

Violence in the Name of God: An Analytical Study of the BokoḤarām Insurgency in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The Nigerian nation and its people have witnessed various forms of crisis since independence in October, 1960, but there seems not to be anything as challenging as the BokoḤarām insurgency; not even the civil war which had known reason(s) and advocates which made it easily trackable unlike the BokoḤarām crisis. Worse still is the role and involvement of the media whose perception generally about Islam, which is the platform on which the Group emerged, is that of a conflict-prone religion and its people (i.e. Muslims) as those obsessed with martyrdom. In this paper, an analysis of the crisis is done within the framework of Qur’ānic teachings on the four Islamic concepts of da‘wah, Jihād, warfare and martyrdom which together characterise the activities of the BokoḤarām members. The analysis is then linked with the socio-economic situation of the country with a suggestion on how to end the crisis and as well forestall the emergence of similar groups in the future.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the BokoḤarām crisis began in Nigeria in 2008, various tools and approaches have been employed in analysing it with a view to proffering solutions to it. People of different walks of life including professionals and experts have expressed views and opinions about the Group, its nefarious activities and ways of curtailing them. Public and political analysts, social critics and commentators, security experts, media practitioners, among many others have spoken and also written extensively about the Group that one would think that the crisis would have ended. While some had recommended a clamp down on the Group, others have called for dialogue with it. Some have even recommended amnesty for its members as done for the youths of the Niger Delta. That then would mean that further, better and perhaps more comprehensive analyses would be required for the unfortunate experience to be stalled. It is against this background that this paper is written to further analyse the Group so as to understand it and the possible reason(s) behind its activities with a view to proffering practicable and lasting solution(s) to the crisis associated with it. The analysis, this time around, is theologically done from the Islamic point of view, using the Qur’ān as the main source of reference. This is because the Group, rightly or wrongly is associated and identified with Islam and analysing it and its nefarious activities within the context of the religion’s divine book will help a great deal in understanding the problem and in proffering solution(s) to it.

2. BOKOḤARĀM AND ITS ACTIVITIES

Boko Ḥarām is a name by which a group responsible for most of the recent bombings and killings especially in northern Nigeria is known to the public. “Boko” is a Hausa word meaning “Western/formal education” or “Western ideology” or “Westernisation” in its entirety¹. In classical Hausa language, it means “deception” because of the experience of the people of the region with the colonial masters who used western/formal education to lure them into accepting Christianity². “Ḥarām”, on the other hand is an Arabic word which means “prohibited”, “forbidden” etc³. “BokoḤarām”, therefore, would mean either “Western/formal/secular education is Islamically prohibited or forbidden” or “Evangelism deceptively camouflaged as western education is Islamically unacceptable” or both⁴.

The Group, popularly known as “BokoHarām” calls itself *Jama’atuAhlusSunnahli’dDa’wahwalJihād* meaning “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Striving in the Cause of Allah”. It started like any other group formed by Muslims to advance the cause of Islam. The formation of the Group or any of such in Islam is hung on the verse of the Glorious Qur’ān which urges Muslims to constitute themselves into a group for the purpose of enjoining good on people and forbidding evils for them. The verse reads:

Let their arise among you (Muslims) a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity (Qur’ān 3:104)

This verse has been the motivating factor for Muslims, not only in forming groups, societies or associations, but also in striving to correct societal ills. They see themselves as duty bound to do so particularly that the verse ends with the description of those who do so as “ones who attain felicity”. Going by its official name, “BokoHarām” could not have otherwise been formed. Evidence on its founder and the activities of the Group prior to its militarisation point at this. Muhammad Yusuf, who founded the Group, for example, was said to have been a member of the Islamic Brotherhood of ShaykhAzZakizaki in Kaduna⁵. But when later the Group was accused of *Shi’ah*⁶ tendencies and consequently broke into two, Muhammad Yusuf joined the *Tajdid*⁷ group. He was said to have later found the teachings of the *Tajdid* group also unpleasant and therefore founded his own group which he called “*Jama’atuAhlusSunnah li d Da’wahwalJihād*”.

A cardinal preaching of the Group is that western education is the main cause of corruption which to them is the mother of all the problems facing the country. They hold further that if Muslims were to attain felicity, they should avoid it (i.e western education). Before long, many of those who listened to his sermons withdrew from school, many stopped sending their children and wards to school and those who had acquired one certificate or another burnt them. A revolution against western education had started. The irony of the matter is that the founder himself was a university graduate.

