

Univerzita Karlova
Filozofická fakulta
Katedra Blízkého východu

Obor: Blízkovýchodní studia (arabistika)

Boko Haram
Genesis and Evolution of a Terrorist Organization

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2023

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Poděkování

Děkuji Mgr. Ťupkovi, Ph.D. za odborné vedení práce, věcné připomínky, dobré rady a vstřícnost při konzultacích a vypracování bakalářské práce.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je představit organizaci Boko Haram skrze její genezi a vývoj a indentifikovat formativní momenty v její historii. Korupce, špatné ekonomické plánování, a dopady kolonialismu jsou často uváděny jako hlavní důvody vzniku a popularity Boka Haram. Práce má shrnout relevantní literaturu, která pojednává o těchto jevech a problematice Boka Haram celkově. Zároveň se práce soustředí na postavy vůdců Boka Haram a jejich vliv na vývoj organizace, něco co nebývá často akcentováno. Práce dochází k tomu, že i přesto, že všechny výše zmiňované faktory měli vliv na vývoj Boka Haram, byly to právě její vůdci, kteří trajektorii své organizace v klíčových momentech nasměrovali určitým směrem a ovlivnili tak zásadním způsobem její další vývoj.

Klíčová slova:

Boko Haram, terorismus, salafismus, džihádismus

Abstract

The goal of this bachelor's thesis is to introduce Boko Haram through its genesis and evolution and to identify formative moments in its history. Corruption, bad economic planning and a colonial legacy are often presented as the main reasons for the creation and popularity of Boko Haram. This bachelor's thesis provides a summary of the relevant literature that deals with these factors and with Boko Haram more broadly. It also focuses on the leaders of Boko Haram and their influence on the evolution of the organization, something that is rarely emphasized. The bachelor's thesis comes to the conclusion that although all of the above mentioned factors played a role in the evolution of Boko Haram, it was precisely the leaders of the group, who, during important moments, steered their the group in a certain direction and thus had a significant influence on its further evolution.

Keywords:

Boko Haram, terrorism, salafism, jihadism

Boko Haram

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Introduction

Boko Haram is an Islamic sect operating in northern Nigeria. It has become notorious due to its contention that western-style education is un-Islamic and part of a larger evil system that includes multiparty democracy, constitutionalism and man-made laws. The group believes that politics in northern Nigeria have been seized by corrupt Muslims and it seeks to build a pure Islamic state governed by Shari'a law.

The goal of this thesis is to introduce Boko Haram through its genesis and evolution. The amount of literature focusing on Boko Haram demonstrates the academic interest in the subject more broadly. Alexander Thurston provides a good overview of the history of Boko Haram in his monograph *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* and is cited frequently. The author focuses in detail on the educational problems in Nigeria preceding the emergence of Boko Haram, showing how the failures of the educational reforms might have fuelled discontent among the local population. The trend of Sharia implementation at the turn of the 21st century and its consequent shortcomings are presented as one of the reasons for a rising alienation from the state and for the resurfacing of old Christian-Muslim tensions. The fact that the group evolved from a religious movement into a militant organization is given as a factor distinguishing it from most other similar organizations as well as its strong focus on education as an "enemy".¹

The discontent mentioned by Thurston was further exacerbated by socio-economic situation, which is the topic of *Boko Haram: The Socio-Economic Drivers*, authored by Ojochenemi, et al. With the help of GDP and various other relevant economic metrics, it illustrates the relative poverty and hardship of the north of Nigeria as compared to the South. The colonial legacy of Britain, which had a more solid foothold in the south is presented as the main reason behind this. The shift from agriculture to Oil-dependence is presented as another key point. The author argues that Nigeria has widened the support base for radical organizations such as Boko Haram

¹ Alex Thurston also provides an extensive bibliography including most of the relevant literature on Boko Haram.

by repeatedly alienating its citizens by means of corruption and bad economic planning.

Socio-economic issues were likewise a driving factor behind the emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate and its expansion led by its founder Usman Dan Fodio. As it resembled Boko Haram in various ways² such as in its geographical proximity and similarities in their discourse, Virginia Comolli provides a good overview of Usman Dan Fodio and his caliphate in her publication *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency*. The author later brings forth other, more recent Islamic movements in Nigeria, which bear some resemblance to Boko Haram, such as the Maitatsine³ movement, the MSS, and the Izala movement. By this the author stresses the cyclicity of Nigerian Islamist movements.

The monograph *Boko Haram and the Drivers of Islamist Violence*, written by Zacharias Pieri, also sheds light on the Sokoto Caliphate, while focusing primarily on the factor of ethnicity. He contrasts the Fulani-dominated Sokoto Caliphate with Boko Haram's support base, which is mainly made up of Kannuris. The author also argues that whatever the goals of Boko Haram, its members do not see their actions as something new but as something rooted in historical examples and situations.

As much as Usman Dan Fodio was a formative figure in the history of the Sokoto Caliphate, the same can be said about Muhammad Yusuf and Boko Haram. Brendan Kendhammer and Carmen McCain⁴ detail the emergence of Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram's first leader and arguably its most important figure. They picture his rise under the tutelage of respected Islamic scholars, whose authority he challenged, when he decided to gain religious and political authority of his own. They also call attention to how Boko Haram was able to co-opt dissatisfied farmers and traders who were affected by the states counter-measures against Boko Haram by means of violence and road and border closures.

² Pieri, Zacharias P. *Boko Haram and the Drivers of Islamist Violence*. New York: Routledge. 2019, 27.

³ A overview of the group is provided in Ben Amara, Ramzi. *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Shari'a ReImplementation*. DPhil diss. BIGSAS, 2011, 142-144.

⁴ Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain. *Boko Haram*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018.

This bachelor's thesis seeks to introduce the history of Boko Haram through both the summary of existing literature focusing on a multitude of topics pertaining to the group, as well as by considering the potential personal ambitions of Boko Haram's leaders, something that, although mentioned, is rarely given much importance in comparison to socio-economic and religious factors⁵.

In addition secondary sources, I will also use sources of Boko Haram provenance, namely proclamations made by the leaders of Boko Haram and letters that were authored by members of the group, who were dissatisfied by the leaders' behaviour and actions. These sources, among others, are compiled in the publication *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* by Abdulbasit Kassim, et al.

I use the the term Boko Haram to refer to an organization that, as is widely accepted, has been forming since 2002 around the person of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. This is also the preferred dating of Virginia Comolli⁶. However, there are also other opinions about the true founding of Boko Haram such as the one provided by Human's Rights Watch. HWR states 2003 as the year when Boko Haram was formed⁷.

2002 also marks the beginning of the main part of my thesis, with the end being in 2015 with the oath of allegiance to ISIS proclaimed by Abubakar Shekau⁸. After this the operations and structure of the group become highly fractionalized and treating them in sufficient detail would be beyond the scope of this thesis. I confine myself mainly on Boko Haram's activities within Nigeria. The group's activities in neighbouring countries will be omitted, unless they provide an important insight into the local development of the organization.

⁵ Which is demonstrated by the amount of literature focusing on the economic reasons behind the group's rise, as well as the group's religious ideology.

⁶ Comolli, Virginia. *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, 45.

⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift*. London: Hurst, 2019, 101.

⁸ Abdulbasit Kassim et al. *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2018, 466.

As for the structure of my thesis, the first chapter gives an overview of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic situations in Northern Nigeria. It introduces the various Islamic groups and polities that preceded Boko Haram, focussing on their mutual similarities and differences with the said group. Moreover, it sheds light on some important figures that shaped Nigeria's history, Usman Dan Fodio or Abubakar Gumi, respectively. Lastly it talks about the various socio-economic issues that preceded the rise of Boko Haram such as high levels of corruption, failings in the agricultural sector, or English language being the main vehicle for upward social mobility. The second chapter maps the rise of Muhammad Yusuf as a religious figure. It deals with his views, alliances and main events, in which he was involved, such as the Maiduguri uprising, which marked the beginning of Boko Haram's open confrontation with the Nigerian state. The third chapter depicts Boko Haram after the uprising of Maiduguri when it went underground. The final chapter deals with the period between the beginning of 2012, when president Goodluck Jonathan announced a state of emergency in the areas of Northern Nigeria due to the Boko Haram insurgency⁹, and Shekau's oath of allegiance to ISIS in 2015.

⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift*. London: Hurst, 2019, 116.

Chapter 1: Religious, Socio-Economic and Ethnic Background

Since the beginning of the 19th century, various groups and sects have criticised the status quo in Northern Nigeria. The usual targets of their criticism are corruption, despotic leaders, and deviation from what they deem to be pure Islam.

When looking at Boko Haram and its message, there are some obvious similarities with the Sokoto caliphate, an Islamic polity, established by Usman Dan Fodio in 1809¹⁰. Usman Dan Fodio was a religious reformer and military leader from the Fulani ethnic group who worked as a religious scholar on the court of the King of Gobir¹¹, one of the kings that ruled over the territory of Hausaland at the turn of the 19th century. Over time however, he came to be disappointed by various social issues including enslavement, high-levels of taxation (namely the cattle tax) and corruption¹². This combination of religious fervour and criticism of the prevailing social issues are something that Boko Haram would focus on almost two centuries later. This ideological connection is manifested in a letter by Boko Haram where Dan Fodio is referenced directly, to give just one example¹³. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a factor that distinguishes Boko Haram and Dan Fodio's polity as the former operates mainly in Kanuri areas, while Usman Dan Fodio led his jihad to establish the Sokoto caliphate from predominantly Fulani lands in North-western Nigeria¹⁴. This might allude to the fact that ideals are of a much higher importance to Boko Haram than ethnicity. The Fulani ethnic group, despite being later converts to Islam, were known for their sound religious observance¹⁵. This placed them in a position to identify the various problems and lack of religious-observance in the various Hausa kingdoms.

Dan Fodio's victory over Gobir in 1809 set off a chain of campaigns against other Hausa leaders led by Fulani clan-leaders who later became emirs of the emirates that constituted Dan Fodio's empire¹⁶. Their descendants maintained their status as traditional

¹⁰ Comolli, Virginia. *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency*. London: Hurst & Company, 2015, 15.

¹¹ Ibid, 14.

¹² Ibid, 15

¹³ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴ Pieri, Zacharias, P. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20-21.

religious leaders in Northern Nigeria until the present day, albeit with severely reduced authority¹⁷.

Two prominent Sufi orders are well established in the region: the Qadiriyya¹⁸ and the Tijaniyya.^{19,20} The first came to be positively viewed by the British colonial authorities, helping them put a stop to a Mahdist revolt in the north in 1906²¹. The latter, however, due to its wide reaching network all across north and west Africa, was viewed with suspicion by the British²², probably due to its potential to mobilize a lot of people spanning a vast territory that European powers were trying to gain a foothold in Africa. Mentioning the Sufi orders is relevant when shedding light on the various Islamic polities and organizations that preceded Boko Haram. While Usman Dan Fodio was himself affiliated with the Qadiriyya, later organizations, such as the Izala, while resembling the Sokoto caliphate in part of their message, would be strongly opposed to Sufism²³

This traditional religious balance however started to unravel with the advent of indirect rule employed by the British. With emirs losing their formal stature and after having been more of a front and spokesperson for the colonial administration in their respective domain, coupled with rising poverty and growing divide between the south and north of the country after Nigeria's independence, the state of affairs was favourable for the growth of new organizations into which the dissatisfied population could vest their hopes. Among these movements were a wide range of Salafi-oriented movements²⁴.

¹⁷ Ibid, 26.

¹⁸ The Qadiriyya traces its origin to the scholar of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who was an established scholar and a preacher in Abbasid Baghdad during the late 11th and early 12th century. The order reached Nigeria in the 12th and 13th century and Dan Fodio himself was affiliated with it

¹⁹ The Tijaniyya is named after Sheikh Ahmad Tijani, who himself was a member of numerous Sufi orders, and began building a series of religious schools called zawiyas in 1800. The Tijaniyya spread throughout North and West Africa¹⁹ and is thought to have been introduced to Nigeria by the Senegalese al-Hajj Umar Thall, when he visited the territory on his way to Mecca in 1826¹⁹

²⁰ Ibid, 24.

²¹ Ben Amara, Ramzi. *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Shari'a ReImplementation*. DPhil diss. BIGSAS, 2011, 87.

²² Ibid, 88.

²³ Comolli, Virginia, 38.

²⁴ Salafi movements are treated in detail in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. By Roel Meijer.

One of the groups that capitalized on this dissatisfaction was the millenarian Maitatsine group, established by Cameroon-born Muhammad Marwa as a group that was able to gain popularity by speaking out against similar issues that Boko Haram would a few decades later²⁵. *Maitatsine* is the Hausa word meaning *the one who damns*.²⁶ He followed an extremely radical doctrine that was far from the established norm in Nigeria at the time, denouncing parts of the holy Qur'an, calling himself a prophet with a mandate from God and gaining a cult-like following²⁷. Falola accurately points out that the attraction of such a radical movement might have had more to do with the very bad socio-economic situation at the time and might have served as an outlet for youth dissatisfaction, rather than the Maitatsine's ideas being especially enticing for potential recruits²⁸. The fact that the Maitatsine drew support mainly from rural migrants²⁹ might further support this theory. The movement came to be involved in clashes with the authorities culminating in a large riot after trying to storm Kano's Friday mosque³⁰.

Boko Haram was able to evolve partly as a consequence of the population's dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions in Northern Nigeria. The roots of this discontent among the population can be traced to the colonial legacy left by Great Britain. Northern Nigeria came to the attention of Britain's imperial ambitions at the turn of the 20th century, considerably later than the south, with Lagos becoming a British protectorate in 1867³¹. After recent negative experiences with the Mahdist uprising in Sudan, the British decided to stop of short of directly controlling the vast northern territory and decided for a form of indirect rule, which was facilitate by cultivating

²⁵ Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 62.

²⁶ Elkaim, Zachary. "Boko Haram: The Rise, Success, and Continued Efficacy of the Insurgency in Nigeria." International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09426>. 9.

²⁷ Falola, Toyin. *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*. Rochester, N.Y.: University Of Rochester Press, 1998, 141-142, quoted in Comolli, Virginia, 40.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Pieri, Zacharias, P, 62.

³⁰ Loimeier, Roman. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria." *Africa Spectrum* 47, no. 2/3 (2012): 137–55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23350455>. 140.

³¹ Ben Amara, Ramzi. *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Sharī'a ReImplementation*. DPhil diss. BIGSAS, 2011, 81.

relationships with local emirs who ruled over their own respective domains. They acted as agents of British colonial rules and were strongly influenced by them, even collecting taxes on their behalf (and keeping a significant portion of them). By the nature of their affiliation with the British, the local emirs in effect switched from their traditional allegiance to the sultan of Sokoto³². The British decided to uphold the administrative system of the territories and not to interfere with local customs such as the Shari'a and the de-facto inferior status of non-Muslim people³³. However, the relative isolation of the north compared to the south resulted in the south being able to reap the benefits of globalization significantly more and developing a superior education system. After the independence of Nigeria as a unified country, most of the political posts in the new government were taken by southerners, due to their much higher level of education³⁴. Before independence, the north accounted for just a meager 8% of pupils while boasting a sole university³⁵. This contributed to a feeling of alienation some people in the north were able to feel with regards to the Nigerian state. As well as causing a regional divide in terms of power distribution, it also caused an ethnic misbalance, wherein the northern-based Hausa-Fulani weren't afforded a lot of space in the political arena³⁶. The first decades of Nigeria's independence were plagued by a series of changes in political leadership and violence related to the Biafra war³⁷.

The most important and relevant movement in the 20th century was the Izala, which had its roots in the teachings of Abubakar Gumi (d.1992). Serving as the Grand Qadi in 1962-1967, he was in a position to make his religious views and opinions heard³⁸. Sheikh Gumi criticized the position of Sufism in Islam and its propagation of various modern customs and local religious practices³⁹, considered by the Salafis as un-Islamic, as well as the Sultan of Sokoto's position as a spiritual leader of the region's Muslims⁴⁰.

