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The Distorted Ideology of Boko Haram: Jihad or Terrorism?

Boko Haram'ın Çarpık İdeolojisi: Cihad mı Terörizm mi?

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Abstract

The emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria's heterogeneous society has brought up important concerns about the ideology underlying the group's activities. In this study, the group's use of violence and destruction, together with its assertion that it is operating under the principles of Islamic Jihad is evaluated. Analyzing the ideas of terrorism, jihad, and ideology becomes crucial to comprehend the group's ideology, taking into consideration its transition from a religious insurgency to a full-fledged terrorist organization. It is of great importance to understand that the concept of 'jihad' has been and is being misused by different radical entities, especially Boko Haram, to fulfil its radical interests and terrorist activities. However, the prophetic tradition is seen to be contradictory to the activities carried out by Boko Haram. This study argued that while jihad is a multifaceted term that is interpreted differently by Islamic scholars, Boko Haram significantly deviates from the typical Islamic comprehension of jihad. In this context, an extensive review of scholarly works, primary texts, and doctrinal analyses related to the ideology of Boko Haram and jihad is examined in this study. While the paper sheds light on the ideology driving Boko Haram and draws parallels between it and Islamic warfare and jihad, it also attempts to offer recommendations to Muslims on taking ideological initiatives to counter destructive interpretations and misconceptions.

Keywords: Religious Group Studies, Boko Haram, Jihad, Terrorism, Ideology

Öz

Nijerya'nın heterojen toplumunda Boko Haram'ın ortaya çıkışı, grubun faaliyetlerinin altında yatan ideolojiye ilişkin önemli endişeleri gündeme getirmiştir. Bu çalışmada, grubun şiddet ve yıkıma başvurması ile İslami Cihad ilkeleri çerçevesinde faaliyet gösterdiği iddiası birlikte değerlendirilmektedir. Terörizm, cihat ve ideoloji kavramlarını analiz etmek, Grubun dini bir isyandan tam teşekküllü bir terör örgütüne geçişini göz önünde bulundurarak, terörizm, cihat ve ideoloji kavramlarını analiz etmek, grubun ideolojisini anlamak açısından oldukça büyük bir önem taşımaktadır. 'Cihat' kavramının, başta Boko Haram olmak üzere, farklı radikal oluşumlar tarafından, radikal çıkarları ve terörist faaliyetlerine bir zemin oluşturmak adına kötüye kullanıldığını anlamak, konu için kilit bir noktadır. Bununla birlikte, sünnetteki uygulamanın Boko Haram tarafından yürütülen faaliyetlerle çeliştiği görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, cihadın İslam alimleri tarafından farklı şekillerde yorumlanan çok yönlü bir terim olmasına karşın, Boko Haram'ın tipik İslami cihat anlayışından önemli ölçüde saptığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada Boko Haram ve cihat ideolojisine ilişkin bilimsel çalışmalar, birincil metinler ve doktrinel analizler kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Çalışma, Boko Haram'ı yönlendiren ideolojiye ışık tutarken, bu ideoloji ile İslami savaş/ cihat arasında paralellikler kurarak yıkıcı yorumlara ve yanlış anlamalara karşı ideolojik girişimlerde bulunmanın gerekliliğine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dini Grup Araştırmaları, Boko Haram, Cihat, Terörizm, Ideoloji



Introduction

Boko Haram is a terrorist organization established in 2002 by Muhammad Yusuf, a radical Salafi activist who is against Western civilization and democracy. The name of the group was initially known as *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* (people committed to the prophet's teachings for propagation and Jihad) before neighbours named the group "Boko Haram" based on its doctrine and discourse (Vera, 2020, 5). Boko Haram's ideology encompasses hatred for the Western influence on the Nigerian state. As its name implies, "Boko Haram" is a Hausa language word that means "Western civilization is forbidden" (Umaru, 2009). Boko Haram launched an insurgency against the Nigerian government in 2009 and has claimed the loss of over 350,000 lives since its inception (Paul - Felix, 2021).

After the encounter with military and local police forces in 2009, security forces initiated an attack on the group, killing many of its members. Muhammad Yusuf, the group's leader, was apprehended and killed while in police custody, along with some of his followers. Not long after, the group revived in 2010 under the leadership of Yusuf's deputy, Abubakar Shekau, and launched a violent campaign that lasted for years. During this period, the terrorist organization that claims to be Jihadists fighting for Islam has created an uproar, mostly in the northern part of Nigeria. In May 2021, Shekau was declared dead after his encounter with The Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in a full-scale fight in the battle of Sambisa forest (Iyora, 2021). It was reported that he detonated himself in a suicide vest after refusing to accept the authority of ISWAP. In May 2022, Boko Haram declared Abu Umaimata as the new leader of the group and has been operating under his leadership since then (Jacob, 2022).

The activities perpetrated by Boko Haram are of profound concern due to their catastrophic effects. The destruction of human lives and properties, the burning down of places of worship, the indiscriminate killing of individuals, and the kidnapping of people for illicit human trafficking under the auspices of Jihad collectively constitute a phenomenon that necessitates a thorough study.

The study made by Kassim and Nwakpa (2018), examined the way Boko Haram utilizes Islamic Theology to justify, radicalize, brainwash, and propagate their ideologies throughout West Africa. It analyzed this propaganda by extensively looking at the primary sources of the group leaders. Additionally, the study also deduced that Boko Haram aims to discredit its opponents while solidifying its doctrines as the accepted version of Islamic thinking in the theological marketplace of West Africa. The extensiveness of this study gives us a general overview of the ideological framework of the Boko Haram phenomenon. However, we have tried to analyze the concept of jihad by taking the discourse and activities of Boko Haram into consideration.

