

## The Culture of Political Corruption and the Emergence of Terrorism in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*Corruption is the greatest tragedy of Nigeria. Its machinery has spread through this burgeoning nation with its tentacles well spread and its nest well laid, with its flame burning wild and wild. Its effects on socio-political and economic development of the nation are myriad. They range from affecting economic growth, increase in poverty and income inequalities, political destabilization, reduction in quality of goods and services available to the public, scares away investors from a nation, tarnishes the image of a nation, 'brain drain' phenomenon, slow movement of files that get through the desk of officers. It also leads to missing files that resurface immediately the desk officer is settled, unnecessary bureaucracy and delays until bribes are given. This notwithstanding, this piece argues that there is a very strong connection between corruption and terrorism in Nigeria. When disenfranchised Nigerian populations see leaders amassing wealth unfairly through corruption while failing to deliver minimum services, the result is frustration and aggression. The frustration-aggression theory of violence, alongside other related theories were employed to understand and interpret the terrorist phenomenon in Nigeria. Frustration makes people turn to other bodies for protection, swelling the ranks of terrorism. This work submits that for the fight against terrorism in Nigeria to be successful, the issue of corruption must be tackled alongside.*

**Keywords:** *Terrorism, Corruption, Political, Corruption, Emergence, Boko Haram, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

Corruption is a moral problem that afflicts all political organized human societies- be they rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped/developing, traditional

or modern. However, Gyekye (2013) avers that for several reasons, the phenomenon of corruption manifests itself more often in some societies than others, is also more widespread and pervasive in some societies than in others, and therefore, produces more devastating effect on some societies than in others. A glance at the history of Africa reveals that corruption has been an outstanding and resilient issue that has beset and blighted the new nation-states of post-colonial Africa. Its indices characterize the daily sufferings of the people of Africa. The employment of the concept 'corruption' is centred on political corruption. By political corruption, it is meant the illegal and unethical exploitation of one's office by the holder of public office to pursue personal or private interests. It refers to public affairs- goods, fortunes, resources, agencies etc. While discussing political corruption, this piece intends to establish the nexus between political corruption and the problem of terrorism- that is, to what extent does political corruption enhance terrorism? While dealing with the issue of corruption in relation to menace of terrorism in Nigeria, this research would focus on the *Boko Haram* terrorist group as a case study.

The focus on the *Boko Haram* terrorist group is not the result of an ignorance of or an undermining of other faces of terrorism in Nigeria, like the Niger Delta Militant Groups, it is rather for the purpose of precision of scope. The focus is also informed by the fact that the *Boko Haram* terrorist group is the most lethal and deadly ever since the rise of terrorism in Nigeria. The scope is also very significant as this study is a research within the parameters of religious studies. This notwithstanding, Emesowum (2008), Obiajulu (2011), Ngare (2012), Ngare (2013), Bazza (2014), among other analysts and scholars, argue that several factors are responsible for terrorism, ranging from poverty, unemployment, religious fundamentalism, illiteracy, among others. While all these contribute in one way or other, this work argues that the fundamental cause of terrorism in Nigeria is corruption. Corruption has brought about a prolonged failure of the State to provide purposeful leadership and deliver the dividends of "good governance" to the people. This has created the aperture for the emergence of terrorist sects.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are formulated to explain predict and understand phenomena and, in many cases to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the limits of the critical boundary assumptions. The idea of a theoretical framework would be of great significance in the interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon of

terrorism in Nigeria. The theory employed in this work is that of socio-economic decay, which is anchored on the human-needs theory of social conflict. It posits that human beings have needs which they seek to fulfil and failure to meet them results to frustration, aggression and conflict. This can also be linked to the frustration-aggression theory of violence, which maintains that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. Dougherty and Pfaltzgrate (2012) rightly observe that hostilities at such times are directed towards the wrong persons- persons not responsible for the original frustration. In the analysis of the phenomenon of terrorism, it is obvious that those responsible for the original frustration are hardly affected by the hostilities of terrorists- the poor and innocent masses end up being at the receiving end of their brutal forms of violence.

