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**AFTER-LIFE IN ISLAM AND ITS INTERPRETATION BY BOKO
HARAM FUNDAMENTALISTS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The recent patterns of intolerance and bombings with religious undertones in major parts of Nigeria show that the country is no longer a model of religious tolerance. This is a problem that calls for academic investigation. Some of the suicide bombings resulted in extremely serious loss of lives and destructions of property. These religious developments throw up the issue of after-life in religions; particularly how the sect "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda' await Wal-jihad", popularly known in the media as Boko Haram interprets after-life. This is especially because the actors of the Nigerian Boko Haram claim to be propagating the Prophet's teaching and jihad. They voice visions of after-life and defence of Islam in their public statements. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to examine the Islamic views on oneness of God, after-life, and Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria. The paper, using historical and analytical methods, argues that in the sacred texts and traditions of most religions are found basis for violence and doctrines that are subject to contradictory interpretations. This accounts for the reason why people take to fanaticism, suicide mission and bombings in the name of God. The paper recommends and concludes that in the 21st Century, people should recognize and appreciate the supremacy of citizenship over religious or ethnic claims. This is the challenge of globalization.

Keywords: Afterlife, Fundamentalism, Islam, Quran

Introduction

In view of the many reported and unreported cases of bombings, which have literally become a routine in the Northern part of Nigeria, the development of the afterlife doctrine in Islam has become especially important to scholars. Religious practitioners and researchers now commit time and energy to survey the Muslim tradition to get a broader perspective on the after-life. The Nigerian actors of *Boko Haram* phenomenon voice visions of after-life and defence of Islam in their suicide notes, and they see their members who have died as martyrs; yet not even their intense faith can persuade most Nigerians,

or some Muslims, that their actions are the norms for after-life in Islam. *Boko Haram* as a sect is the '*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'await Wal-jihad*', meaning a community witnessing to the Prophet's teaching and jihad. The group is committed to proselytization and armed struggle in defense of Islam.

Though the group has come to be popularly known as *Boko Haram*, it is doubtful whether the sect called itself by this name. This is because the words: '*Boko*' and '*Haram*' convey neither theological meaning nor a system of beliefs. Be that as it may, in the mind of an average Muslim, every act is either permissible, that is, *Halal* or impermissible, *Haram*. In this regard, while '*illimin Islamiyya*' was considered '*Halal*', '*Ilimin Boko*' was '*Haram*' or impermissible act. Therefore, '*Boko*' is now used in relation to western education. In other words, '*Boko Haram*' is used to derogatorily refer to western education as forbidden or witchcraft. Today many scholars and religious leaders in Nigeria have described and condemned *Boko Haram* phenomenon as un-Islamic and dangerous. Having said that, Nigerian *Boko Haram* activities have something important to teach about after-life beliefs through fundamentalist extremism in every religion.

Boko Haram activities in Nigeria are fired by deep religious convictions and the phenomenon presents a multi-level response than the government in power is doing. Political imbalance, social injustice, unemployment and poverty created fertile feeding grounds for *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. But these conditions in themselves are not the prime reason some people feel compelled to kill in the name of their religions. The political, social and economic situations in some Northern states of Nigeria may have acted as a trigger to the present bombings in Nigeria but the roots of the religious intolerance and militancy are encoded in the history and sacred scripture of the religions. McTernan confirms this when he observed that, "today's extremists can find in their own traditions sufficient texts and in their own religious history sufficient exemplars to justify their adoption of a worldview that allows them to annihilate those who think or act differently."