According to Umar (2020), the Boko Haram creed is well grounded in the Salafi-Wahabi discourse due to the evidence found in the videos, lectures, and debates of Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau. This ideology of Boko Haram is radically twisted in its attempt to attain its goals and interests. Some Salafi scholars in the northern part of Nigeria emphasize that Muhammad Yusuf has doctrinal links to international Jihadi scholars like Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi. It was also proven from the debates carried out with Yusuf that he didn't attend any formal religious or theological school, indicating that he was self-taught. However, it is evident that Yusuf passed through the Almajiri¹ informal school system which is one of the major social and educational problems in Nigeria, posing a threat to the future of a national security (Abbo et al., 2017). The counterpart of the Almajiri system known as "karatun boko", i.e Western Education is the basis of Yusuf's struggle. Anecdotal evidence also suggests he was associated with different Islamic groups, including the *Shia*, who rejected the authority of the Nigerian state before settling with the well-known Salafi leader, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam.

Apard (2015), discussed the ideologies underlying the actions of Boko Haram. He gathered the rarely used speeches of Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau and conducted a discourse analysis to understand the ideologies behind their actions. Apard emphasizes that Muhammad Yusuf's doctrine is far more radical and political than the way he presents it to his audience. Apard also states that Shekau was maintaining the discourse of Yusuf before the ideological dimension changed and was rapidly supplanted by war declarations and direct threats. Another study by Aboul-Enein and Zuhur (2004) highlights Islamic warfare and the Ten Ethics of War in Islam, extracted from the Prophetic Tradition. This study emphasized the sword verses in the Qur'an that cause misconceptions and analyzed them by taking the activities of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIL into account. Furthermore, it tried to explain the stand of Islam in the acts of the so-called Jihadists. The study was concluded by presenting recommendations for policies and measures to be taken in order to restore peace and understanding in the international community.

In this article, a content analysis of the Jihadist ideology propagated by Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau is conducted. In this context, the jihad understanding of Boko Haram compared to the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions will be tolerably studied by discussing the theological and sociological dimensions of the ideological instrumentalization of jihad and its relationship with Islam. This perspective provides a

¹ Al Majiri is a system of Islamic education which has been practised in Northern Nigeria since the 11th century. In this education system, parents send their children to Mu'allim (Qur'an Teachers) who engage them in rote learning and writing by using slate and quill pen to learn and memorise the Qur'an. In the process of this learning, parents often leave their children to stay with the Mu'allim without going back home. The Mu'allim and his students live at the mercy of the community. As a result, these children are mostly seen on the streets begging for alms to cater for themselves. The unregulated structure of these schools makes the children potential instruments open to the recruitment and utilization of terrorist groups.



more comprehensive analysis of Boko Haram's Jihadist ideology in the broader context of radicalism and terrorism.

1. The Emergence of Boko Haram in a Multireligious Nigerian Society

Nigeria is a country with over 250 ethnic groups and 500 indigenous languages (CIA, 2023). This demonstrates that Nigeria is a pluralistic society where different ethnic groups mix and coexist. Taking the ethnicity factor into account, it can be deduced that Nigeria is also a country where different religious adherents live in conformity. In contemporary Nigeria, the influence of religion on every segment of the society is an inevitable phenomenon. There are basically three main religions in Nigeria. These consist of African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, and Christianity. In addition to these, a small some Nigerians and foreigners adhere to other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, The Grail Message, Baha'i, and The Reformed Ogboni Fraternity in Nigeria (Kitause - Achunike, 2013, 45).

The religion practised in Nigeria before the arrival of Islam and Christianity is known as the African Traditional Religion, which refers to the beliefs and practices of Africans (Kitause - Achunike, 2013). Before foreign missionaries introduced their religions to Nigeria, the people there practised this religion. This religion is mostly transmitted orally; it is not written down, instead, it exists primarily in people's memories and hearts through rites, shrines, and religious ceremonies.

Today, Islam has many adherents in the Yoruba region of southwest Nigeria and is primarily practised in the country's northern regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has the biggest Muslim population. Christianity, which came into Nigeria through missionaries, also brought Western education along with it. The missionaries started their work in the latter part of the nineteenth century and carried on with their teachings until the British Empire was established (Gbadamosi, 1967). The southwest Yoruba region exhibits both Protestantism and indigenous syncretic Christianity, while Catholicism predominates in the southeast Igbo region and similarly related areas (Ngbea - Achunike, 2014).

The majority of Muslims in Nigeria are Sunni adherents of the Maliki school. But still, there's an extensive Shia minority, mostly in Sokoto. A lesser minority of people practice Ahmadiyya Islam. Several Islamic movements, such as Nasfat, the Hizbulahi Movement, and the Ansar-Udeen Society, are active in promoting Islam in Nigeria, particularly in the southern region. The diverse Islamic sects that are emerging in the north, such as the Shia and Izala movements and many more, are still in the early stages of growth. These new sects are gradually severing their ties to the mainstream Islamic community because they reject the Sufi Brotherhood's traditional Islamic teachings (Ngbea - Achunike, 2014). Boko

Haram as an extremist group parted from one of these emerging sects in the north because of its radical sentiments.

