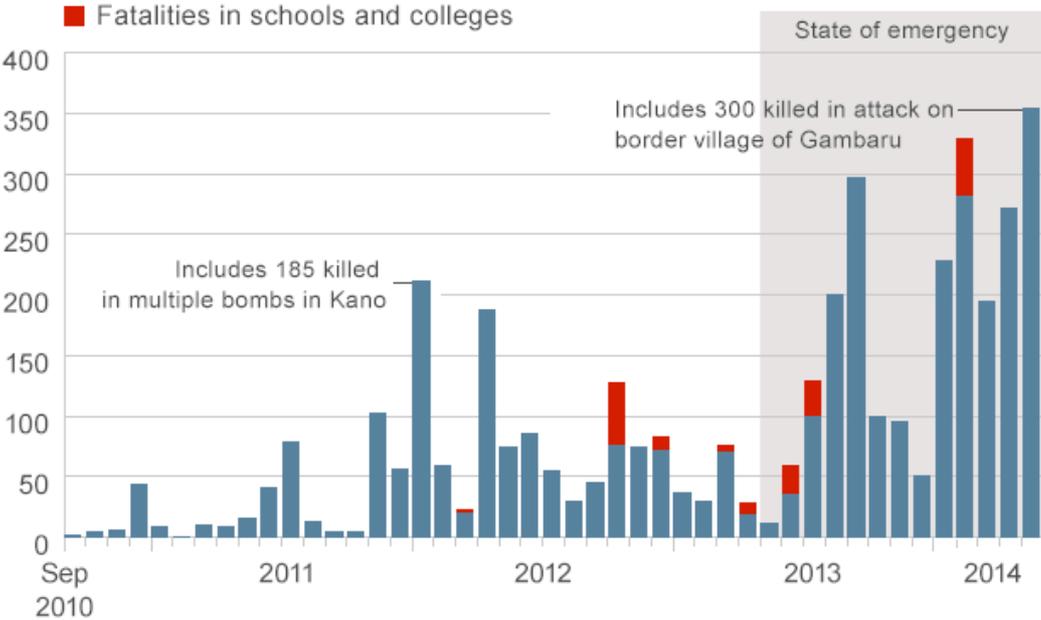
The clash between Boko Haram and state security forces in 2009 set the stage for Boko Haram to step up its violence, unleashing a systematic campaign of bombings and drive-by shootings across much of northern Nigeria. The insurgency began in July when members of Boko Haram refused to follow a motorbike-helmet law during a funeral procession of one of its members, leading to heavy-handed police tactics that killed 17 Boko Haram members. This event set off an armed uprising and reprisal killings in the northern state of Bauchi, which spread into the states of Borno, Yobe and Kano. The incident was suppressed by the army and left more than 800 dead (Agbiboa 2013). It also led to the execution of Boko Haram's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, as well as the bloodletting of his father-in-law and other group members, which human rights advocates considered to be extrajudicial killings (Human Rights Watch 2012). Following Yusuf's death, Boko Haram went dormant for a year, only to 'transform itself into a network of underground cells with a hidden leadership – a situation that today makes any military solution illusory' (Marchal, 2012: 3). Determined to avenge the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf by the Nigerian security forces, Boko Haram re-emerged in 2010 with more sophisticated attacks and advanced tactics (such as the use of suicide bombings). Boko Haram's quick recovery following the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, demonstrates both the strength and tenacity of the group. Under Abubakar Shekau, who took over leadership of the group after Yusuf's death, Boko Haram carried out several successful attacks, most notably the September 2010 assault on a Maiduguri prison that resulted in the release of 700 prisoners, including Boko Haram members, and a bombing in the city of Jos that killed more than 80 people (Agbiboa 2013b). In June 2011, Boko Haram Islamists bombed the police and United Nations building in Abuja in the first suicide bombing that Nigeria has ever witnessed. In the first 10 months of 2012, over 900 people lost their lives in Boko Haram attacks – more than in 2010 and 2011 combined (Forest, 2012). In total, Boko Haram conducted 364 terrorist attacks, which killed 1,132 people in 2012 (FATF Report 2013: 5). These attacks were targeted at opponents within Islam, police stations, military facilities, churches, schools, cell phone towers, beer parlours, newspaper offices, and the United Nations mission in Abuja. The number of civilian deaths has been on the increase since 2011 (see Chart 1). Acts of terror against civilians (like the murder of sixty-five students while they slept at the agricultural college in Yobe state in September 2013, the chainsaw beheadings of truck drivers, the killing of hundreds on the roads of Northern Nigeria, and the recent abduction of over 200 girls from Chibok) have raised serious doubts about Nigeria's ability to control territory (Sergie and Johnson 2014).