³² Ibid, 83.

³³ Comolli, Virginia, 17.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ojochenemi J, David et al. *Boko Haram: The Socio-Economic Drivers*. Cham: Springer, 2015, 96.

³⁶ Comolli, Virginia, 18.

³⁷ This part of Nigerian history is looked at in detail in: Comolli, Virginia, 19.

³⁸ Ben Amara, Ramzi, 111.

³⁹ Loimeier, Roman. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria." *Africa Spectrum* 47 (2-3): 137–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971204702-308>. 2012, 141.

⁴⁰ Akali Omeni. *Insurgency and War in Nigeria*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2019, 16.

Gumi formalized proper doctrine according to the Shari'a his thoughts and ideas in his work *al-Aqidah al-Sahihah bi-Muwafaqah al-Shari'a*⁴¹ (proper doctrine according to the Shari'a), which he published in 1972⁴². In it, he criticized many aspects of Sufism including the popular belief that a Sufi master can intervene on behalf of his disciples during the day of judgement, witchcraft, seeking blessings for a particular purpose, and other things considered as heretical⁴³. Together with Sufism, Gumi also identified western-oriented education as a means of turning children away from religion⁴⁴, a point that Boko Haram would also emphasize later on.⁴⁵

His thoughts were in a way institutionalized when his followers established the *Jama'at Izalat al-Bid'a wa Iqamat al-Sunna*, Commonly known as Izala, was established in 1978 in Jos by Ismaila Idris (d.2000), a follower of Gumi⁴⁶. The organization expanded rapidly, thanks in part to the funds supplied to it by donors from abroad, namely Kuwait and Saudi Arabia⁴⁷. Violent clashes soon supplanted the mere negative attitudes its followers felt towards the traditional Sufi brotherhoods⁴⁸. Izala soon tried to bring as many mosques under its control and break with the traditional order of accepting Sufi brotherhoods as a part of the religious landscape⁴⁹. As the traditional religious authorities were not able to respond to rapid changes, modernization and the deterioration of living condition, the Izala offered disenchanting Muslims a new, more direct outlet, without the need for any of the traditional authorities as intermediaries. This was happening against the backdrop of heightened sense of pan-Islamic solidarity and a large influx of preachers who had been educated in the Gulf and been exposed to more orthodox and stern interpretations of Islam. One of these preachers was Ja'far Adam, who together with other

⁴¹ Although searching for this publication extensively in order to gain additional information about sheikh Gunmis views, I was not able to locate it.

⁴² Pieri Zacharias, P, 57

⁴³ Ben Amara, Ramzi, 119.

⁴⁴ Gumi, Abubakar. *Al- 'Aqida al- Sahihah bi- Muwafaqat al- Shari 'a*. Beirut: Dar al-Arabiyya, 1972, 78, quoted in Pieri Zacharias, P, 80.

⁴⁵ Thurston, Alexander *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 1.

⁴⁶ Ben Amara, Ramzi, 121.

⁴⁷ Loimeier, Roman. *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011, 222, quoted in Comolli, Virginia, 37.

⁴⁸ Comolli, Virginia, 38.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

graduates of the Islamic University of Medina created a network of Saudi-influenced preachers⁵⁰. Even after the Sufi orders joined their efforts with state authorities to stem the growing influence of the afore-mentioned Salafi preachers and movements, Salafism gained a strong foothold in the region thanks to the control of a well-established mosque network and contacts between the various preachers⁵¹.

The existence of many organizations and networks led to some intra-Muslim conflicts regarding the stance that should be taken against Sufism, as experienced by the cadres of Izala⁵². The dissatisfaction of some members with the direction that their groups were taking would soon lead to splits and the creation of new, oftentimes more radical and uncompromising organizations, such as Boko Haram.

Apart from some intra-confessional tensions, there were also a number of Christian-Muslim conflicts, including violent clashes in 1987 and 1992⁵³. This was likely influenced by the large migrations that were happening in Nigeria in the post-independence era, during which large numbers of Muslims migrants settled in Christian-majority areas and vice versa. This might have evoked bitter memories relating to the Jihad of Dan Fodio and the colonial period, when Britain Occasionally imposed Muslim rulers over non-Muslims⁵⁴. Another major point of contention between the two confessional groups was the debate about the potential creation of federal Shari'a court of appeal⁵⁵.

Northern Nigeria also suffered from severe economic hardship in the post-independence years. In 1980 the poverty levels in the northern regions were more than double those of their southern counterparts⁵⁶. This trend has continued until the active

⁵⁰ Thurston, Alexander *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 59.

⁵¹ Ibid, 61.

⁵² Ibid, 58.

⁵³ Ibid, 36.

⁵⁴ Ochonu, Moses E. *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1-3, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 2014, 69.

⁵⁵ Thurston, Alexander, 67.

⁵⁶ Ojochenemi J, David, et. al, 93

years of Boko Haram with the 5 regions with the highest poverty rate being Zamfara, Bauchi, Gombe, Nassarawa and Niger, all of them being regions situated in the north of the country⁵⁷. This economic hardship was influenced by the downfall of the agricultural sector, which used to provide almost 70% of all jobs⁵⁸. With the switch to dependence on oil-exports due to its rising price, the closure of many agriculture-related companies led to many people losing their jobs⁵⁹. The lower level of education in the north exacerbated the disappointment among the populace as it was harder for them to switch to other industries than in the south, where education had been more developed since colonial times. This caused many to migrate from rural to urban areas, with the population of some cities doubling in the span of a couple of years in 1960s and 1970s. As an example, the population of Potiskum in present-day Yobe state grew from 31000 in 1963 to 60000 in 1976⁶⁰. Living conditions worsened due to the unpreparedness of the cities for such a high influx of migrants, and crime rates grew⁶¹. The situation of rising gang power elicited a military operation termed ‘Operation Zaki’, but the military was accused of being involved in criminal activities of their own⁶². This only furthered the tensions between ordinary northerners and the Nigerian state. The government tried to ameliorate the situation with a massive spending campaign devoted to educational programs, by which the poor level of enrollment in schools was supposed to increase⁶³. The program saw a massive increase in school enrollment⁶⁴, but wasn’t able to provide enough teachers, resulting in a lacking quality of schooling. In Maiduguri, the pupil-teacher ratio rose from 28:1 to 38:1 in the eleven years from 1975 to 1976 alone⁶⁵. There was also a language barrier for students wishing to continue to secondary or higher education. Even though they were taught in local languages, they had to pass English-language tests to enter secondary education which hindered the possibilities for social advancement⁶⁶. It is

⁵⁷ Ibid, 85.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁰ Max Lock Group Nigeria. *Potiskum: Surveys and Planning Reports*. Max Lock Group Nigeria, 1976, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 45.

⁶¹ Khalifa Aliyu Ahmed Abulfathi, “The Metamorphosis of Boko Haram: A Local’s Perspective” (Maiduguri: Sheikh Ahmed Abulfathi Foundation, 2016), <http://sheikhahmadabulfathi.org/content/metamorphosisbokoharam>. Quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 49.

⁶² Bukar Ahmed, “Borno Police and Its Squad of Extortionists,” *Daily Trust*, 30 June 2007, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200707130678.html>. Quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 50.

⁶³ Thurston, Alexander, 72.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bray, Mark. *Universal Primary Education in Nigeria: A Study of Kano State*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, 82-84, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 73.

⁶⁶ Max Lock Group Nigeria. *Maiduguri: Surveys and Planning Reports for Borno*,

exactly this western influence in education that Boko Haram would attack later on⁶⁷. This and the higher hopes placed on education coupled with the prevailing scarcity of jobs resulted in even more animosity that regular citizens felt towards state power. Corruption was also a major issue with politics viewed as a means of personal enrichment and frequent protests against the rising prices of oil, even though Nigeria boasts large crude oil reserves⁶⁸. Against the backdrop of a worsening economic situation for many, a huge population growth and alienation from state power, this environment of change, tension, and conflict was ripe for the emergence of Boko Haram.

