

ETHNO – RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: THE THREAT OF THE BOKO HARAM SECT

Obagbinoko Clement Odiri
Department Of Political Science
Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria
E-mail: klemobas@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Nigeria unarguably has been a theatre of ethno-religious violence since independence. Interestingly, two factors are responsible for the unabated occurrence of violent conflicts - first, is the noticeable inability of the Nigerian state to properly integrate the diverse ethnic groups into an organic state; and second, the obvious failure of the ruling class to recognize the secular & Federal nature of the Nigerian state as enshrined in the constitution. Against this background, this article investigates the activities of the insurgent Boko Haram sect in Nigeria, and the palpable threat it poses to Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper employs the globalization and the frustration-aggression theoretical perspectives to explain the activities of the Boko Haram sect which seems to have derived its potency from the interface and collaboration with other similar terrorist groups in other parts of the world. The study also unveils the critical aspect of the Boko Haram phenomenon which is the failure of the ruling class and the constitution to adequately address the issues of National Question.

Introduction

Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria in 1914, the Nigerian state has been grappling with the problem of nation building. This problem became even more evident since Nigeria obtained political independence from its former British Colonial master in 1960. Interestingly, the challenge of nation building in Nigeria is traceable to the forceful integration of various ethnic groups whose divergent socio-cultural, linguistic features are very profound.

Therefore at independence, Nigeria was a conglomerate of numerous ethnic groups devoid of any organic unity (Imobighe, 2003).

The deep seated ethnic feelings among the numerous ethnic groups in Nigeria have been attributed to various factors. One of such factors is the structure of the federation which is believed to be defective and unsatisfactory to virtually all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. And this no doubt has prompted government at various levels (especially at the centre) to initiate policies and put various mechanisms in

place towards making Nigeria a nation with an organic unity. For example, the *First Republic* administration of Tafawa Balewa, propagated the doctrine of "Unity in diversity" by introducing symbols of unity such as the national flag, the national anthem and the quota system of appointment into federal service. The military regime of J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi legislated against divisive tendencies among the major ethnic groups by promulgating the "Unification Decree". The suspicion and hostility that trailed the Ironsi's 'Unification Decree' became the primary reason the Gowon administration fragmented the country into twelve states from the former three regions. There were also deliberate efforts to establish federal institutions such as Federal Unity schools, promotion of sporting activities and more importantly, the creation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme (Adebayo, 2010; Imobighe, 2003; Adigwe, 1979). The above measures which were intended to create a more balanced federation appeared to be a progress in error leading to the creation of more states at different times, by different military regimes, and resulting more in fear, suspicion, distrust, intolerance and greed among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. (Adebayo, 2010).

The situation has over the years further degenerated into an unprecedented acrimony between Northerners and Southerners. Just as Southerners did not hide their contempt for the Hausa-Fulani, the Hausa-Fulani did not hide its 'demonization' agenda from anybody. So much so that one of the northern political leaders openly said "We had to teach the people to hate the

Southerners; to look at them as people depriving them of their rights, in order to win them over" (Albert, 2000).

Unfortunately, the ethnic feud between the North and the South has assumed a religious dimension. Northerners not only use the Islamic religion to rally support among themselves, they also deploy Islam as an instrument to deplete and discriminate against the south. Commenting on this, Dudley noted inter alia:

"Islamic influence in winning mass support can hardly be underestimated. The identification of the party and its leaders (the Patron of the Northern People's Congress is the Sultan of Sokoto, the Sarki Musalumi) with the religion of Islam is such as to suggest that the party represents the consensus of the society-Ijma' and not to accept the consensus of the society is to be heretical- Bid'a- a rebel from the community, but as the Prophet said: "The hand of God is upon the community (al-jamalah); and he who sets himself apart from it will be set apart in Hell-fire. He who departs from the community by a hand span ceases to be Muslim" (Dudley, 1968).

Incidentally, this feeling of discrimination among ethnic groups and the incidents of ethnic crisis in Nigeria is not restricted to the Northern part. Indeed there have also been similar insurgencies of various social movements in the South that have erupted ostensibly to determine the stake of the people of the South in the Nigerian federation at one time or the other. The *Odua* People's Congress (OPC) was put in place by the Yoruba people in South Western Nigeria to fight for the protection and defence of Yoruba in Nigeria. The

menace of the OPC was accompanied by ethno-religious violence in Lagos and Shagamu. In the Eastern part there were the Igbo People's Congress and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), fighting for the cessation of the Igbo ethnic tribe. In the South-South, there was the Itsekiri-Ijaw violence in the Delta and the violent protests by *The Egbesu Boys* and the militants in the Niger Delta over perceived injustice in resource distribution (Elaigwu, 2005).

