



Perspective of Boko Haram Insurgency: Beyond the Contours of Ethnicity – Yobe State Experience c.2011-2016

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Abstract. This article examines perspective of Boko Haram insurgency which is beyond the contours of ethnicity as it was experienced in places such as Yobe State that were affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. Boko Haram insurgency is quite contrary to the views of others who misperceived or erroneously interpreted the insurgency alongside ethnic/tribal inclination as Boko Haram sect is a combination of multiple tribal groups within and beyond Nigeria that came together and formed the terrorist's cell which over the years became a serious security threat to the entire Sahelian Region. Boko Haram sects are Islamic extremists who are now operating even at transnational level and as such, the question of likening or linking the sect to tribal or Kanuri sentiment projection per-se does not even arise as the violent attacks by Boko Haram insurgents did not discriminate against tribe, religion or otherwise. This shows that everybody is a victim of Boko Haram insurgency irrespective of a Kanuri person or not. Beside, the Kanuri's were the most affected and a vulnerable person in as much as Boko Haram insurgency is all about.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Insurgency, Sect, Contours, Ethnicity.

1. Introduction

Most people especially those living outside the North-Eastern Region of Nigeria have misperceived Boko Haram insurgency regarding its operations as to who really constituted the terrorist cell. This had led to the erroneous interpretations of Boko Haram sect whose terrorist acts constituted serious threats to peace and security within and beyond the country.

However, the misperceptions or misinterpretations of Boko Haram terrorist cell do occur and exist even among some few individuals or groups of people found living across the North-eastern of Nigeria who viewed Boko Haram insurgency alongside

ethnic/tribal inclination. These misperceptions could not be unconnected to either lack of proper insight regarding issues and cases surrounding Boko Haram insurgency or inconsiderate opinions developed due individual selfish interest and biased nature of people regarding Boko Haram insurgency. (A B Modu: 2019)

Boko Haram in whatever perspective or angle, it is a religious movement constituted by Islamic extremists or fundamentalists whose aim is to evolved an Islamic State rather than anything else. In the ab initio, the need or quest to create and establish an Islamic State which could be governed under Sharia-law precipitated the Boko Haram insurgency that culminated into killings of incalculable Nigerians to such an extent even worshiping places like Mosques and Churches were not spared. It was as a result of these violent acts of Boko Haram insurgents that made a clergyman in the person of Reverend Hassan Martins Kuka to called the Boko Haram insurgency as “a war against Nigerians”, while the English-literature icon – Professor Wole Soyinka tagged the Boko Haram sect as “Butchers of Nigerians”.

The term or phrase Boko Haram was a media coinage and came to be heard by the general public in Bauchi town due to an encounter between the sect members and the security operatives (Policemen) in which a number of Boko Haram members were killed by the Police at then and later, the name Boko Haram spread across Nigeria and the world at large. (BBC [News:2009](#)).

Thereafter, the name Boko Haram became to be used and even institutionalized. However, the name Boko Haram was not the real name of the sect whereas the sect members called themselves or their group as “Jama’atu Ahlissunnah Lidda’awati Wal Jihad” (i.e People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s teaching and Jihad). (M S Abdulmumin: 2009)

The epicenter of Boko Haram insurgency is Maiduguri, the Borno State Capital and the founder of Boko Haram ideology – cum – its pioneer leaders is Muhammad Yusuf who died under the custody of security operatives in the year 2009 following the sect members encounter with the Nigerian security operatives at Maiduguri. Prior to the eruption of Boko Haram insurgency or violent attacks, these very sect members were used to be called Yusufiyya sect as the name is being derived from their leader's name Yusuf in which suffix is added to Yusuf making it to stand for the followers/disciples of Yusuf.

The irony is this, no one could tell or say with obsolete certainty as to the real or accurate fact concerning the origin of Boko Haram as a group. That is to say reasons for its emergence and when it is started as an Islamist extremist group. In fact, there were incalculable views postulated to arrive at possible reasons for its emergence into the public scene. (Ibid) Hitherto, the precise date of the advent of the Boko Haram sect is contradicting, especially if one depends on social media books or articles. All the same, most local and international media trace its cause to 2002, when Muhammad Yusuf emerged as the leader of the sect. (M A Ali: (2018).

