

## Boko Haram in Retrospective

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### Introduction

The militant Islamic group, popularly known as “Boko Haram”,<sup>1</sup> has been grabbing the headlines with brutal attacks on the Nigerian security forces, villages, churches, mosques, markets, English medium schools as well as murders of prominent Muslim clerics in northeastern Nigeria. The group gained international notoriety with the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls on April 14, 2014 at Chibok, a small town in Borno State. But who are they, what is their origin and what do they really stand for? Unraveling the mystery of “Boko Haram” has been made difficult by various factors including the climate of fear and hysteria the attacks have created within Nigeria and the nature of politics in Nigeria that generates and feeds on conspiracy theories.

Commenting on the conspiracy theories in Nigeria surrounding Boko Haram, James Verini, a journalist with the National Geographic and the New Yorker, states that

Almost no Nigerian I spoke with believes Boko Haram is just Boko Haram. Some claim it's the creation of Wahhabis from the Gulf states; others, of “the West.” Still others believe Boko Haram is backed by northern politicians vying for power; or by southern politicians who want to destabilize the north; or by people in President Jonathan's party who want to unseat him; or by Jonathan himself, in an effort to cancel elections in the north; or, if not by him, by the people around him. In fact, Jonathan apparently believes the last. In a moment of unbuttoned paranoia at a church service last year he said, “Some [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. (Verini 2013)

The fractured nature of northern Nigerian Islam of several splinter reformist and radical groups has compounded the problem. Professor Murray Last, a renown specialist on Islam in Nigeria, though, has put his finger on something very important in the following observation: “The Boko Haram incident follow[s] a pattern that goes back at least 200 years in northern Nigeria, and has a logic to it” (Last 2009: 11). Last, like many other observers, goes on to rather simplistically blame the rise of the group on the high levels of poverty and corruption in Nigeria.

In this article I will attempt to locate Boko Haram within what Last calls “the pattern of dissent” and endemic factionalism within northern Nigerian Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> We are using the term “Boko Haram” in quotation marks because the group does not self-identify as such. I will explain the origin and meaning of the name later in this paper

I will explore the ambivalence of the British colonial authorities towards Islam and the traditional *'ulama*, on the one hand, and Muslim ambivalence towards modernization and westernization, on the other. A romanticized jihadist legacy, disillusionment with the leadership of first generation of Western educated Muslim elite and failed implementation of shari'a in the early 2000s; the backdrop of 9/11 and the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and corrupt successive governments and incompetent security forces at the Federal and State levels are all factors that have contributed to creating the environment that birthed Boko Haram and feeds its toxic ideology and appeal.

### **Northern Nigerian Islam in retrospect**

Joseph Kenny, a leading Roman Catholic specialist on Islam in Nigeria has observed that "Northern [Nigerian] Islam has been firmly reformist and separatist with regards to anything non-Islamic" (Kenny 2001: 9). Boko Haram is symptomatic of the reformist and separatist character of northern Nigerian Islam. Broadly speaking, Boko Haram's claims has four key features: opposition to Western education (or rather aspects of it), opposition to the modern nation state of Nigeria, the desire to establish a shari'a/Islamic government and the use of violence (militant jihad) to effect change.

Among Nigerian Muslims, the most revered figure and inspired exemplar is Uthman Dan Fodio (d. 1817), a nineteenth century jihadist/reformist who took up arms against the Hausa chiefdoms of his day because he did not consider them to be Islamic enough. Dan Fodio accused the Muslim ruling class of heretical innovations and declared fellow Muslim opponents as unbelievers who are fit to be legally killed. He also declared the system they presided over as un-Islamic. He also accused the Muslim elite of his time of friendly relations with unbelievers and for failing to carry out jihad neighboring non-Muslim groups. Adherents of primal religions were declared "enemies of God" by virtue of their "unbelief" and communities decimated through pillage and enslavement (Azumah 2001: 68ff).

The jihad Dan Fodio unleashed led to the massive enslavement of indigenous populations resulting in one of the largest slave societies in modern times in the theocratic Sokoto Caliphate he established. Dan Fodio's jihad was strongly opposed by leading Muslim scholars of his day mainly from present day northeastern Nigeria. In their scholarship on Islam in Nigeria, leading British scholars (especially H. F. C. Smith and Mervyn Hiskett) in the 1960s and 70s took sides with the jihadists, presented them as "reformers" and standard bearers of orthodox Islam and painted their co-religious opponents as venal and corrupt scholars.

