



Boko Haram's Misinterpretation of Islam: A Challenge to National Unity and Development

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ABSTRACT

Islam has its root in the Arabic word salaam or Silm which connotes peace and submission to the will of Allah. Islam laid down a noble code of conduct guiding all aspects of human life and social behavior. This noble code of conduct is misinterpreted by some religious sects and it affects its primary objectives. Boko Haram is coined from Hausa "Boko" and Arabic "haram" to mean "book" and "forbidden". Boko Haram, officially known as JAM TU AHLUS-SUNNAH LID D WATI WAL JIH D. This paper identifies Boko Haram's misinterpretation of some Islamic precepts and factors influencing their misinterpretations. Therefore, the aim of the research is to examine the consequences of misinterpretation of Boko Haram on national unity and development. This paper also explains the way forward to maintain national unity and development, conclusion, and recommendations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade now, living in Nigeria most especially in the Northeast tends to generate fear due to the Boko Haram insurgency. Globally, Boko Haram has established links with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula from where it has received advanced training and monetary support for its strategic insurgent activities in Nigeria (Shannon, 2012). The sect has remained a source of regional, national, intercontinental, and global concern since its formal establishment in 2002 (Danjibo, 2009; Gilbert, 2014). It has attracted worldwide attention because of its constant operation that had claimed many lives and destroyed several properties (Adesoji, 2020). The group justified its activities based on its misinterpretation of the teachings of Islam. Their justification calls for a brief review of the following.

Boko Haram is a compound word made up of the Hausa word “Boko” meaning “book” and “haram” an Arabic word meaning “forbidden”. Boko Haram means “book is forbidden” (Iyekekpolo, 2016). Technically, it stands for outright rejection of western education, western culture, and modern science. Its proponents advocate strict adherence to Islam in its purest form. They seek to Islamise Nigeria by whatever means at their disposal and whatever human cost (Al, 2012). Keming (2018) affirmed that the word “Boko Haram” is a name given to the group by dismissive neighbours who had rejected the idea of the sect. The group believes that those who pursue Western education sin.

Therefore, the aim of the research is to examine the consequences of misinterpretation of Boko Haram on national unity and development. Islam voluntarily promotes coexistence among diverse social groups. The Islamic code of conduct includes truthfulness, sincerity, righteousness, unselfishness, humility, patience, forgiveness, honesty, cleanliness, kindness, consideration, respect for others, courage, moderation, cheerfulness, keeping a promise, justice, greeting and a good manner added that It also tends to avoid harshness, cheating, falsehood, lying, harming others, stinginess, hardheartedness, disrespecting others, creating anarchy, etc. (Muhammed, 2014). In summary, Muslims should practice justice in every activity of society with everyone without any discrimination; should maintain good relations with all other social groups, and should fulfil their promises and covenants within the framework of Islamic law. This code of conduct teaches Muslims the best social behavior that reforms society, encourages goodness, discourages injustice, and most importantly strengthens coexistence among diverse groups of people living in a society.

2. METHOD

This is a literature review. We collect data from internet sources, including articles in international journals. Data were then interpreted, giving us the possibility for explaining and making opinions, ideas, and suggestions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Boko Haram's Misinterpretation of Islamic Precepts and the Factors Influencing Their Misinterpretations

A model by Issa analyzed Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic precepts and the factors influencing their misinterpretations. As shown in **Figure 1**, the first horizontal box is the super-ordinated one, which comprises the two main sources of Islamic precepts which are the Glorious Qur'an and Authentic Hadith. The box leads to the intermediate horizontal box which contains factors influencing Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic precepts. These factors lead to Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic Precepts as indicated by the

big box on the left. The big box on the right contains authentic interpretations of Islamic precepts.

