

Path Dependence Historical Perspective of Boko Haram's Emergence in Northeastern Nigeria: Beyond Identity Frame

©Emmanuel Vincent Nelson Kallon

African Studies Center, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan



Abstract

With the emerged upsurge and spread of terrorism in Africa, this paper particularly has examined the case of “Boko Haram insurgent group,” a radically established terrorist organization operating in the Northeastern part of Nigeria, a region considered primarily as a Muslim dominated area, with specific emphasis on factors leading to its formation. The context of Boko Haram which became identifiable as an organization was metamorphosed in 2009 as a violent armed group with a notion situated against the existence of Western civilization, especially in the country’s north. It considered Western-style politics as a condition for the widespread corruption in every facet of its communities and have seen it as evil and, therefore, incompatible with the fundamental principles and ideals of the Islamic religious faith. Consequently, it desired to establish an Islamic value to completely dispel Western influence, which it acclaimed as forbidden to its society—hence, the emergence of Boko Haram. While Boko Haram continues to operate under the assumed guise of Islamic faith and a state of poverty, this paper explores and answers the following question: What factors have underpinned the formation of Boko Haram as a group and why is its localization based in the Northern part of Nigeria? Using the path-dependence perspective as an analytical framework, this study argues that Islam generally may not be the fundamental trigger for the emergence of Boko Haram. Rather, the action of the organization can be understood within a particular historical trajectory notorious for the region and its neighboring countries at a particularly critical period and has systematically evolved over generations. Therefore, this is a phenomenon that has become structurally inherent, and it is not just unique to one country per se.

Keywords: Boko-Haram, History, Path-dependence, Terrorism, Religion

Introduction

The increase in the number of terrorist organizations in recent times has, for the most part, remained a fundamentally worrying apprehension across many societies. In particular, the

behavioral patterns of terrorist organizations in locations where they have been recorded have come to be sturdily affiliated with some ideological beliefs such as Islam and now widely taken as the fundamental objective underlying such movements. Many theorists have in this regard associated terrorism and its violent nature across many societies as an Islamic fundamentalist movement underpinned by its collective identity nature (Appleby and Marty, 1992, Epstein and Gang, 2007; Katz, 2004,; Wright, 2016).

Collective or social identity, according to Korostelina, is a “feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social categories, and as an important part of the mind that affects social perception and behavior” (2007, 15). Collective identity it is believed has therefore become one of the main explanatory approaches in replacement of structural analyses for the explication of the mobilization of people in the projection of contentious claims in societies (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). The multiplicity of civil wars, terrorism, and other seeming forms of violence in many parts of the African continent and beyond, both in the past and present, have often been analyzed from the collective identity perspective (Deng, 1995; Holliday and Leech, 2016). Collective identity, noted by Charles Tilly (2004), is centrally placed within the “activation of boundary change dictum.” And, to many, this activation of identity within boundaries uniquely explains certain social patterns within society.

Deviating somewhat from the assumed identity conception of terrorism, this study focuses on the significance of history and has analyzed how historical patterns that evolve in distal periods could advance understanding of certain contemporary or future phenomena in societies and their importance within causal analysis. Indeed, while Islam remains the main religion widely practiced in the country’s northern region to which Boko Haram’s existence has been directly linked, as referenced in many monographs (Agbibao, 2013; Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman, 2009), this study argues that Islamic collective identity was not the cause for Boko Haram’s organizational crystallization. The study proffers that it was how the historical experience of this region has evolved and been shaped over decades such that it has continually come to impact the current political and social structural patterns of the entire region, including the neighboring countries such as Chad and Cameroon, and not just a mere northeastern Nigerian phenomenon.

The remaining parts of this analysis are arranged into three sections. In section one, the study examines some of the argued conceptual analyzes of violence emergence in societies with the view of establishing the existing analytical gap and explains an alternative approach of how violence emergence, particularly with the context of Boko Haram, could be examined. In addition, the section has an advanced path-dependence analytical framework and process tracing methodological paradigm as the alternative approach to cogently and analytically situate robust causal mechanisms in understanding the historical context that laid the basis for Boko Haram’s emergence. This section also included the scope and limitations of this study.

In the second section, the study examines the historical context of Northern Nigeria in harmony with two of its neighbors, Chad and Cameroon, to establish robust historical patterns of incongruence that served as a catalyst that influenced Boko Haram’s emergence. Also, extensive discussions are situated on the various findings, connecting how long-term historical patterns of this region such as violence serve as a critical juncture that enhanced a self-reinforcing and increasing return patterns over time and sequence in the region, of which Boko Haram’s emergence is not unconnected. The last section is on the conclusion, reiterating the importance of the historical theoretical context in comprehending the Boko Haram insurgency.