The dominant and profoundly impactful narrative that emerged in post-colonial Nigeria is a monolithic re-construction of Dan Fodio and the nineteenth century: a great reformer who inaugurated one hundred years of good, progressive Islamic government. Most of these scholars, linked to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), in London, UK, taught for many years in Nigeria where this uncritical jihadist narrative was passed on to Muslim students at High School and undergraduate levels. SOAS faculty, some of whom "directly influenced" policy in northern Nigeria, over the years passed this narrative to

Muslim students at the graduate level who became the main policy makers in post-colonial northern Nigeria in the political, judicial and educational spheres (Thurston 2014: 76-78).

In a near *mea culpa* in a 1993 preface to his major work on Dan Fodio's jihad, Mervyn Hiskett, a towering figure in the study of Islam in northern Nigeria, admitted that his work fell short of "true objectivity", that "the brutality and intolerance" of militant jihad, especially the Dan Fodio jihad, "has been veiled by an assumption of moral righteousness ... that leaves no place for an approach from the point of view of the victims" (Hiskett 1994: viii). Instructively, Hiskett laments that "the absolutism of the jihadists has been in no way diminished by the passage of time" and that proposals of Dan Fodio's model as a solution to Nigeria's ills by influential Muslim scholars continued to enjoy "widespread support". He went on to predict that "such inflexibility is, perhaps, the greatest problem facing a would-be democratic and pluralist Nigeria; and indeed, at the global level, it may be among the most intractable problems that face the non-Muslim world today" (Hiskett 1994: xii-xv).

### **Abubakar Gumi, *Izala* and *Salafi* Groups**

Since Dan Fodio in the nineteenth century, Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d.1992) is arguably the one individual whose scholarship and activism has profoundly shaped the trajectory of northern Nigerian Islam. Under the political leadership of Ahmadu Bello (d.1966), first premier of the Northern Region, a kind of truce was reached in the 1960s between the two main feuding Sufi factions in Nigeria. But no sooner was Bello killed in 1966, than factionalism reared its head with the rise to prominence of Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d.1992), one time Grand Mufti of Nigeria, and his public anti-Sufi campaigns. Holding himself up as the reformer of his time, Gumi accused the Sufi orders of syncretistic and heretical innovations, labeled practitioners as polytheists and declared in a public sermon in April 1977 that some of them could be legally killed (Loimeier 1997: 298).

His anti-Sufi sermons led to violent clashes between his followers and Sufi sympathizers, stabbings during prayers in mosques and killings of prominent opponents. He also led the campaign to declare the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement a heretical sect and attacked the newly introduced Shi'a Islamic movement in Nigeria under the leadership of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky. Gumi's political agendas and views played a significant role in worsening Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria as he consistently preyed on Muslim fears of a Christian domination. Gumi had close connections with Saudi Arabian scholars and notables where he drew his ideological and financial support.

Gumi who himself was a product of western education believed it had subtly undermined Islamic learning and called for a return to the Qur'an and Sunna, and the reenactment of the seventh century theocratic model of governance in Madina. Gumi's rather opportunistic political dealings with the various military and civilian governments, under Christian and Muslim leadership, led to divisions among Muslims and sowed seeds of discord between Christians and Muslims. For instance in 1987, Gumi advised Muslims not to join a political party headed by a non-Muslim, and that if Christians refused to accept Muslim

leadership, “then we have to divide the country” (Loimeier 1997: 171). Gumi’s ideological and doctrinal views inspired the founding of the *Izala Movement* by one of his students in 1978 with Gumi as the spiritual and ideological head (Amara 2011: 157). The *YanIzala*, as the movement came to be known, provided Gumi with the much needed organizational backing for his religio-political activities.

Other leading ideologues like Ibrahim Sulaiman arose from the ranks of the Muslim Students Society (MSS) who initially drew inspiration from Gumi’s teaching. Sulaiman along with a good proportion of the MSS became disillusioned with Gumi and *Izala* divisive propaganda. They chose to concentrate their attacks on colonialism, secularism and Christians. If Gumi was the arch anti-Sufi campaigner, Sulaiman became the chief anti-Christian propagandist. Sulaiman believed the prescription for the malaise of Nigerian society lay in Dan Fodio’s theocratic model (Sulaiman 1986). He accused his fellow western trained Muslim elite of being

afflicted with a fatal disease implanted in them by colonialism. This disease has two major symptoms: the pathological fear of the cross, and the passionate love for the dross of earthly life. The cross bestrides the psyche of the Muslim elite like a colossus. They shiver and quake at the very mention of the cross, and to appease this powerful god, everything is being sacrifice (Loimeier 1997: 367).