A number of Islamic scholars were said to have challenged Muhammad Yusuf’s preaching against western education in public lectures, drawing his attention to the socio-political and economic implications of his position especially on the people of Northern Nigeria who are educationally disadvantaged compared with their counterparts in other parts of the country. One of those scholars was ShaykhJa’far Muhammad Adam who eventually was assassinated in 2006 in controversial circumstances. While some have alleged that his death was the price he had to pay for criticising the government of the day, others have attributed it to his stern opposition to the Group’s position on western education⁸.

The Group came into prominence and public notice in 2008 during the regime of late President ‘Umaru Musa Yar’Adua. While details of the circumstances surrounding its militarisation remain sketchy and may perhaps remain so due to the killing of the foundation members of the Group who would know, its founder was said to have claimed in a *tafsir*⁹ video tape that some mobile policemen attacked and injured some members of the Group and would not also allow families and friends to visit them in the hospital. He was said to have further claimed that attempts by members of the Group to visit the injured in the hospital attracted the brutality of the police and several members of the Group were killed. The founder also said that while those killed were being taken for burial, the policemen also attacked them and further killed some of his members. He then vowed never to take kindly to this as he and members of his Group were determined to fight back¹⁰. The Group made good its threats by attacking police formations in Maiduguri, Borno State where its headquarters is and where the unfortunate incident started.

As a Yoruba adage would say: *agbe f’ obakijebi*, meaning “no fault is found with actions taken as a government official”, the then President Musa Yar’Adua, acting on intelligence report ordered a clampdown on members of the Group. Though he did not live to see the outcome of his decision, this further aggravated the crisis as members of the Group were (and are still more) determined to fight on. More than six years into the crisis, the battle rages on with casualties on both sides. The Group had lost its founder and many of its foundation members as well as their family members, the government and people of Nigeria have equally lost many of their loved ones in one attack of the Group or the other since the attacks are no longer limited to military formations and government establishments. Attacks are now

targeted at getting as many casualties as possible by freely using guns and bombs in markets, worship places, motor parks among other places.

An inventory of some of the nefarious activities associated with or for which the Group claims responsibility include: Bauchi prison break of 7th September, 2010; Abuja attack of 31st December, 2010; Yola jailbreak of 22nd April, 2011; series of bombings in some states in northern Nigeria on 29th May, 2011; bombing of Nigeria Police Force Headquarters, Abuja, on 16th June, 2011; and bombing of a beer parlour at Maiduguri on 26th June, 2011. Others include bombing of the All Christian Fellowship Church at Suleja on 10th July, 2011; killings of a Muslim cleric (LimanBana) in Maiduguri on 12th August, 2011; bombing of the United Nations' Building at Abuja on 26th August, 2011; series of attack at Damaturu on 4th November, 2011; and series of bombings across some states of the northern Nigeria on 25th December, 2011. To show that the BokoHarām crisis is not near ending or easily solvable as people would think, the Group also claims responsibilities for the series of killing and bomb attacks in many states of northern Nigeria between 5th and 28th January and between 8th and 16th February, 2012. In January 2013, an attack was made on the entourage of the Emir of Kano and members of his family just as scores of people died in Kano as a result of two bomb explosions allegedly carried out by BokoHarām members at motor parks during the Easter holidays of March 2013. About one hundred and eighty-five people were said to have also died in the fracas between members of the Group and government forces in Maiduguri in April, 2013.¹¹

The nature and dimensions of the attacks of BokoHarām have made it difficult for analysts, commentators and even experts to describe the Group and what it stands for, moreso that a good number of the attacks were suicidal. When the attack was on the church, Christian leaders were often quick to say that the Group was targeting Christians with a view to Islamising the country and the Muslims reacted by debunking the allegation. While the 'debate' was on, the Group would shift its attacks to the Muslims, killing scores in the mosques in the course of worship. No sooner would the Muslims claim they were vindicated that the Group would attack people from the eastern part of the country who had settled and are residents in the north. Analysts and commentators would then interpret the Group's action and mission as aiming at the disintegration of the country. When the attack was on government establishments and security institutions, people read political meanings into it claiming it was a ploy of politicians of northern extraction to destabilise President Goodluck Jonathan Southern-led government which the former had earlier objected to. The continuation of the attacks months into the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari also proved that wrong.