Current State of Knowledge of Violent Terrorist Emergence in Society

There have been growing academic accounts on particularly factors that more often precipitate violence emergence in societies, particularly violent terrorism currently considered a social threat to the world (Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman, 2009). Large proportions of these accounts are focused on analyses of actor-centric and their behavioral patterns as a fundamental cornerstone towards the conceptualization of such phenomena in societies.

Aware of the two methodological approaches as indicated by Kalvas (2009) in conflict analyses, which are, the group-level perspective and the individual-level perspective, as conspicuously inherent in the work of sociology, political science, economics, and social psychology schools, this section begins with relative deprivation, one of such approaches widely utilized in expatiating societal violence and which also combines individual and group level contexts. In the work of Gurr, the relative deprivation concept is characterized as a “perception of discrepancy between actors’ valued expectations and their valued abilities” (1970, 24). Valued according to Gurr is the expected aim of human motivation in the quest for needs satisfaction. As a result, Gurr stated that valued expectations are exactly what individuals in society believe are legitimately their entitlement, while the valued capabilities are the opportunities in society which members of that society believe are capable of achieving. Therefore, Gurr asserted that the discrepancy that emerges between the valued expectations and valued capabilities among individuals within a given society constitutes the basis for the emergence of violence in the society.

The approach of Gurr’s analysis of violence emergence in society referenced through his relative deprivation concept is analogous to Frances Stewart’s horizontal inequality concept. Stewart asserted that violence emergence in multiethnic societies is ignited by the presence of disparities among socially distinct groups with collective characteristics (Stewart, 2008). In further categorizing the distinct layers within which this phenomenon becomes salient, Stewart opined that horizontal inequality in society can occur in the political system where marked discrepancies in political participation appear to favor one distinct group over others. On the economic front, Stewart asserted that horizontal inequality is made manifest in instances where job opportunities, level of income, and possession of assets are widely channeled towards one group over the others. In addition, on the social and cultural aspects, Stewart also specified that horizontal inequality occurs at the level of access to social amenities like school, accommodation, medicare, human development between different social groups within society, and how particularly a society that perceives a set of cultural practices over the others. Work on relative deprivation and horizontal inequality concerning violence emergence in societies, such as terrorism has been analyzed by many other scholars (e.g., Burraston, McCutcheon and Watts, 2017).

Conversely, collective identity among people in society has been another concept that seems to have been argued as a strong explanatory account for the behavioral characterization of individuals which has often formed the source of terrorism in society. Karina V. Korostelina in an explanation of this phenomenon noted that “social identity is conceived as a feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social category, and as an important part of the mind that affects social perception and behavior” (2007, 15). In line with this context, Jerrold M. Post (2007) in identifying the underlying factor that often would result in terrorism in society offered an argument beyond what is referred to as “individual psychopathology” to what he called “collective identity” within society as the most cogent means through which terrorism

can best be explicated. Furthermore, in his collective identity within society thesis, Post (2007) opined that group organizational and social psychology within the social and cultural context is fundamental to the extent that individual interest becomes secondary with respect to the pursuance of collective identity, and such phenomenon is a commonplace identifiable within terrorist behavioral patterns.

In further expanding the collective identity analysis context, Donald M. Taylor and Winnifred Louis posited that “collective identity is a description of the group to which individuals belong which serves as the normative backdrop against which they can articulate their attributes” (2004, 169-172). In a similar vein, Anthony Oberschall (2004) also contributed to the discussion of terrorism and its emergence by using the collective action perspective, which is also within the domain of collective identity. Oberschall predicated his exposition along four thematic parts upon which terrorism emerged, which he chronicled as follows: “discontent, ideology-feeding grievance, capacity to organize and political opportunity” (2004, 27). He also posited that discontent is the bedrock that qualifies the existence of terrorism and, therefore, ideology held in a collective action would embolden discontent to become valid. The capacity to organize and political opportunity, according to the author, lies within the power of their connectedness and the faith they held for one another, and when backed by public sympathy would therefore propel collective action that drives terrorism in a state.