Therefore, in this chapter, the intention is to examine Islamic views of the after-life and try to avoid the prejudices of seeing Islam from the perspective of its extremists exemplified in Nigerian *Boko Haram*. Ordinary Islamic views of the after-life seem to be as manifold as in African Religion or Christianity. It is in this regard that this paper, using historical and analytical methods, argues that in the texts and traditions of all religions, particularly Islam, lay a destructive potential susceptible to contradictory

interpretations. This accounts for the reason why religion is always ignited into political and ethnic flames by some people to achieve selfish purposes both locally and globally.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of contemporary Islamic thought of the afterlife, the theory of dualism comes to mind. The theory of dualism has to do with the dichotomy of principles that manifest themselves in the universe. The Greek Philosopher, Plato (428-347BC) was the most prominent scholar of dualism and his work titled: *Timeus* has purely dualistic foundations. For Plato, the human spirit belongs to the world of idea which is divine while the body which is mortal comes from the lower goods. Plato explains the presence of the immortal soul in this world with the doctrine of "the fall" of the soul; and the reason for this fall is non-reason.

Overtime, platonic dualism came to have a long echo in the history of the major religions of the world, including Islam. Islam, from its inception, is a religion of conversion. Conversion in religions is a type of transformation. In this context, Schmidt submits that,

Inner conversions involve a reorientation of identity, a dying to the old self and the birth of a new identity. Structural conversion entails a change from one religious tradition to another.

In the light of the above, Prophet Muhammad who lived as a preacher challenged his hearers to convert because the soul will stand in judgment in the after-life. Prophet Muhammad was born around the year CE 570 in Mecca. In about 610 he came to believe that he was receiving messages from God which he was to convey to his fellow Meccans. These messages were later collected and form the Glorious Qur'an. The central message of the Prophet is that God is one (Allah) and that he is merciful and all-powerful, controlling the course of events. The Prophet taught that on the last day God would judge people according to their acts and assign them to heaven or hell. In the revelations, Muhammad saw himself as merely a spiritual watchman, telling of God's punishment for sinners and reward for the just. In any event, the close connection between the vision of the horrors awaiting sinners in the afterlife and the necessity of conversion is at the base of Islam, which is the only way for an unbeliever to avoid the coming eschatological disasters.

So, the Muslim idea of the afterlife hangs on the dualist structure; it is a two-way theology that gives description of true, calm, peaceful life in the Islamic community, while death and suffering characterize all outside of it. Quran 1: 6-7 sums it up thus:

Show us the straight path: the path of those whom you have favoured; not (the path) of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray.

The straight path dominates and influences the idea of after-life in Islam to the extent that the one God who sent the Prophets and protected them is at the same time "the warrior God calling men to battle, sending his angels to reinforce the Muslims, shooting his arrows and killing the enemy to ensure the victory as a supreme sign of his favour and of the truth of the Quranic revelation". (2:250; 3:124-125; 8:5-9, 42-43).

Sunni – Shi'ite on Oneness of God

From 1970s till date, Nigerian society has been punctuated by the rebirth of radical Islam. The developments now account for a great deal of the religious intolerance exhibited in recent times. Since then, Hackett notes that, "Nigeria has become transformed from a model of relative religious tolerance to a country with a reputation for repeated outbreaks of religious violence some with extremely serious loss of life and destruction of property." Islamic revivalist movement that is the concern of the paper came to life after the failure of the secular nationalist experience in many countries of the world. Khosrokhavar gave the account of the rebirth of radical Islam thus:

The return of Islam in its militant version took place more or less everywhere under influence of Muslim intellectuals who looked to the Muslim Brotherhood, like Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi. Iran saw the development of a revolutionary shi'ism, and in Egypt a new generation of Islamist intellectuals and ideologues, for whom Islam is the solution, gave life to movements like al-takfir wa l-hijra.

These reformists maintained that the Quran contains all science, and that the best of the West, (democracy, religious tolerance, women's right and so on), was borrowed from Islam. The guiding principles of the Islamic reforms is stated clearly that: "the laws and teaching of Islam are comprehensive,

ordering the affairs of men in this world and the next . . . Islam is both creed and worship, homeland, and a nationality, religion and government, spirituality and work, scripture and sword." The establishment of Shar'ia in many Northern states probably follows this guiding principle. And adherence to principles rather than personalities is characteristic of the Sunnis. In radical Sunnis, the right of the Muslim community to choose, especially its political leadership is not negotiable.