At times, the Group hacked down certain individuals including politicians and leading Islamic scholars of the region. Some of the attacks were even carried out in the month of Ramaḍān in which Muslims worldwide fast and which they hold in very high esteem. In short, the Group's activities have defiled all forms of description. No sooner would one perfectly describe the situation than happenings and events necessitated a modification of the description. Although, peace talks are already being initiated, it suffices to note that the only *fair* description of the Group and its activities is the media usage of the phrase "the nefarious activities of the fundamentalist militant Islamist sect- BokoHarām". The description is said to be fair because the activities of the Group are truly nefarious as hundreds of innocent lives and property had been wasted on the one hand and on the other hand, the Group was formed by supposedly Muslims and, rightly or wrongly, claims to have the advancement of the religion of Islam as its mission. What meaningful interpretation can one read into the activities of this vicious Group which is identified so fairly with a religion that claims "peace" as its motto? In other words, why would members of the Group do what they are doing and believe they are justified in their faith more so that other practitioners of the faith have disowned and disassociated themselves from them¹²? Explanations for this are sought in the relevant Islamic concepts of *da'wah* (Invitation to Islam), *Jihād* (striving in the cause of Allah), warfare and martyrdom which are the concepts around which the formation and activities of the Group can be understood.

3. THEOLOGICAL BASES FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF BOKOHARĀM

One distinguishing feature between Islam and other religions is the prominence attached to law in its practice. Although only the bases of the laws are laid in most cases while subsidiary legislations are left to

jurisprudence as time went on and as occasions demanded, there is virtually nothing done in the religion or by a Muslim that there is no law supporting it. Hence, there are laws guiding all Muslims' actions including Invitation to Islam (*da'wah*), striving in the cause of Allah (*jihād*), warfare and martyrdom. What are these laws and how do they explain the activities of the BokoHarām?

4. DA 'WAHIN ISLAM

Every religion has a mechanism for spreading its message and winning converts. The Bible for example quotes Jesus Christ as advising his disciples not to take with them gold, silver or money, not even slippers when on evangelical mission as the one for whom they worked would provide for them. They were however, to find out who was worthy in any town they entered and stay with him and whoever would not receive them or their preaching, they should shake the dust of their feet in his house as a testimony against him or the town, adding: "Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matthew 10:5-15). This, with modern understanding, has been the principle guiding evangelical activities of today's Christians.

In Islam too, there is a mechanism for evangelical activities and there are also rules guiding them. The concept is called *da'wah*, defined by Raji as "the propagation of the message of Allah through which Muslims understand their religion better and the non-Muslims are exposed to the beauty of Islam"¹³. Oladimeji opines that *da'wah* is "any duty performed by any Muslim for the purpose of inviting others to the religion of Islam, because if *da'wah* is to invite non-Muslims to the fold of Islam, what other name could be given to efforts on maintaining faith of the Muslims"¹⁴. Other interesting definitions of *da'wah* include those of Afolabi, Yusuf, Racijs and Gulush. While Afolabi sees it as "efforts made to maintain faith in Allah and keep away from disbelief,"¹⁵ Yusuf defines it "as embarking on public enlightenment activities that will project Islam as it truly is and how it should be practised".¹⁶ For Racijs, it is "the explanation and practical action that lead to conversion"¹⁷. Gulush however, views *da'wah* as "practical or communicative efforts to divert people's attention to Islam", seeing its scope as covering three basic elements of Islam; namely faith (*'aqā'id*), Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), and morals (*akhlāq*).¹⁸ According to him, faith and its articles constitute the inner actions and foundation for Islamic principles and ideologies while the other pillars of Islam: *Ṣalāt* (Ritual Prayer), *Ṣawm* (fasting), *Zakāt* (Islamic tax) and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah) are the outer actions physically demonstrated. Both the inner and the outer actions are however governed by certain rules and regulations known as the *Shari'ah*. In other words, *Shari'ah* regulates the relationship between mankind and their creator and makes it the basis for any kind of relationship with other creatures, living and non-living things. According to Gulush, it is this relationship that becomes the product of both inner and outer actions of man otherwise called morals (*akhlāq*).¹⁹ Regardless of what each of these definitions emphasises, the goal of *da'wah* according to all of them is to ensure peace in man's relationship with God and fellow creatures, which is what "Islam" means both as a word and as a religion.