As collective action in most instances is occasioned based on the shared identity salience, both the perspectives of Post (2007) and Oberschall (2004) are among what have been invariably utilized in the analyses of terrorist emergence, including the eruption of ethnic violence in some particular heterogeneous societies (Voll, 2015). Particularly, in the context of Boko Haram in Nigeria, the work of Adesoji titled: “The Boko Haram Uprising and Revivalism of Islam in Nigeria” (2021), for instance, expresses how Islam became the fulcrum for collective identity crystallization upon which its adherents emerged to impose their dogma on the society they perceived has become secular. As noted by Adesoji (2010) and Adigun (2018), the notions that emerged, such as the institutionalization of Muslim Sharia regulations in Northern Nigeria as the main advocates of Boko Haram, were a reflection of the prior existential practices that were considered incompatible to the values of Islam and, therefore, the Sharia regulation came resonate with many followers’ identity which collectively not only increased followership but gained unprecedented support from within the environment (see MacEachern, 2018). Likewise, Azumah (2015) and MacEachern (2018) asserted this Islamic motivating view that Boko Haram has a strong affiliation to the Islamic movement which particularly emerged from Usman Dan Fodio’s jihadist movement in the Northern part of the country in the quest for reforms and purity. These scholars’ contributions to the existence of Boko Haram are within the context of an actor-centric shared identity frame which often emboldens collective actions, as argued by the authors.

Another approach advanced on identity for the understanding of violence in society is within the constructivist perspective. Sandra Joireman (2003) pointed out that identity in general is not an instinctive element but one that can be socially formed (also, see Williams, 2015). In line with this thought are two prominent scholars, James Fearon and David Laitin. In their work titled “Violence and Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” they underscored identity as a “social category,” and not as an immutable element, but one that is constructed by individuals, and those constructions might be centered on varied reasons (Fearon and Latin, 2000). According to the instrumentalist perspective, identity itself which is a social construct can be manipulatively used as an instrument by individuals for their ends (Kaup, 2000). The

instrumentalist approach to manipulating identity is evident in the strategic role employed by individual elites in modeling, assembling, as well as campaigning across wider identities (Beland and Lecours, 2008). Instrumentalist Paul Brass in the book titled: *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (1991) expressly conveyed the elite manipulative tactics such as the utilization of an existing shared social category to achieve desired objectives.

Of these aforementioned conceptual analytical frameworks, through which violence is initiated in societies, are in one way or the other, significant in unearthing mechanisms accounting for societal violence such as terrorism. For instance, in the context of relative deprivation and horizontal inequality, their analyses provided reasons regarding certain societies are vulnerable to violence emergence at a given time in the sense that those fundamental factors that can be exploited are readily made available in their state governance (Adedeji, 1999). Nonetheless, the weakness found in these approaches, particularly in accounting for specific violence emergence such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria, is that they are both unable to account for how historical periods, sequences, and patterns evolved to influence such a phenomenon. The region within which Boko Haram is in existence has been characterized by violence, such violence has been situated in a long historical period before the contemporary social and political trajectories of the country. This aspect is in line with what Charles Tilly (2006) advanced that causal explanations that explicitly consider the relevance of history in the analysis have the power of substantially authenticating historical postulations about the source of social phenomena.

It is also important to note that there are several societies fraught by features of relative deprivation and inequality disparity challenges; yet, these societies have existed beyond being degenerated into instances of terrorism or intractable violence. A typical instance could be the Republic of Guinea and The Gambia. Particularly after their independence, for the most part, these countries have remained stabilized, despite some egregious governance systems and practices that have been evident in those societies and many others (Arieff, 2009; Sillah, 1990).

More importantly, while collective identity and collective action approaches have been vital in analyzing how shared ideology influences behavioral patterns, considered as often accounting for insurgency formation in communities, however, it is important to underscore that identity itself cannot be taken to be absolute, or as a given that always drives people to action on account of shared beliefs. The rational choice perspective thus explains individual behavioral patterns in society based on actions reached on the calculation of their preference maximization as the most alternative preference that determines behavioral patterns within an institutional or societal setting (Hall and Taylor, 1996). This concept negates collective identity action-oriented arguments. In essence, while it is challenging to provide a robust causal explanation of individual actions with an unlimited focus on collective identity and deprivation in society, the historical explanation could provide a compelling argument, especially concerning the Boko Haram context, taking into consideration the historical evolution of the region within which this phenomenon is in occurrence. The next section therefore attempts to lay out the formulation of this historical conception in the form of an analytical framework for this study.