### **Terrorism: Origin, Meaning and Perspectives**

The word terrorism was first used during the French Revolution (1789-1799) in reference to the reign of terror initiated by the Revolutionary Government. According to Emesowum (2008), "the agents of the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention that put the policies of the 'terror' into force were referred to as terrorists" (p. 3). The Readers Digest Oxford Wordfinder (cited by Njoku 2013) defines a terrorist as a "person who uses or favours violent and intimidating methods of coercing a government or community" (p. 140). According to Chan (1984), it "can be practiced by individuals and small groups as random violence against innocent bystanders. It can be carried out by governments on a systematic basis, as in the Nazi policy to exterminate Jews and the U. S and the British fire-bombings of enemy cities during the World War II" (p. 76). Thus, John Paul II (1995) describes terrorism as "one of the most brutal forms of violence traumatizing the international community today; it sows hatred, death, and an urge for revenge and reprisal" (pp.385-386). From the foregoing, it can be said that terrorism is an action that is perpetuated with the intention of killing civilians or non-combatants or causing them harm, which could be physical or psychological. With the advancements in the area of science and technology and the spread of information favoured by advancement in information technology, terrorism has advanced from simple forms into a complicated network and sophisticated organization. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) teaches that:

*Terrorism has moved from being a subversive strategy typical of certain extremist organizations, aimed at the destruction of material goods or the killing of people, terrorism has now become a shadowy network of political*

*collusion. It can also make use of sophisticated technology, often has immense financial resources at its disposal and is involved in large-scale planning, striking completely innocent people who become chance victims of terrorist actions. (p. 533).*

As already indicated, those at the receiving end are mainly the poor and innocent masses. Thus, the targets of terrorist attacks, according to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004):

*Are generally places of daily life and not military objectives in the context of a declared war. Terrorism acts and strikes under the veil of darkness, with no regard for any of the rules by which men have always sought to set limits to conflicts, for example through international humanitarian law. Nor must we overlook the causes that can lead to such unacceptable forms of making demands. The fight against terrorism presupposes the moral duty to help create those conditions that will prevent it from arising or developing. (no. 513).*

It is in this regard that John Paul II (2002) teaches that:

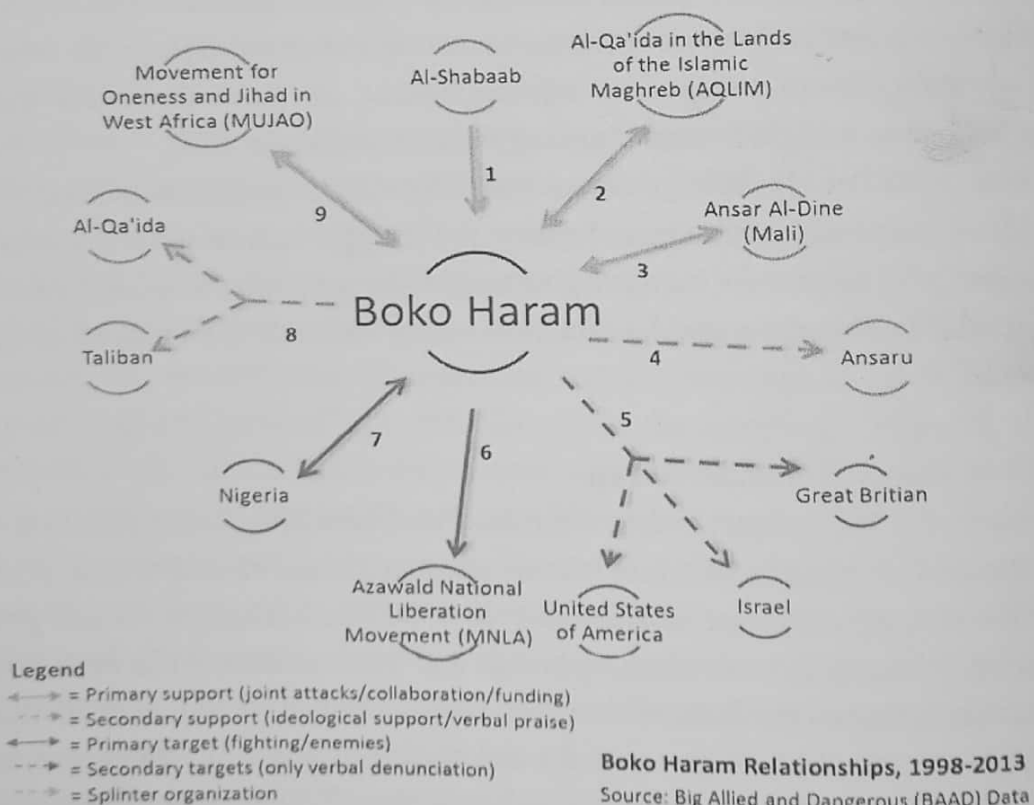
*Terrorism is to be condemned in the most absolute terms. It shows complete contempt for human life and can never be justified, since the human person is always an end and never a means. Acts of terrorism strike at the heart of human dignity and are an offence against all humanity; there exists, therefore, a right to defend oneself from terrorism. (p. 131).*