While it may be true that the crisis in Northern Nigeria is intrinsically religious in nature, the crisis in Southern Nigeria may not be fundamentally religious. Thus the crisis witnessed in Northern Nigeria over time has been engendered by the fusion of ethnic and religious factors but mainly religious. In southern Nigeria, much of the crisis has been attributed majorly to socio-economic reasons with some isolated cases linked to religion, which have been reprisal in nature (Adebayo, 2010).

Religion generally has grown to become a veritable and divisive instrument in the politics of Nigeria. And this has become more evident in Northern Nigeria where *Islam* has been a unifying factor among the more monolithic North. Religion, ironically has also become a major instrument for the ruling elite to manipulate politics in Nigeria. Today, Islam is a fertile ground for various Muslim religious sects prominent among them is Boko Haram. Against this background, this article examines the hawkish and xenophobic nature of the Boko Haram sect and the ultimate implication of the Islamic

religion as a basis for its crusade for an Islamic Nigerian state.

Conceptual Analysis

This article provides conceptual framework for four major concepts. **Ethnicity, Religion; Constitutional Democracy; and Boko Haram.**

The word Ethnicity is a derivative of the word ethnic which is derived from the Greek word "ethnos" meaning a group of people who share a common and distinctive culture. Thus, ethnicity should be seen as the feeling of belonging to a distinctive cultural and linguistic group, or a manifestation of ethnic consciousness in relation to other groups (Imobighe, 2003). Nnoli (1980) also refers to ethnicity as "a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different groups". In his perception, ethnicity amounts to ethnic groups which are "social formations distinguished by the communal character (i.e. language and culture) of their boundaries". Otite (1990), defines ethnicity as "the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols".

What is obvious in Otite's (1990) explanation of ethnicity is the dysfunctional ways ethnicity has been used to particularistic interest which undermine national cohesion and integration in many countries. Otite's analysis of the subject is an indication of the fact that he was operating within the Nigerian environment that has witnessed more of the negative than the positive aspect of ethnicity. It is however, still unclear whether ethnicity has been

implicated in the activities of the Boko Haram sect.

Religion - Religion is one of the phenomena that is often misunderstood in the analysis of interpersonal activities, especially violent conflicts in Nigeria (Ogban-lyam, 2005). Gunn (2003) acknowledges that no convincing theory of religion exists, he nevertheless projected what he refers to as three principal theories of religion, which are first, religion in its metaphysical or theological sense (e.g. the underlying truth about the existence of God, the *dharma*, etc.); second, religion as it is psychologically experienced by people (e.g. the feelings of the religious believer about divinity or ultimate concern, the holy, etc.); and third, religion as a cultural or social force (e.g. symbolism that binds a community together or separates it from other communities).

The third theory becomes more relevant in the context of the discourse of religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria. As a social force, religion portrays the more tendency to disintegrate than to integrate; it thus creates identities and division. Ogban-lyam (2005) is more explicit in explaining religion as a divisive instrument by referring to it as the outcome of human social production. He argues that in religion, prayers are made to perceived super human and/or supernatural forces or being(s), by whatever name, for protection and survival. Prayers are made to enhance our positions in the production and reproduction system. We pray for daily bread, shelter, health, children, knowledge, skills, employment, promotion, control of more resources, etc., which are normally

attained through production and reproduction.

In many instances, adherents of different religions occupy distinct positions in the social production system and thus constitute classes and sub-classes, status groups, occupational or even professional groups. Such groups become identities for struggles and conflict for enhanced position in the production system. Consequently, only co-religionists must be leaders of the polity versus anybody of any religion can be leaders of the polity. When co-religionists engage in conflicts with some other groups, religion becomes a means which people who are dissatisfied or satisfied with their position or lot in the social production system often deploy to fight for a change or for the maintenance of the status-quo. People must use one platform or the other to get what they want. In many instance, religious riots provide grounds for economic, political, psychological and sociological redress: for looting, intimidation, and controlling the affairs of co-religionists and non-co-religionists and even that of the hated co-religionists. Threats are purportedly to be issued to one religious sect when adherents of another religious sect occupy the advantageous position within the social production process. When this happens, conflicts and violence is engendered, (Ogban-lyam, 2005). It is in this context that the activities of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria come under investigation.