Conceptual Framework

Tilly once asserted that history matters, and it matters fundamentally in historical causal analysis (Tilly, 2011 & 2006). Tilly further specified that history is paramount in that it enhances the restoration of historical facts about the phenomenon that happened unknown of human

observation. In the analysis of the historical phenomenon, timing and sequence of events, and how they are patterned are better featured within path-dependence, which, according to James Mahoney (2000), is evidence once a contingent past occurrence prompts some successive patterns to follow a relatively deterministic form. Within the path-dependence, he also asserts the notion of a “self-reinforcing” sequence to explain where the contingent period is vividly linked with the early embracing of a certain institutional arrangement while the deterministic pattern links with the stable reproduction of this institution. This aspect attunes to the notion of “increasing returns” as stated by Paul Pierson (2000) when he opined that increasing returns course is the likelihood in which actions that have occurred at the earliest period are followed along the same path as they progress with increased inclination. The immutable progression along this path, according to this scholar, “is because the relative benefits of a current activity compared with other possible options increase over time” (Pierson, 2000, 252). The work of Kathleen Thelen conceptualized that this pattern would result in what she characterized as a “mechanism of reproduction” within a specific establishment (2003, 211). The increasing return within the self-reinforcing explanatory mechanism situated in the path-dependence conception is vividly what characterizes the context of the emergence of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria, fed in by historical features from its neighboring countries such as Chad and Cameroon.

Hall and Taylor (1996) in their work established the connection between patterns of institutions and their influences on an individual. They elucidated on the “culturalist approach,” which explains individual behavioral patterns beyond being a rationalist view to highlight that an individual often than not follows established or recognizable pattern of behavioral action in pursuance of his/her desired goal contingent on prevailing circumstance.

Hall and Taylor added that individuals are deeply engrained within the institutions which invariably are characterized by repertoires upon which actions are unvaryingly tailored. Thus, from this perspective, they asserted that certain institutional designs become “conventional or taken-or-granted” which made people evade “scrutiny”—hence, making it burdensome for its transformation by a unitary action, especially given that institutions endure over time (Hall and Taylor, 1996). But, as Arthur L. Stinchcombe (1968) asserted, causal mechanisms that culminate into the formation of an institutional pattern may not equally be like those that maintain its continuity. Yet, it is vitally remarkable that such originated institutional patterns would provide or enhance the basis upon which similar future actions come into effect, even though at or in different patterns. This view explicitly captures the conception of institutional layering (Thelen, 2003) in which the pattern of the violent historical institutional evolution of this region instead of being deserted had been remodified and reproduced in a nuance course, but the pattern and characteristic not exclusively detached from what used to exist therein. Understanding Boko Haram from these perspectives, therefore, could help to robustly locate time, sequence, and processes beyond any ephemeral causality accounts.

Historical accounts have demonstrated that the section of Nigeria that is considered as the North has had a long history of violence and this also holds for particularly its two neighboring countries along the same Sahel belt as earlier referenced in this study. The long distal history of violence within this region, its patterns, and sequences, and the increasing returns accrued by its actors and the different layering patterns are largely not unconnected from the emergence of Boko Haram and the violence infamous in the region. The next section outlines the methodological approach, scope and limitations of the study.

Methodology, Scope and Limitations of the Study

Empirical evidence is the bedrock of academic inquiry. Thus, this study utilized a qualitative data collection approach (which emphasizes words over numerical values) to establish essential empirical sources. The study exclusively focused its data collection process on secondary sources of published and unpublished materials, including monographs, journals, reports, as well as appropriate Internet sources. These data provided significant historical context of Boko Haram from its formative stage to the current operational status of the movement upon which a concrete analytical conclusion has been drawn.

In particular, the processing tracing methodological approach was therefore employed to trace and unravel several historical sequences of time and patterns of the different phenomena that ensued relating to the existence of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and in the two neighboring countries, Chad and Cameroon. According to Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen (2013), process tracing could be understood as an approach used for researching “causal mechanism” in research and, therefore, specifically differs from other methods in that it focuses mainly on making “within-case inferences as opposed to cross-case inferences.” As this study focuses on the third element of the process-tracing type, which is explaining outcome processing tracing, the unique feature of this type is aimed to situate an adequately explanatory account on demystifying given consequence of a particular past event and, as a result, it traces compounded multiplicity of efficient and “case-specific causal mechanism” (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) that form the conclusion of this research. From this perspective, this study examined this path to establish a compelling causal and robust mechanism to account for the occurrence of Boko Haram and the pattern of its formation beyond merely looking at the identity construct. The culture of violence that had in many decades ensued in the Sahel region is located within the region’s historical context about which adequate causal explanation is required.

The scope of this study limited itself mainly to the emergence of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization in Northern Nigeria. The study focuses on the Northern part of Nigeria where the activities of the Boko Haram insurgency have existed. It also included two of its neighboring countries, Chad and Cameroon, as they have had unique histories and patterns of a phenomenon that is significant for inferential verification. The study did not exclusively examine the Islamic religion and its emergence in that part of the country. It only employed the Islamic religion to explicate how the insurgency group instrumentalized it in furthering its desired agenda. Another limitation of this study is that the research only briefly looked into the historical accounts of three countries (Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon) on an aspect that particularly has explanatory importance to this research without any attempt to unravel their full-scale historical accounts. As a result, the succeeding section explicates the historical pattern and manner with which perpetual violence had become commonplace in the Sahel region by utilizing two neighboring countries (Chad and Cameroon) and including Nigeria, and the impact of such on the domestic instabilities in current Northeastern Nigeria.