Consequently, the sect's name is widely called as Boko Haram, that is widely translated as "Western Education is Sin", for the group rejection and dismissal of Western concepts/cultures. But the sect members never christened or associated themselves with the name Boko Haram which as earlier stated as a mere media coinage. Muhammad Yusuf himself was a trained Salafist (i.e an ardent adherent of the school of thought generally associated with Jihad), and he was strongly influenced by the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah – a 14th Century Islamic scholar who preached the gospel of Islamic fundamentalism that served as a road – map for the emergence of militant/radical groups in West Asia. (S Garba:2021). As such, Boko Haram can be said as an indigenous Salafist group that metamorphoses into a Salafist Jihadist group in the year 2009 (Umar, M. S. 2012).

2. Beyond Tribal Inclination

Boko Haram insurgency or terrorism as opposed to the views of a mere or ordinary observers of the scene, the insurgency had gone far beyond the borders of ethnic/tribal issue or affair as the insurgency had expanded from its initial local/regional and national outlook rather appeared to be of transnational perspectives. As such, in the recent past, Boko Haram insurgents or militants were drawn from different socio-cultural backgrounds and from far places

beyond the borders of Nigeria. Infact, across West African region and even upto Maghrib – North Africa. (M Tanchum: 2021).

This shows that Boko Haram insurgency is neither Borno/Yobe affair nor North Eastern Region let alone Nigerian federation but the Boko Haram insurgency had adversely affected the West African countries especially the Sahelian countries, Chad Republic inclusive. The Socio-economic activities of these countries were negatively affected due to Boko Haram terror and that the agonies of Boko Haram terrorism were felt all over as the insurgents did not spared any community or tribal group, religious group inclusive as the insurgents made attacks and killed indiscriminately and anyhow. (D Molomo: 2014).

Ideally, no one can deny that the city of Maiduguri served as a birth place of Boko Haram sect and that Maiduguri which is also called "Yerwa", served as the Home – town of the Kanuri people. As such, the bulk of the sect members in the early days or years of the insurgency were from the Kanuri tribal group that constituted the majority of people of Borno, and perhaps Yobe State. (Primary Source). However, still in the early days Boko Haram movement, the sect had a reasonable members and influential figures in Potiskum, Bauchi, Wudil, Azare, Danja – (Katsina State) and other towns across Northern Nigeria. (OpCit). The afore-mentioned places or towns were neither Kanuri catchment areas nor the people were of Kanuri stock.

Therefore, Boko Haram likes any other terrorist groups spread across the globe has/have no any other ethnical inclination or language rather than causing havoc and agonies to humanity. The agonies and cruelties that Boko Haram insurgents meted against humanity are too numerous to mention in this article, ranging from killings of innocent people, abduction, arson, destructions of properties, lootings/stealing of properties worthy millions of Naira, cattle rustling inclusive which served as a source of income to Boko Haram terrorists' cell. (M I Bare: (2021). In fact, the agonies of Boko Haram insurgency is somewhat incalculable in nature as no one can actually and accurately tells the exact level or magnitude of destructions or threats caused by Boko Haram militants to both individuals and communities affected by the insurgency.

Of these agonies of Boko Haram insurgency, the Kanuris seem to have been largely the most affected people by the Boko Haram insurgency as they became the major victims of Boko Haram terrorist acts more than any other people or group in Nigeria and beyond.

The issue is this, Boko Haram insurgency is unlike the ongoing ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria in which a particular group is targeted and killed, and vice-versa and also, the operations of the Boko Haram militant group is quite contrary to that of Niger Delta Avengers or Militants whose militancy revolves around oil bunkering. Likewise, the first Nigerian military coup d'état of 1966, which is not unconnected with the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War. To that effect, a book was even authored in the year 1981, titled "Why We Struck", by one of the coupists so as to explain the reasons for their coup which was bloody nature.