Constitutional Democracy

On the surface, it would amount to mere semantics to attempt to distinguish between “Constitutional Democracy” and

“Democracy”. However, a deeper meaning of constitutional democracy is bound to resonate with a better understanding of the three basic forms of democracy: Direct, Representative and Constitutional.

Direct Democracy is a form of government in which the right to participate in making political decisions is exercised directly by all citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule. In this regard, city-states of ancient Greece stand out as one of the earliest examples of a codified and institutionalized democracy. Representative democracy is a form of government in which the citizens exercise the same right of participation in making political decisions, not in person but through elected representatives. Plato’s fear that the elected representative could implement policies that would disadvantage a minority gave birth to a third form of democracy- constitutional democracy- a form of democracy in which the powers of the majority is enshrined in constitutional provisions designed to guarantee the individuals and collective rights of all citizens.(Bale, 2000).

According to Bale (2002), what mainly characterized constitutional democratic state are: a system of periodic elections with a free choice of candidates; competing political parties; political decision by majority vote; protection of minority rights; constitutional safeguards for basic civil liberties; and the opportunity to change any aspect of the governmental system through agreed procedures.

Johnson (1998) identified some specific features of constitutional democracy as “the rule of Law based on Rule of Reason” and “Due Process of Law”. He further posits

that though majority rule is sacred, there are things which no person, no group, not even a powerful majority may require - such as choice of marriage partner, an occupation, a religion, or none. Essentially, Johnson emphasizes the protection of the rights of individuals and minorities in a constitutional democracy. He, therefore, defines constitutional democracy as “a government under law in which coalition and majority rule is balanced by minority and individual rights, and in which most rights are balanced by responsibilities...”

In the face of the Boko Haram scourge in Nigeria, it is becoming increasingly obvious that most of the key ingredients of constitutional democracy mentioned above are under grievous threat. No doubt, the prevailing Boko Haram violence and conflicts in Nigeria is capable of preventing and stifling the emergence of constitutional democracy. It is a sheer showcase of “might is right” which is antithetical to representative democracy.

Boko Haram

Better known by its Hausa name, Boko Haram, is a Salafist Jihadist terrorist organization based in the Northeast of Nigeria. It is known in Arabic as *Ahlis sunna Lidda awali Wal-Jihad*, it is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man made laws. The movement founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001 or 2002 in the city of Maiduguri seeks to abolish the secular system of government and establish a sharia system in Nigeria.

The name Boko Haram translates as “Western Education is sacrilege” or “a sin” is adopted by this indigenous Salafist group which only turned itself into a

Salalist Jihadist group in 2009. The term Boko Haram comes from the Hausa word Boko meaning 'Western Education' and the Arabic word "Haram" figuratively meaning "sin" (literately "forbidden").

The Boko Haram group conducted its operation more or less peacefully up to 2009 when the Nigerian government launched an investigation into the group activities. This investigation eventually led to several arrest of the group's members in Bauchi, sparking deadly clashes with Nigeria security forces which led to the death of an estimated 700 people. The group's founder and then leader, Mohammed Yusuf was also killed during this time while still in police custody. Boko Haram is today considered to be a major potential terrorist threat affecting Nigeria and other countries and US officials believed it is potentially allied with Al-Qaeda. There are also considerable evidence that the group is collaborating with two other African terrorist groups- Shabah of Somalia, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb across the Sahel region, (Muozoba, 2011).

Since 2009, the activities of the Boko Haram sect has become more deadly and its methods have become increasingly sophisticated and audacious (Adibe, 2012). The sect has been linked with and responsible for several killings, bombings and suicide bombings across Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is hinged on two theories - the Globalization theory and the Frustration – Aggression hypothesis. The globalization theory, though not entirely a new one, consists of processes that lead towards global interdependence and the increasing

rapidity of exchange across vast distances. The globalization process comprises of forces which are turning the world into a global village - compressing distance, homogenizing culture, accelerating mobility, and reducing the relevance of political borders. Globalization is the gradual villagization of the world. The term "Globalization" is indeed new, the forces which have been creating it have been going on for generations (Mazrui, 2001).