History of Violence within Northern Nigeria and the Sahel Neighbors

The social and political organizations of Africa have been in existence for many decades, and this has been referenced in the works of many scholars, including Walter Hawthorne in his work: “State and Statelessness” (2013). Hawthorne described Africa as a continent with countries characterized by state structural systems with a centralized form of political governance system

having leadership and obligation for the protection of the governed and, in turn, the governed having absolute reciprocity obligation of “tributary function” to the rulers. In addition, Hawthorne asserted that within the same period, some sections of the African societies were stateless, which he referred to as “acephalous”—i.e. a system in which the administrations of such places were not in the hands of an identified individual leadership, but representatives of different families and lineages. This type of state system occurred in Nigeria, especially before the advent of the British colonizers (Falola and Heaton, 2008). This context of this earliest African societal structure engendered a multiplicity of pathways that considerably accounted for divergent occurrences to be experienced in the continent, particularly in the subsequent years that followed.

The section of Nigeria that is considered today as the Northern part has had a long history of instabilities, predating the advent of European engagement in the slave trade. The historical context of this region, according to Falola and Heaton, was long characterized by domestic slave trade enterprise which was considered the mainstay to sustain and project its might, as well as served as the bastion for the economic and political prowess of the respective states, including Hausa, Borno, and others. Historically, the zone is said to have been flooded with a flurry of itinerant traders originating from faraway countries across the region with the possession of multiple skills. Islam was considered to have been accompanied to this region by migrants from “Mali and Songhay in Western Sudan and nomadic Fulani and pastoralists,” especially in the early period of the 14th Century (Falola & Heaton, 2008), and it was that which cemented the authority and influence of the Hausa State. At the erosion of the Kanuri Empire, the Hausa State adopted Islam to be used as an instrument to entrench its power in the entire region as well as to advance commercial partnerships with North Africa and the Sahel, particularly (Falola and Heaton, 2008). As trade intensified in the locality, Hausaland experienced recurrent warfare especially between 1500 to 1800 in the contestation to gain entrance among states, to respective trade arteries for easy access to take into their custody slaves to be used for both external transactions or internal use, and warfare that culminated in the emergence of other states such as Gobir, Kano, and Katsina (Falola and Heaton, 2008) and others.

With the appearance of the Europeans, the region was almost characterized or awash by warfare and an established form of trade in humans and in other products exported through the trans-Saharan axis to North Africa and the Middle East. Starting from the 16th Century to the 19th Century, slavery experienced a dramatic upturn exponentially with the presence of the new partners, a period that became characterized by the myriad struggles in the pursuits of slaves among states as it had momentous impacts on the “political, economic and social structures” of the states in these respective regions (Falola and Heaton, 2008). It was amid this warfare that had already been experienced in the region that Sheikh Usman dan Fodio launched an Islamic Jihad which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in Hausa State, Northern Nigeria.

The Sokoto Caliphate under the stewardship of Fodio aimed to establish Islamic influence over Hausaland in Northern Nigeria and was interfaced with confrontation from the state’s ruling leadership (Falola and Heaton, 2008), a situation that laid bare violence and conflict as the means to an end. Inherent within the conflict, was the contestation for space which both sides realized was constricted and which was pursued by each side inconsiderately, particularly when Yunfa, a former student of Fodio, took over the state’s administration, in opposition with his former teacher. Following the success of the ideal dream of Fodio under the leadership of his son, Bello, to the defeat of the ruling class, intense conflict emerged within the Caliphate among its membership. This movement led by Emir Buhari and, subsequently Yussuf Bin Abdullahi, who

was considered to be an extreme enthusiast for power, led to the civil war in Kano from 1893 to 1895. Moreover, Falola and Heaton (2008) stated that the fundamental reasons for which the so-called Sokoto Caliphate unfolded were never realized as issues such as taxation and the enslavement of Muslims continued unabated.

In addition, a stern conflict also emerged between the colonial authorities represented by Luggard and the emirates, particularly in the northern part of the country, a war that resulted or had profound consequences on the Sokoto Caliphate that was established in the North, eventually leading to the extermination of the Caliph Attahiru I (Falola, 2009). This gave the British colonial power extreme authority over the whole region. Thus, this flooded the waves of civil wars that bedeviled this period and location and was, however, indicative of the fact that violence did not only become a perpetual feature at the time but became institutionalized in the region.