### ***Boko Haram as a Non-monolithic Entity***

In their recent article in *African Affairs*, Dowd and Raleigh (2013: 501) cautions against attempts to obscure the 'fractious nature of diverse Islamist groups' that are 'highly variegated and fragmented not only in terms of the general absence of unity but also in its tendency towards splitting, splintering, and turning on itself.' This caveat applies in the case of Boko Haram, which is a diverse entity with no unified purpose. Already, at the level of group membership the motivations for joining are as diverse as the recruits: 'from a desire for revenge against the Nigerian government for its suppression of the July 2009 uprisings, to the desire to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria, to pursuit of the economic incentives entailed in bank and car robberies, to the rewards paid to members for killing government officials' (Zenn *et al.* 2013: 48). There are separate factions within Boko Haram who disagree about tactics and strategic decisions, competing at times for attention and followers. In July 2011, for example, a group emerged in

Maiduguri known as the *Yusufiyya* Islamic Movement; the group distributed leaflets widely to northerners denouncing Boko Haram’s ‘false holy war’ and ‘bombings targeted against civilians (ibid: 46). Asserting the legacy of Boko Haram’s founder, Mohammed Yusuf, the authors of the leaflets distanced themselves from attacks on civilians and on churches. Today, ‘some local observers now discriminate between a Kogi Boko Haram, Kanuri Boko Haram, and Hausa Fulani Boko Haram’ (Forest 2012).

**Chart 1**  
**Reported civilian deaths in Boko Haram attacks Sep 2010 - 17 May 2014**



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, created by Prof. Clionadh Raleigh, University of Sussex

In 2011, a Boko Haram splinter group by the name *Jama’at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan* (‘Supporters of Islam in the Land of Sudan’), popularly known as Ansaru, emerged in northern Nigeria condemning Boko Haram’s killing of Muslims and announcing that they will not target non-Muslims except ‘in self-defence or if they attack Muslims’ (*Al Arabiya*, May 27 2013). Ansaru, whose leaders received training from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), have claimed a ‘different’ interpretation of ‘jihad’ (Zenn et al. 2013: 46). The group’s ideology has ‘translated international and pan-West African rhetoric into militant activity, with a focus on kidnapping foreigners’ (ibid). Already, there are signs of growing linkages between Ansaru and Sahelian militant groups such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Onuoha 2014). This study suspects that the tension between Ansaru and Boko Haram may be related to matters of strategy between members who are more inclined towards the local (‘strategic’) agenda and those whose ideological convictions lie in the global (‘universal/abstract’) agenda. This matter of strategy is similar to the intra-group ideological differences and power struggle within the Somali Islamist group Al Shabab. In his recent book, Hansen (2013: 2) argues that ‘there is tension within the [Al-Shabab] organisation between the *local* and *global agendas*, in which local dynamics still dominate but ideological convictions are often blurred, self-contradicting and unclear’ (emphasis added). In 2013, after kidnapping a French engineer in Katsina, Ansaru claimed that the attack was in response to France’s plans to militarily intervene in a ‘war on Islam’ in Mali and ‘its prohibition on the wearing of the Islamic headscarf by women in public places’ (Zenn et al. 2012: 46). In November 2012, 40 Ansaru fighters stormed the Special Anti-Robbery Squad prison in Abuja and freed senior Boko Haram commanders, a move that was welcomed by Boko Haram’s Abubakar Shekau. According to Zenn (2013: 3-4), Ansaru’s freeing of Boko Haram prisoners suggested that despite the circumstances surrounding its emergence, the two groups were capable of supporting each other’s mutual objectives.