The hallmark of the globalization process is the emphasis on the growing interdependence of the world's people; about the increasing interdependence and interconnectedness among the world's regions, nations, governments, business, institutions, communities, families and individuals. Globalization fosters the advancement of a "global mentality" and conjures the picture of a borderless world through the use of information technology to create partnerships to foster greater financial and economic integration. However, it is not just a process which integrate world economies but also the culture, technology and governance. It also has religious environmental and social dimensions (Obadan, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, Maximum attention will perforce be devoted to the socio-cultural dimension of the globalization. Thus the claim of an alliance of the Boko Haram sect with other terrorist groups such as Shabeb of Somalia and Al-Qaede in the Islamic maghreb, can hence be an implication of the infectious effect of globalization, resulting from the exchange of ideas (this time ideas that are based on terrorism) across countries, between terrorist groups in Nigeria and

terrorist groups in other regions and part of the world. To this effect, distance have been compressed, borders have been undermined, free mobility of arms and persons has been enhanced and violence and terrorist activities have been gradually homogenized.

The frustration–aggression theory on the other hand, simply canvasses that frustration causes aggression and when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target (Adibe, 2012). There are a number of explanations of the Boko Haram phenomenon that would seem to fit into this theory. For example, the rise of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, including the Boko Haram crisis, has been attributed to economic inequality among states and regions caused by the principle of derivation which gives 13 per cent of oil revenue to oil producing states. The frustration- aggression seems to establish a direct link between the very uneven nature of distribution of resources and the level of violence.

In this consideration, it is instructive to note that a major cause of what we see now as ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry. This has been the case and may continue to be case on the basis of the fact that in Nigeria, there seems not to be an agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. There is also no agreement on how to effect necessary changes and reforms. And since different groups and

individuals have diverse interest and aspirations, in which case some groups will have their aims met, while others will not, conflict (ethno-religious conflict inclusive) becomes inevitable. This is, especially so when deprived groups and individuals attempt to increase their share of power and wealth or to modify the dominant values, norms, beliefs and ideology (Salawu, 2010)

The Boko Haram Phenomenon and Constitutional Democracy in Nigeria

Prior to 2009, there were generalized impressions that the emergence of the Boko Haram group in early 2000s as a small radical Sunni Islamic sect merely existed to advocate a strict interpretation and implementation of Islamic law for Nigeria (Ploch, 2012). The group which is said to have existed right from the 1960s, started to draw attention in 2002 when one Mohammed Yusuf, became its leader (Ekanem, Dada and Ejue, 2012). However, the sect was directly implicated in the 2009 sectarian violence that enveloped the city of Maiduguri in North Eastern Nigeria. The incident which was believed to be a reprisal attack by members of the sect to avenge the extra-judicial killing of their leader, Mohammed Yusuf, resulted in the death of over 450 people. At this point, it became obvious that a major problem had set into Nigeria's socio-political life.

Since the 2009 Maiduguri mayhem, the activities of the sect have become audacious and ferocious. And the group's attack have since increased substantially in frequency, reach, and lethality, now occurring almost daily in Northeast

Nigeria, and periodically beyond. It has primarily focused its attacks on state and federal targets, but has also targeted civilians in churches, Mosques and Taverns. Bank robberies have also been attributed to the group and may contribute to its financing (Ploch, 2012). There were ferocious blasts at the police headquarters on June 16, 2011, and at the United Nations (UN) Head office, on August, 22, 2011, both in Abjua. Several police stations have been attacked and vandalized at will and officers and men cut down with so much ease, including several officers of the state security service. In like manner, soldiers especially members of the Joint Task Force set up to tackle the

menace are not spared. Even precincts of army barracks have been hit by bombs while vulnerable banks have been attacked and millions of Naira taken to finance their activities. The most devastating of all the attacks was the recent which took place on Friday, January 20, 2012 a few hours after the *Jumaat Prayers* (Friday Muslim Prayers). The attack which took place in Kano, North Western Nigeria, targeted the state security service office, the zonal and state headquarters of the police and several other police formations. The official casualty figure released by the police was 185 (African News, 2012).