The methodology of practising *da'wah* is however what makes it whatever every Muslim takes it to be. Saying that there is no compulsion in religion (Qur'ān 2:256), the Qur'ān advises Muslims on how to carry out *da'wah* thus:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best... (Qur'ān 16:125)

According to this verse, *da'wah* may take the form of sermons, lectures, question and answer sessions, discussions, dialogues and debates. Other methods include book writing, organising conferences, workshops, seminars, training and having good character.

Another relevant verse of the Glorious Qur'ān on *da'wah* is that which sees it as the best act a Muslim could engage in. It says:

Who is better in speech than one who invites to the way of Allah, works righteousness, then says: I am among the Muslims. (Qur'ān 41:33)

Another is that which says:

You are the best community of people produced evolved for mankind (because) you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah (Qur'ān 3:110)

These verses and similar ones in the Glorious Qurʾān have helped to shape the opinions of Muslims about *daʿwah* so much that many, including members of the BokoHarām consider it duty bound to engage in *daʿwah*, stretching its meaning. Hence, some consider it as *farḍ al ʿayn* (i.e. a compulsory duty for every individual) while others take it as *farḍ kifāyah* (i.e. a collective duty which, once embarked upon by some, exempts others from being held responsible). *Daʿwah*, therefore, is not the duty of certain professionals but of all Muslims, though some are encouraged to take it as a profession. Every individual is expected to engage in it as much as he/she can and anywhere one finds oneself including markets, offices, and motor parks. The establishment of the *Jamaʿatu Ahlus Sunnah li dDaʿwah wal Jihād* otherwise known as BokoHarām therefore is an effort in the direction of *daʿwah*.

5. JIHĀD (STRIVING IN THE CAUSE OF ALLAH)

The dictionary meanings of the word “*Jihād*” include endeavouring, striving, labouring, taking pain, to overwork, to overtax, to go out of one’s way to concentrate on something, to fight or to struggle.²⁰ Generally, the word “*Jihād*” means unceasing efforts made by a Muslim towards self-improvement and self-purification. Technically however, it means to struggle to the utmost of one’s ability to please Allah and advance His cause.²¹ The Qurʾān talks about it when it says:

And if anyone strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls; for God is free of all needs from all creation. (Qurʾān 29:6)

“*Jihād*” also means the individual and collective duty of Muslims to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny, oppression and even unbelief committed by or against Muslims or non-Muslims.²² The Qurʾān urges Muslims to help God’s cause by extending the frontiers of godliness in all ramifications when it says:

Had it been Our Will, We could have sent a warner to every people. Therefore, listen not to the unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness with it (i.e. the Qurʾān) (Qurʾān 25:51&52)

Muslim theologians have argued that the struggle enjoined by God in this and similar verses involves both peaceful and armed struggle. Yusuf Ali for example, interprets “it” in the last verse quoted above as referring to the Glorious Qurʾān, saying “the man of God pays no heed to carping critics who reject Faith. He wages the biggest *Jihād* of all, with the weapon of God’s Revelation”.²³ Those who hold this opinion about *Jihād* rely on verses of the Qurʾān like Q27:80-81 which read:

Indeed, you will not make the dead hear, nor will you make the deaf hear the call when they have turned their backs retreating. And you cannot guide the blind away from their error. You will only make hear those who believed in our verses; so they become Muslims

Thus, one form of *Jihād* is the peaceful one.

Other Muslim theologians however believe that though *Jihād* principally entails peaceful struggle, it also entails armed struggle if necessity demands it. Among the verses of the Glorious Qurʾān relied on by this group is that which says:

Fight them until there is no more oppression (*fitnah*) and until religion (i.e. worship) is acknowledged to be for God (alone). But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors. (Qurʾān 2:193).

Consequently, *Jihād* can be peaceful as well as forceful either to fight an oppressive government denoted in the verse by the phrase “until there is no more oppression (*fitnah*)” or to advance the cause of Islam also described in the verse as “until religion (i.e. worship) is acknowledged to be for God (alone)”. Going by the meaning of the last quoted verse, *Jihād* is therefore a tool for effecting social, political, economic and even religious changes. Hence, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have answered a man who asked him what kind of *Jihād* is best thus: “A word of truth before an oppressive ruler”.²⁴ He also identified other forms of *Jihād* to include *hajj* and service to one’s parents.²⁵ He however described “striving against oneself for the sake of Allah” as the best form of *Jihād* and in interpreting this, Muslim scholars have said that as long as (the servant of God) does not first strive against his own evil tendencies in obedience to