However, another was written in 1982, also titled "Why they Struck", as a rejoinder to the coupists as the coup was an Igbo conspiracy since its targeted and killed solely the Northern political elites of the First Republic with some few non-Igbos politicians of South-Western Nigeria. Not only that even top military ranking officers of Northern origin or descent were not spared as they were killed by the 1966 coupists, whereas no single Igbo politician or military man that was killed. (A M Mainasara: 1982).

Hence, Boko Haram extremists do not spare anybody or anything as they can violently attack at any given point in time regardless of location, tribe and religion. They are like any other terrorist group in Africa and beyond, such as Al-Shabab in Somalia whose attacks are unpredictable as the attacks are both incessantly and sporadically depending on the circumstances. The Boko Haram insurgents were said to have nexus/links with the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) as in 2014, (Daily post:2022). Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State and rebranded as the Islamic State in the West African Province under the leadership of Abu-Musab Al-Barnawi who died in 2021. (Crisis group: 2022). With this development, the tentacles of Boko Haram militants had gone far beyond the borders of Nigeria into not only the countries that shared the Lake Chad but across the entire region of West Africa in which the sect is linked to the global Islamic terrorist groups as such Al-Qaeda and ISIS. (Viginia Comoli:2022)

Accordingly, Boko Haram insurgency is not even confined or restricted to a particular geographical location tackle of tribal induce motives as the insurgency appeared to be of transnational network operating at a global scale in the perpetration of evil deeds against humanity. Had the Boko Haram sect is built on the premised of tribal sentiment or Kanuri agenda per-se, then, there would be no tendency for the sect members to be intersected with other groups of terrorists operating in other parts of Africa and beyond.

Moreover, in an event, if Boko Haram is viewed and likened to Kanuri conspiracy or whatever that might have been related to the Kanuri as a people, then, the sect members who were said to be majority Kanuri by tribe could have spared and prevented their fellow Kanuri-Kinsmen from the menace and manslaughter of Boko Haram insurgency. As earlier made mentioned, the Kanuri tribe despite the involvement of their people in the on-going insurgency, yet they emerged to be the number one victim and for that matter, the most seriously devastated people in as much as the insurgency is all about. (L Abdu: 2021). For instance, the "BAY States" (i.e Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States) were the most disastrously affected by Boko Haram insurgency compared to the rest of the states in the Federation. (FGD:2023). Thus, the Boko Haram insurgency is beyond tribal issues, most of the displaced persons were the Kanuri's and equally important, most of the communities destroyed as a result of the insurgency were predominantly Kanuri settlements/villages and towns.

As such, Boko Haram insurgency knows no barrier and at the same time, has no preservation whatsoever in so far as carrying or executing its inhumane activities of terrorism as Churches, Mosques, public buildings, public gatherings, road and travelers, markets, schools e.t.c. all were neither save nor preserved by the terror of Boko Haram. in all that could be said, the insurgents are not selective in approach as they attacked their own communities, thereby killings their own relatives and in some instances the insurgents even do kill their immediate family members, their parents inclusive. (B M Goniri: 2021). The Boko Haram insurgents were unlike what A. M. Mainasara noted in his monograph on the 1966 coup plotters who were selective in their killings.

Equally worthy to note is that the membership of Boko Haram sect has cut across tribal lines or groups as people of different tribes and from different cultural background formed and constituted the membership of the sect. other than the Kanuri's, there are several tribes or tribal groups that constituted the sect members of Boko Haram terrorist cell especially in the North-Eastern Nigeria comprising the Margi, Babur, Gwoza people, Shuwa Arab/Mare e.t.c. (Derrick J.:1959). Of course, the so-called Hausa/Fulani joined the Boko Haram sect, though their number is scanty. However, there are also other tribes along the shores of the Lake Chad Basin areas that formed and joined the Boko Haram sect particularly in countries such as Cameroun, Chad and Niger Republic. The tribes that constituted the Boko Haram sect along the shores of the Lack Chad included the Buduma, Bulala people, Zaghwah and the Tubu or Toubou who are even

referred as the “Black Nomads of the Desert”. (C Baroin:1997). Then, comes the Mang/Daghra people who also of the Kanuri stock in Zinder and Diffa prefecture in Niger Republic but whose dialect differs slightly from that of the Kanuris of Borno/Yobe States. As for the Shuwa Arabs, there is a great figure or leader of one of the factions in the sect against Abubakar Shekau whose name is Mamman Nur that held from the Shuwa tribe. Though, a little bit softer and not as extremist as Shekau. (L Agujja:2021).