Bauchi and Gongola State Governments. Max Lock Group Nigeria, 1976, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 74.

⁶⁷ Thurston, Alexander *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 1.

⁶⁸ Olumuyiwa Temitope Faluyi, et al. *Boko Haram's Terrorism and the Nigerian State*. Cham: Springer, 2019, 65-66

Chapter 2: Genesis of a Terrorist Organization

Boko Haram as a group emerged around 2002, amid growing calls for sharia implementation and during a generational shift in the religious establishment, when many old scholars were being replaced by younger, more hardline preachers, who had often undergone a period of study in Saudi Arabia and were thus influenced by its interpretation of Islam. The subsequent shortcomings of the Sharia implementation, coupled with prevalent corruption led many in the organization to adopt a much more radical and violent stance towards to the Nigerian state and the Religious establishment.

First, it is necessary to introduce Mohammad Yusuf, the group's first leader and probably the person who played the most important role in shaping the organization and its views. Born in 1970 in the village of Girgir, Yobe state⁶⁹, Mohammad Yusuf moved to Maiduguri after the death of his father under the patronage of Baba Fu, his father-in-law and a successful businessmen who would have a significant influence on the activities of Boko Haram in the future. Yusuf first came into contact with religious activism around 1995, after joining a Salafi organization led by Abubakar Lawan⁷⁰. After some time Yusuf became the disciple of Ja'far Adam, the prominent Izala scholar mentioned in the previous chapter, who delivered regular sermons at Maiduguri's Indimi mosque from the mid-1990s up until his death in 2007. Yusuf started to rise to prominence after he began to preach in Adam's absence⁷¹. His worldview and ideas would soon, however, start to diverge from those of his mentor, and from those of the religious establishment of the time.

The environment of the time was probably the main impetus behind Yusuf's turn to increasingly radical views. As mentioned in chapter 1, the economic situation in Nigeria was far from good, and because of Nigeria's relative international isolation at the turn of century, children of well-off families flooded the best universities around the country. On top of the prevalent socio-economic dissatisfaction, their presence also increased the feeling of alienation many ordinary Muslims experienced from the rich elites of Nigeria,

⁶⁹ Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain. *Boko Haram*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018, 38.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Akali Omeni. *Insurgency and War in Nigeria*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2019, 19.

who had (according to the Salafis), turned away from religion, embracing a life of drinking, personal indulgence, and other un-Islamic practices⁷².

The appeal of more hardline preachers was increased by the relative failures of the Sharia implementation issue that took place in Northern Nigeria at the turn of the century, when many states in northern Nigeria moved towards a more significant implementation of Shari'a. It was proposed that Sharia courts would hear criminal offences, as opposed to only dealing with personal matters such as marriage and inheritance, as had been the case previously⁷³. There was clearly a desire from people to implement Shari'a as 12 states moved to do so in the short time frame of 1999 to 2001. Many politicians have undoubtedly supported this cause in order to preserve their religious credentials in the face of the local Muslim population.

It can therefore be argued that Sharia could be presented as a change that could alter the status quo and improve the lives of millions of Muslims, and as such was supported by various constituencies⁷⁴. Many committees were set up for the facilitation of dialogue and the implementation, Muhammad Yusuf himself being part of the Sharia implementation committee⁷⁵ and being nominated as the representative for Borno state in the Supreme Council for Shari'a⁷⁶. The problem with these committees was their heavy reliance on older, well established scholars⁷⁷, who for the younger generations represented exactly the corrupt system that many wanted change. At the same time, many scholars went to study to Medina at the turn of the 21st century leaving a vacuum that new, younger preaches could attempt to fill in their absence⁷⁸.

In this situation, Muhammad Yusuf adopted a much more radical stance, which later led to a confrontation with his former teacher Ja'far Adam, with whom he differed on a

⁷² Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain, 39.

⁷³ Thurston, Alexander, 113.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 116.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 85.

number of issues. The most important element in Yusuf's criticism has always been the incompetence and corruption of the Nigerian state⁷⁹. While Adam discouraged his followers from openly opposing the political establishment, so that they could later oppose it with greater resistance⁸⁰, his apprentice, Yusuf, declared that western education contradicts Allah and that he rejects the concept of Darwinism⁸¹. Furthermore he also caused serious discord by refusing to accept the Sultan of Sokoto as the spiritual leader of all Nigerian Muslims⁸².

On top of this he invoked the concept of *al-Wala' w-a al-Bara'*⁸³ (loyalty and disavowal, and asserted that worship of other than Allah is tantamount to polytheism. Therefore, according to Yusuf, man had to choose between God and man-made laws.⁸⁴ By this, Yusuf was essentially marking all those who participated in Nigerian politics (and even the people who did not oppose it) as polytheists, i.e. unbelievers⁸⁵. Yusuf also expressed his disdain at the fact that the traditional ulama were taking a stance against those who were calling for a turn to the law of Allah⁸⁶. Yusuf was effectively trying to make a clear break away from the traditional Islamic rulers, systems, and ideas. It could be proposed that this was done with the goal of distinguishing himself as a unique religious figure which people, disenchanted by the status quo, could follow. This was necessary in order to grow his following and this support would enable Boko Haram's rise.

As a result of these views, Yusuf was soon forced to leave the Indimi mosque in Maiduguri and moved to a newly built mosque complex funded by Baba Fu⁸⁷. The

⁷⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift*. London: Hurst, 2019, 104.

⁸⁰ Akali Omeni, 24-25.

⁸¹ Comolli, Virginia, 48.

⁸² Ibid, 49.

⁸³ Ali, Mohamed Bin. "Al-Wala'Wal Bara'in Wahhabism: From A Tool to Fight Shirk to Takfir of Muslim Leaders." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2019): 39.

⁸⁵ Thurston, Alexander, 110.

⁸⁶ Yusuf, Muhammad. *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna wa- Manhaj Da 'watina*. Maiduguri: Maktabat al- Ghuraba', likely 2009, quoted in Thurston Alexander, 111.

⁸⁷ Thurston, Alexander, 87.

religious complex would come to be known as the Ibn-Taymiyyah markaz⁸⁸. His centre grew to boast a good organizational structure, providing youths with hot food, shelter⁸⁹ and even providing financing for those, who wanted to start a business, thus in effect setting a system of microfinance⁹⁰. Preaching against the ruling elites, he came to be seen as a champion of deprived and poor. This was made possible by the contributions and sponsoring of local businessmen such as Baba Fu, as well as thanks to Yusuf's connections in Saudi Arabia⁹¹. Yusuf's strength stemmed in part from his ability to draw support from different social spectrums, even attracting members of the elite in some cases⁹², and from the tactful use of resources made available to him. Many traders also soon joined the organization, gaining leadership positions and further supplying Muhammad Yusuf with the means necessary for the running of his operations⁹³. He was also able to secure the support of a prominent politician Modu Sheriff, who became governor of Borno state, and provided Yusuf's group with various forms of assistance. He probably promised to intensify the Shari'a campaign, in return for the latter's endorsement of his campaign⁹⁴. Borno's attorney General Kaka Lawan even publicly accused Sheriff of playing a role in the genesis of Boko Haram⁹⁵. It could be argued that his rapid rise in popularity led to a large number of mostly young, unemployed and uneducated people suddenly being exposed to very radical views regarding society and religion. The large number of new sympathizers was augmented by the large number of conversions that took place in the early 2000s⁹⁶.

Despite Yusuf's less than conciliatory tone, certain cliques still found him as not stern enough. One such faction broke off and moved to establish a preaching community in rural Yobe state⁹⁷. The group is supposed to have flown Taliban flags and tried to

⁸⁸ This was a direct reference to Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar who fought against the corruption of Islam and Sufism, and from whom many modern Salafis draw inspiration, as he viewed strict adherence to scripture (hadith and the Qur'an) as the main method of purifying Islam.

⁸⁹ Omeni, Akali, 21-22.

⁹⁰ Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 44.

⁹¹ Omeni, Akali, 22.

⁹² Thurston, Alexander, 89.

⁹³ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 106.

⁹⁴ Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 41.