1.1. The Religious Ideology of Boko Haram

Islam arrived in what is called Nigeria today through the northern borders five or six centuries before Christianity (Kitause - Achunike, 2013). The early nineteenth century is a turning point in the history of Islam in Nigeria. The founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman Dan Fodio, who led the Fulani Jihad launched a successful socio-religious revolution against the tyrannical kings of that time. The establishment of the caliphate reintroduced Islam and influenced the socio-political structure in the region. The emergence of Boko Haram in the same region where the Sokoto jihad took place prompts questions about any potential comparisons or relationships between these two entities. Boko Haram and the Sokoto jihad are similar in that they both challenge the conventional interpretation of Islam in their respective time and place. However, even though Boko Haram operates in the same geographic area and advocates for the establishment of an Islamic state, there are notable differences when compared to that of the Usman Dan Fodio's movement in terms of ideologies, leadership styles, objectives and tactics (Jennifer, 2018). Moreover, it is important to understand that both Boko Haram and the Sokoto caliphate have different Islamic intellectual traditions. Boko Haram is not only against the Nigerian government but also against the tradition of the Sokoto caliphate which is based on the Maliki school of thought and the Qadiriyya Sufi order (Jennifer, 2018). Whereas, Boko Haram is rooted in a radical Salafi-Wahabi ideology. The group is also against the mainstream Salafi scholars of the Northern Nigeria and the system of the Nigerian government.

Different schools of thought, ideologies, and sects have emerged in the historical revolution of Islam. The sects have revolved around generations with different doctrines and views varying from *Salafism*², *Shi'a*³ Islam and *Sufi*⁴ brotherhoods. These doctrinal claims have been a competing issue between the Muslims in northern Nigeria since 1970 (Mustapha - Bunza, 2014), when the Sunni reformists intensely started opposing the other sects. Boko Haram's case is not different because they latch onto *Salafi's* ideology with extremism and radicalism.

The founder of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, was a student of the Kano wing *Ahl al-Sunna*⁵ founder, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, who publicly rejected Muhammad Yusuf and his views before he was assassinated in 2007 (Umar, 2020). Yusuf developed anti-

² Salafism is a school of Sunni Islam that advocates following the footsteps of "the pious predecessors" (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ; often equated with the first three generations of Muslims) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible.

³ One of the two main schools of Islam, Shia considers Muhammad's cousin Ali and his successors to be the legitimate imams and makes up at least 10% of the worldwide Muslim population, as well as the majority in Iran and Iraq.

⁴ Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam in which adherents aspire to know and understand God personally to discover the reality of divine love and wisdom.

⁵ The people who follow the Qur'an, the sayings of the prophet, his deeds, and approvals.



national and anti-western doctrines, which made him go against Sheikh Ja'afar. On this occasion, he was banned from preaching in the circle of *Ahl al-Sunna*. After becoming independent, Yusuf formed a group called the *Yusufiyya* movement, which was later changed to *Jama'atu Ahlul Sunna li Da'awatiwal Jihad*⁶. This term was mostly used after the emergence of Shekau as the leader of the group (Mustapha, 2014). The emergence of Boko Haram under its former leader, Yusuf, was initially caused by religious fundamentalism, politics, and poverty (Vera, 2020, 4).

Yusuf was against the Nigerian democratic state, Western education, and its civilization. However, he believed that the Jews and Christians were Allah's enemies. As a result of this, the democracy brought by them can't be accepted. According to him, *we do not believe in democracy, which has appeared on the face of the earth at the hands of Allah's enemies, the Jews and the Christians* (Kassim - Nwankpa, 2019, 37). The opposition of Yusuf towards the West is well understood through the conversation that transpired between him and the Islamic scholars in the northern part of Nigeria. Since the start of the *Yusufiyya* movement, there have been several debates between Yusuf and the other Salafi scholars. In one of these debates, Musa Pantami, who is a Western-educated elite, asked Yusuf if he thought it permissible to study medicine, engineering, or other disciplines in Nigerian universities. Yusuf answered him by saying, *In my understanding, with the system that we have in Nigeria, it is not permissible* (Cook, 2018, 11). The ideology of Muhammad Yusuf is understood to be against all that is Western. He highlighted his view on the football game by saying, *This democracy that is from America is unbelief. The football they play is damaging to the manners of the family; why would you love those people? Because they're good at football? Would you wear a shirt with the name of someone who doesn't carry Allah in his heart? Like Ronaldo? Why would you love those people? Because they do politics? Because they make movies?* (Cook, 2018). Looking at the discussions that ensued between Yusuf and his counterparts can help us understand the ideology behind his actions and sermons.

Boko Haram has gone through many stages and has existed in various forms and versions since its emergence. The most evident change is the group's transformation from a religious insurgency opposing the government and Western culture into a full-fledged terrorist organization. This new ideology emerged after the deaths of Yusuf and some Boko Haram members in police custody in 2010. Abubakar Shekau, the deputy of Muhammad Yusuf, surfaced with this new radical ideology in a quest for revenge, which has led to violent attacks against police forces, government officials, and innocent individuals (Adelaja et al., 2018).

Shekau decrees that anyone who is against them is an unbeliever, and they are subjected to being eliminated. He believes that the *Mushrikun and Munafikun*⁷ must be

⁶ People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad.

⁷ The hypocrites and unbelievers.

killed. According to him, *if you know to what you commit yourself and know it well in your hearts, brutality and killings will just be like a story! A story!* (Cook et al., 2018). Fundamentally, it can be seen that the opinion of Shekau is based on a radical discourse. While he's trying to instigate his followers into terror, he's also making them realize the importance of their commitment. Within this context, it is understood that Shekau did not deviate from the hatred towards the West that was started by Muhammad Yusuf. After the 2009 insurgence, he continued to preach against Western education. According to Shekau, women should follow a set of duties that are largely focused on household tasks. He claims that university is a sin for women, and Islamic teachings encourage women to be veiled and confined to their homes (Cook et al., 2018).