By the account of a pastoral aristocrat, whose two sons together with four (4) others were killed by Boko Haram militants on the 25th June, 2015, in Uba-Askira area of Borno State, stated that most of the Boko Haram insurgents operating in Yobe East (i.e Gujba/Gulani areas) and Southern Borno areas such as Damboa, Uba-Askira, Gwoza, Chibok e.t.c were Marghi youths more than any other tribe. (L rido:2022). The Pastoral leader added that these areas mentioned were formerly their grazing orbit area but due to the insurgency, they left the places to another more secured environment in North-Western Yobe State. Of course, the Marghi people joined the Boko Haram sect or terrorist cell en-masse yet there are other tribal groups found as Boko Haram insurgents both indigenous and non-indigenous tribes/people as the areas shares borders with the Sambisa Forest that served as the major hideouts – camp if not the base of Boko Haram insurgents. (Ibid).

In this regard, these issues and matters arising concerning the insurgency will suffice any reasonable and matured mind that Boko Haram insurgency is beyond the contours of ethnography which is the fundamental objective of this article.

The idea of linking Boko Haram insurgency with tribal or Kanuri sentiment per-se does not even arise as the Kanuri people especially their elites or leaders should be saved and protected in the hands of the insurgents and which is not. In Yobe State only, not to talk of Borno, and in the year 2012 alone many innocent people were killed by the insurgents, majority of whom were the Kanuri's including two prominent District of Heads of Geidam town and Mafa-Muri in Tarmuwa Local Government Area who were respected and highly admired Kanuri figures in their respective domains.

These instances or circumstances should be enough for thoughtful mind to view Boko Haram insurgency not on ethnical grounds rather as threats against human survival that needed an urgent concerted efforts and actions to arrest the situation. (A Y Ahmed:2022).

3. Yobe Experience

In the eve of the 2009 Maiduguri Boko Haram uprising that resulted into the death of Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf, frequent visits were made by Muhammad Yusuf himself and other figures of Boko Haram sect such as Abubakar Shekau, Mamman Nur and their likes to Damaturu purposely for preaching the gospel of Boko Haram sect especially to the youths. These people were able to have convinced many youths in Damaturu in joining the Boko Haram sect as they have good system approach while preaching towards their ideology (M. I. Bare: 2009).

In Damaturu metropolis, apart from Ajiri and Lawanti ward which are traditionally Kanuri settlements or residential areas, other places like Pawari, Abasha, Nayi-Nawa ward e.t.c that are predominantly non-Kanuri areas rather inhabited by the Hausa and other tribes also served as a strong-hold of Boko Haram sect members. The issue is this, colloquially the term “*Pawari*” in Kanuri dialect means “an abode of butchers”. So, ideally, in the Kanem land or Kanuri world, Pawari and Hausari are synonymous as it is the Hausa man that brought the business of meat selling. (M S Bille:2022).

The youths of Pawari responded to the call of Muhammad Yusuf actively and earnestly to such an extent of building an Islamiyyah School and a Mosque for the purpose of spreading Boko Haram ideology. With the eruption of 2009 Maiduguri Boko Haram attack many Pawari youths have left and joined Muhammad Yusuf fighting against the Nigerian security operatives. As such, only a small portion of them escaped. (M Bigela:2022). Likewise, in Nayi-Nawa ward where Adamu Yallabai – a gang leader of Boko Haram insurgents played their merciless game of slaughtering innocent people secretly and tactfully some of whom were his business associates and neighbours. This act of manslaughter or killing scenario undertaken by the likes of Adamu Yallabai prior to his or their detection and apprehension by the security operatives in Damaturu is been described in Hausa terminology as “*Dauki Daddaya*”, literally means killing one by one. (Ibid).