While Boko Haram's grievances and attacks are fundamentally localized, the group's most high-profile suicide attacks have targeted the United Nations mission in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, in August 2011. Following the attack, Boko Haram released a statement that read: All over the world, the United Nations is a global partner in the oppression of believers. We are at war against infidels. In Nigeria, the Federal Government tries to perpetuate the agenda of the United Nations... We have told everyone that the United Nations is the bastion of the global oppression of Muslims all over the world (*The Punch*, September 2, 2011). Since Al-Qaeda has attacked United Nations targets in Algeria, and Al-Shabaab has attacked UN targets in Somalia, Boko Haram's decision to attack the United Nations mission is unlikely to be a coincidence. Forest (2012: 130) is convinced that 'this attack on a distinctly non-Nigerian target was a first for Boko Haram and indicates[s] a major shift in its ideology and strategic goals.' Already, in one of its early statements, the group declared that 'Boko Haram is just a version of the Al-Qaeda which we align with and respect. We support Osama bin Laden, we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamized which is according to the wish of Allah' (*Vanguard*, August 14 2009). Akinola (2014) argues that the 'sophistication of the Boko Haram operations, outsmarting the military in the manner in which they have been doing, suggests the outfit benefits from the collaboration of experienced international terrorist groups.'

### ***Why Boko Haram Rebels***

Many analysts have tried to make sense of why Boko Haram rebels (Onuoha 2012; Mustapha 2012; Kukah 2012; Agbibo 2013; Zenn et al. 2013). A number of reasons have been variously adduced, including (1) a northern feeling of alienation from the more developed Christian south of Nigeria; (2) rampant government corruption; (3) incompetent and brutal state security services; and (4) the belief that relations with the West are a corrupting influence. Several theories have emerged, including the conviction in the south and among Christians that Boko Haram is a handiwork of disgruntled northern Muslim politicians who want to make life unbearable for a southern Christian president, a conviction that was recently peddled by Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, during an annual African Studies lecture delivered at Oxford. In the north and among Muslims the conspiracy theory is that Boko Haram is not the doing of Muslims, but the machinations of enemies of Islam who want to bring the religion to disrepute. There is also the conspiracy theory in the north that President Goodluck Jonathan's administration is funding Boko Haram either to make Islam look bad or to depopulate the north ahead of the 2015 elections (Adibe, 2014). In between these conspiracy theories of local provenance is the claim that Boko Haram is the work of the Americans because two studies by US institutions has predicted that Nigeria will collapse by 2015 and 2030, respectively (Mustapha 2012). Not infrequently, leaders in Nigeria (ab)use these conspiratorial theories 'to locate the blame for violence elsewhere, away from poor records of governance, state capacity, and representation' (Dowd and Raleigh, 2013: 498).

A recurrent issue in the Boko Haram literature is the extent of relative poverty and inequality in the north which has led some analysts to argue that underdevelopment is the main reason why extremist groups like Boko Haram rebel. Kwaja (2011: 1), for example, argues that 'religious dimensions of the conflict have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and inequality are the root causes.' For Mustapha (2012), 'Boko Haram is the symptom of the failure of nation-building and democratic politics in Nigeria. It is the misguided cry of a disgruntled youth crushed by the socioeconomic system on the one hand and then repressed by the state on the other.' With the northern cleric-scholar, Rev. Fr. Matthew Kukah (2012: 3), we observe a nuanced movement away from the poverty-conflict nexus to the bad governance-conflict nexus. Kukah argues that religion is used to mobilize against modernity, which is seen as the root cause of social anomalies. According to Kukah, 'in the eyes of the [Boko Haram] sect members, the persistence of corruption, collapse of public morality, injustice and so on could only be attributed to those who govern. In their reasoning, those who govern us [*yan boko*] do so because they have acquired their tools by gaining Western education [*boko*]' (ibid). Kukah finds a kindred spirit in Christopher Clapham (2004: 200) who argues more broadly that 'the breakdown of law and order in African states was basically the result of the legacy of bad governance.' Similarly, others like Evans (1994: 3) argue that 'a downward spiral of economic decline, often exacerbated by official corruption and mismanagement, has created governments that are at or near the point of collapse and that are being challenged, often violently, by their own citizens. Economic decline has hastened the process of national disintegration and vice versa.'