Sulaiman had a huge influence on the MSS through his publications. The MSS got embroiled in open conflicts with Christians, first at Ahmadu Bello University in 1978 where Sulaiman taught for many years and the devastating Kafanchan riots of 1987, which started between MSS and Christian students at the Kafanchan Advanced Teachers Training College (Christelow 1987: 237-244). Much attention has focused on poor, wandering Qur’anic students who are easily recruited during violent encounters. What is less talked about is the fact that more well-to-do young people on college and university campuses in Nigeria have become radicalized in their religious views.

It was against this backdrop of factionalism and violent clashes in the late 70s and 80s that the Movement of Muhammad Marwa (d.1980), known locally as *Maitatsine* (literally, the one who damns), emerged in Kano with its strong anti-Western and anti-modernity rhetoric (denouncing the use of watches, radios, bicycles, and cars) and the ensuing bloody confrontation with security forces that claimed thousands of lives in the 1980s. Leading Muslim figures of the day had no doubt that Gumi and *Izala*’s aggressive and divisive propaganda created the environment that gave rise to the *Maitatsine*.

The similarities between *Maitatsine*’s views and *modus operandi* and those of Boko Haram are more than coincidental. *Maitatsine*, like Boko Haram, established a separate community, had a particular dislike for the police and started a campaign of violence after their leader was killed in a police raid (Lubeck 1987: 97-105). It is also noteworthy that the northeastern part of Nigeria, where Boko Haram was birthed in the early 2000s, is the area where most of *Maitatsine*’s fighters/followers sought sanctuary after the violent

crackdown in the 1980s.

Included in this mix are radical *Salafi* groups nearly all founded by second generation *Izala* alumni, and graduates from the University of Madina, Saudi Arabia. Upon their return, most started splinter reformist organizations out of disillusionment with the trajectory of the movement under the leadership of the first generation and a quest to carve their own spheres of influence. Ja'far Mahmoud Adam (d.2007) is one such *Izala* alumni and Madina graduate who became a prominent *Ahlus Sunna* leader in northern Nigeria, and who in turn, was the teacher of Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram (Brigaglia 2012:36-38).

In the words of Muhammad S. Umar, a leading Nigerian Muslim intellectual at Northwestern University, "the genealogy of Boko Haram comes partly from the long-standing negative attitudes towards Western education among the Muslims of northern Nigeria, and partly from Salafi-Wahabbi trends in Nigeria originating from the preaching career of al-Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi" (Umar 2012: 120). One can safely conclude therefore, that the *YanIzala* created the environment for the rise of Maitatsine in the 1980s just as *Ahlus Sunna* did for Boko Haram in early 2000s. The *Izala* is now split into different factions, and as we shall demonstrate shortly, Boko Haram itself has fractured since the death of its founder in 2009. And it is fair to say that there is no love lost between many of these groups. It is within this context of an entangled web of radical reformist factions, and the violent jostling for power and control that we now turn to construct the rise of Boko Haram.

### **The Making of Boko Haram**

The origins of Boko Haram go back to the mid 1990s in a youth group at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi mosque (an *Ahlus Sunna* mosque) in Maiduguri in the Borno state in northeastern Nigeria. Muhammad Yusuf assumed leadership of the group after the then leader left for studies in Saudi Arabia. Yusuf exercised some leadership roles with the *Izala* in the mid-1990s. Towards the late 1990s to early 2000, he became a student-follower of Ja'far Adam, the *Ahlus Sunna* leader based in Kano. For some time, Yusuf was considered a potential successor to Ja'far and from about 1999 to 2002, he was the accredited representative of *Ahlus Sunna* in Maiduguri, delivering sermons and lectures on local television and radio.

Yusuf apparently fell out with his teacher and mentor, Ja'far Adam, and around 2002, began a process of withdrawal from the Ndimi mosque to establish his own community around a new compound which served as the group's headquarters. The compound included a mosque, which he named *Ibn Taymiyya Masjid*, after a thirteenth century Islamist jurist-theologian and universally acclaimed father of modern radical, reformist Islam, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). In late December 2003, following a community dispute, a splinter group then known as the "Nigerian Taliban", got into conflict with the local police. This confrontation led to a siege of the group's compound and killing of several members including the leader. The few survivors returned to Maiduguri, where some reintegrated into Yusuf's group.