2. Ideology and Terrorism

"What is the cause of terrorism?" is undoubtedly one of the most frequently asked questions in the world today. Although researchers have conducted numerous studies to get a satisfactory answer to this single question, the role of ideology is still solidly established. Therefore, while we do not know much about the specific mechanisms at play, we can reasonably conclude that ideology plays at least some part in the growth of violent extremist behaviour when it comes to explaining terrorism. Every action is often supported by either an open or hidden intention. The intention creates ideologies or misinterprets other people's ideologies to justify some acts and acquire the desired intention.

Sandler (2014) defined terrorism as the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or sub-national groups in order to obtain a political, economic, or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of their immediate victims. In light of this, the ideology of terrorism can be understood as the system of initiating ideas and ideals shared by members of a particular group, and it serves as the basic objective, origin, and nature of their terrorist acts. Additionally, it is believed that the goals that serve as the group's motivation are what encourage terrorist activities.

The terrorist attacks on society, government, and infrastructure have caused a lot of panic around the world. To understand terrorism, we need to look at it from various perspectives. Terrorist groups' ideologies vary depending on socio-economic, political, environmental, and religious factors (Adelaja et al., 2018). The complexity of these factors emphasizes the need for a sophisticated study of terrorism that considers the various influences and motives that lead people and groups to engage in extremist actions.

In this regard, the research made on terrorism can't be assimilated if these ideologies are not taken into account. Every terrorist group has its own peculiar ideology, and this ideology serves as the foundation on which the group justifies its acts. Restricting terrorism to a religion, people, or region needs to be reviewed with root causes like political deprivation and socio-economic inequalities (David et al., 2015). This underlines the



significance of looking at terrorism holistically and considering a wide variety of variables rather than relying on generalizations or preconceived notions.

On this basis, terrorism is a multifaceted and complicated issue. It cannot be fully comprehended by blaming it on just one cause or motivation. Instead, a thorough strategy is needed that considers the complex interactions between ideologies, historical background, political grievances, socioeconomic inequality, and other root factors. It is crucial to have an open mind to all viewpoints and to engage in thorough research that takes into consideration the many factors influencing this distressing phenomenon as we continue to debate what causes terrorism. We can only expect to properly confront and alleviate the causes of terrorism in the modern world with such detailed knowledge.

3. Jihad from an Islamic Point of View

Jihad is an Islamic term that is derived from the word *ja-ha-da*, meaning power or ability, while the word *jihad* means struggle (Munawwir, 1984, 234). In the Qur'an, it is usually followed by the phrase *fi sabīl Allah*, which connotes 'in the way of Allah' (Rahmatullah, 2017). Generally, it means striving for the cause of Allah. Western writers have often translated "Jihad" as "holy war" and characterized the term as a synonym for terrorism. Not many people understand the concept of Jihad and its meaning. According to most Islamic scholars, Jihad is divided into three parts: verbal struggle, doing good deeds, and fighting against infidels for the sake of Allah (Allahdad, 2019). The verbal struggle signifies preaching and telling people about the beauty of Islam, etiquette, the way of the Prophet, beliefs, and dos and don'ts. Doing good actions refers to practising good behaviour and obeying Islamic laws in every phase of life. The last principle of Jihad is known as the lesser Jihad. It is fighting against the enemy of Islam and defending the religion when there is a need for it. Muhammad, who brought the message of Islam, did not prioritize the last principle in his lifetime. He only made it as a last resort. This last principle is utilized when there is no other option left. In the wars Muhammad participated in, particularly the battle of Badr, he predominately said, "Let's not wage battle" (Özkan, 2020). It is understood that he tried to come to an agreement with his opponents before resorting to war. Moreover, Muhammad did not mostly centralize Jihad on wars or battles; instead, he proposed that his companions fight their internal selves (at-Tirmidhī, 2007, 3/380), learn and live according to the orders of Allah and teach it to others, preach goodness, avoid doing bad and preaching Islam (An-Nasii'i, 2007, 1/3096), fulfil *Hajj Mabruur*⁸ for women (al-Bukhārī, 2009, 4/643), and take care of one's parents (al-Bukhārī, 2009, 4/643).

⁸ Hajj Mabruur is a term for the Islamic Pilgrimage in which a person refrains from sins and perfectly fulfill the commandments and conditions related.

The Sword Scriptures, which are mostly used by terrorist organizations, constitute a collection of specific scriptures that encourage resistance against oppression. This signifies that war, as a last resort, was sanctioned as a defensive measure against oppressors. However, the terrorist organizations' misconception of these verses to justify their acts and relate them to Islam is a matter that warrants thoughtful consideration. One of the verses from the Qur'an that pertains to the propagation of Islam emphasizes the importance of employing wisdom, fair admonition, and appealing arguments (al-Nahl, 16\125). This particular verse, which is not applied to the cause of Boko Haram, explicitly advocates for an open discussion of ideas and the right to the free will of religion. Furthermore, it instructs authorities to guarantee that acceptance of Islam should result from sincere free choice rather than pressure through compulsion. Critics of this view contend that, in reality, such a scenario is still insufficient.

The way the media currently depicts Jihad in society makes it seem like one of the most terrifying phrases in the world. In a speech, Muslim activist Linda Sarsour used the phrase "Jihad" to describe her hope that God would support Muslims in their fight against discrimination directed at them in the United States. It went viral in the media with the tag "Sarsour calls for jihad against Trump" Sarsour replied by saying, "The word jihad does not mean to wage holy war or to commit terrorism; the word jihad means to struggle. The Prophet Muhammad said the best Jihad was to speak words of truth in front of a tyrannical leader" (Rashid, 2017). According to this, it can be understood that the term jihad is wrongly assimilated and used.