Explanations such as the above tend to draw on the human needs theory of social conflicts which holds that all human beings have basic needs which they seek to fulfil; and failure to meet these needs could lead to the outbreak of violent conflict (Rosati *et al.* 1990: 156-190). According to Kelman (1999)

Conflict is caused and escalated to a considerable degree to unfulfilled needs – not only material needs, but also such psychological needs as security, identity, self-esteem, recognition, autonomy and a sense of justice. Parties in conflict, in pursuit of their own security and identity and related needs and interests, undermine and threaten the security and identity of the other (cited in Azcarate n.d.).

The human need theory resonates with the theory of ‘relative deprivation’ which links economic disparity with the propensity of individuals to resort to violent political action. T.R. Gurr (1970) puts it succinctly: ‘misery breeds revolt.’ However, the nexus between relative deprivation and the onset of conflict has been criticized as ‘simplistic’ because it fails to explain why some poor people or places do not participate in violence, and because it offers very little in the way of clear recommendation for policy-makers (Agbibo, 2013). People can in actual fact be advantaged while experiencing group-based relative deprivation (see, for example, Leach *et al.* 2007: 191-204). Conversely, people can be comparatively disadvantaged without experiencing their inequality as deprivation (see, for example, Jost and Banaji, 1994: 1-27). Perhaps, this explains why findings in social psychological research place relative deprivation as a likely contributor to radicalisation (King and Taylor, 2011: 610). This critique is bolstered by Krieger and Meierriek’s research finding that, ‘there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that economic deprivation causes terrorism... poor economic conditions matter less to terrorism once it is controlled for institutional and political factors’ (2011: 3). Instead, they argue that ‘terrorism is closely linked to political instability, sharp divides within the populace, country size and further demographic, institutional and international factors’ (*ibid.*). Similarly, James Piazza (2006: 171) employs a series of multiple regression analyses on terrorism incidents and casualties in 96 countries from 1986-2002 to argue that ‘variables such as population, ethno-religious diversity, increased state repression, and most, significantly, the structure of party politics are found to be [more] significant predictors of terrorism’ than the ‘rooted-in-poverty’ thesis. Yet, it is the view of this paper that the socio-economic factor cannot be simply wished away in the search for understanding.

Every social indicator one can think of puts northern states at the bottom of the Nigerian social piles (see Tables 1 and 2). One legacy of disunity bequeathed to Nigeria by the British colonialists is the unequal educational development of the north and south (Akinola, 2014). At independence in 1960, northern Nigeria had been only loosely administered by the British colonial authorities and had not approximated the southern economic and educational development (Cook 2014: 5). In 1965, the north with more than half of the national population had 10 percent of the national total of all primary school population. For higher education in 1965, northerners made up 8 percent of total student population compared to 48 percent for the East, 5 percent for Lagos, and 39 percent for the West (Agbibo, 2013a: 51). Akinola (2014) claims that the assumption of the iniquitous Boko Haram ideology, ‘Western education is evil,’ has its genesis in the once hostile attitude of the northern traditional rulers to Western education. The hostilities of the Emirs and Islamic clerics of the north to Western education and *yan boko* were appreciated by Sir Lord Frederick Lugard (first Governor General) and his colonial successors, not least because of the need to preserve the prestige and authority of the Emirs (*ibid.*). In other words, the disparity between the two regions (north and south) emanated from the fact that the activities of Christian missionaries, *de facto* pioneers of education in the colony, were restricted to the south and the pagan areas of the north (*ibid.*). According to Akinola,

Most of Nigeria’s political leaders since independence from Britain in 1960 have come from the north. Were they to have been visionary, they would have appreciated the need to redress the historic imbalance in education between the regions of the Nigerian federation. It is not that they do not know that education is important. In fact, their own children receive education in the best schools and universities Europe and America can offer. That they seem comfortable with the poverty and servitude that surround them is amazing (Akinola 2014).