God's commands, it is not possible for him to succeed in striving against the enemies in the outside world.²⁶

6. WARFARE IN ISLAM

The claim Islam makes to be a comprehensive and complete way of life would not permit it to leave any aspect of human life unregulated. That is why it has issued legislations on all aspects of human endeavours including war which is the direct opposite of what it stands for - i.e. peace. Instructions to the early Muslims on how to relate with their neighbours who challenged their rights to existence and freedom of religion formed the bases of legislation on war and warfare in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him) and his few followers had been challenged and persecuted by the unbelievers of Makkah on the basis of the new faith they practised to the extent that they had to flee from their place of birth for refuge.²⁷ These unbelievers of Makkah would not also allow them to practise their newly found religion in their new home as emissaries were not only sent to the governments of the host communities to reject the Muslims asylum but wars were also waged on them.²⁸ Even when an agreement was reached to keep and maintain peace in the community for a specific number of years, the unbelievers would still not keep to the agreement.²⁹ It was then that Allah ordered the Muslims to resist the persecution of their enemies. The Qur'an recounts this when it says:

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and verily God is Most Powerful for their aid. They are those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, (for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is God"...(Qur'an 22:39&40)

Even at that, the Muslims, for so many reasons including the fear of being few in number were reluctant in going to war with the unbelievers. The Qur'an attests to this when it says:

Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not. (Qur'an 2:216)

It was then necessary for God to encourage the Muslims to fight since He so desired. Hence, God addressed them as follows:

And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)?-men, women, and children, whose cry is : " Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from Thee one who will protect, and raise for us from Thee one who will help". Those who believe fight in the cause of God and those who reject Faith fight in the cause of Evil. So fight ye against the friends of Satan; feeble minded is the cunning of Satan (Qur'an 4:75&76)

The address to encourage them continues:

Will you not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the Apostle, and took the aggressive by being the first (to assault) you? Do you fear them? Nay, it is God Whom you should fear, if you believe. Fight them, and God will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you (to victory) over them, and heal the breasts of the believers. (Qur'an 9:13&14)

The address even involved threats to punish them if they would not oblige Him of His request. Allah said further:

If you do not go forth, He will punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another (set of) people; and you will not harm Him at all. And Allah is over all things competent (Qur'an 9:38&39)

God however attached conditions to the permission given to fight and ways of going about it. For example, He specifies those who such fight should be directed at so that the permission does not appear to be an open licence to violence. He says:

O ye who believe! Fight the unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you; and know that God is with those who fear Him. (Qur'an 9:123)

It must be noted that the fight permitted, according to the above verse is not against all unbelievers but against *only* those who make life uncomfortable and unbearable for Muslims among them. Besides, the permission is granted on the condition that the enemies are the first to launch the attack on Muslims. Again, God urged the Muslims to be firm and persevere in the battle against the unbelievers. He further says:

And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevails justice and faith in God ... (Qur'ān 2:193)

Other conditions are that no fighting should occur in the Sacred Mosque at Makkah (Qur'ān 2:191) and the Sacred Months of DhulHijjah, DhulQa'adah, Muharram and Rajab unless initiated by them (Qur'ān 2:194) and that women, children, the elderly, trees bearing fruits and animals are to be spared³⁰. The fight should also be suspended by Muslims as soon as the unbelievers sue for peace. The Qur'ān says:

But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression (Qur'ān 2:192&193).

The Qur'ān however permits Muslims to collect ransom from their war captives and also to grant asylum to whoever seeks it from them even if he/she were to be from the unbelievers. The relevant verses read:

Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks, at length, when you have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (at them); thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom until the war lays down its burdens... (Qur'ān 47: 4)

If one amongst the pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of God; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are without knowledge. (Qur'ān 9:6)

7. MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

The concept of warfare in Islam relates to the concept of martyrdom. Once there is war, the possibility of lives being lost is very high and as Erikson posits, "it is easy to kill and to be killed, what is hard is to make one's death count for life"³¹. This is called "martyrdom". According to Brown, the common denominator in all cases of martyrdom is that the martyr, in attesting to his/her faith, dies for a noble cause and that the martyr must feel that death is necessary to his/her cause which is a strong testimony of furthering the truth and righteousness of his/her belief.³² Bowersock believes that martyrdom becomes the private, religiously internalised goal of the martyr, and then, through his/her sacrificial act, he/she makes public and advertises the goal to his fellow comrades.³³ He also believes that the public aspect of martyrdom serves both to intimidate the enemy, by demonstrating the fervour and commitment of the martyr, and to inspire and vitalise his fellow comrades, by serving as a role model.