However, John Paul II (2004) cautions that “this right cannot be exercised in the absence of moral and legal norms, because the struggle against terrorists must be carried out with respect for human rights and for the principles of a State ruled by law” (p. 119). This is to avoid a situation where violence is employed to quell violence.

### **The Boko Haram Terrorist Group**

Ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Uthman Dan Fodio launched a Jihad on the Northern part of Nigeria, different Islamic terrorist groups have emerged, posing a serious security challenge to Nigerians. In 1980, the Maitatsine radical group sprang up, bringing about devastating human and material losses. The most recent and serious is that of the *Boko Haram* sect. It was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the aim of establishing a Shari'a government in Borno State under former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. They refer to themselves as *Jama'at ahl as-sunnah li-d-da'awati wa-li-jihad* (People committed to the

Prophet's teaching and jihad). Ali Modu Sheriff established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighbouring countries enrolled their children. The centre had ulterior political goals and soon it was also working as a recruiting ground for future jihadists to fight the state. The group includes members who came from neighbouring Chad and Niger and speak only Arabic. In 2004 the complex was relocated to Yusuf's home state of Yobe in the village Kanamma near the Niger Republic border. Yusuf was able to recruit membership from numerous unemployed youths, whose situation has made them become dissatisfied with the state. Late Yusuf also took advantage of the corrupt leadership of all levels of government, unemployment, poverty and insecurity. And as he pointed out such failures, citing verses of Quran and the sayings of the prophet, the youth saw him as the leader who will indeed deliver them from malevolence to the Promised Land. Gradually, the group connected to other like international terrorist groups who gave them support at different levels. Below is a figure illustrating the relationship of the *Boko Haram* sect with other terrorist groups in other parts of the world.



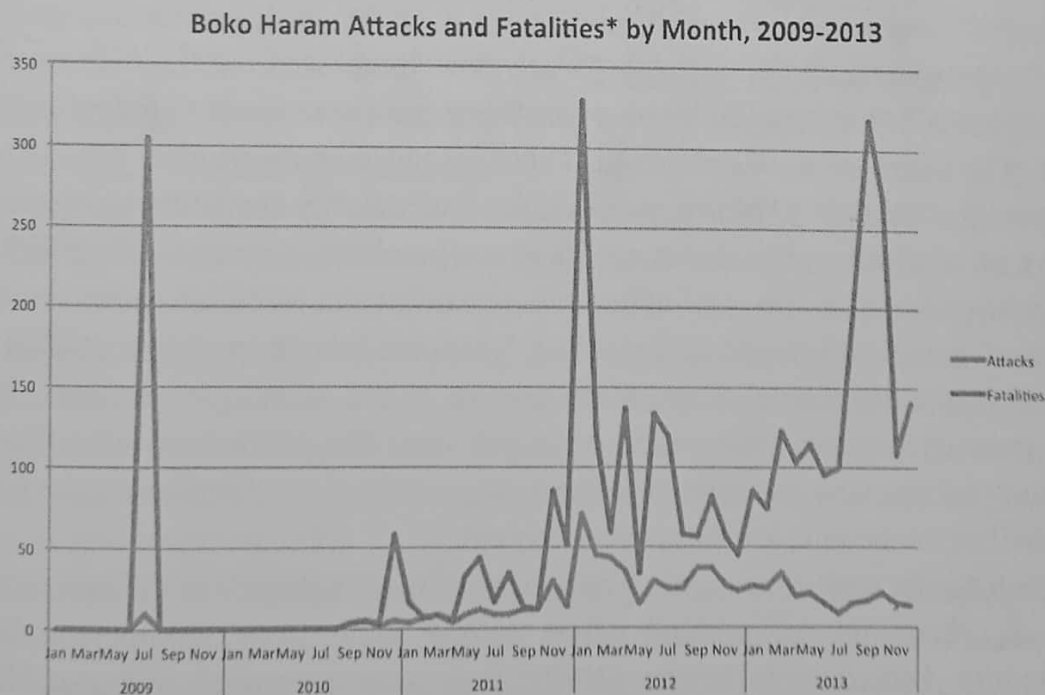
Etymologically, *Boko Haram* are two words which comes from the Hausa word: *boko*, which means book or Western education and from the Arabic word *haram*,