⁹⁵ Olusola Fabiyi and Chukwudi Akasike, "Sheriff Created Boko Haram, Says Borno AG," *Punch*, 25 August 2016, <http://punchng.com/sheriff-created-boko-haram-says-borno-ag/>. Quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 121.

⁹⁶ Thurston, Alexander 87.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 92.

establish a pure Islamic community near the town of Kanamma⁹⁸. They were essentially making a hijra⁹⁹, just as the prophet Mohammed himself had done when establishing an Islamic community in Medina and as other Islamist activists have tried to in the past, such as Shukri Mustafa in Egypt and others. This faction however soon fell out with the local authorities and after an attack on the local police station, the military was called upon and moved to crush the group, resulting in the death of many of its members and the return of some to Maiduguri, where they slowly started to reintegrate in Yusuf's religious networks¹⁰⁰.

There are various accounts of the sequence of events regarding the split of the Kanamma faction from Yusuf's network. Some sources indicate that Yusuf also spent time in the community while others claim he did not¹⁰¹. Regarding the beginnings of Boko Haram, there is also a version promulgated by the Nigerian security services stating that Muhammad Yusuf led the Kanamma group directly after being involved with Lawan's organization in Maiduguri. This narrative therefore does not take into account Yusuf's time at the Indimi mosque, nor his leadership in the Ibn Taymiyya markaz¹⁰². It is possible that this chain of events was curated by the security services in order to picture Yusuf in a more extremist colour, ignoring the social services that he provided. Notwithstanding these differences, it is possible to say that there were various cliques and individuals around Yusuf that were pulling him in different directions, be it in a more radical one, or closer to the traditional religious establishment. It is also certain that Muhammad Yusuf gained a large following and increasingly hardened his views in this time period.

Wary of the negative attitude towards the Kanamma faction, Yusuf tried to tread carefully and even claimed that the establishment of an Islamic state must be brought

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Hijra – emigrating from the land of unbelievers to a place where one can practice his religion freely.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 93-97.

¹⁰¹ Kyari Mohammed (Muhammad Kyari), "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, edited by Marc- Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, 9– 32 (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014), 12, quoted by Thurston, Alexander, 95.

¹⁰² Comolli, Virginia, 46.

about primarily through dialogue¹⁰³. Yusuf, for his part, however, continued his diatribe against the Islamic establishment. After his former protégé Adam denounced him, Yusuf cut his ties with Izala and Adam as well.¹⁰⁴ It can be assumed that Yusuf felt he had to resort to a more extreme position to compensate for his lack of formal education compared to mainstream quietist Salafi scholars, who were often graduates of prestigious Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, and as such were versed in Islamic theology and law.

In 2007, Yusuf's former mentor and protégé Jafar Adam was assassinated. Some scholars suppose that Yusuf's followers were somehow involved in the murder, yet there is no evidence, yet there is no evidence to prove that they assassinated him personally.¹⁰⁵ Boko Haram had many obvious reasons for getting rid of Jafar Adam so as to silence a prominent critic of Muhammad Yusuf who had been challenging him publicly and putting into question his religious legitimacy. Adam went so far as to claim that Yusuf lacked patience compared to famous religious reformers like Usman Dan Fodio.¹⁰⁶

Whether or not Yusuf was directly or indirectly responsible for the death of the famous scholar, his group was definitely seen as such, thus putting them on a collision course with the religious establishment. This event forced Yusuf to make a decision, as he could no longer try to accommodate both the hardliners and the moderate religious figures. Having learnt his lesson from when more radical factions of his group split off during the events in Kanamma, Yusuf decided that a further move to the radical side of the spectrum was his only way forward, leading to another major event in 2008 when members of the group attacked a police station leading to fighting and the death of many of its members¹⁰⁷. The relationship between Boko Haram and authorities also soured due to constant conflicts about its members not wearing helmets while riding a motorbike,

¹⁰³ Thurston, Alexander, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 99.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 99; Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 46; Walker, Andrew. Review of *What Is Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace. 2012.
https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/usip/0025390/f_0025390_20750.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ Kendhammer, Brando and McCain, Carmen, 45-46.

¹⁰⁷ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 108.

which had been made mandatory in 2008 as part of a wider government effort to increase safety on the roads¹⁰⁸.

Since the death of Jafar Adam Yusuf was arrested on various occasions, as were many of his followers, on charges of involvement in the murder¹⁰⁹, signalling a growing unease on the part of the authorities with regards to growing radicalism and potential for terrorist activity and extremist violence¹¹⁰. Yet another ally that Yusuf was about to lose was Modu Sheriff. In 2007 while seeking to be re-elected as governor of Borno, he established a police-military force dubbed ‘‘Operation Flush’’, which was supposed to fight against the growing crime and lawlessness¹¹¹. Due to the many incidents and negative attitudes surrounding Boko Haram at the time, it is possible to establish that Sheriff’s partnership with the group had become more of a nuisance to the governor, and he sought to cut ties with the organization. After his election as governor, Sheriff established in 2005 a Ministry of Religious Affairs and Special education and appointed Buji foi as its minister. Buji Foi was known as Yusuf’s close associate and financier¹¹². Apart from that however, little work was done in terms of Shari’a implementation as mentioned previously, so Boko Haram itself most probably wasn’t happy with his part of their pact either. The situation grew even more intense in July of 2009. During a funeral procession for one of Boko Haram’s members, the group and the police once again clashed over the issue of helmets¹¹³. Boko Haram would retaliate against the security forces in the coming weeks in what is known as the ‘‘Maiduguri uprising’’, leading to the most widespread fighting between the authorities and Boko Haram up to that point in its history.

However, this event cannot be the only factor in the further radicalisation of Boko Haram, and the subsequent escalation in violence. As has been demonstrated, there had been many events leading up to 2009, and a progressive worsening of the public image of Boko Haram and the group’s relationship vis-à-vis the state. It is interesting that despite all of the warning signs that had been given off, the group was able to continue

¹⁰⁸ Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Thurston, Alexander, 130.

¹¹⁰ Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 47.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 48

¹¹² Thurston, Alexander, 126.

¹¹³ Ibid, 109.

running its operations more or less under the banners of legality¹¹⁴. However, this period for Boko Haram was now about to end.

The decision to embrace violence after the death of Ja'far Adam was a milestone in the evolution of Boko Haram for years to come. Having decided to placate the hardliners around him and radicalize his views, Yusuf undoubtedly lost the support of many that he has enjoyed previously. After having made this decision, Yusuf could however not go back as, as this would risk throwing his support base into disarray. It is therefore possible to say that the decision to embrace violence after Adam's murder is the decision that defined the path that Boko Haram would take from that moment.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 110.

Chapter 3: Boko Haram as a Clandestine Network

Boko Haram was forced to go underground following the clashes that followed the funeral-procession incident in 2009. This, however, did not stop the group from further attacking symbols of the state, such as police stations, gaining control of smuggling routes and taxing villages.

After the funeral-procession incident, Boko Haram suffered a couple of setbacks such as the discovery of a training camp and the arrest of some members over the possession of bomb-making material¹¹⁵. This, however, did not stop the momentum of Boko Haram's escalation of violence. Mohammad Yusuf addressed a message to the Nigerian government which later came to be known as the "open letter", in which he criticized the state authorities for committing injustices against Muslims and using Operation Flush as a tool to repress his community of believers. He also talked about the doctrines of *al-Wala wa a-l-Bara* (loyalty and disavowal) and *Izhar-ad-Din* (openly practicing the religion), demanding an aggressive defence of Islam¹¹⁶. The Group attacked a police station in Bauchi in late July of 2009 and the violence quickly spread to other areas such as Potiskum and Yobe, with gun battles and confrontations also raging in Ganblru, Ngala and Maiduguri¹¹⁷. On the day of the Bauchi police station attack, Yusuf reiterated his confrontational stance and said that until people reject democracy and western education, the current conflict will go on for a long time¹¹⁸. Boko Haram's leader thus once more closed any possible path of reconciliation, just as with the failure to take a stance against the assassination of his former protégé Ja'far Adam. After Yusuf's capture and interrogation by the police, he was shot dead¹¹⁹. The police also killed his father in law Baba Fugu Mohammed¹²⁰. The heavy-handedness with which the security services pushed back Boko Haram's uprising might have afforded the group some sympathy

¹¹⁵ Thurston, Alexander, 135.