Similarly, as conflict was a common feature of this region, one of its neighboring countries, Chad, which in many instances shared the same commonality, had a deep-seated war and. as Walter Hawthorne (2013) mentioned, Africa has been characterized as acephalous and cephalous, Chad was not exempt. In pre-colonial Chad, varied dynastic wars were prevalent which lasted for several decades. This was also followed by virulent civil wars during European intervention, particularly between the French and Chadians, leading to the total defeat in 1900 of the Rabah and Wadai by the French (Azevedo, 2005).

Traces of violent eruption between the state authorities and the Chadian inhabitants were also indicated in Chad when enlistment particularly into the army of only one of its main tribes, the Sara Tribe, of the southern region expected for its engagement in wars (external) and also for domestic labor such as construction and farms which, in many instances between the 1910s-1920s, led to the assassination of many state authorities who were working as representatives and enforcers of French colonial rule on the argument of the southerners' disenchantment (Azevedo, 2005). In certain localities, the responses of French colonial authorities as a counterattack were marred by extreme violence culminating in the burning of entire village settings that often resulted in the exodus of people from the region (Azevedo, 2005). According to Azevedo's account, under the French colonial administration, the actual construction of violence was registered in Chad, including discriminatory policies and approaches between the north and south of Chad which largely demonstrates that any robust analysis of present-day Chad would not be complete without due recognition of this historical fact. More fundamentally, the post-independence governance of Chad that saw the presidency of François Tombalbaye, a southerner, extremely characterized as repressive further laid the platform for intractable instability in the country, as practices of reprisal and exclusion of northerners, for instance, led to the formation of FROLINAT Guerilla group in the north against the government and it spread in the Sahel (Azevedo, 2005). The consolidation of this instability in the country reached its peak when diverse external actors propped these warring factions, on the one hand, the government, and on the other, the rebel forces, resulting in the removal from power of the government by the Habre Rebel Group (Azevedo, 200). This development was a historic phenomenon that manifested into a stateless entity conquered state structure, which then followed years of coups and countercoups and migration within the region.

Cameroon, another neighbor to Nigeria, was never an exception to this historic evolution of incidences and violence within the region. The three countries have had a long history of internal strife, a history of political power discriminations of certain groups within their societies and, fundamentally, the presence of large Fulani ethnic groups inhabited across the three

countries in particular, and in Central Africa in general, known for a migratory pattern. Similarly, the location of certain ethnic groups at the frontiers of these three countries was strategic and could be relevant in a primordial context. A case in point is the Muslim minority of Cameroon situated in the northern part of the country like that of northern Nigeria (DeLancey, Mbuh and DeLancey, 2010). About the commencement of Fodio's revolutionary Jihad in Nigeria, Delancey and Mokeba in their work stated that Modibo Adama was tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that Cameroon experienced a similar wave of activity which to a quantum level led to huge success by establishing a large empire around the northern part of Cameroon (Delancey and Mokeba, 1990). Cameroon, according to these authors, like Chad and Nigeria, experienced violent instabilities following the anticipated shift in the political ideology of Felix Moumie and Ruben Um Nyobe of the then Union Des Population Du Cameroun Party towards the socialist economy and their stern position for the amalgamation of French and British Cameroon, an attempt that was somewhat opposed by the French colonial authority (Atangana, 2010; Delancey and Mokeba, 1990). The French rather supported Ahmadou Ahidjo as President, whose political ideology leaned on a capitalist economy, and violent civil war unabatedly ensued in the country, signaling one of the French territories in colonial history in which succession towards what could be called "political independence" became extremely fraught by violence. According to Atangana (2010), the unabated insurrection that confronted Cameroon at some points, especially in the 1959s, resulted in the formation of vigilante groups that could arm themselves in response to self-defense.

Consequently, these earliest historical contexts of violence that had been situated within this region and the pattern of their continuity provided a propitious environment for diverse criminal organizations to exist and continued to be supported by actors for the pursuance of what appeared rationalistic, even though completely to the contrary. This theoretically, therefore, has no extremely direct connection to the identity frame and the overall Western governance system per se but would be seen as a necessary factor that could supply proximate opportunities upon which an organized and sustained group such as Boko Haram could emerge and flourish. In all three countries, the long historical existence of the domestic slave trade and its external expansion, the struggle in the state formation and the advent of colonial existence, and the earliest unplanned migration were all marred by egregious patterns of violence, and these became a self-reinforcing process of which in the last several years both increasing returns and layering became inherent in Boko Haram institutional evolution. That particular period in their historical context, thus, would be viewed as the most critical juncture moment that had laid the basis upon which subsequent violent actions and violent organizations in the region, including Boko Haram, to be founded and continue to exist. The next section therefore extensively provides the basis for understanding the path-dependence historical importance within the emergence of the Boko Haram construct.