In the Shi'ite understanding of religious revivalism, the central place is occupied by the doctrine of martyrdom animated in the context of after-life. But it goes without saying that martyrdom is not mentioned directly in the five principles of Islam. The notion is only deduced from the reading of the principles of Islam. This may account for the varied understanding of the doctrine by the Sunnis and Shi'ites.

The Oneness of God forms the founding notion of Islam and neither the Sunnis nor Shi'ites negates the affirmation. For the actors of radical Sunnism, loyalty to Islam underlies every battle against secularism and the agents of modernity, capitalism, imperialism and practice of diluted version of Islam are considerable as illegitimate political order that must be fought against. Revivalism Muslims, regardless of sect, belongs to this context. It is a war without mercy against the impious principles of a political order that is illegitimate from the Islamic point of view. And to realize the Islamic ideal, the Muslim must stake his own life, according to the notion of imperative individual duty towards the after-life.

Shi'ites, most likely, represent one tenth of the Muslims in the world. Based on their minority factor, the Shi'ites aim at keeping absolute control of the part of the world where they are in a majority, as in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. Rather than pursuing a universal hegemony of Islam, their conception strives for the recognition of Shi'ism as a legitimate version of the religion of God. For them, the Islamic ideal means a society derived from the cumulative tradition of Islam, carefully and reasonably applied to the conditions of today. In their battle against evil in the world and imperialist governments, the martyrdom of Husayn remains at the centre stage. For them, the martyrdom represents the struggle to death against injustice and evil symbolized in the impious world order. Within this context, desire for the afterlife is connected with the notion of divine oneness.

The Sunni quest for afterlife and understanding of God are based on the imperative duty, of God are based on the imperative duty, founded on

the reinterpretation of the Qur'an but also on a re-visitation of the Sunna" or the "Hadith". The framework allows the use of legitimate violence in the fight against the impious and the heretics. The Sunnis, in practicing suicide bombing, try to follow in the footsteps of the Shi'ite despite their being anti-Shi'ite. The fervent desire to die in the service of Islam makes them activists longing for the after-life.

Resurrection as the Primary Reward

The religion of Islam is budded not the hierarchy of clergy as in Roman Catholic Church for example. In this respect, more like Judaism, Islam is united by the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad sayings, as noted in the Quran and Hadith concerned many things. Chief among the concerns is the fact of the resurrection which points to the afterlife. This article of faith is very important to Muslims.

Before this day dawns, there will be a kind of devastations and reversals on earth. Quran 81:1-14 clearly notes this fact. Verses 13-14 states, "When hell shall be set blazing, when paradise shall be brought nigh, then shall a soul know what it has produced." For Muslims, resurrection will be the blessing of the Day of Judgment for the ones who have faith and lived justly. (cf. Q. 22:7). It is not matter of surprise, then, that in Islam the doctrine of the resurrection is articulated within the context of proselytization. Segal puts this fact clearer thus:

Islam downplayed the elaborate temple rituals of Arabia's polytheistic past, substituted simple daily devotions, and emphasized oral sermons, which both convicted hearers to convert, while continuously fostering and confirming the faith of those who had already entered the community.

So, the Quran and Hadith, besides their poetic format, are exhortatory and sermons; not narratives as seen in other traditions of Hebrew and Christianity. The exhortatory core of the Islamic religion centers on purification and repentance. "It demands repentance and submission and joining the community of fellow believers." In other words, there are traditions in Islam that accept that the promise of the resurrection belongs to those who fight in the holy war. In particular, those who die in God's path have the privilege of being sure of paradise.

In this atmosphere, the relationship between Muslims and other faith traditions keeps modifying. Some see resurrection as reserved to the Muslim believer who puts his/her faith into practice by exercise of worship, caring for the poor and regaling in the holy war (violence in the name of God). There are other traditions that interpret resurrection in Islam to mean that neither Jesus nor Christians will share the benefits of the resurrection, although they are to be allowed to exist and be tolerated.