¹¹⁶ Abdulbasit Kassim et al. *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2018, 231.

¹¹⁷ Comolli, Virginia, 50.

¹¹⁸ Thurston, Alexander, 138.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Comolli, Virginia, 52.

among the general populace, especially after al-Jazeera published footage of mass executions of detained prisoners¹²¹. By taking measures such as mass detainments of possibly innocent civilians and extra-judicial killings, the government risked playing into the cards of Boko Haram's message, that the security services are leading a war against Muslims and Islam. After the initial confrontations, the situation calmed down with many of Boko Haram's mosques destroyed and the group banned by governor Sheriff, the group's former ally, in 2010¹²². The religious establishment and politicians alike were mostly positive about the death of Muhammad Yusuf and the fight against Boko Haram, proclaiming victory over the group a few days after the start of the confrontations. A prominent sheikh of the Sufi Tijaniyya brotherhood claimed that by killing Yusuf, the security forces had rid the group of its capabilities and potential to execute more attacks¹²³. In reality, however, the security forces hadn't taken any measures except from a very aggressive military pushback. Barely any questions were asked about the reasons a group with such a radical message was able to garner such popularity and problems such as poverty, corruption, police harassment and lack of jobs were not addressed. The group had been pushed back, but not defeated, as the following events would show. In a sign of the adaptability that the group has demonstrated over the course of its history, the employed tactics changed significantly, with targeted attacks and assassinations becoming more prominent. The main victims of these attacks were politicians and other public figures who had opposed Mohammed Yusuf. The state's representative for Nigeria's leading ANPP was murdered in his house and a prominent Muslim cleric was shot to death not long after¹²⁴. In 2010, a video of Abubakar Shekau, the new leader of Boko Haram who had been presumed dead, emerged¹²⁵. The new self-proclaimed leader of the group restated many of Yusuf's former ideas, such as the fact that their religion was under attack, and they are only defending it, a right bestowed upon them by God, while also criticizing the mainstream scholars for having sat on the side while Islam was being humiliated by state¹²⁶.

¹²¹ Thurston, Alexander, 149.

¹²² Ibid, 145.

¹²³ Ibid, 147.

¹²⁴ Comolli, Virginia, 57.

¹²⁵ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 112.

¹²⁶ Abdulbasit, Kassim et al. 266.

With the group regrouping under its new self-proclaimed leader, more attacks and violence were soon to follow, with a large assault on Bauchi prison launched on September 7th 2010, which led to the freeing of many incarcerated members of the group and a reinforcing its ranks¹²⁷. Such attacks against prisons became almost a trademark of the ‘New Boko Haram’, with more to follow in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa¹²⁸. Shekau’s organization also tried to revive intra-confessional tensions between Christians and Muslims, with simultaneous attacks against Christians occurring on Christmas Day in Jos and Yobe¹²⁹. They partially succeeded, with some retaliatory attacks following¹³⁰.

In line with the group’s new clandestine face, a new form of attacks soon emerged: suicide bombings, the first one happening in June 2010 and a UN compound being attacked by a suicide bomber not long after on August 26th¹³¹. Suicide attacks were mostly executed by young boys from impoverished families, which attended religious Quranic schools¹³². Many unsuccessful suicide bombers, who ended up in jail, cited financial motivation as a prime reason for joining the group’s ranks¹³³, which further points to the theory that economic hardship and social dissatisfaction had played a huge role in initial growth and continuing support of Boko Haram. The group also started to bomb all symbols of democracy, attacking political rallies and polling stations¹³⁴. It is notable here to retract to Muhammad Yusuf and his importance in the forming of Boko Haram’s message. In his book *Hadhihi Aqidatunna* (This is our creed), he specifically said that the group would never accept the values of democracy and the Nigerian constitution as they are diseases¹³⁵. Now, the group was in effect transforming the message of its former leader into a militant program. The geographical scope of its attacks also widened, with suicide bombings reaching Kano and the capital: Abuja, and claiming hundreds of lives¹³⁶. Abubakar Shekau even addressed one of his video messages specifically to Goodluck Jonathan, claiming that according to God, ‘Chaos is worse than killing’¹³⁷. By

¹²⁷ Comolli, Virginia, 55.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 64.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 58.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid, 72.

¹³³ Ibid, 76.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 63.

¹³⁵ Abdulbait, Kassim et al. 174.

¹³⁶ Thurston, Alexander, 159.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 160.

this he was essentially implying that Chaos had already come in the form of the situation in northern Nigeria and his group was only trying to save it.

With financing becoming scarcer after the formal banning of the group in 2010, they had to turn to other forms of revenue, such as bank robberies and kidnappings done as joint-venture operations with other criminal groups¹³⁸. Some friction within the group between some members and Shekau started to emerge when he refused to disclose how the funds were being disbursed¹³⁹. The group also tried to get in touch with AQIM, al-Qaeda's affiliate in northern Africa, which led to AQIM's leader Droukdel authorizing a financial injection of 200 000\$ for the group¹⁴⁰. Letters from Abubakar Shekau were even found in Osama Bin Laden's compound in which the Nigerian leader stated that he wanted to be 'under one banner'¹⁴¹. Unlike Yusuf, Shekau cited respected Salafi scholars such as Uthaymin¹⁴². Shekau started to employ the term Takfir (declaring a fellow Muslim an unbeliever) in an increasingly broad manner, even stating that merely not taking a stance against democracy rendered someone an unbeliever¹⁴³. There were also signs of Shekau becoming increasingly erratic, when the group's captured lieutenant revealed that 'no one dared to ask the leader any questions for fear of death'¹⁴⁴. This is supported by a letter from a group of dissatisfied members addressed to the leaders of AQIM, in which they claimed that Shekau thought evil of those who cautioned his errors and that he was starting to show increasing signs of extremism¹⁴⁵. A letter of advice was then addressed to Boko Haram by AQIM, in which they caution Shekau against his use of Takfir, invoking respected Salafi scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya by saying that no Muslim has the right to declare another Muslim an unbeliever, until the proof is established against him¹⁴⁶. It is possible that AQIM was becoming worried that the growing extremism of Shekau might damage the global jihad movement more broadly.

¹³⁸ Comolli, Virginia, 81-82.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 67.

¹⁴⁰ Thurston, Alexander, 165.

¹⁴¹ Abdulbasit, Kassim et al. 285.

¹⁴² Thurston, Alexander, 180.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 183.

¹⁴⁴ Kendhammer Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 63.

¹⁴⁵ Abdulbasit, Kassim, et al. 287.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Andalus Foundation for Media Publication. *Shari'i pieces of advice and directives from Sheikh Abu al-Hassan Rashid to the mujahideen of Nigeria*. Al-Andalus Foundation for Media Production, 2017. <https://www.aymennjawad.org/21618/aqim-advice-to-boko-haram-dissidents-full>.

Shortly afterwards, a group calling themselves Ansar al-Muslimin split from Boko Haram. Barnawi and Kamar became leaders of this group¹⁴⁷, and it included members of the group who had previously trained with AQIM and had voiced their discontent over Shekau's actions. In their manifesto, they disassociated themselves from the mass killings of Muslim civilians¹⁴⁸¹⁴⁹. As with Yusuf's large role in the formation of Boko Haram's ideology and its turn to violence, it was now Abubakar Shekau whose individual behaviour and deeds were having a profound effect on the course of Boko Haram's evolution, being a public face of the group and therefore having considerable control over how the group would be viewed. We can also see that his behaviour directly led to the partial splintering of the organization. Once again the leader of Boko Haram was having a huge influence on the group.