Placing the Emergence of Boko Haram of Northeastern Nigeria in Historical Context

Nigeria is the largest country in the African continent with the highest Black population in the world, amounting to about 203,452,505 people in July of 2018 (World Factbook, 2018). The country is situated on the West Coast of Africa, neighboring Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger. According to Sklar (2004), the country has a total landscape of about 356,000 square miles, bigger in size than Germany and France when coalesced. Nigeria gained political independence

on October 1, 1960 from the British colonial administration and inherited an “indirect rule political system.” As noted by the author, it was a system that was introduced during the British colonial period to facilitate and expected to enhance smooth administrative governance across Nigeria, especially given its vast geographical nature and is one of the countries of this magnitude in West Africa to would have come under British dispensation (Sklar, 2004).

Nigeria is divided into three geopolitical regions: (1) north, (2) south, and (3) west, with the north, accounting for the highest population density of the country and Islam as the dominant and widely practiced religion in the region (Sklar, 2004). It is a heterogeneous country with approximately many ethnic groupings of which Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Ijaw, and Kanuri, among others, remain the largest ethnic groups. Frederick Lugard, known in Nigeria's history books and beyond as the then British Colonial Administrator, or the Governor-General in Nigeria as a representative of British colonial power, amalgamated the northern and southern parts of the country to become one country, a period many believe beckoned the birth of Nigeria as a country as widely known to date (Kalu, 2011). Nevertheless, many accounts have advanced arguments that the amalgamation was later characterized by intense desperation among the inhabitants particularly in circumstances where communities characterized by dissimilar traits were dovetailed together, which significantly weakened the embryonic political and geographical settings of the country, a pattern that has continued to linger (Apata, 1990).

The exact date for the formation of Boko Haram is somewhat debatable. Nonetheless, while some accounts have traced its initial transformation in the 1990s and 1995, others suggest 2003/4. What remains clear, however, is that it was Lawan Abubakar, a conservative Islamic cleric, under his leadership the movement was formed, but later traveled to Saudi Arabia to pursue his studies at Madinah University (Forest, 2012; MacEachern, 2018). Some Islamic students who were unable to further their education at the University of Maiduguri in 2002 played a significant role in the movement which was later led by Mohamed Yusuf, who became extremely instrumental in expanding the movement. According to Adesoji (2010), Boko Haram was identified in 2009 as a group that has metamorphosed itself into an armed movement. It was a demonstration of its total opposition against the existence of Western civilization, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria where it saw Western politics as a catalyst that has brought corruption to every facet within the communities and which was viewed as evil; and evil, according to its interpretation, is contrary to the fundamental canons of their religion, Islam. Hence, it desired to establish Islamic values across the region to dispel the Western influence which it stated as being forbidden to the society (Adesoji, 2010).

The word “Boko Haram,” according to Adesoji (2010), is taken from one of the dominant languages in the Northern part of Nigeria, a region that is predominantly of Muslim inhabitants, the Hausa, from whose language Boko means “Book” and Haram means “forbidden,” “sinful,” or “evil.” Simply put, its connotation means that Western book/education is forbidden. This was, however, taken for granted and came to be accepted among members of Boko Haram that Western education in all its forms is deemed evil and incompatible with their beliefs and values. This system, they claimed, had rendered their region into total deviance from the willingness of their Creator and, therefore, demonstrated their desperation for its total eradication with its replacement of their sharia system which conforms to their God’s aspirations (Adesoji, 2010).

The history of the Boko Haram uprising is dated far back from the 1980s, a period when few states in the North experienced widespread violence through the Maitatsine uprising. Maitatsine was noted as an Islamic group that seemed to be in total aversion to the secular governance system because of its immoral characteristics organized to revive the Islamic

caliphate in the region, especially in Kano State situated in the North, and during this process and the years that ensued, Boko Haram was in its embryonic stages fostering its membership when the first leader, Mohamed Yusuf, with some Quranic scholars, established a school for free Qur'anic classes which served to provide the earliest center for recruitment (Adesoji, 2011).

This class was provided along with a prayer group under the name of “Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati Wal Jihad,” an Arabic phrase whose connotation is “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and jihad” (Forest, 2012, 62). There was the promulgation of Sharia law in Maiduguri in the 1990s; but, according to Yusuf, its implementation did not follow the Muslim faith, and he was a devout Salafist, and any leader who fails to completely propagate Sharia law and jihad against unbelievers is unqualified to rule, says Yusuf (Forest, 2012). MacEachern (2018), indicated that the very region where Boko Harm emerged, which is within the West and Central African region, has long been characterized by a wide range of religious rebellions among the different clerics on the question of reinstating purification into the Islamic practices, a notion that thereafter lingered for several years from within which the movement had its springboard (MacEachern, 2018).