Therefore, the question of linking Boko Haram insurgency to a tribal or Kanuri sentiment/conspiracy does not even arise looking at the historical antecedent insurgency in Yobe State by the so-called Taliban – Group that went and established their camp in Kanamma area of Yunusari Local Government Area in 2004. The Boko Haram insurgents were said to be an off-shoot of the Taliban sect whose camp was destroyed via a military action in the same 2004, and

it was some of the escaped Taliban members that later metamorphose into Boko Haram terrorist cell. (M Kompas:2022). In the Kanamma Taliban camp, the Taliban sect members comprised not only the Kanuri's but also the Yoruba's and Nupe – cum – Ibra people who were mainly students of University of Maiduguri. (R Boye: 2018).

Likewise, in Potiskum area, a notorious Boko Haram gang leader popularly called Ali Dogon-Kuka – named after his village along Damaturu – Potiskum road, and one of his lieutenants called Dan-Madinah were not of Kanuri tribe or stock but Boko Haram militants to the core as they were solely behind the attack and killings of Potiskum cattle market of March 2, 2012. Information gathered on the attack of Potiskum cattle market revealed that over a hundred business men and women as well as under aged hawkers were killed, over seventy persons sustained severe injuries and getting to a hundred cattle shot dead while others perished. (M Yamel:2023).

Consequently, the December 1st, 2014, Damaturu attack by the Boko Haram insurgents was of a disastrous type. On that very attack, the insurgents came out en-masse and attacked Damaturu with the intention of taking over the whole of Damaturu the State capital just as they took over Mubi town in Adamawa State. However, the fight appeared to be waterloo on the side of the insurgents as the military/security operatives, the vigilante groups inclusive fought gallantly against the insurgents in which the insurgents recorded an incalculable loss of their sect members. Though, few casualties were recorded on the side of security men and civilians as some were injured while others lost their lives. (R Konti:2018).

On the 1st December, attacked of Damaturu which was on Mondays, information obtained revealed that some insurgents were even foreigners that served as mercenaries brought to fight the Nigerian Government – some of them were killed, while others apprehended and made to surrender by the security operatives. Those that surrendered like resembled the Tuaregs of Mali and some like the Tubu (Toubou) of the Chadic stock as they were Caucasian or light in complexion, lean and hairy unlike our indigenous kinky haired people. (Ibid). Of the apprehended insurgents, some of them could not even understand or speak Kanuri and Hausa language as well as other indigenous dialects spoken in Yobe State and the North-Eastern region at large. This happening and other events or cases surrounding the Boko Haram insurgency had no doubt dismisses the notion or idea of relating or linking Boko Haram insurgency to a particular tribal affiliation as

the components and composition of Boko Haram sect as well as its modus operandi goes beyond the contours of one ethnic group (i.e Kanuri) and even exceeded geographical lines or borders as the Boko Haram insurgency had been terrorizing the entire Chad Basin Region/Sahelian Countries of West Africa and even beyond.

In this regard, Boko Haram terrorist cells were not composed or constituted by one or two tribes rather a coming together of multiple tribes with different background from far and near according to an abducted aristocrat by Boko Haram insurgents from Tarmuwa Local Government Area of Yobe State who was taken to Sambisa Forest and stayed for more than one Month in the custody of Boko Haram terrorist prior to his released via a ransomed. In fact, the aristocrat was highly flabbergasted as he saw the representation of Nigerian tribes in the Sambisa Forest including people Southern Nigeria, whereas others insurgents belong to foreign nationals. (A Hussein:2019). The abducted aristocrat, being a Fulani by tribe, his experience in Sambisa had broaden his horizons of not seeing Boko Haram insurgency from the angle of tribal or Kanuri and if not, he would have left in the picture of an Alice – in Wonderland.