Tabular representation of selected Boko Haram Violent Attacks in Nigeria between 2011 and 2012.

| Date | Nature and Location of Attack | Casualty |
|--------------|--|--|
| 20 Jan, 2012 | Coordinated bomb and gun attacks on State Security Service Office, Zonal Headquarters of the Police and Immigration office in Kano | 185 killed |
| 17 Jan, 2012 | Attack at a military check point in Maiduguri, Borno State | Two soldiers and four BH gunmen killed |
| 13 Jan. 2012 | Two separate attacks on pubs in Yola (Adamawa state) and Gombe city. Gombe State | Four killed and two injured |
| 11 Jan, 2012 | Gun attack on a car occupied by four Christians from Eastern Nigeria in Potiskum, Yobe State | Four killed |
| 9 Jan 2012 | Gun attack on a secret police operative in a Mosque premises in Biu, Borno State | One killed |
| 7 Jan 2012 | Gun attack on three Christian poker players in Biu, Borno State | Three killed |

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| 6 Jan, 2012 | Two separate attacks- one by BH gunmen on a Church in Yola & the other on 17 Christian mourners in Mubi, Adamawa | Eight and seventeen killed respectively. |
| 5 Jan, 2012 | Six Christian worshippers attacked in Gombe city | Six killed |
| 30 Dec, 2011 | Muslim worshippers attacked in BH bomb attack | Four killed |
| 25 Dec, 2011 | Christmas Day BH bomb attack on St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madala, near Abuja. | 42 killed |
| 26 Nov, 2011 | BH attack on six Churches, a police station and the office of Nigeria's Road Safety Agency in Maina village, Borno state. | Nil |
| 29 Oct, 2011 | BH gunmen attack on Muslim Cleric, Sheikh Ali Jana'a outside his home in the Balabuli Ngarnam neighbourhood of Maiduguri | One killed |
| 12 Sep, 2011 | Bomb and shooting attack by BH men on a Police station and a bank in Misau, Bauchi State | Seven killed |
| 4 Sep, 2011 | Muslim Cleric, Malam Dala attacked by two BH gunmen outside his home in Zinnari area of Maiduguri | One killed |
| 26 Aug, 2011 | Bomb attack on the UN building in Abuja | At least 23 killed. |

Source: *Humanitarian News and Analysis - a service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Intriguingly, members of the Boko Haram sect have over time introduced more lethal and sophisticated methods to carry out their numerous attacks on unsuspecting victims. These novel and unprecedented method range from the use of fuel laden motorcycles, bows with poison arrows, to suicide bombings which are hitherto considered alien to Nigeria (The Nation, 2009). More worrisome is the fact that as the Boko Haram scourge is becoming deadlier and more pervasive,

the Nigerian government has shown no visible capacity to handle the situation.

Like previous and similar ethno-religious conflicts, the rampant killings so far perpetuated by the Islamic fundamentalist group do not only constitute the main threat to the nation's fledgling democracy, national stability and security but also do consistently and stubbornly throw up the issue of the National Question. For one, the recurring and pervasive nature of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria since the advent of the extant democratic dispensation in 1999

is an indication that hitherto repressed dissatisfaction, disillusionment and frustration are being given expression (Ikelegbe, 2003).

On the other hand, the methods and means long repressed grievance are presently being ventilated is also a pointer to the fact that the 1999 constitution is structurally deficient in addressing issues that fundamentally touch on the lives of the generality of the people. Perhaps, of more serious concern is the threat the Boko Haram onslaught is posing to Nigeria's constitutional democracy. In this consideration, there is a compelling need to ascertain the true nature of the crisis - is it religious, ethnic, or a combination of the two?

Although, there is indeed a religious dimension to the Boko Haram crisis, the political dimension appears more profound. The group's demand for the abolition of the secular system of government and establishment of a Sharia system in Nigeria portrays the group as a vintage fundamentalist Muslim. While its attacks have not exclusively focused on Christian targets, actions attributed to the group are fueling religious tensions in Nigeria and may more broadly have the effect of delegitimizing the state. The establishment in Maiduguri of a religious complex which included a school and a mosque and the sect's campaign for the introduction of Sharia in 12 of the 19 Northern states in Nigeria is an indication of the religious dimension (African Examiners, 2011; Ploch, 2012).

Almost all the crises have been subsumed under religion and explained by even some authors as religious factors, it has

become apparent that other extraneous and underlying factors like economic disequilibrium/inequality, envy, poverty among youths (who become willing tools in the hand of patrons), and the unhealthy contest for political offices have all played parts (Abimbola, 2010). Moreover, there are incidents which seem to vitiate religion as a factor responsible for the Boko Haram upsurge. For example, members of the group do not interact with the local Muslim population and have carried out assassinations in the past of anyone who criticizes its activities, including Muslim clerics (Joe, 2012). To this end, religion remains an ambiguous reason for the Boko Haram crisis.