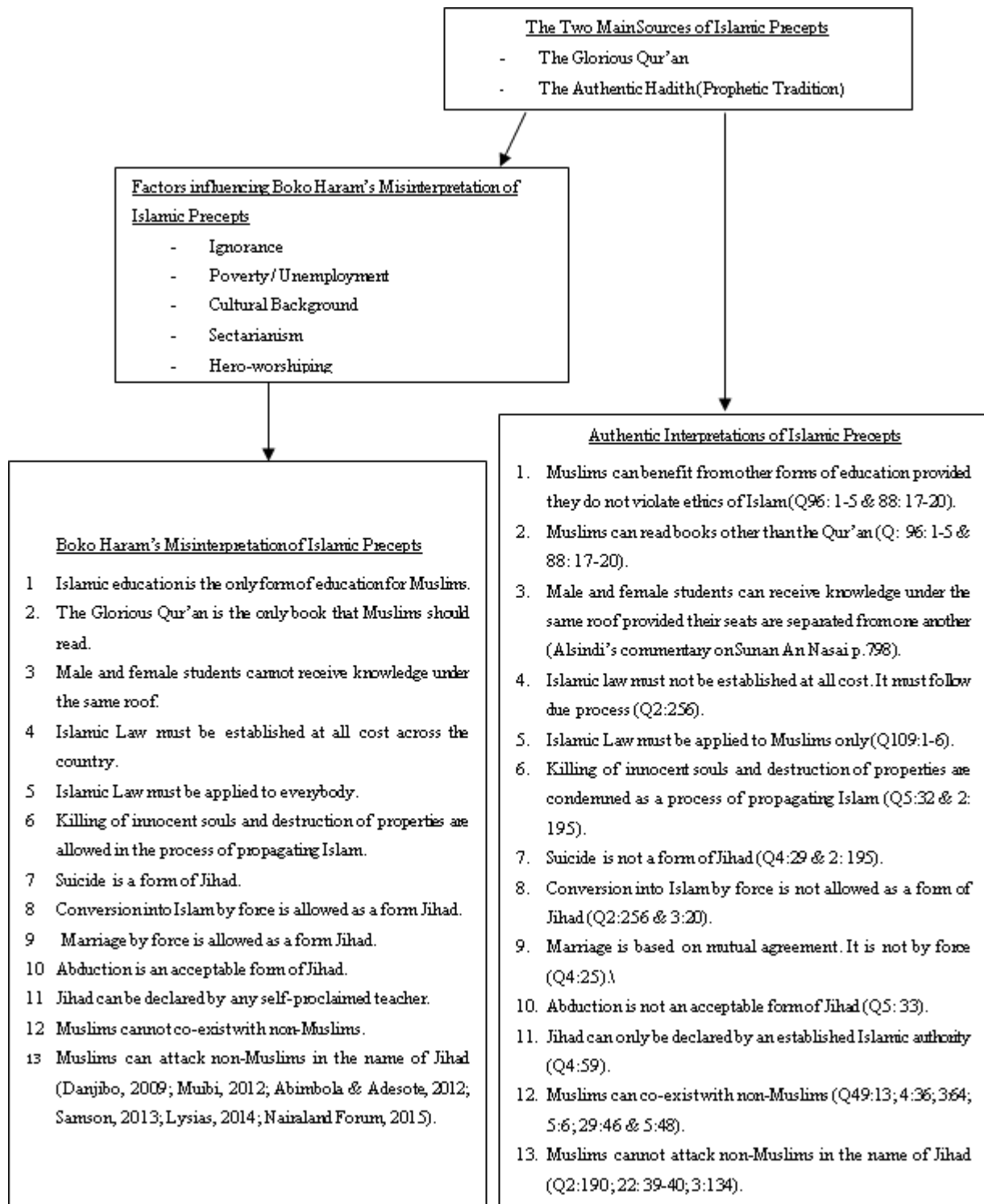


Figure 1. Model Issa.