The experience of the “Nigerian Taliban” at the hands of the security forces must have deepened Yusuf’s resentment of the state security forces and squashed any lingering hopes of working with the Islamic establishment in Maiduguri and Borno State. Yusuf formally launched his own separatist community around the *Ibn Taymiyya Masjid* not too long afterwards. At this point in time, the group’s official name was *Ahlussunnawa-l-jama’awa-l-hijra* (Society of prophetic practice and withdrawal). Local people referred to the group as *Yusufiyya* or followers of Yusuf. According to Ahmad Salkida, the only Nigerian journalist known to have had direct access to Yusuf:

In a 2006 press release signed by the sect’s *shura* (consultative council), they stated that Islam permits them to subsist under a modern [state] like Nigeria but has explicitly prohibited them from joining or supporting the governments in so far as their systems, structures and institutions contain elements contradictory to core Islamic principles and beliefs (Salkida 2009).

In other words, the group was now openly operating on the doctrine of being *in* Nigeria but not being *of* the modern Nigerian state and its institutions. At this point, Yusuf was now in open confrontation with his former teacher and mentor, Ja’far Adam. The two engaged in polemical exchanges through sermons, with Adam rejecting Yusuf’s stance against participation in Western education and service in government institutions. At the height of these exchanges in 2007, Ja’far Adam was gunned down, apparently on Yusuf orders, during early morning prayers in his mosque in Kano.

Yusuf continued to mobilize and consolidate his group. Then in July 2009, following a confrontation with police, Boko Haram members engaged security forces in running battles. The group’s compound and mosque in Maiduguri was razed to the ground and Yusuf himself captured by the military and handed over to the police, who by all accounts, executed him, along with his father-in-law and a former commissioner of religious affairs of Borno State, Buji Foi. After the killing of Yusuf, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) issued a statement of condolence and offered to give Nigerian Muslims training and weapons to fight Christians in Nigeria (Reuters: 2010).

Several members of Boko Haram escaped into neighbouring Niger and Cameroun. Some proceeded to Algeria for training in militant camps. A power struggle ensued between Abubakar Shekau, the second-in-command, and Mamman Nur, third-in-command. Shekau eventually won over his more theologically trained and regionally connected rival mainly because of his Kanuri ethnic origins as against Nur, who is of Cameroonian origin. Shekau’s reported favoritism of ethnic Kanuris drove Hausa, non-Nigerians and other non-Kanuris to ally with Nur in the formation of a new group, *Ansaru*, in 2012. This group released flyers in Kano in Jan. 2012 claiming to be a “humane” alternative to Boko Haram, targeting government institutions and Christians in “self-defense” (Zenn Feb. 2014: 25 -26).

Meanwhile since mid-2010, members of Boko Haram regrouped in Maiduguri, under Shakau’s leadership, with a new name: *jama’atahl al-sunna li-l-dawawa-*

*I-jihad 'alaminhaj al-salaf* (the community of the people of the Sunna who fight for the cause [of Islam] by means of jihad according to the methods of the *Salaf* [first three generations of Muslims]). The change of name is a clear evolution from advocating withdrawal to advocating militant jihad.

If Yusuf had a crush on al-Qaeda, his deputies certainly consummated the marriage. "Shekau pledged loyalty to 'the amir of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb,' Usama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the 'Islamic States' in Iraq and Somalia, declaring 'Oh America, jihad has just begun'" (Zenn Feb. 2014: 24). Boko Haram and *Ansaru* have since developed a particular hatred for Christians and Christianity that was hardly noticeable in Yusuf's sermons and lectures which may be partly explained by their ideological and operational connections with AQIM. Shekau makes his hatred for Christians and Christianity clear in one of his YouTube rumbings:

We know what is happening in this world, it is a jihad war against Christians and Christianity. It is a war against western education, democracy and constitution. We have not started, next time we are going to Abuja; we are going to refinery and towns of Christians. You don't know me. I have no problem with Jonathan. This is what I know from the Qur'an. It is war against Christians and democracy and their constitution. Allah says we should finish them when we get them (Shekau 2014)

Since 2010 Boko Haram has succeeded in subjecting northeastern Nigeria to a campaign of terror apparently to avenge the death of their leader and comrades. The attacks escalated since 2011 into full-scale suicide bombings and unprecedented levels of sexual violence against women in the forms of mass abductions. Mamman Nur's faction of *Ansaru* operates in the northwestern part of Nigeria targeting security forces, kidnapping foreigners for ransom and was responsible for the attacks on the police and UN headquarters in Abuja in June and August 2011 respectively.