The belief that the Boko Haram insurgency could be engendered by factors other than religion was reinforced by the opinion of the Central Bank Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, when he attributed the crisis to poverty and structural imbalance of enormous proportion. According to him, states in North Eastern Nigeria simply do not have enough money to meet their needs while some states (South-South Nigeria) have too much. Others are of the opinion that activities of the Boko Haram sect are clearly aimed at balkanizing the country. The statement issued by the sect late 2011 ordering Nigerian of Southern origin to leave Yobe state before a certain date only gave credence to the Balkanization factor (African News, 2012)

The Boko Haram sect have at various times claimed responsibility for numerous violent attacks on both individuals and corporate bodies including places of worship and state institutions, with most of the attacks leading to massive loss of

lives, destruction of property and displacement of people. These activities have been considered grave threat to national security. The agenda of the sect to forcefully Islamize Nigeria is unconstitutional and constitute a gross breach of the fundamental rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as guaranteed in section 38(1), (2), (3) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution. Thus, it is not the act of expressing grievances *per se*, but the method and means through which such grievance are expressed that constitute a democratic breach. The deployment of force and arms as a means of addressing grievances revolts against the spirit of constitutional democracy.

Unfortunately this has been the trend in Nigeria's body politics; to the extent that there has been a tacit support by government for the deployment of arms and violence by various ethnic groups as a means of achieving their goals. This is on the basis of the fact that government over the years has inadvertently catalyzed the activities of various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. In the past, it was the OPC in the South West, it was MASSOB in the South East, it was the Niger Delta militants in the South-South and today it is Boko Haram in the North East. The overall implication of this is that there is a noticeable ultimate failure of institutions of government to address the issues that are bordered on National Question; this is coupled with the obvious weak capacity of the state to deal with ethno-religious conflicts such as the Boko Haram scourge. There is an inherent systemic failure which is responsible for the inability of the state to appropriately and effectively respond to

ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. This incapacity on the part of government is considered even more grievous to Nigeria's democratic process.

Government probable involvement in and reticence over cases of extra judicial killings; especially as it was in the case of the former leader of the Boko Haram sect, Mohammed Yusuf who was killed in 2009; government blatant show of unfair play in state affairs; and lack of judicious use of political power and state resources have combined to aggravate the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria has indeed thrown up several fundamental issues; essentially issues that raises doubts over the capacity of the Nigerian state to effectively manage and/or curtail ethno-religious crises; and government's capability to integrate the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Indeed the Boko Haram crisis has also drawn attention to the issue of a Sovereign National Conference where genuine feelings of aggrieved nationalities within the country can be ventilated and addressed sustainably. Attention has also been drawn to the issue of lack of agreement on how political power and economic wealth can be shared among individuals and groups in Nigeria. The critical aspect of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria is the linkage of its activities to the political interest of the political elite. For example, there is a generalized belief that the activities of the sect amount to a proxy clamour by the Northern political elite to

address the political and socio-economic imbalance in the country.

Apart from the evident failure on the part of government to address the fundamental problem of socio-economic deprivation and marginalization, frequent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has also been attributed to the long military intervention in politics which tends to encourage and legitimize the use of force and violence as instrument of social change and attainment of goals. To this end, the use of coercion and force in settling disagreements has become a tradition in Nigeria. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some historical antecedent. This is because many government actions during the colonial rule and after independence encouraged, to a large extent, the sowing of the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts that are found to be rampant in Nigeria today. For example, many events in Nigeria have led to the politicization of mistrust, intolerance, violence and acrimonious relations between the mainly Moslem north and the Christian south of Nigeria (Salawu, 2010). All of these challenges require urgent and genuine attention from government. The

framework for sharing political power, especially through appointments needs to be well spelt out and liberalized.

Specifically, the impact of the globalization process remains a formidable impetus to the audacious activities of the Boko Haram. This is to the effect that the sect is affiliated to foreign terrorist groups in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc., in the areas of financial and logistic support. This trend amounts to homogenization of ideas in the area of terrorism and cooperative efforts in the art of suicide bombing. The allegation that the Boko Haram leadership is building ties with international Al Qaeda franchise and the offer of assistance by the regional AQ affiliate Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to the Boko Haram (Ploch, 2012) further reinforces the globalization claim.

By and large, the homicidal impulse so far exhibited by the Boko Haram sect, whether driven by religious or political interest; the blatant attempt to foist a religious ideology on a secular Nigerian society amounts to a violation of the country's constitution. It is indeed a criminal way of delegitimizing the Nigerian state (Abimbola, 2010; Ploch, 2012).

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