In Islam, martyrdom is a great virtue with great rewards attached to it. Although, other forms of death from plague, stomach disease, drowning and falling from a tree or wall are also recognised as martyrdom and are equally rewarded with paradise in Islam,³⁴ martyrdom achieved through warfare in defence of Islam attracts greater comments and remarks in the Glorious Qur'ān. Qur'ān 22:58 for example promises them a lot of good things. It reads:

Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow verily a goodly provision.

Of the many good things promised them, Qur'ān 3:157 talks about forgiveness and mercy from God, saying those are better than worldly goods and materials:

And if you are slain, or die in the way of God, forgiveness and mercies from God are far better than all they could amass.

Another verse says they will be taken to God:

If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days (of varying fortunes) we give to men by turns that We may know those that believe, and He may take to Himself from your rank, martyrs-witnesses to Truth. (Qur'ān 3:140)

Qur'ān 22:58&59 say they will be admitted into paradise:

Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow verily a goodly provision. Truly God is He Who bestows the best provision. Verily, He will admit them to a place with which they shall be pleased, for God is All-Knowing, Most-Forgiving. (see also Qur'ān 3:167-171)

Apart from these Qur'ānic passages, Prophet Muhammad also spoke gloriously about martyrdom and the martyrs of Islam. According to him, the martyr is forgiven at the first drop of his blood,³⁵ saved from the punishment of the grave,³⁶ as well as the great fear of the Day of Judgement.³⁷ It is also said that he will be dressed in the clothes of Iman (which is the decoration of belief) on the Day of Resurrection³⁸, wear the crown of honour on his head³⁹ and intercede on behalf of seventy members of his family on the Day of Judgement.⁴⁰ The Prophet also said he will secure a unique status in paradise⁴¹ and also marry the virgins of paradise.⁴² Taken together, these Qur'ānic passages and prophetic sayings convey the undeniable message that martyrdom occupies and attracts unique and unquantifiable rewards in Islam. This belief in the special qualities of the martyr in Islam perhaps accounts for why there has been a long list of martyrs which cuts across all developmental stages and generations in Islamic history. Mention can be made of Sumayyah and her husband, Yasir, who were the first and second martyrs in Islam respectively.⁴³ Others include Harith ibn Hala, the nephew and adopted, son of Khadijah who was killed while defending the Prophet from the idolaters who mobbed him while reading the Qur'ān in the precinct of the Ka'abah,⁴⁴ Khubayb who was captured on his way from Madinah where the Prophet had sent him for *da'wah* purposes⁴⁵ and Hamzah ibn Abdul Muttalib who lost his life in the battle of Hud.⁴⁶ The murder of Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and seventy-one members of his family is also considered an act of martyrdom in Islamic history by some scholars.⁴⁷ All these teach and serve as examples for Muslims, including members of Boko Haram what awaits them in martyrdom in the cause of Allah.

8. AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE ACTIVITIES OF BOKO HARAM IN THE LIGHT OF THE ISLAMIC CONCEPTS OF DA'WAH, JIHAD, WARFARE AND MARTYRDOM

From the foregoing, one can see that there are bases for some of the activities of Boko Haram in the teachings of Islam, particularly the Glorious Qur'ān. The formation of the Group, for example is an attempt by its members to form a group of Muslims "inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong" as contained in Qur'ān 3:104. It is an act of *da'wah* seriously enjoined on Muslims in a number of Qur'ānic verses as earlier quoted. Although people like Quadri have, on the basis of the nefarious activities of the Group disassociated it from Islam⁴⁸, and that is very reasonable and correct, there are proofs that it started like any other group formed by Muslims to advance the cause of Islam. It only became militarised as a result of the brutality of the security agencies in the country. One of such undeniable facts is that the Group held public and Ramadan lectures which hundreds attended before its face-off with the government.

In a similar vein, the condemnation of corruption through the condemnation of what they considered its remote cause (i.e. westernisation through western education) is a form of *Jihad* which is equally seriously enjoined on Muslims. In fact, for Boko Haram members, the armed struggle they are engaged in is for the "weak, ill-treated (and oppressed) men, women, and children of the town (Nigeria) whose cry is: "Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from The one who will protect, and raise for us from The one who will help" described in Qur'ān 4:75&76. This conclusion was reached having considered the impunity with which fraud and corruption are committed by the elite especially those in the corridors of power in Nigeria while several millions of the country's citizens are living in abject poverty.