Ignorance is one of the factors influencing Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic precepts as indicated in the above model. This factor has contributed to unnecessary rivalry and tension among the adherents of religions. For instance, adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism ought to have remembered that they have common ancestors. They have also forgotten to live according to the basic tenets of their religions. When people fail to have

adequate information or ideas about their religious dogmas, they tend to engage in the contraries. Thus, they misrepresent their religious institutions. This misconception has led some adherents to be anti-social and extremist in their modes of association, dressing, and actions. Another one is poverty which has driven many people to commit crimes in the name of religion. Poverty constitutes a danger to prosperity all over the world. Many parents have failed in their responsibilities of giving parental care to their children as a result of poverty. This creates an avenue for those children to look for any means to sustain themselves, even if the means required the destruction of lives and properties.

Cultural background is the next factor influencing Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic precepts in the above model. The cultural background of one group may be different from another group and both will look for support from Islamic precepts to back their group even if it is not stated by law, it will be coined to suit their culture. On the other way around, understanding some Islamic precepts may be different because of the background of their culture and it can lead to misinterpretation of the precepts. Sectarianism is also a factor influencing Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islamic precepts because many followers of different sects believed their leaders dogmatically and any order given must be followed by the followers and cannot be questioned, even if their leaders go against the precepts guiding the conduct in Islam. Some religious leaders misinterpreted the law in a way that suit their ideology. On the other hand, most religious leaders have failed in their responsibilities of giving spiritual guidance to their followers. Oftentimes, those claiming to be religious leaders have founded the flames of hatred and fanaticism, themselves serving as the greatest obstacles in the path of peace and harmony.

3.2. Consequences of Boko Haram's Misinterpretation of The National Unity and Development

Boko Haram activities have destabilized the educational, political, religious, and socio-economic system and have resulted in an increased crime rate and destruction of both lives and properties of Nigerian citizens. This is attested to by the mass movement of people living in the northern part of the country, most especially Maiduguri (Iyekekpolo, 2016). The situation has made it impossible for the citizens in that part of Northern Nigeria to carry on their legitimate businesses. It has also scared foreign investors out of the country and students have been forced to flee their schools. The gravity of the crisis has made some governments vow never to allow Nigerian students from their state to go to the Northern part of Nigeria for anything (Iyekekpolo, 2016).

The situation has affected the posting of graduates from the South-west, South-east, and South-south for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to the north. This is to the extent that some concerned parents are strongly resisting the posting of their children as corps members to the north. Boko Haram itself is a fatal blow to the noble objectives of the scheme as a unifying strategy since the unity of Nigerians is seriously threatened by the activities of the Boko Haram fundamentalist sect. Therefore, it is considered to be a major potential terrorist threat to the socio-economic development of the country. Similarly, Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013) noted that Boko Haram has become a threat to the entire nation, and their activities have crippled the socio-economic life of the entire citizenry. Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013) maintained that the activities of the Boko Haram sect have rubbished the image of Nigeria and hampered the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the vision 2020. Since the advent of a new dimension to terrorism in Nigeria, the fabric of the Nigerian economic foundation has been shaken by the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram sect, and the physical, psychological and economic welfare of the country has been

seriously threatened. There is a sharp drop in commercial activities in the North as foreign investors are gradually leaving the country due to the increasing security crisis (Awojobi, 2014). Boko-haram insurgency particularly, in the northeast and generally, in Nigeria has shown that most thugs have metamorphosed into Boko Haram and this is hindering the socio-economic and political development of Borno State (Mbaya, 2013).

The opinions of scholars above on the socioeconomic development of Borno State differ from that of Solheim (2005) who claimed that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), fulfill a pivotal role in terms of establishing and maintaining essential services like assisting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and helping to strengthen societies. NGOs increasingly work "in the field," providing humanitarian relief and development assistance in post-terror places like Maiduguri. Hilton (2018) explained further that over 100 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have flooded the city providing humanitarian services to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) taking refuge within and outside government-designated camps. Their presence has been very noticeable to almost every resident of the metropolis and environs, as they were always seen going up and down at the city's airport, motor parks, banks, hotels, restaurants markets, business centers, grocery and shopping stores as well as filling stations, suya meat joints, social clubs, and many car hire stands that are furnished with the exotic and current version of cars.