In all, images of the resurrection as the ultimate reward are at the level of creative imagination of the believer in Islam. They are elaboration of the evocative signals mentioned in the holy Quran. As a result, a vivid eschatological picture of the resurrection has developed in Muslim religious thought. The eschatological picture does not exclude revolts against corrupt government and systems which apparently betray Islam as one sees today in Nigeria. The Nigerian – Islamic eschatological signal is expressed in the *Boko Haram* phenomenon.

Boko Haram in Nigeria

Boko Haram in Nigeria is an Islamic fundamentalist who follow a programme aimed at destroying the political and social structures in the Northern part of Nigeria and replacing this with an Islamic state. Their targets are government agencies, secular institutions and at times, places of worship. The sect's name, as noted earlier, is "*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda' await Wal-jihad*," that is, community committed to propagating the prophet's teaching and jihad. From their name, two key concepts emerged that point to ultimate goal: proselytization and armed struggle in defence of Islam. *Boko Haram* claims to be a voice for true Islam. According to them, true Islam is based on the absolute indivisibility of religious, social and political life of a believer. It is the society as it was shaped by Muhammad himself. So, the over-riding purpose in *Boko Haram* activities, among other things, is the preservation of the Muslim identity and the Islamic faith particularly in the North.

The struggle of the *Boko Haram* in Nigeria may continue for a long time because of its history, networking, and ultimate purposes. To buttress this fact, Enayat before now notes:

The frustrations bred of the Arab defeat in the Six Day War of 1967 had naturally created a fresh hankering among the

militant youth in the Muslim world. For a more vigorous political doctrine.

Enayat's submission points to the historical background to the appearance of a new variant of Islamic socialism especially in Nigeria.

The current of Islamic proselytization would continue as noted earlier. The struggle is anchored on the traditions and teachings of Islam, particularly teachings on after life. Unfortunately, *Boko Haram* agitation is expressed blindly. Jeyifo notes this fact succinctly when he submitted that:

There are millions of Christian Northern who have no "South" to go to before the onslaught of the jihadist sect. The consequence of blanking out on these aspects of the terror campaign of Boko Haram is a blindness, an indifference to the fact that the sect is wreaking . . . disunity and mistrust within in the North itself.

Boko Haram so far has painted Islam in Nigeria with the biggest brush dripping with innocent blood. The actors contradict the merciful attributes of God.

Most revivalist movements in the history of world religions have had ramifications in the form of egalitarian and anti-government doctrines. The consequence is popular uprisings as now provoked by *Boko Haram* and the influence of afterlife doctrine in the Quran precipitated the crisis. Religious thinkers and authentic orthodox Islamic scholars have a lot of challenges to confront. The contemporary religious situation in Nigeria has a serious moral import for everybody, regardless of affiliations.

Suggestions and Conclusion

First, as Hackett noted, Nigeria has become a nation repudiated for repeated outbreak of religious violence. Therefore, no one should be surprised if another version of *Boko Haram* emerges. The fact is that there is high level of inter-religious intolerance among Christians in Nigeria. But none of the Christians have led an open violence against the Nigerian nation. Why is it that some adherents of Islam have remained volatile in Nigeria? Thus, the fundamentalist sects should learn how to channel their disagreements through the proper quarters.

On the issue of *Boko Haram* activities, Nigerians and indeed the world have seen both Muslims and Christians killed. This may imply that this is not just about religions. The fact is that Nigeria is becoming a lawless nation where anything can trigger frustration and violence. Therefore, the law enforcement agencies should rise up to be more proactive in their responsibilities.

Again, the Islamic scholars should let the world know who, in Islam, has the authority to punish an apostate and in what way? This knowledge or religious authority loses its power to enforce laws, the society becomes vulnerable. Under this situation, any group can take the law into their hands. Nigeria should punish murderers for murder regardless of the personality involved. This will put a stop to the outright lawlessness and criminalities which are daily mistaken as religious conflicts.

Finally, the Muslim world should know that an Islamic state in Nigeria is not possible no matter how hard the actors try. It would be an impossible task to desire a total Islamic state where political, economic, social and religious life is derived from Shar'ia. The era of such state may not be tenable in Africa in the 21st Century. The supremacy of citizenship over religious and sectional claims in Nigeria has come to stay.

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