which means sin or forbidden. Put together, it means that Western education is forbidden. The group teaches that interaction with the Western world is forbidden and, therefore, against the Islamic religion. Therefore, Christians who have a religious connection with the Western world are persecuted and Muslims who criticize the sect are not spared. Eme & Ibieta (2012) and Bartollota (2011) observe that this group publicly extols its ideology despite the fact that its founder and former leader Muhammad Yusuf was himself a highly educated man who lived a lavish life and drove a Mercedes Benz.

In a confession made by Nasir Isiaku reported by *Saturday Sun News Paper* on August 10, 2013, he described their agenda thus:

Our agenda is to wipe out Christians; we have governors, senators as sponsors; our sponsors are past Nigerian leaders; we have infiltrated the Nigerian forces. We have our members in the police and the army. Those members help us a lot when we want to fight; if we asked our victim: will you become a Muslim or not? And he or she refuses, then, we will slaughter the victim like a goat. And after killing the victim, we will collect his blood or her blood in a small cup and then drink the blood. (pp. 12-13).

Below is a figure illustrating the attacks and fatalities of the *Boko Haram* sect in Nigeria:



Source: Global Terrorism Database

\*Includes perpetrator fatalities

The figure above relates in a diagram the attacks and fatalities of the *Boko Haram* sect in Northern Nigeria. It indicates that the major outburst of the sect began in 2009, however, the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 down to 2013 were the worst periods in terms of attacks and fatalities. With the national elections in 2015, it wouldn't be surprising that 2014 would be worse than 2013. However, with the new government, the fatalities brought about by this group has been reduced to the barest minimum.

### **The Ubiquity of Corruption in Nigeria**

If there is any social malaise whose notoriety hardly can be paralleled, and which bears an ignoble identity with the geographical construction otherwise known as Nigeria, it is corruption. It enjoys an unrivalled fame whose knowledge, one neither requires the dexterity of a herald nor an excruciating probe of the intellect to decipher; its ubiquity is phenomenal in all respects. It lies beneath the façade of social *cum* political problems confronting the Nation. Mordi and Afangide (2002) aver that it is a malaise that wears the toga of an enigma that defies a definite description, yet intimate in all fronts. The damages it has done to Nigeria are astronomical. Even the mad people on the street recognize the havoc caused by corruption – because the funds allocated for their welfare disappear into the thin air.

It has become so institutionalized that many now accept it as the Nigerian way of doing things. Ojakaminor (2004) observes that people now speak of the 'Nigerian factor' when they speak of corruption. Those associated with criminal records are embraced by the society, while merit, honesty and integrity are hardly recognized. In the area of election, it is common site to see purchase of votes by the political class with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. Votes are bought, people are killed or maimed in the name of election, losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast. The politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws on behalf of the people, are themselves corrupt.

Nigeria for quite some time now has been trapped in a tangle web of callous leaders who are champions of administrative tactical indiscipline, dissipations and plundering. According to Uneka (2007), they wear corruption and matchless mischief like a signet ring to demonstrate to the rest of the world that they are quite shameless in their brash polity and harsh principles that put everything on the

nation in dare strata with the attendant recipe for disaster. Corruption has led to a high rate of unemployment. The faces of a greater percentage of Nigerians register destitution, frustration and despair. With this sort of climate, inundated with frustration, uncertainty and despair, the stage for the emergence of terrorism has been set.