Apart from world agencies' ratings of the country as (one of) the most corrupt nation(s) of the world, which the country's leaders have always denied⁴⁹, daily occurrences in the country not only vindicate the positions of the world agencies but also substantiate them. For example, a judge of the Nigerian court once imposed one year jail term or a fine of N750,000 on one John Yusuf, the chairman of the Police Pension Committee who confessed to conniving with others to defraud the Police Pension Office of the

sum of N27.2bn⁵⁰. The convict paid the fine and got his freedom and the trial took barely six months while the accused was on bail. Conversely, about the same time, one Austin Igadolor was sentenced to forty-five (45) years imprisonment *without* an option of fine for stealing the N50,000 worth of a phone of a serving governor⁵¹. These are aside other cases of corruption like that of James Ibori who was convicted by a London court for the same offences for which he was discharged and acquitted by a Nigerian court and that of Dieprieve Alamaighiea who was granted state pardon eight years after his conviction for looting state funds and money laundering offences against the recommended minimum of ten year stipulated in the country's law. Such are the levels of corruption and the irrational exercise of judicial powers in the country.

For the ordinary man on the streets and particularly Muslims who have religious instructions to fight oppression in whatever form it appears, this is unacceptable and must be resisted as a religious duty. Hence, the formation and possible struggle of Islamic groups like BokoHarām in the country. Members of the Group would, on the basis of this verse, see themselves as the ones that God has raised (i.e. the best of mankind described above and more clearly in Qur'ān 3:110) to "rescue," "protect" and "help" the people (of Nigeria) from their leaders "who are oppressors". The evils of corruption in the lives of ordinary Nigerians was (and possibly will continue to be) so great that it constituted a major issue of that saw President Muhammadu Buhari to the Government House in May 2015. This obviously would be difficult for members of an Islamic group like BokoHarām formed to fight oppression to bear and in the course of any struggle that ensued also difficult for them to distinguish who an enemy is from a friend. Since the Islamic principle favours a lesser evil to a bigger one,⁵² members of BokoHarām would like to consider all that fall within their target at a particular time as enemies than harbour or save the life of an enemy in an attempt to respect one of the several conditions of war (in Islam) when all others have been fulfilled. Quadri however, believes that although Islam recognises war as a lawful and justifiable course of self-defence and *restoration of justice, freedom and peace*, it also posits that no war should be waged in the name of religion by his understanding of Qur'ān 22:40 quoted above⁵³.

Although, the Group initially rejected both peace talks and amnesty being proposed by some people and being considered by Government, it is noteworthy that when the peace talks eventually took off and the committee to consider the possibility of amnesty for the Group was being set up, members of the Group still continued to fight the Multi- National Joint Task Force set up by Government. This might be as a result of Qur'ān 8: 15&16 which enjoin the Believers to employ strategies when they engage the Unbelievers in battle and even encourage them never to be afraid of being killed in the course of the battle as both sides in the battle are bound to suffer casualties of varying degrees. According to a Muslim *Jihād*ist quoted by Timehin, "this method of martyrdom is the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponents and the least costly to the *mujahidin* in terms of casualties".⁵⁴ This method is also said to be a modern war strategy as a soldier may also decide to fall upon a hand grenade in order to save the lives of his comrades⁵⁵. While both acts assign meanings to death, transforming it into acts of choice and purpose that can be remembered, treasured, and possibly emulated by others in the struggle, the difference lies in that one is further rewarded with the best place in paradise and that explains the suicidal approach of the Group.

The other perspective through which the activities of the BokoHarām Group can also be assessed is on the basis of its ideologies and teachings. As noted earlier, the main teaching of the Group is that western education should be avoided by Muslims because, in the opinion of its founder, it encourages and perhaps permits corruption. This led a good number of its members to begin to disassociate themselves from western education. If this position is based on the teachings of Islam and specifically on the position of the Qur'ān on education, one would see that it will fall flat. This is because the Qur'ān places high premium on education without limiting the extent to which Muslims could go in acquiring it. Apart from Qur'ān 2: 30-32 which talk about the generality of knowledge God bestowed on Adam to prove that he and subsequently humankind are superior to the angels and Qur'ān 96: 1-6 which also speak of general knowledge at the beginning of revelation of the Glorious Qur'ān to Prophet Muhammad, other Qur'ānic verses on education include: "Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know" (Qur'ān 39: 9). Another one says: "God will raise up to suitable ranks and degree those of you who believe and have