In early 2013, Nigeria’s Bureau of Statistics (NBS) figures revealed that, despite favourable economic performance, Nigeria’s poverty rate jumped from 54.7 percent in 2004 to 60.9 percent in 2010. In 2011, 100 million Nigerians lived in absolute poverty and 12.6 million more were moderately poor. The worst

hit by these afflictions are young people, especially in northern Nigeria (Onuoha 2014: 6). Given the level of poverty in the north, it appears that the Boko Haram insurgency is being used as a form of protest with a view to drawing attention to the region's plight, as well as a bait to draw the most impoverished into the group. According to Elegbe, 'Unemployment is higher in the north than in the south. Mix this situation with radical Islam, which promises a better life for martyrs, and you can understand the growing violence in the north' (cited in Agbiboa 2013: 52). Similarly, Komolafe argues that, even if unemployment and poverty are not the principal factors in radicalisation in Nigeria, 'the tendency to produce suicide bombers is greater in a community defined by mass misery and joblessness than the one in which basic needs of food, education, health, housing, and sanitation are met for the majority of the people' (cited in Onuoha 2014: 6). While the feelings of disenfranchisement from mainstream society are not uncommon among societal youths, in few cases does this prompt a person to take on the identity of a terrorist or suicide bomber. Yet, as Schwartz *et al.* (2009: 540) contends, feelings of disenfranchisement, when coupled with fervent adherence to traditional, dichotomous 'us versus them' religious principles justifying violence against those perceived to threaten one's religious or cultural group, a strong prioritization of the group over the individual, and a belief that one's group is morally superior to the group being attacked, may combine to make terrorism considerably more likely. Erikson wrote some four decades ago about the lure of terrorism in youths who perceived their personal and group identities as being threatened:

Where historical and technological development, however, severely encroach upon deeply rooted or strongly emerging identities (i.e., agrarian, feudal, patrician) on a large scale, youth feel endangered, individually and collectively, whereupon it becomes ready to support doctrines offering a total immersion in a synthetic identity (extreme nationalism, racism, or class consciousness) and a collective condemnation of a totally stereotyped enemy of the new identity. The fear of loss of identity which fosters such indoctrination contributes significantly to that mixture of righteousness and criminality which, under totalitarian conditions, becomes available for organised terror and for the establishment of major industries of extermination (cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006: 21).

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) recently commissioned a study – entitled 'Why Youths Join Boko Haram?' – to examine the factors contributing to youth radicalisation and recruitment into Boko Haram. The findings suggest that conditions of widespread unemployment and poverty are key factors in making northern youths vulnerable to radicalisation (Onuoha 2014). The survey findings identified the high incidence of unemployment and poverty that prevail in many northern states as the second most important reason why youth engage in religious-based violence, the first being the ignorance of religious teaching opposed to violence. In Kaduna state, 83 percent of respondents reported that unemployment and poverty are important factors. In Kano, 92 percent cited them as important (see Onuoha 2014: 5). Thus, Mustapha (2012) argues that, 'Boko Haram... is the misguided cry of a disgruntled youth crushed by the socioeconomic system on the one hand and then repressed by the state on the other.' The key point here is that extreme poverty and relative deprivation writ large in the north are telling factors in the generation of an army of young men (and increasingly women) ready to kill or be killed in the name of religious identity. Citing the work of Adejumo (2005), Solomon (2013) argues that in situations where there is shrinking social resources, excruciating economic crises, a retreat of the welfare state and its consequences on contracting social services, and a market ideology of 'fend for yourself', sharp divisions are wrought in social relationships, in which the identity issue becomes a major weapon of economic and social competition (cf. Solomon 2013). It is within this context that political elites exploit resurgent identities for both political and economic gain (ibid). Drawing on Erikson, Crenshaw aptly argues that:

At the stage of identity formation, individuals seek both meaning and a sense of wholeness or completeness as well 'fidelity', a need to have faith in something or someone outside oneself as well as to be trustworthy in its service. Ideologies, then, are guardians of identity... political undergrounds utilize youth's need for fidelity as well as the 'store of wrath' held by those deprived of something in which to have faith. A crisis of identity (when the individual who finds self-definition difficult is suffering from ambiguity, fragmentation, and contradiction) makes some adolescents susceptible to 'totalism' or to totalistic collective identities that promise certainty. In such collectivities the troubled young find not only an identity but an explanation for their difficulties and a promise for the future (cited in Arena and Arrigo, 2006: 21-22).

**Table 1. Human development index by zone**

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

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2009: 10)

**Table 2. Trends in poverty rates by zone for two relative poverty lines**

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

Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2010)

\*South South: Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Delta.