#### **"Boko Haram": The Name and the Mission**

It is true that "Boko Haram" means Western education is forbidden or sinful. It is also true that "Boko Haram" is opposed to aspects of Western education because they believe it is sinful. However, the group rejects the name "Boko Haram" for itself. In a YouTube video, Abubakar Shekau insists, "I am not Boko Haram, I am *jama'atahl al-sunna li-l-dawawa-l-jihad*. I don't care what you call me, you are all in trouble" (Shekau 2014). Commenting on the name "Boko Haram", Brigaglia makes the following insightful observation:

The popularity of the nickname Boko Haram in the national and international press might be explained by two different reasons. For the northern Muslims, especially those ideologically close to Izala and Ahlus Sunna, the label transforms the radical group into an exotic eccentricity and hides its embarrassing connection to the leadership of a well-established Salafi organization in the country. For the southern Nigerian Christian press on the contrary, as well as for the global Western media, the nickname Boko Haram magically captures all the

stereotypes that have daily currency in Islamophobic discourses: at the same time obscurantist, primitive and ferocious, Boko Haram embodies all the prejudices associated with the supposed 'essence' of Islam (Brigaglia 2012: 37-38).

The term *Boko* is a Hausa word meaning sham, fake, counterfeit, inauthentic which came to be applied to secular-western education within northern Nigerian society. In other words, the stigmatization of secular education as counterfeit has a long and deep history in northern Nigeria. Umar recalls a well known Hausa song that stigmatizes western-secular education:

*Yan makarantarboko* (pupils of the public schools); *Ga karatubasala* (do have knowledge, but do not observe prayers); *Sai yawanzagin Mallam* (And often insulting teachers).

This song charges that western education undermines basic Islamic/religious tenets, instills indiscipline and disrespect for authority. In other words, knowledge without religious and social values is worthless. Umar goes on to cite another popular Hausa song which warns of the consequences of acquiring such worthless knowledge:

*Elementarẹmantan Allah* (pupils of Elementary school forget about God); *In kun mutubaruwanmu* (so when you die we have nothing to do with you).

With such strong popular stigma and aversion towards western-secular education, "very few Muslim parents allowed their children to receive western education, on account of which they became a distinct elites, *yanboko*" (Umar 2002: 86).

*Boko* therefore captures the spirit of the general northern Nigerian Muslim suspicion and aversion towards Western education, a suspicion that was, ironically shared by British colonial authorities if not inadvertently fostered by colonial educational policies (Thurston 2014). On the one hand, colonial authorities were concerned about Muslim conservatism and radicalism, and on the other hand, concerned that a full-scale secular education could undermine traditional Islamic values and religiosity.

In their bid to raise a corps of "liberal" Muslim elite for the colonial project, the British initiated a two-track education system, i.e. the Arabic and English medium schools. From 1934 to 1962, Sudanese were brought to teach in Arabic medium schools in northern Nigeria and scholarships provided for elect students to study in Sudan, and then at SOAS. Abubakar Gumi of the *Izala* Movement was among the first batch of students of the Arabic track who benefited from these scholarships. Between 1954 and 1966, colonial and northern Nigerian regional authorities sent more than 80 young men to study in Arab universities and at SOAS (Thurston 2014: 63). As the population became increasingly discontented with colonial rule and the failed policies of the ruling Muslim elite in the north, so did the resentment of the western educated Muslim elite mount.

At the time of independence, modern secular education had gained only a tenuous foothold in northern Nigeria, while the traditional system operated

relatively unabated. For western educated elites like Gumi, it was critical to start what became known as *Islamiyya* schools where Islamic subjects are taught alongside subjects such as mathematics, English, and science as well as offering religious education to adults, including women. The *Izala* championed *Islamiyya* schools in independent Nigeria as a double-edged sword for fighting what they saw as Sufi obscurantism and superstition and a corrupting secular educational system. Despite its exemplary track record in promoting *Islamiyya* education,

On the first page of the journal “al-Burhān” (the Proof) edited by the *Izala* headquarters in Jos we read the sentence “*al-‘aqīda al-Salafiyya khayr mina al- Shahāda al-‘ilmiyya*”, meaning The Salafiyya path is better than any academic certificate (Amara 2011: 235).