The new Ansaru group had a large representation of people, who had trained with AQIM in the Sahel after the initial crackdown in 2009, and its activities were partially inspired by it, as they focused heavily on kidnappings, just as al-Qaeda's North African franchise used to¹⁵⁰. Despite the ideological split between Boko Haram and Ansaru, efforts were coordinated for organized kidnappings as Abubakar Shekau had the necessary manpower to execute such tasks and could benefit from being able to claim the kidnappings as Boko Haram's endeavour, while the former AQIM trainees in Ansaru had the know-how and experience¹⁵¹. Such blurring of responsibility for various attacks and crimes was however making it very difficult to establish who actually was involved and responsible for various attacks and who should represent Boko Haram if the two sides were ever to come to the negotiating table. The situation also aided Nigerian politicians in claiming that all of the attacks being committed were part of a global al-Qaeda terrorist network, thereby effectively gaining support from western powers to use heavy-handed tactics and methods in suppressing the Boko insurgency. It also enabled them to downplay

¹⁴⁷ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 114.

¹⁴⁸ Abdulbasit, Kassim et al. 326.

¹⁴⁹ This was justified by Takfir

¹⁵⁰ Comolli, Virginia, 66.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 67.

potential local issues such as corruption and nepotism, on the back of which the insurgency was initially able to gain momentum¹⁵².

This also demonstrates that despite the radicalism and extreme ideas of Shekau that even members of the group spoke out against, he was able to put aside these differences when it benefitted his organization and goals. Another example of the leader's shrewdness is the way he took advantage of poor economic situation in the Lake Chad basin. Decades of environmental neglect from the countries surrounding it destroyed almost all possibilities to obtain livelihood, and left smuggling as one of the only options left. Shekau was able to recruit from this pool of smugglers and traffickers who were acquainted with the local terrain well, and were able to pay-off local chiefs and the police/military¹⁵³.

Barring a few attempts at forming various dialogue committees¹⁵⁴, the Nigerian government primarily relied on harsh repressive measures of its security forces to fight the Boko insurgency. According to Amnesty International, over 20000 arrest were made after the start of the uprising, many of which were, however, made against innocent civilians, who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time¹⁵⁵. Some symbolic attempts at reconciliation include the start of a trial of 5 police officers allegedly responsible for the extra-judicial killing of Mohammad Yusuf. The trial was however postponed for many years and didn't include any higher-ranking members of the security apparatus¹⁵⁶.

One of the main problems at the time was estimating the size of Boko Haram, given a wide range of passive or semi-passive supporters, and wide range of reasons for joining the group, ranging from ideological motivation, to financial motivation and in some cases

¹⁵² Thurston, Alexander, 178.

¹⁵³ Barkindo, Atta. "Abubakr Shekau: Boko Haram's Underestimated Corporatist-Strategic Leader." Edited by Jacob Zenn. *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*. Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21483.7>. 68.

¹⁵⁴ Thurston, Alexander, 190.

¹⁵⁵ Kendhammer, Brandon and McCain, Carmen, 66.

¹⁵⁶ Thurston, Alexander, 186.

even peer pressure¹⁵⁷. The recurring attacks on prisons and army checkpoints led President Jonathan to declare a state of emergency in Northern Nigeria on January 1st 2012¹⁵⁸.

Chapter 4: War

Following the group's reluctance to reconcile with the state following the Maiduguri uprising in 2009¹⁵⁹, it went underground and was involved in many armed clashes with the security forces, undertook numerous kidnappings, took control of smuggling routes, taxed villages, executed prison breaks and bank robberies. After an assault on the city of Baga, however, the nature of the boko insurgency changed significantly as the clashes resembled conventional warfare more than a regional insurgency¹⁶⁰. Many homes were destroyed and civilians killed. Boko Haram also felt emboldened by a series of successful bank robberies and prison breaks¹⁶¹. It is estimated that by April 2013 the group had successfully overrun 10 local government areas (LGAs)¹⁶².

After Boko Haram attacked a police station in Borno's second largest city, Bama, in April 2013 and freed 105 prisoners, president Jonathan was once again compelled to declare a state of emergency (SOE) in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states¹⁶³. The military

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 194.

¹⁵⁸ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 116.

¹⁵⁹ The series of clashes which followed the funeral procession, that was intercepted by the Nigerian security forces on the grounds that the attendees were not wearing helmets while on their motorcycles.

¹⁶⁰ Jarle Hansen, Stig. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift*. London: Hurst, 2019, 116.

¹⁶¹ "Gunmen Break Nigerian Jail, Free 170 Inmates," PM News Nigeria, 16 March 2013, <http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/03/16/gunmenbreaknigerianjailfree>

170inmates/; and "127 Prisoners Escape in Adamawa Jail Attack," *Vanguard*, 24 March 2013, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/03/24/127prisonersescapeinnigerianjailattack/>,

quoted in Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 199.

¹⁶² Ibid, 216.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 201.

escalation that accompanied the newly introduced SOE in part also aided Boko Haram as the group was able to take over the large amounts of weaponry after successfully defeating the army's Joint Task Force in battles¹⁶⁴. At approximately this time, a new actor, commonly known as the CJTFs, became entangled in the war between the state and Boko Haram, fighting on the side of the former. These were groupings of vigilantes drawn mainly from local communities with the goal of fighting Boko Haram¹⁶⁵. The contacts and detailed knowledge of local areas and people were a great asset that the army was able to leverage in its fight. The local units also regularly turned over prisoners to the army¹⁶⁶. The degree of government involvement in the formation of these local groups is debated, but what is certain is the fact they provided them with weapons and offered military training¹⁶⁷.

With the help of the CJTFs, by the end of 2013, Boko Haram was mostly pushed out of Maiduguri and forced to regroup in rural areas such as the Sambisa forest¹⁶⁸. Although it seemed that the CJTFs were a positive factor, it also severely deepened the inter-personal level of the conflict, as many people found themselves confronted by the wrath of both sides, either being suspected of harbouring sympathies for Boko Haram, or being an accomplice of the CJTFs. Many citizens were killed in September 2013 in Benisheikh after being singled out as CJTF supporters¹⁶⁹.

The main problem of the government's campaign, however, was the failure to target their actions solely on Boko Haram members¹⁷⁰. It is estimated that 5-10 thousand people were arrested on Boko Haram-related charges by 2014¹⁷¹. And as a result of the ongoing

¹⁶⁴ Fund for Peace, "Conflict Bulletin: Borno State," 2, <http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/cungr1420nigeriaconflictbulletinborno05a>. Pdf, quoted in Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 204.

¹⁶⁵ Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 207.

¹⁶⁶ Okeowo, "Inside the Vigilante Fight.," quoted in Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 210.

¹⁶⁷ Yusuf Ali, "Borno Retrains 632 Civilian JTF Members," *Nation*, 27 September 2013, <http://thenationonline.net/bornoretrains632civilianjtfmembers>, quoted in Thurston, Alexander. *BOKO HARAM: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 209.

¹⁶⁸ Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain. *Boko Haram*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018, 71.

¹⁶⁹ Thurston, Alexander, 218.

¹⁷⁰ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 116.

¹⁷¹ Amnesty International, "Welcome to Hell Fire," 14–15, quoted in Jarle Hansen, Stig, 204.

conflict, both Boko Haram and its adversaries were able to benefit financially. The countryside was suitable for capturing food, livestock, and strategic resources. It was later able to leverage the financial means obtained to secure support¹⁷². The group also managed to take control of important smuggling routes leading through the region¹⁷³. A part of the organization's revenue was also drawn from kidnapping activities, which were mainly executed in collusion with the Ansaru group¹⁷⁴. Data has indicated that Boko Haram became involved in the same style of kidnapping operations in 2013 that had been the trademark activity of Ansaru in the Sahel in 2011 and 2012¹⁷⁵. This would point to at least a partial re-integration of the faction into Boko Haram, which might have been motivated by the end of Islamist rule in Mali in 2013, which led the Ansaru group to seek other areas of operation.

On the other hand, there were reports of senior commanders in the Nigerian military selling weapons to Boko Haram¹⁷⁶. Not only did these actions empower Boko Haram, but they also caused many soldiers to flee to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon when they felt they were not being given enough support in their fight against Boko Haram¹⁷⁷. It was at this time that Boko Haram, after becoming consolidated in the countryside and exercising temporary control over towns and villages, that they began their efforts to reshape the religious landscape by assassinating Sufis, Local emirs, and even prominent Salafis who opposed them¹⁷⁸. By disposing of the present authorities, Boko Haram aimed to become the sole voice of Islam speaking on behalf of all Muslims in the region and making it more difficult for people to oppose them¹⁷⁹.