\*South East: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Adamawa and Imo

\*South West: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo

\*North Central: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and Abuja

\*North East: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe

\*North West: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara

It would appear that Boko Haram is infusing religion into a long-churning brew of grievances about corruption, injustice and unfair distribution of wealth and power (Felbab-Brown and Forest 2012). In fact, the whole logic of attacking *'boko'* and *'yan boko'* is not unconnected to dashed hopes of gaining a livelihood through western education or the modern system built around it. Instead, Boko Haram members seek a 'return' to a version of society in which Western knowledge and education is expunged. They hope such a 'cleansed' society will better serve their needs (both spiritual and material). This echoes the point made by Ramsbotham et al. (2008: 86) that 'groups that seek to satisfy their identity and security needs through conflict are in effect seeking change in the structure of their society.' While unemployment and poverty are not necessarily correlated with youth radicalisation and violence, as research by Krieger and Meierriek (2011) and Piazza (2006) have shown, it is important to note Onuoha's (2014: 6) point that 'privation and other frustrating conditions of life render youth highly vulnerable to manipulation by extremist ideologues.' Writing about Palestine, for example, Pedhazur *et al.* (2003: 405-423) argue that the typical suicide terrorist was a 'young, vulnerable person with strong religious affiliations... [that] had been skilfully manipulated to persuade him into taking part in the terrorist operation.'

Asides from the above, the ultra-violent turn of Boko Haram ought to be traced back to the extrajudicial killings of founder Mohammed Yusuf and several of his followers. One of the most important elements in understanding why people become ultra-radical is an appreciation of 'the psychology of vengeance' (Agbibo 2014). Catalysts events (violent acts that are perceived to be unjust) provide a strong sense of outrage and a powerful psychological desire for revenge and retribution. In the case of Boko Haram, the unjust killing of their founder was the catalyst event that served to foment pre-existing animosities that stemmed from arbitrary arrests as well as the torture and killing of group members by state security forces. Until 2009, Boko Haram was seen as radical, but not ultra-violent; Boko Haram members were known among northern communities, and not the 'faceless' tag that President Jonathan likes to put on the group. Things took a turn for the worse with the killing of the group's leader, which 'provoked a staunch reaction from Boko Haram members who primarily want to settle their scores with the police and the army' (Marchal 2012: 2). Hence, since 2009 Boko Haram has 'been driven by a desire for vengeance... But the group has proved itself to be very adaptable, evolving its tactics swiftly and changing its targets' (Walker 2012: 2). In particular, using suicide bombers and explosives has intensified the ferocity of the group and led to speculation in some quarters that the group might be linked to al-Qaeda (Agbibo, 2014). In November 2011, a spokesman for Boko Haram called 'Abu Qaqa' stated:

'It is true that we have links with al-Qaeda. They assist us and we assist them' (Vanguard, November 24, 2011). Boko Haram has also admitted to establishing links in Somalia. A statement allegedly released by the group read: 'very soon, we will wage jihad...We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable...This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they have been' (The Weekly Standard, June 18, 2011).

## Conclusion

The paper has used the SIT to gain fresh insights into the social dynamics of Boko Haram. The growing frustration of the Nigerian government with the deteriorating security situation in northern Nigeria has become increasingly evident in its fluctuating approach from dialogue about granting amnesty to Boko Haram members to the deployment of military troops and the proclamation of war against Boko Haram (Thurston, 2013). The adoption of such contradictory strategies by the Nigerian state has stalled any prospect of a negotiated dialogue with Boko Haram. As Shehu Sani, a leading rights activist in the north who has participated in past negotiations with Boko Haram, recently noted: 'You can't talk of peace on one hand and be deploying troops on the other' (cited in IRIN 22 May 2013). The questions currently facing the amnesty committee set up to negotiate with Boko Haram are serious: How will the committee identify credible interlocutors? Can anyone speak for Boko Haram, particularly if the group is non-monolithic or fragmented? If Boko Haram has already turned its back on the amnesty, what conditions would induce a *volte-face*? Does Boko Haram have grievances and demands that an amnesty program could feasibly address, as in the case of the oil conflict in the Niger Delta? Does the current state of emergency signal that the Nigerian government lacks a clear counter-terrorism strategy? (Thurston, 2013).