acquired knowledge” (Qur’ān 58: 11). None of these verses or any other one restricts the type of knowledge Muslims could acquire to either western or eastern. Although a number of statements are credited to the Prophet Muhammad attaching greater value to Qur’ānic or theological form of knowledge, no known verse of the Qur’ān or statement of the Prophet restricts Muslims to such knowledge or any other one for that matter. It would therefore be wrong for the founder of the *Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah li dDa’wah walJihād* to have condemned or forbidden western education for Muslims in its entirety. An intelligent approach would have been to identify areas where members of the Group have problems with and sensitise their members or the generality of Muslims about it or better still establish their own schools where the grey areas would be taken care of.

9. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper is to give an objective analysis of the BokoHarām crisis in Nigeria in the light of the theological teachings of Islam as contained in the Holy Book of the religion with a view to contributing to ending it as well as forestalling similar occurrence in the future. After an indepth study of the reasons and circumstances surrounding the formation of the Group, four relevant Islamic concepts that help explain the perceptions, attitudes and actions of members of the Group were also studied in the light of the Qur’ān. The efforts have revealed that the Group, rather than being faceless as alleged by some commentators on the crisis, was born in the broad day light of events in the country. It was also found that reasons for the formation of the Group include but are not limited to the need to sensitise and make the Nigerian Muslims conscious of the perceived dangers of acquiring western education which, in the estimation of the founder of the Group is the basis of all the socio-political and economic injustices and imbalances in the country. It was also discovered that some of the actions of the Group, have theological bases in Islam. For members of the Group also, they are fighting a just cause, fighting for the poor masses of Nigeria.

While it is true that the divine scripture provides guidance on all aspects of human life including *da’wah*, *Jihād*, warfare and martyrdom as a proof of its claim to being the Book of Guidance for mankind (Qur’ān 6: 38), it is also clear that the interpretations upon which the Group based aspects of its *da’wah*, *Jihād*, warfare and martyrdom or any other reason for its struggle are shaky and faulty and for that only God knows if they merit the rewards attached to those Qur’ānic concepts and which probably they so much desire for embarking and sustaining the armed struggle.

The challenge this study has thrown however is whether or not Islam is a conflict-prone religion or its Holy Book (i.e. the Qur’ān) encourages war and violence. One thing that is clear is that it does not deserve being blamed for the wrong interpretation of its contents either by its adherents or its adversaries. As a divine book which has provided guidance for Muslims and indeed humanity since the seventh century, it remains inimitable and so it will be. However one may remark that the Qur’ān should not be seen as a conflict-prone book which instigates its adherents to violence but as one that liberates the human mind and makes people the architects of their own destiny. It renders inappropriate the common belief that “religion generally is the opium of the people”.

Conclusively, one may note that the Boko Harām members might be wrong in their methodology or approach to the much-desired change in the way the country is being governed and might be silenced by force or persuaded to end violence which is the heart desire of every peace loving Nigeria including this writer, more Boko Harām-like groups and those which may not necessarily be of Muslim extractions would still arise in the country if all forms of socio-economic and political injustices that are manifested in wanton corruption and insensitivity to the plight of the poor do not stop. The existence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND) and Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the country, though ethnic based is indicative of this assumption. Those in the corridors of powers are therefore called upon to ensure equitable management and distribution of the resources of the country to the advantage of all. It is in this spirit that the wind of “change” that is blowing in the country and even already sweeping some big-wits in the country is being supported.

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7. *Tajdid* means “renewal”
8. The above pieces of information were gathered at interactive sessions with a number of Northern Nigerian Muslims during the Ethical Reform Programme (EPR) jointly organised by Karimia Institute, Nottingham, United Kingdom and *Da'wah* Institute of Nigeria (DIN), Islamic Education Trust (IET), Minna, Nigeria at IET, Minna, Nigeria between 28th February and 6th March, 2013
9. *Tafsir* means “Qur’ānic exegesis”
10. As in no. 8 above.
11. Stories of BokoHarām make headlines of most Nigerian newspapers since the crisis started. For some of these stories, see *The Punch*, April 5th 2013, *The Punch*, April 23th 2013, *Tribune*, April 30th 2013 among others.
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