Fighting against the enemy, which is the last resort mentioned in the hadith, can only be implemented by following some ten specific warfare rules. This is also known as the ethics of war stated by Abu Bakr, the first caliph of the Islamic state after Muhammad's death. Abu-Bakr formulated a certain set of rules that would govern the Muslim army setting out for Syria, which was then under the Byzantine Empire.

These ten rules can be listed as follows (2004):

1. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path.
2. You must not mutilate dead bodies.
3. You must not kill a child.
4. You must not kill a woman.
5. You must not kill an old man.
6. Do not cut down fruitful trees.
7. Do not destroy buildings.
8. Slay not any of the enemy's flock.



9. Save for your food.

10. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.

The rules stated above are considered to be a compelling set of commandments found in the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions. In other words, the warfare rules set out by the prophet in the wars he participated in directly or indirectly were explained by Abu-Bakr in detail. Therefore, for a jihad to be lawful, it must be carried out by considering these rules.

At a cursory glance, every religion is subjected to a violence strand, whereby most religions have annotations about peace or war. Islam, on the other hand, compared to other religions in the world, has its own warfare rules, like those mentioned above, which must be followed by every soldier in the war. On the other hand, there are people who compare Jihad to the Christian concept of just war and assert that Jihad was less brutal than other warfare in the Middle Ages (Maszka, 2018).

4. The Jihad Ideology of Boko Haram

Boko Haram's ideological origin can be traced back to the mid-1990s when Muhammad Yusuf was operating in the Shababul Muslim Youth organization under the leadership of Mallam Lawal in the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi mosque (Aktaş, 2023). Yusuf undertook the leadership of the organization when Mallam Lawal went to further his education in Saudi Arabia. Under the leadership of Yusuf, the organization gained political influence and fame (Awortu, 2015). Consequently, Boko Haram was founded by Yusuf in 2002 in Maiduguri to establish a Sharia government in the region. Even though Sharia is been practised in Borno and neighbouring states, Yusuf considered the practice not enough and he is against the general democratic system of the country.

The educational background of Yusuf in the Almajiri informal school is also a very important aspect of understanding the jihad ideology of the "Boko haram" phenomenon. It must be emphasized that the Almajiri education system is a threat to the security of Nigeria. Despite the promising beginnings of this education system when Islam first entered Northern Nigeria, it has now been hijacked by instrumentalists to serve their interests. The merits of the system are far outweighed by its demerits. Before joining salafism, Muhammad Yusuf also passed through this educational system (Abbo et al., 2017), which is neither formally recognized by Nigeria's post-independence federal government's schools as part of the country's educational institutions, nor provided funding for their activities (Awofeso et al., 2003). With the founding of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf gained popularity by advocating for the prohibition of components of chemistry and geography, evolution, and the big bang theory of universe formation, all of which he believed to be at odds with the Quran, based on his literal reading of the holy book (Awortu, 2015).

The modus operandi and rulings of Boko Haram explain the type of ideology they possess. The Salafi-Wahabi ideology draws attention to the framework of the struggles, ideas, and movements associated with radicalism. The Shiite Hezbollah and Sunni al-Qaeda terrorist organizations adopt this ideology and justify their acts with it. The influence of Wahhabism on Bedouins and non-Muslims through religious sentiments is undeniable. Abdulwahab, who is the founder of Wahhabism, conducted Jihad operations against tribes that did not accept his ideas and authority, and the Jihad operations carried out included bloodshed and elimination (Özyiğit, 2016).

A similar ideology and jihad understanding are adopted by the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria today. The extremist ideology and a Jihadi twist of the Salafi-Wahabi are evident in Muhammad Yusuf's book, *Hādhihi 'Āqīdatunā wa Minhāj Da'awatina*⁹ which is the only written text directly originating from the movement and also acts as the foundational text and ideological fundamental principle of Boko Haram. This doctrine is also evident in the lectures, debates, and numerous statements released by Abubakar Shekau after succeeding Muhammad Yusuf (Umar, 2020). Boko Haram leaders have mostly quoted Bin Taymiyya as their reference to justify their cause, but scholars in the northern part of Nigeria have criticized this, arguing that the terrorist group either misinterpreted the views of Ibn Taymiyya or quoted him out of context (Maihula, 2020). According to some other Salafi scholars, Khawarij's tendencies are exemplified by Boko Haram.

After the insurgency broke out in Maiduguri, Salafist scholars like the late Sheikh Bashir Mustapha Gwange, Abubakar Kachallah, and Ibrahim Ngomari used the term 'Khawarij' to describe the sect because of their radical views about Islam and hence their focus on western targets and symbols (Monguno - Umara, 2020). However, the Islamic scholars who disagree with the doctrine of Boko Haram are called and tagged as unbelievers by the group (AI, 2015). Muhammad Yusuf, in a lecture video, emphasizes that the scholars who follow the education, laws, politics, and knowledge that contradict the way of Muhammad will be driven away from *al-Kawthar* on the day of resurrection (Yusuf, 2018). In a video uploaded online by Silverbird (2014), Shekau condemns all the remaining sects in Nigeria, referring to them as pagans. The Boko Haram terrorist group is keen on its ideology and does not consider any other ideologies contradicting it.