### **Corruption and the Rise of Terrorism: The Nigeria Experience**

The effects of corruption on Nigeria's socio-political and economic development are myriad. According to Callaghy (2004), Paulo (1997), Kanu (2011) and Carson (2012), the consequences of corruption range from affecting economic growth, increase in poverty and income inequalities, political destabilization, reduction in quality of goods and services available to the public, scares away investors from a nation, tarnishes the image of a nation, 'brain drain' phenomenon, slow movement of files that get through the desk of officers, it leads to missing files that resurface immediately the desk officer is *settled*, unnecessary bureaucracy and delays until bribes are given.

This notwithstanding, recent developments in Nigeria history reveal a very strong connection between corruption and terrorism. In countries where corruption is rife, problems with security and terrorism are rife. This is observable in Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine which are the world's conflict hot-spots. They and other unstable states score badly on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2015) and the Transparency International UK's Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (2015). One of the reasons cited why the Iraqi army crumbled before ISIS is because the army itself is riddled with corruption. The widespread corruption in the Nigerian army is also considered a factor in their inability to halt *Boko Haram*. However, with the recent developments by the present administration in stepping down corruption, the *Boko Haram* issue is gradually dying down. It is in this regard that Mohammed (cited by Cook 2011) avers that the *Boko Haram* terrorist group was ultimately formed due to "the fallout of frustration with corruption and the attendant social malaise of poverty and unemployment" (p. 23).

Corruption in Nigeria has undermined justice, economic development and destroyed public trust in government and political leaders. There is mass poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Report (2014) reveals that 112.47 million Nigerians (about 70%) live below \$1.00 per day, as a result, they barely can afford the minimal standards of food, clothing, health care and shelter. The NBS further

reports that 20.3 million Nigerians are jobless. The figure is inclusive of 5.3 million unemployed youths and an average of 1.8million graduates who enter into the labour market annually. It is this large mass of poverty stricken unemployed youths that constitute fertile soil for recruitment as foot soldiers by terrorist organizations. There is a saying that "idleness is a disease" and that "the idle mind is the devils workshop". When disenfranchised populations see leaders amassing wealth unfairly through corruption while their governments fail to deliver minimum services, people get frustrated and aggressive. This frustration makes people turn to other bodies for protection, swelling the ranks of terrorism.

### Conclusion

The foregoing has attempted to discuss the problem of political corruption in relation to the menace of terrorism. It discussed the meaning and origin of terrorism, while focusing on the Boko Haram terrorist sect. While many reasons have been advanced by many scholars regarding the cause of terrorism, this work, while focusing on the Nigerian context, argues differently. It avers that in the Nigerian context, where many people do not have jobs, are idle, depressed and lack basic necessities of life they readily become instruments vulnerable to all manners of social ills and evil mechanizations- terrorism. It, therefore, maintains that it is very important that in addressing the problem of terrorism, that it is not enough to employ force to quell the situation, there is need to study the fundamental causes of terrorism in particular areas. Thus, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004) maintains that:

*It is essential that the use of force, even when necessary, be accompanied by a courageous and lucid analysis of the reasons behind terrorist attacks. Also needed is a particular commitment on the political and educational levels in order to resolve, with courage and determination, the problems that in certain dramatic circumstances can foster terrorism: the recruitment of terrorists in fact is easier in situations where rights are trampled and injustices are tolerated over a long period of time. (no. 504).*

Having established corruption as the fundamental cause of terrorism, this work, therefore, submits that the tackling of terrorism in Nigeria must begin with the fight against corruption. This is already evident in the new administration's effort to stop the activities of the terrorist group. With an intensified fight against corruption, the issue of *Boko Haram* is gradually dying out. To fight terrorism in Nigeria without reference to the issue of corruption can be compared to a scenario

where a person builds with one hand while he pulls down the same building with the other hand. While corruption can be described as the disease, terrorism is only a symptom. When a person fights the symptom of a disease without addressing the main disease, it would turn out to be a wasted effort.

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