So also, by the account of an ex-Boko Haram sect member (i.e repented Boko Haram), who acquired a certificate of DE-radicalization training school of Malam Cidi Local Government in Gombe State, and now certified as a free and good citizen – community member stated that the Malam Cidi school otherwise known as “Operation Safe Corridor” is just like any other conventional school or institution where students of diverse cultural background and ethnic groups converged in order to acquire a certain knowledge or skill. The repented Boko Haram member is a Kanuri man, however, asserted that there were equally numerous non-Kanuri persons whom they undergone the DE-radicalization training together including those individuals from Southern Nigeria. (B. Bur:2023). At the end, they were all graduated and certified.

4. Conclusion

Conclusively, Boko Haram insurgency is like any other terrorist organization spread across the globe such as the Al-Shabab, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, e.t.c and therefore, not affiliated or confined to either tribal group or to a particular geographical territory. Boko Haram cell have no preservations or limitations regarding their terror activities or violent attacks as they can attack any person and anywhere – cum – at any given time. Boko Haram insurgency to a reasonable and thoughtful mind, knows no barrier

regarding tribe, religion or otherwise as the insurgents do engage in an indiscriminate killing of innocent people to such an extent Mosques and Islamic clerics were not spared. Besides, the Kanuri people/communities where the worst had happened and still happening in Borno and some communities of Yobe State.

These experiences of incalculable agonies against meted against humanity due to Boko Haram insurgency is not a tribal uprising or Kanuri sentiment and as such, the Boko Haram insurgency is far beyond the contours or boundaries of ethnographical considerations.

Endnotes

Primary Source:

- Alhaji Bukar Modu Jumbam, 67 years, a retired Permanent Secretary of Cabinet and Security Yobe State Government, Commissioners Quarter, Damaturu, 11th April, 2019.
- Alhaji Hussein, 76 years, Village Head of Biriri/Vizier of Jajere Emirate, Biriri town, Tarmuwa Local Government Area on 27/08/2019.
- Alhaji Yawudima Ahmed, 68 years, retired Civil Servant Yobe State Government, Mairi ward beside Emir's palace – Damaturu. 20/10/2021.
- Anonymous source, 67 years, a retired military officer, Buhari Estate – Damaturu, September 9, 2021.
- Ba Bukar Many Goniri, 67 years, a displaced retired primary school teacher from Goniri-Gujba Local Government Area at Ajari ward – Tashan Kurma, Damaturu on 28/08/2021.
- Ba-Bura, 48 years, now a trader at Tashan Kurma along Gashua road, Damaturu on 5/05/2023.
- Dr. Raji Rafiu Boye, 57 years, Yobe State Co-ordinator of Humanitarian Dialogue “hd”, Oasis Resort Hotel Sabon Pegi – Damaturu, on September 9th, 2019.
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD), with the Village Heads under Damaturu Local Government Area organized by Humanitarian Dialogue “hd” (Workshop) at Oasis Hotel Damaturu.
- Lamido Rido, 72 years, pastoral leader, Tashan Kurma – Gashua Road Damaturu on 11/6/2022.
- Lawan Abdu, 75 years, the Village Head of Damaturu town, Lawanti ward along Gashua Road, Damaturu on June 17, 2021.
- Lawan Agujja, 47 years, Village Head of Shuwari – Buni-Yadi, Gujba Local Government Area, at Damaturu Sunday Market on 17/10/2021.

- Mahammadu Bigela, 58 years, Driver/Transporter, Sarkin-Pawa Street, Pawari ward Damaturu, 17/01/2022.
- Malam Sani Bille, 64 years, Ward Head of Pawari, old abattoir – Pawari ward, Damaturu, January 15, 2022.
- Mamuda Yamel, 47 years, Cattle Dealer at Potiskum cattle market, 29/12/2023.
- Mohammed Komfasa Ibrahim, 65 years, former Chairman of Yunusari Local Government, Ajari ward, Damaturu. 20/01/2022.
- Ruwa Konti, 53 years, Commander of Sarkin Baka – Vigilante group at vigilante camp beside Shagari Housing Estate Damaturu, 19/07/2018.

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