He also asserted that hundreds of youths in the city have been recruited as either full or part-time staff by the NGOs. An IDP youth, Baale, 25 who got employed by humanitarian aid organizations said: "When fled from my village in Konduga LGA to Maiduguri in 2014, life was so difficult; I hardly had three square meals. But now, I thank the Almighty that I have been employed by one of the NGOs. Previously, I and my wife and two kids were living in the IDP camp; the NGOs now gave me money to rent an apartment where settled down". Owonikoko (2022) concluded that these worker's NGOs trooping into Maiduguri have been able to turn around life generally. They have even made the city to become lively.

As regards the educational implication of the Boko Haram insurgency, Eme and Ibieta (2012) noted that with the increased intensity of bombing in the North, there is a strategic mass movement of individuals from the most attacked northern states, especially in early 2012. The men, mostly businessmen, stayed behind to defend their livelihood. The sudden movement directly affected school attendance among children. Some were forced to change location and school. With the massive killing of youth corps members serving in Northern Nigeria in 2010, most corps members, especially southerners, reject postings to the north, thereby influencing the manpower needs of the people. Most primary school children have permanently dropped out of school, either as a result of the death of their parents or as a result of the fear of sporadic attacks. National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that 1,188,018 people, including teachers and students, have been internally displaced from their permanent homes in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states in the north-east of Nigeria (Itumo & Nwefuru, 2016).

Similarly, some research findings have indicated that school attendance is affected in the areas prone to Boko Haram attacks in Northern Nigeria (Fareo & Muktar, 2020). Urban schools are often protected by government security forces during the such insurgency. Rural schools are often neglected and the children live in perpetual fear of attacks. The primary schools record very low attendance as parents disallow their children from attending school as soon as there is an attack or rumors of an attack. Most secondary school students risk attending school, even in the face of attack, and because security measures are put in place to protect tertiary institutions, most students often risk attending classes at that level (Oladunjoye & Omemu, 2013). Other research findings have revealed that the insurgency has affected basic

education negatively in Borno State (Abdulrasheed *et al.*, 2015). It was revealed that the majority of the school children have been hurt in the presence of other fellow students during attacks in their schools and that since the abduction of the Chibok school girls on April 14, 2014, the pupils had been afraid of being kidnapped, which prompted them to stay away from school in most affected areas of the states (Olowoselu *et al.*, 2015).

Further research findings have also revealed that the majority of the schools have been closed down indefinitely, while most basic schoolteachers working in the affected areas had narrowly escaped death during a series of attacks on their communities. This means that majority of teachers are currently internally displaced, and the lack of teachers would affect basic education in the region. Similar findings have also shown that many respondents agreed that teaching and learning processes cannot be properly conducted in an unsafe school environment as most education officers in the region were out of their states for safety. This means that inspectors of basic education programs cannot conduct a termly inspection to ascertain the level of development in the basic school education programs in Borno State.

Concerning the political and religious implications of the insurgency, Mohammed (2014) observed that although elections and bye-elections were held in local government offices in Yobe State and Nangere constituency, the security situation (if not improved) may not allow some people in other locations of the State to perform their civic obligations in future elections, especially those in Gujba local government area. This is because a lot of people have relocated from Buni yadi, Goniri, and so on, to other parts of the State. Another effect is that the insurgency has drastically reduced the performance of the government of the day.

4. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Boko Haram's misinterpretation of Islam has become a challenge to national unity and development because of its negative effect on education, politics, religion, and the socioeconomic system of the nation. In line with the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Mosques, churches, other places of worship, and the market should not be destroyed in the name of any religion without any reason.
- (ii) Children and women should not be abducted in the name of any religion without any reason.
- (iii) Islamic religious propagators should be educated, professionally trained, and tolerant in their approach and method of delivering sermons.
- (iv) Workshops, conferences, seminars, and public lectures should be organized by the government on mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Non-Muslims.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Nulla aliquet facilisis dignissim. Integer quis justo at mauris blandit viverra id at neque. Nunc sed consectetur nisi. Praesent dictum feugiat cursus.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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