4.1. Yusuf's Ideological Justifications for Violence: Impact on Non-Muslims

During the reign of Muhammad Yusuf, it is seen that his speeches were mostly directed against the infidels both locally and internationally. He purportedly stood against the western ideologies and its impact on Nigeria. While Yusuf, whose speeches reportedly induced his adherents to pick up arms were mostly condemning unbelievers and his

⁹ This is a text of 168 pages written in Arabic and it was most likely composed in late 2006 or 2007.



adversaries, Shekau's discourse rapidly deteriorated by directing his targets to anyone vulnerable regardless of their faith.

Primarily, Boko Haram started indulging its doctrines in people by using strategies like preaching and supporting their discourse with verses from the Qur'an. In the sermon delivered by Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri in 2006, it was apparent that he was trying to convince the people to set off with him, eradicating the infidels and anyone who embraces Western ideologies. Yusuf was not considered a great theologian because he had little ability to analyze sacred texts (Apard, 2015). But he was known as a gifted, and suasive orator who directed his speeches toward politics and radicalization. He often quoted verses from the Qur'an to substantiate his views. One of the examples is this:

Allah said, 'The rulers of the infidels, their leaders, must be killed. They must be killed because they doubt your religion.' If you kill the leaders, they will subside. Among those who doubt your religion, you must find the highest leaders and cut their throats because they don't keep their word. Find the leaders and kill them because they doubt your religion. Allah said: 'That's how they will stop doubting your religion.' 'The infidels must be killed. They're not worthy of trust. Most of them are people who can't keep their word. They're sinners, they don't know the truth (Apard, 2015, 46).

It is clear from this text that Muhammad Yusuf is attempting to justify his idea with a verse in the Qur'an (at-Tawba, 9\5) commanding that the unbelievers should be killed, particularly their leaders. He believes that with the annihilation of the leaders, the number of non-Muslims would reduce, and there would be less scepticism toward the Islamic faith. Muhammad Yusuf was able to encourage his ideologies with the use of compelling oratory.

4.2. Shekau's Pragmatic Terrorism: A Violence Against All

Abubakar Shekau, Muhammad Yusuf's successor, based his sermons on threats and radical discourse. Shekau's regime can be qualified as a continuation of Yusuf's cause. However, Shekau didn't only denounce infidels like Yusuf but also extended his radicalism to the Muslim communities. The ferocious personality of Shekau is reflected in his violent assaults carried out against civilians, irrespective of their faith, doctrine, or ethnicity. The attacks launched by Boko Haram under the Shekau regime spread to media, educational, cultural and religious institutions (Okereke, 2014). The speeches of Shekau have a consistent format. While his early videos preserved some important aspects of Yusuf's speech, the intellectual component quickly faded and was replaced with vows of war and blatant threats. An example of this was what he said in the video posted after the raid on Maiduguri in 2014.

I Shekau, I am the person speaking. Henceforth you will know who Shekau is. You don't know my madness but today, you will see it. By Allah, I will slaughter you. If I don't slaughter you, I will not be contented. Brothers! This Wherever you are, may Allah make this cassette reach you; I have

given you then permission to rise, Don't spare the elderly, the women, the mad ones, or the fake converted. Put an end to all those who offend Allah. Refusing to practice the religion is an offense toward Allah take arms and start killing them. Kill! Kill! Kill! Today, our religion is nothing but killing." "My brothers! Even if you are in Abuja, Lagos, in the south or anywhere else, you should start fighting. Even if you are alone, take your knife, go and look for a person sleeping and slaughter him. We are fighting because of Allah. This attack is still a low-scale attack (Shekau, 2018, 289).

The fearlessness and high form of radicalism perceived in this speech demonstrate how religion can be instrumentalized to suit one's interests. This message by Abubakar Shekau clearly stated the goal of his mission, which contains threats both against the Muslims who are not supporting them and the non-Muslims. It is seen that he deviated from the theoretical path of Muhammad Yusuf to a practical radicalism against the Nigerian government and their adversaries. This message contains threats and assertions of his intention to commit violence in the name of his beliefs. In the text, he justifies his willingness to indiscriminately attack anyone vulnerable as a religious duty. Shekau's instigation of his audience by the necessity of violence demonstrates propaganda based on an extremist ideology that prioritizes death and destruction.

Shekau emphasizes his unyielding and aggressive way of speaking by displaying a resolve to cause harm, claiming his right to rule, and using coercion to instil fear. Aligning with the name of the group, Shekau repeatedly condemned Western education and its values in his speeches. While addressing the women attending university, he states, that *Western education is a sin, university is a sin. Stop going to university, bastards! Women, go back to your homes!* (Apard, 2015, 60).

Following the abduction of the Chibok girls, he declared, *I abducted your girls, I will sell them in the market by Allah, there is a market for selling humans. Allah says I should sell, he commands me to sell, I will sell women, I sell women* (CNN, 2014). While Shekau is known for utilizing verses from the Qur'an to justify his ideologies, he also misuses religious texts and teachings to justify his atrocious acts. This is evident when he said, *In Islam, it is permitted to take the wife of an infidel. Soon, we're going to take those women and sell them in the market. Danger, danger, danger!* (Apard, 2015, 60).

If we look into the ideological differences between Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau, it can be seen that there is a shift from a fanatical and extremist discourse to practical and dreadful radical ideologies. Therefore, it can be said that Muhammad Yusuf's execution caused a paradigm shift for Boko Haram members. The damage that has been carried out by Boko Haram since the 2009 insurgency to children, women, old people, flocks, trees, food, and religious buildings is hardly estimated.

The ideologies brought forward by the former leader of Boko Haram and the criticism from his counterparts compared to those of his successor suggest a huge difference.