The *Izala* ambivalence towards education is reflective of the wider attitude. When it comes to the actual position of Boko Haram on Western education, the picture is more nuanced than is portrayed in the media and popular discourse. Yusuf cites an Islamic tradition which grades non-Islamic knowledge into three categories, i.e. knowledge which conforms to the Qur’an and Sunna; knowledge which neither conforms nor contradicts the Qur’an and Sunna; and knowledge which contradicts the Qur’an and Sunna. The first two are *halal* (permissible) while the third is *haram* (forbidden). He however went on to condemn the public school system as *haram* because it mixed boys and girls in the same classrooms (Umar 2012: 124).

From the northern Nigerian context itself, Abubakar Gumi wrote and taught about the conspiratorial and destructive nature of the colonial education system bequeathed by the British who he said

built schools to teach destructive western culture and they began by teaching the children of the idolatrous infidels whose fathers walked the land naked, unaware of that morals, manly virtue and humanity might be. They placed them in sensitive government positions and they came to lord it over the Muslims whose brains had fallen asleep amid fantasies of superstition (Hiskett 1994: xix)

Yusuf banned participation or even being a sports fan because it could lead a Muslim to develop affection for non-Muslim sports stars. He also rejected the secular nature of the Nigerian state and government as based on *kufr*, unbelief. He invoked the classical Islamic teaching of rulers who rebel against God and impose their rebellion upon others and contended that it was obligatory for Muslims to embark on civil disobedience against secular governments, shun their services and institutions and remove it from power by force, if need be, and to replace it with an Islamic government.

Shekau declared: “I am against government of the people by the people. I am for government of the people by Allah. I will not worship what you are worshipping, you are worshipping democracy and because of that you are tracing to kill us” (Shekau 2014). But, again Yusuf and his deputies are neither the first nor alone in branding the secular Nigerian state and government as a

symbol of evil and idolatry. Umar notes that “virtually every Salafi would agree that a non-Islamic government ought to be replaced with an Islamic one, but the key difference is whether that should be done forcefully, even when the balance of power is heavily in favor of the non-Islamic government” (Umar 2012:132-134).

For virtually all *Salafists*, the best strategy is to participate in order to overthrow the system from within. The continuities notwithstanding, the atrocities of Boko Haram and the eccentricity of Shekau, have genuinely shocked Muslims across Nigeria some of whom are resorting to preposterous conspiracy theories that Boko Haram is the creation of the CIA for the purpose of tarnishing the image of Islam! Several leading individual Muslim clerics and organizations in Nigeria and around the Muslim world have nonetheless unequivocally and publicly condemned Boko Haram’s ideology and atrocities. These include the Sultan of Sokoto, the spiritual leader of Muslims in Nigeria, who has described Boko Haram as “anti-Islamic” and “an embarrassment to Islam”. The coalition of Muslim clerics in Nigeria also condemned the group and called upon it to disarm.

The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia described Boko Haram as misguided and intent on smearing the name of Islam while Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi of Iran called Boko Haram “savages who do not deserve to be called human beings”. The Indonesian *Ulama* Council condemned the group while the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University maintains that “the actions by Boko Haram are pure terrorism, with no relation to Islam” and criticizes them for using religion to justify their nefarious activities (See Wikipedia: “Boko Haram” for Muslim condemnations). In 2013 Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or AQIM came out to condemn targeting and killing students without mentioning Boko Haram by name. Abu Mundhir al-Shniqiti, one of AQIM’s spiritual leaders, issued the following *fatwa*:

Targeting schools to kill young students is impermissible, since they have not joined the ranks of the apostate military yet... This will give the enemies of the religion and Western media the opportunity to exploit these scenes to prove to Muslims that the *mujahideen* are far from Islam. These schools can be combated by warning people against enrolling in them, punishing the families who send their sons to them, and by destroying them when they are empty of the students (Zennundated:111).