It is striking that the vilest forms of terrorism and political violence that have plagued Nigeria since 1999 have originated in the poorest regions of the country, namely the oil-rich Niger Delta and northern Nigeria. Agbiboa (2013) observed that people living under conditions of poverty and deprivation may draw meaning and guidance – rightly or wrongly – from their religious identity, particularly as religious actors are commonly accessible at the most grass-roots levels. In northern and especially northeastern Nigeria, rampant levels of poverty and oppression coalesce with the sense of humiliation and grievance to create an identity crisis that is exploited by religious and political extremists to gain influence. Thus, providing mainstream paths for young people, within the cultural constraints of their society, can help to alleviate the anger, frustration, and hopelessness leading many northern youths to join terrorist. True, poverty is not itself a cause of terrorism. However, the lack of a personally meaningful career path means that there is less holding a person back psychologically from becoming involved with terrorist groups. In this regard, it is worth reflecting on Fathali Moghaddam's 'Staircase to Terrorism' model of radicalisation, which argues that, 'It is conditions on the ground floor that lead to terrorism [...] Only by reforming conditions on the ground floor can societies end terrorism' (2005: 166-67). In Moghaddam's 'ground floor,' it is the perception of individuals, and what shapes them, that provide the basis for radicalisation. In this regard, two societal factors are important: social mobility and procedural justice. Commenting on Moghaddam's 'Staircase to Terrorism,' King and Taylor (2011: 606) argue that,

If legitimate possibilities to move up the social hierarchy exist, people are less likely to engage in radical action. Additionally, if people view decision making as fair, with opportunities to participate in the decision making process – as in liberal democracies – people are less likely to radicalise. Without social mobility or procedural justice to rectify their illegitimate status, discontent leads people to the next floor.

At the moment, there is a presumption in Nigeria that the government should not give in to terrorists like Boko Haram. There are good reasons for this position: giving it might set the precedent for a series of threatened terror attacks with an eye to gaining more concessions. Yet this paper argues that *if* acts of terror are motivated by the desire for 'justice' and retribution for perceived damage to the Islamist group (i.e. the extra-legal killing of Boko Haram's founder Mohammed Yusuf), they will stop once justice has been served. Thus, the motivation here is to restore a damaged sense of identity, not necessarily to garner more material concessions. In such cases, taking seriously the demands of terrorists may not be an invitation for a future flood of demands (Eswaran and Neary 2014: 39). But even such a reasoned view must confront some difficult questions. For instance, what kind of justice would be served? How will the state meet the demand of Boko Haram terrorists without wishing away its own existence given that Boko Haram abhors the existence of the state *ab initio*? Also, given the failure of other strategies, the refusal of

Boko Haram to come to negotiate or even accept amnesty, what methods other than the military option would serve to curtail their activities? One thing is clear: a security-only military approach to fighting terrorism not only precludes democratic culture and attitudes, but further radicalizes the religious terrorist group and strengthens the collective resolve of its members, who are unlikely to compromise (which means betraying their faith). A security-only approach also risk pushing yet more restless, jobless and frustrated northern youths into violent extremism and ‘negative identity.’ According to Keller (1983: 274), ‘an overreliance on intimidatory techniques not only present the image of a state which is low in legitimacy and desperately struggling to survive, but also in the long run can do more to threaten state coherence than to aid it.’ This paper, therefore, submits that an effective counterterrorism policy in Nigeria must go beyond an exclusively security-driven logic to embed counterterrorism in an overarching national security strategy that not only appreciates the ideological context in which (Islamist) radicalisation occurs, but also tackles poverty and the corruption-driven alienation felt by many in northern Nigeria. These factors contribute to Boko Haram’s support and justification. If the counterterrorism efforts against religious terrorism in northern Nigeria are to be effective, the Nigerian government must also invest in inter-religious dialogues between leaders of the two dominant religions in the country: Islam and Christianity. Such dialogues will help clear the cloud of misunderstanding and create a better atmosphere of mutual tolerance. In this regard, there is need to set up schools in Nigeria that combine secular and Islamic education. In addition, there is need for the state government to work with northern political, traditional, and religious elites towards a political solution to the Boko Haram crisis. Finally, the Nigerian government must recognise that unless issues of bad governance and systemic corruption, especially the problem of political corruption stemming from interreligious and interethnic rivalry aimed at the control of the state machinery for economic and political gains, are seriously addressed, all other measures will be nothing but cosmetic and *pro tempore*.

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