While the territory Boko Haram came to control gave them a more permanent base and led to an increased level of centralization, it also made them a lot more vulnerable to

¹⁷² Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain, 78.

¹⁷³ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 117.

¹⁷⁴ The group that had undergone training with AQIM and had split from Boko Haram, as mentioned previously.

¹⁷⁵ Zenn, J. 2018a. 'Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How al Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory'. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. DOI:10.1080/1057610X.2018.1442141. 12, quoted in Pieri, Zacharias P. *Boko Haram and the Drivers of Islamist Violence*. New York: Routledge. 2019, 73.

¹⁷⁶ Associated Press, "Nigerian Military: Some Officers Selling Arms to Boko Haram," 4 September 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/nigerianmilitarysomeofficerssellingarmstobokoharam/3493038.html>, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 213.

¹⁷⁷ Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain, 77.

¹⁷⁸ Thurston, Alexander, 222.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 223.

conventional military tactics as they became significantly less mobile and adaptable¹⁸⁰. By creating such a religious enclave, Boko Haram was able to terrorize the Christian population by forcing them to convert to Islam and by burning down churches and seminaries¹⁸¹. Shekau claimed to be imitating the Prophet by slaughtering “unbelievers” in north-eastern communities, but disaffected senior members would later accuse him of having killed civilians on the basis of whim and/or personal benefit¹⁸². Shekau’s ruthlessness is one of the main points in which he differed from Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram’s previous leader. While Yusuf focussed heavily on preaching, community building, and gaining support by providing financial means and services, Shekau was mostly focused on war and armed struggle itself¹⁸³.

This is supposedly one of the reasons why the Ansaru faction split from its parent organization, as two of the main tenets of the group were preaching and the protection of Muslim lives¹⁸⁴. Given the various indications from divisions in the group to letters by dissatisfied members, we can see how big of an impact the leader of Boko Haram on the group as a whole.

Boko Haram rapidly stole global headlines with the kidnapping of 276 Christian girls from a school in Chibok¹⁸⁵. Due to the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency, the inability of the Jonathan administration to secure the release of the girls from Chibok, economic shortfalls, and corruption allegations, Jonathan lost his presidential spot to Buhari in the 2015 Presidential elections¹⁸⁶. The military contribution by Niger and Chad¹⁸⁷, as well as

¹⁸⁰ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 121.

¹⁸¹ Obisesan, Aderogba, “Nigeria’s Christians Fear Persecution from Boko Haram Rampage,” AFP, 7 September 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/nigeriaschristiansfearpersecutionbokoharamrampage131841750.html>, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 227.

¹⁸² Mamman Nur, untitled message against Abubakar Shekau, August 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86TwFqgAqc>, quoted in Thurston Alexander, 228.

¹⁸³ Akali Omeni. *Insurgency and War in Nigeria*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2019, 43.

¹⁸⁴ Pieri Zacharias, P, 71.

¹⁸⁵ Thurston, Alexadner, 220.

¹⁸⁶ Kendhammer, Brandon, and Carmen McCain, 88.

¹⁸⁷ Thurston, Alexadner, 233.

the enlistment of South African private security contractors¹⁸⁸, quickly turned the tide against Boko Haram, with its territory being way beyond its peak by the end of 2015¹⁸⁹.

While both the Chibok events and the involvement of foreign military forces in Nigeria might have provided the group with some sort of international legitimacy of their importance, it was also probably the factor that led to its downfall and to the end of its semi-territorial phase.

Abubakar Shekau then proclaimed his group's allegiance to ISIS in a formal oath of allegiance. Given the fact that Boko Haram was at a disadvantage, it is possible that he decided to proceed with the pledge so as to safeguard his position and importance from a potential split in his organization¹⁹⁰.

Contrary to these potential motivation, the allegiance to ISIS caused or at least promoted divisions in the organization, when they proclaimed al-Barnawi as a leader of the organization at the beginning of 2016¹⁹¹. Ironically, in a last-ditch effort to shore up Boko Haram, its allegiance to ISIS only contributed to its downfall and ushered in a period of deep factionalism and divisions as the group gradually lost control of its territory.

¹⁸⁸ Nossiter Adam, "Mercenaries Join Nigeria's Military Campaign against Boko Haram," *New York Times*, 12 March 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/13/world/africa/nigeriasfightagainstbokoharamgets helpfromsouthafricanmercenaries.html?_r=0, quoted in Thurston, Alexander, 236.

¹⁸⁹ Thurston, Alexander, 229.

¹⁹⁰ Pieri Zacharias, P, 76.

¹⁹¹ Jarle Hansen, Stig, 124.

Conclusion

This thesis introduced Boko Haram through its genesis and evolution, by shedding light on the main reasons that were able to propel Boko Haram to the organization it was at its height. One of these was the legacy of British colonization that left education in a much poorer state in the north of the country than in the south. This was caused by the non-interference policy the British espoused in their relation to the north, relying instead on the mediation of local leaders and not controlling daily affairs such as education, thus leaving them under the authority of the local notables on whom the British relied. As the British commanded a greater degree of rule and promoted modern education in the south, the south developed quicker as compared to the north.

Another important factor was the rapid shift of the country's economy to the oil industry in the 1970s. Prior to this, most people were employed directly or indirectly derived their income from the agricultural sector¹⁹². This move gradually left a large share of the working population unemployed and disenfranchised while their southern counterparts reaped the benefits of being able to take up administrative and technical positions in the booming oil industry.

Boko Haram was also able to capitalize on the changing religious landscape at the turn of the century, with many prominent scholars from the colonial era dying and leaving a vacuum that could be filled by younger more hard-line preachers who were often influenced by Salafism, having studied in Saudi Arabia, or having been influenced by other preachers who had.

The thesis also touched on numerous important moments in the group's history such as Ja'far Adam's absence which left Muhammad Yusuf responsible for preaching during his mentor's absence. The group's (or its leader's) unwillingness to strive for reconciliation with the state following the violent Maiduguri uprising forced the group to

¹⁹² Based on the poverty data and the British non-interference in education in the north (mentioned previously in this bachelor's thesis), we may assume that the percentage of people dependent on the agricultural sector was higher in the north.

effectively transform into a clandestine network. While the groups oath of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria placed Boko Haram into the international sphere of Salafi-jihadism, it came at a time when the groups was losing territory rapidly and being pushed back by a coalition of international and local forces. This situation proceeded to cause deep divisions within the group itself.

By shedding light on various Islamic groups that preceded Boko Haram, it is clear that some of its tenets were influenced by the legacy of Islamist reformist movements in Nigeria, namely Usman Dan Fodio's Sokoto Caliphate and the Izala movement, with their criticism of the state's corruption and Sufism, respectively. On the other hand, while directly referencing Dan Fodio, the group's leaders verbally attacked Sufi practices, even though Dan Fodio himself had been associated with the Qadiriyya brotherhood. While Dan Fodio strived to improve the societal standing of the Fulani ethnic group, ethnicity does not seem to be an important factor for Boko Haram.

Lastly I tried to put sufficient emphasis on the motivations and importance of Boko Haram's leaders. Muhammad Yusuf's unwillingness to distance himself from the Kanama faction in effect made him appear as a tacit supporter of the group's clashes with authorities, and his aggressive stance after the Maiduguri uprising cemented the organization as an enemy of the state. This was taken even further by Abubakar Shekau, who focused almost exclusively on war against anybody who didn't share his religious views in their entirety and didn't devote much efforts to preaching and governing the areas that came under the group's control.

By summarizing various sources focussing on diverse topics pertaining to Boko Haram such as religious history, Economic data, comparison of African Salafi-jihadi organizations and primary sources published by members of the group itself, I hope this thesis will succeed in providing a good introduction to Boko Haram as well as draw attention to some factors that aren't usually emphasized.

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