Notwithstanding, both appear to be contradictory and require careful analysis, considering the 1,400 years of Islamic history and wisdom. While Boko Haram's understanding of Jihad is conceptually extremist, the group also tries to Islamically legalise its ideas by twisting the interpretation of the Islamic texts to suit their interests.

5. Findings and Discussion

After identifying the ideologies underlying the acts of Boko Haram, it is clearly understood that terrorism can hardly be perpetrated if one's identity is not hidden under religion. It is also discovered that the classical texts of Islam and their ultimate goals are not well understood by the group. It won't be wrong to say that the low level of standard education, ideological misorders, poverty-driven self-interests, and political actors are some of the factors driving the actions of Boko Haram (Aktaş, 2023). With a closer look at the operations carried out by Boko Haram in mosques and churches and the number of people killed while worshipping in these places, it would be apparent that the mission of Boko Haram revolves around self-interest. Self-interest can vary according to different points of view. Several commentators have emphasized that the self-interest of Boko Haram is based on political power (Granville, 2020). They argued that the factors and motivations driving Boko Haram attacks are political, hinting that the attacks are motivated by inequality and the unequal distribution of money and power in Nigeria, particularly in the north, where people are poorer than the rest of the country, rather than religious.

Furthermore, some released videos of Boko Haram have shown that the group claims that they are fighting to Islamize the whole of Nigeria. It also states that they won't stop the killings until Sharia is the code of law and constitution (Guardian, 2013). Islam, on the other hand, is believed to invite people to accept the religion willingly (al-Baqarah, 2\256). And not force them to do so. Boko Haram commits suicide bombings in their operations, even though suicide is prohibited by the Qur'an. Suicide is not permitted, nor is voluntary or involuntary homicide. It is also stated that murderers will face harsh consequences in the hereafter (al-Nisā, 4\93). Moreover, the Qur'an also specified that anyone who kills a soul is considered to be killing the whole of mankind (al-Mā'ida, 5\36).

Boko Haram is also known to recruit children and youths to join their cause (TVC, 2020). This recruitment is sometimes carried out forcefully, either by kidnapping or threat. Sometimes, it is carried out willingly because of the money involved (Huriye, 2023). The recruits' parents lament the loss of their children at the hands of Boko Haram ("CGTN 2016). Islam gives more importance to the happiness of the parent than Jihad. A man came to Muhammad one day and said, *I came to you to take the oath of allegiance to you on emigration, and I left my parents weeping. He (the Prophet) said, Return to them and make them laugh as you made them weep* (Abu Dawud, 2008, 3/221). Children's rights in Islam are violated by

coercing adolescents to join their cause without their parents' permission, violating at least one edict on fighter eligibility in Islam, which is having the permission of one's parents.

The ideology of the Islamists in the contradictory quotation of the Qur'an is seen as a quest to create their version of an Islamic state. However, they only quote verses in the Qur'an that support their political objectives and purposely leave out the injunctions that do not (Aboul-Enein - Zuhur, 2004).

Yusuf's misunderstanding of the Qur'an and its exegesis has made him misguide his followers. Yusuf glorified martyrdom and promoted his understanding of Jihad mostly by quoting the verse: *And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful* (at-Tawba, 9\5). This particular verse is often used to malign Islam, but it should be understood that there are some exceptions to the generic categorization of polytheists mentioned in this verse. The exempted people are mentioned as follows, according to the verses in Chapter Nine of the Qur'an:

- Dhimmi: This group includes those who accept to make the Jizyah payment and live under the legal protection of the Islamic state (at-Tawba, 9\29).
- The Musta'min. This is a person asking for temporary refuge. Even if the category of people like this includes polytheists, they are not part of the verse (at-Tawba, 9\6).
- Mu'aahid. This group includes those with an ongoing truce (at-Tawba, 9\4).
- Children and women: This category of people is excluded since the hadith does not include them. Most Islamic schools of thought also include monks, elderly men, and people with disabilities¹⁰.

Furthermore, it is impossible to fully comprehend a verse without understanding its background and context. The context and history of this verse are routinely ignored, even though it is commonly quoted as evidence that Islam supports the killing of non-Muslims. The Surah at-Tawbah opening verses were revealed in honour of the first pilgrimage performed under Muslim rule. Following Makkah's conquest after Muhammad had been persecuted for 13 years, he began teaching the oneness of God, much like other prophets. Muslims who were being persecuted were advised to escape to safer regions rather than stirring up a war; therefore, Muhammad and his companions moved to Medina. After they left, the Meccans periodically persecuted them in Medina for nine years until Chapter Nine of the Qur'an was revealed. After the conquest of Mecca, Muhammad made treaties with numerous pagan tribes during this period. These agreements have different expiration

¹⁰ Ibn Hajar, in his book *Fathul-Bari* 6/147, explicitly provided detailed information about the set of people who are exempted from the scope of the polytheists mentioned in the verse.



dates. Some did not indicate a period, while others were set to expire in less than four months and others in more than four months¹¹.

It is clear from the context of the verses that the mandate in this verse only applies to tribes that continued to wage war on Muslims after they had moved. The five tribes that broke their covenants with Muslims are specifically mentioned. It is also crucial to keep in mind that the verses before them provide these individuals with a four-month window of opportunity to reflect on their actions and put an end to hostilities. However, the Muslims' opponents have continued attacking them over the last four months. Only then did God instruct Muhammad to engage them in war and protect Islam and Muslims. This verse was revealed against the idolaters who were attacking the Muslims. It should be noted that the purpose of its revelation was to enable Muslims to defend themselves and their faith. There is more to this scripture than how the terrorist organization Boko Haram uses it to justify its actions.