The death of Yusuf in 2010 and many other members of the group before that as a result of their ferocious encounter with state police in 2009 left the group with the adoption of expanded tactics such as refusal to adhere to the state’s newly passed regulations on account of its claimed exasperation orchestrated by poor governance, corruption, and the widespread socioeconomic disparities (Adesoji, 2011; Cook, 2011). Moreover, in the period following the appearance of Abubakar Shekau, a famous local businessman from Maiduguri, a town in Borno State situated in the North, as the movement's newest leader grave physical attacks were experienced on governmental installations, churches, killing of inhabitants that particularly reject the acceptance of the group’s cause and, more severely, resorted to attacking and destroying prison cells (Cook, 2011). The most prominent was recorded in Bauchi, where such an attack resulted in freeing about 172 prisoners including their sect members who were held under detention by the police, the institution they had heinously perceived as evil to the state (Cook, 2011). Blanchard (2014) in his characterization of this group asserted that the majority of the Boko Haram adherents are largely young men driven by frustration orchestrated by the apparent inequality, injustice, poor development, and the lack of job opportunities in the region, thereby rendering them extremely gullible.

Whether it was this unfavorable environment that was seen by the planners of Boko Haram taking advantage of it under the pretext of Islamization for self-aggrandizement falls in the ambit of the logic situated within the historical context of the violent nature that has bedeviled the region for decades which this study has located within the path-dependence conception and the practice as a strategically designed critical enterprise. The design of violence in the whole region itself has become a self-reinforcing pattern utilized by either vigilante groups to manifest discontent or politically disconnected individuals craving for an extended political space, which within the process different identity repertoires have been employed to give different connotation to the phenomenon.

In addition to the uniqueness, complexities, and trade routes from the historical period to the contemporary time of this region, violence has become an increasing return upon which different political and economic motives have come to be realized and, fundamentally, given its infamous nature, its institutional transformation is immutable leading to what Kathleen Thelen had called “institutional layering” (2003, 226) accepted as a given phenomenon. The wider web of conflicts ranging from the Central African Republic to Mali, Sudan, and Somalia could be

seen as a macrocosm historically interconnected to this prevailed trajectory that has been sustained in this region for decades.

Therefore, it is instructive to note that given the historical account of Boko Haram and its activities, the action of the organization in Nigeria as argued is beyond a religiously motivated war. Rather, it is a reification of the violent historical practices in which disgruntled actors attempt to take to the mainstream political arena, particularly the Islamic-dominated region, thereby utilizing Islamic rhetoric to appeal to the wider adherents. Laitin (2007) was correct on the point he outlined in his work titled *Nations, States, and Violence* on instances such as “irredentism, secession, and Son-of- the- Soil” that often underline violence emergence in a nation-state. Boko Haram’s insurgency in one way or another may not be diametrically taken away from these instances.

Conclusion

This study directed attention toward the significance of historical patterns in the analysis of emerged terrorist threats confronting the entire global society. It states that a robust causal mechanism that establishes patterns of terrorist organizational existence with credence and time, sequence, and institutional evolution would not be achieved exclusively by merely employing an identity frame. Even though it appears that Boko Haram has not been categorically labeled as a terrorist entity nationally, with careful observation of the instability of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, the entity clearly and largely exhibits features of a terrorist organization and it should be further understood through the historical legacy and problem of the Sahel region that remains eminent, such as the inability of the secular governance system to broadly address the socioeconomic and political challenges. Within the context of Nigeria, the implementation of the 2014 National Conference report relating to the wide range of constitutional amendments could have paved the way for national structuring critical for responding to mitigating the established feeling of exclusion. As opined by Laitin (2007), individuals within society when interfaced with extremely unfavorable instances might propel them to resort to establishing a state on their own to access corridors of politics. While the aforementioned conditions have been in existence, which by extension provided exploitable possibilities, the violent historical experiences of this region laid significant context for Boko Haram’s emergence which this analysis has pointed out.

As argued, the northern part of Nigeria where Sharia law regulations have been in practice since 1999, purely a precept of Islamic traditions, in essence has been part of the bad governance system which it fails to address. In this calculation, there is nothing *sui generis* which the Boko Haram insurgent group wants to project, rather than a mere manifestation of violent criminality. To conclude, the circumstances that led to the formation of Boko Haram can be found everywhere and also are likely to be established in any part of the world; therefore, the fundamental problem of Boko Haram in Nigeria would largely be understood when placed within the historical context.

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