It is very important to underline the fact that in their views, Boko Haram leadership regards nearly all traditional and western educated Muslim elite in Nigeria as infidels and hold themselves up as the true inheritors of the legacy of Dan Fodio. Mamman Nur blames Nigeria’s socio-economic and political woes on the fact that Muslim leaders had departed from the ideals of Dan Fodio and opted for secular constitutional rule from the west. He notes:

It was Shari’a law that was practiced in this country. Dan Fodio and other Islamic scholars carried out the jihad and ensured that Quranic law was implemented... 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 (Zenn undated: 112).

In other words, while the ideological and operational connections between Boko Haram and contemporary external jihadist groups is well established, the leadership are keen to stake their legitimacy and draw inspiration from local jihadists model such as the Sokoto caliphate. The historical legacy is therefore just as relevant and potent to groups such as Boko Haram as the inspiration and support they draw from contemporary militant groups and ideologues from other parts of the world. Weak and compromised state and Federal institutions, widespread corruption, ever widening gap between the rich and the poor and the general political climate of Nigeria are all exploited for recruitment and operation.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Boko Haram's targeted killing of fellow Muslims as well as their rejection as unbelief (*kufr*) and attacks against anything they deem non-Islamic fit into the received romanticized jihadist discourse in Nigeria. That scores of Muslim leaders around the world have come out to condemn and ostracize the group is important in the short term. In the long term, however, Muslims need to acknowledge and undertake a critical reassessment of the received romanticized jihadist narrative. The blunt truth is that, to the Muslim rulers he overthrew and the communities that were decimated, Dan Fodio was the nineteenth century Bin Laden and Shekau! Saudi Arabia adopted *Wahhabism* as an official creed and the same ideology gave birth to and continues to feed al-Qaeda which remains the Kingdom's number one foe today.

There is also a vital need to marshal Islamic arguments in favor of the peaceful tradition of Islam that African societies first fell in love with over many centuries and which still thrives in many parts of the continent including southwestern Nigeria. In the meantime, absolutist claims that *salafism* is the only alternative to secularism needs to be consistently challenged and the internal fallacies exposed. As we pointed out, the received narrative of a successful and progressive jihadist rule of the nineteenth century, at best, lacks objectivity, and at worst is a complete whitewash (Azumah 2001: 100ff).

That colonial education policies, key sections of mainstream western academia and institutions such as SOAS, have contributed to creating and perpetuating this romanticized jihadist narrative which many Islamist seek to turn into a political program, is also evident. At a time that pioneering African specialist on Islam such as Prof. Lamin Sanneh of Yale, were writing on the peaceful Jakhanké tradition of Islam in West Africa, Western scholarship was obsessed with the jihadist tradition. It is clear that the romanticized jihadist narrative, combined with influences from universities in the Arab world are major contributory factors to the radicalization of Islam in northern Nigeria. It is also instructive that the jihadist reformist tradition in Nigeria has been revived by western educated Muslims and rarely by the traditional *'ulama*.

In the early 2000, *Izala* and *Ahlus Sunna* leaders, including Muhammad Yusuf and Ja'far Adam were all at the forefront agitating for widening the sphere of application of shari'a within the judiciary in northern Nigerian states. The abysmal failure of the shari'a implementation project led to disillusionment within the ranks of *Izala* and *Ahlus Sunna* leadership. Ja'far himself resigned in disillusionment from his position on the board entrusted with the implementation of Islamic morality in public life in Kano State. Disillusionment with the failure of shari'a implementation no doubt contributed to the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram (Brigaglia 2012: 38). In other words, the Islamist prescription has been tried and it failed not only in Nigeria, but other parts of the Muslim world (Roy 1994). These facts need to be part of the reconstruction of a critical narrative. And this, too, is a task best undertaken by Muslim scholars themselves.

The rise of Boko Haram against the backdrop of 9/11 is also more than coincidental. In January 2002, barely four months after the 9/11 attacks, the BBC reported of "a massive increase in the number of baby boys called Osama - after Bin Laden" in northern Nigeria. The report goes on to point out that in "one hospital in Kano, where there were celebrations after the 11 September attacks, seven out of 10 babies are said to be given the name Osama" (BBC 2002). The ensuing attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and the "war on terrorism" all fed into an already ideologically restive Nigerian context. It provided fertile soil for anti-American and anti-Western sentiments and any propaganda of a western conspiracy seeking to undermine Islam. In this regards, Boko Haram has to be seen and tackled as part of the global jihadist franchise and not a local Nigerian problem. Ultimately, however, Muslims have to see Boko Haram, first and foremost, as a *Muslim problem* and work at finding Islamic answers to the challenges it poses.

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