Ultimately, the ten rules of warfare that were put forward by Abu Bakr are going to be looked at by contrasting the broad outline of Boko Haram's activities.

- **Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path:** The first guideline of Islamic warfare emphasizes the necessity of refraining from treachery or leaving the right path. After evaluating the purported ideology driving Boko Haram's actions, the group can be categorized as an organization motivated by interests. Consequently, the notions of "the right path" and "treachery," as articulated in the initial rule of Islamic warfare, require analysis in light of Boko Haram's operational framework.

- **You must not mutilate dead bodies:** According to the second rule of Islamic warfare, it is prohibited to mutilate dead bodies. However, there are claims that Boko Haram has been behind the deaths of several civilians in northeast Nigeria. Reports indicate that the group has engaged in the deplorable practice of mutilating the bodies of their victims (AI, 2015).

- **You must not kill a child, you must not kill a woman, and you must not kill an aged man:** According to rules three, four, and five, children, women, and elderly men are specifically prohibited from being killed in war. However, since the commencement of the insurgency in 2009, Boko Haram has frequently demonstrated an outrageous disregard for these ideals, as seen by many suicide bombings and massacres. A significant number of children, women, and elderly people have died as a result of these brutal crimes, demonstrating the group's disregard for the mercy and compassion emphasized in Islamic teachings. The scale of such killings underscores the alarming nature of Boko Haram's

¹¹ For further information, look at Tefsir Ibn Kathir p. 376-377.

actions and highlights their deviation from the ethical guidelines outlined in the doctrine of Islam

• **Do not cut down fruitful trees, destroy buildings, and do not slay any of the enemy's flock:** Rules six, seven, and eight of Islamic warfare forbid killing the enemy's livestock, cutting down fertile trees, and demolishing buildings. On the contrary, Boko Haram has routinely transgressed these ideals by carrying out assaults on people at transportation hubs, schools, and other public institutions employing lethal strategies like IEDs, including vehicle bombs and suicide bombers. These violent attacks have destroyed a large number of trees and buildings, in addition to killing a large number of animals. Boko Haram's destructive tactics have caused a great deal of irreparable harm to the environment and infrastructure, further underscoring their apparent contempt for the moral precepts of Islamic warfare.

• **Save for your food:** The Ninth Rule of Islamic Warfare highlights the need for conserving food and preventing food waste. However, The attacks by Boko Haram on public markets defy this notion. In a particularly tragic event, the group attacked a market in Sabon Gari, Borno State, causing the loss of food supplies and other necessities and resulting in massive food waste. Consequently, this incident resulted in the deaths of about 47 people (Jenkins, 2015). The devastation of food supplies and the loss of innocent lives demonstrate the group's evident contempt for Islamic teachings and humanitarian principles, which further emphasises the nature of Boko Haram's ideology and its relation to Islamic rules of just warfare.

• **You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone:** In Islamic warfare, Rule 10 states that individuals who have committed their lives to religious and monastic work should be respected and not harmed. Boko Haram nonetheless flagrantly violates this rule and targets religious leaders who disagree with or criticize their extreme ideas (AI, 2015). This is clear from their horrible actions, which included placing and setting off explosives in mosques and churches as innocent people gathered to worship. A phenomenon that occurred in 2018 that involved a mosque in Maiduguri, Nigeria, and a suspected suicide bomber is an example of their extreme violence. According to reports, this horrifying incident left at least seven worshippers dead and eight others injured (Kola - Ajakaye, 2018).

Conclusion

The emergence of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria's pluralistic society has undergone ideological evolution over time. The group's use of violence and the destruction of lives and material assets while purportedly acting as Islamic Jihadists and justifying its actions with selective Quranic verses is a situation that calls for an analysis of the ideologies underlying the group's actions. Fundamentally understanding the close relationship



between ideology and terrorism is important to comprehend the radicalization process of Boko Haram, as the jihadist ideology adopted by the group is seen to have grown into a full-fledged radical terrorist organization with time. In the process when the group undergoes ideological radicalization, it is apparent that socio-economic issues, political based self interests, and lack of formal education play more significant roles in shaping its path.

Various researchers have taken up the task of clarifying the meaning of jihad as it is defined in the Qur'an and prophetic tradition. Generally, jihad is a comprehensive term that encompasses the internal struggle against one's self as well as speaking the truth in front of a tyrannical leader. War, which is the last resort in the context of jihad, has traditionally served as a defensive measure to protect Muslims from aggressors and the oppressed from injustice. Contrastingly, Boko Haram today uses the term 'jihad' as a justification for its crimes. According to its self-declared narrative, Boko Haram seeks to spread the idea that Muhammad's historical precedent calls for the use of violence as a means of fighting unbelievers, resulting in the deaths of both innocents and non-innocents, with the ultimate goal of compelling people to embrace the Islamic faith, whereas the Islamic texts make it clear that he fought as a last resort in defence of the religion he brought and his new society in the city of Medina. If Boko Haram uses Islam to justify their terrorist activities, then Islamic texts and the teachings of the Prophet can also be used to debunk these acts.

This article has deduced that the ideology inherent in the cause of Boko Haram significantly diverges from the conventional Islamic comprehension of jihad and warfare, irrespective of the different perspectives presented by various scholars on jihad. In addition, it is crucial to understand that the concept of jihad has mostly been exploited as a tool by a set of interests, which leads to the radicalization and implementation of terrorist activities. Consequently, it is the responsibility of moderate Muslims to undertake an ideological initiative that aims at exposing the interests of terrorist organizations that have fostered misconceptions about Islam through their pernicious teachings and interpretation of Islamic scriptures.

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