

EFFECTS OF FOREIGN RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION ON MUSLIM YOUTHS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA.

By

Azeez, Lihabeeb Hamod

Department of Religious Studies, College of Humanities, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract

Religion is perceived as one of the veritable tools for national peace and development in developed countries such as Canada and Saudi Arabia. However, this same religion in Africa has been a tool contributing to insurgency and recruitment of tender age children as suicide warriors. Records show that developed nations have been consistently harnessing the good potential of religion towards national peace and political stability. They acknowledged the sensitivity attached to religion and are prepared to mitigate the effects of foreign indoctrination and extreme ideologies by neutralizing the means such ideology can penetrate the society by blocking the loopholes that can be exploited through financial or education sponsorships by extremists. Meanwhile, the ripple effects of negligence and unregulated policy on religious matters by Nigeria paved way for religious extremists and their foreign sponsors to exploit the loopholes against the collective interest of the state. The effects manifested in foreign scholarship grants given to teenagers across Islamic institutions in Nigeria by Izala sect, Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN-Shiite) and others designed for human trafficking and recruitment in to radical groups in Islamic states like Iran and Syria. The research problem lies on why Nigerian government activated all state machineries to place the activities of Muslim foreign preachers especially from Middle East in to security checks and surveillance immediately they touched Nigerian soil. The intelligence community usually lose sleep until their activities are given wider coverage and return to their countries, this act could be borne out of their expertise in envisaging threats and the adverse effects the unguarded statement/extremism indoctrination could have on national security as well as on Muslim youths. This study examined the effects of foreign Islamic ideologies on Muslim youths and how to tackle the menace effectively with a view to advocating for adoption of non-kinetic approach (such as de-radicalization, reorientation and amnesty programmes) against the kinetic security approach such as outright clampdown and proscription of the groups as substitute coupled with intensive psychological reorientation because the innocent youths are victims of circumstances. This study adopted observatory, descriptive and sociological methods. Findings revealed that activities of foreign Islamic sects in Nigeria have adverse effects on religious ideology imbibed by the Muslim youths as well as the political stability of the nation as a result of daring attitudes and violent dispositions exhibited by the fanatic groups against the constituted authorities and other Muslim groups who condemned their extremist conducts. The study recommends that government and other religious stakeholders should prioritize non-kinetic approach against age-long kinetic approach adopted to nip the menace in the bud coupled with good political will and regulatory policy to invest in the activities of religious organizations in order to render devilish foreign grants less attractive and curtail its patronage among Islamic groups in Nigeria.

Keywords: Foreign, Religious indoctrination, Muslim youths, Political instability, Nigeria.

Introduction

Foreign indoctrination has contributed to religious, social and political crisis in Nigeria as majority of Muslim youths have been influenced by foreign ideology as they usually perceived others as weaker Muslims or even unbelievers. The promoter of such foreign ideologies capitalized on trivial issues to cause religious unrest and crisis in the country. Consequently, foreign indoctrination snowballed into waging war against their brethren in the same faith who have dissenting voices against what they practiced or represented. Then, if indoctrinated ideologies can be basis of attacking fellow Muslims, then what will be the fate of people who shared different religious faith entirely? The leaders of such movements usually proclaimed themselves as self-acclaimed leaders and no other person has right to express any view contrary to what they are propagating, such behavior most times instigate violent confrontations as witnessed between the Sunni and Shi'a Islam in Nigeria (Danjibo, 2017). Meanwhile, the effect upturns political upheaval as the foreign paymasters usually instigate the members to challenge and confront constituted authorities on slight provocation. This statement could be corroborated by the botched plan of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) popularly known as shites on 29th June, 2018 to confront and kidnap Nigeria security agents and their family members in retaliation of Nigeria government stance against Shia ideology. The movement continued the indoctrinated struggle to advocate for full-fledged Islamic state through its leader Shaykh Ibrahim el-zaki zaki backed by the Islamic state of Iran. The effects manifested in foreign scholarship grants given to teenagers across mosques especially in northern part of the country by Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and Izala Islamic sect, the scholarship was designed for human trafficking and recruitment into radical groups such as Islamic states in Iraq and Syria (Adam, 2022).

The incessant attacks and killings of both Muslims and non-Muslims by militias groups in Africa have fuelled ethno-religious tensions manifested in hatred and anger against the entire Muslim community especially in Nigeria. Though, Sunni Muslims and their leaders have condemned the attacks on non-Muslims, but there are still suspicions from Christian bodies and other faiths despite the sincere condemnation of the sect's activities covertly and overtly, they still tagged all Muslims being violent in nature, and posing a threat to peace of the nation (Ostien, 2002). Boko Haram became dreaded and violent religious sects in 2009 as a result of its extreme ideology and violent confrontation with the Nigerian government. However, its genesis could be linked to the effects of external religious indoctrination and the subsequent socio-economic reality of north-East Nigeria. The activities of the group resulted in the death and displacement of many people in the area with significant damages to collective progress of Nigeria. While the group claimed to be operating under the principles of Islam, the ideology of dreaded sect centered on the rejection of compatibility of Islam with democratic system of governance forced on Northern region. The exposure of the Muslim youths to fanatic ideologies by external forces such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State West Africa Province, Republic of Iran shites and other foreign interested groups had led to both religious and political violence which threatened the peace, security and development of the country. The sovereignty of the nation is being threatened and innocent souls lost their lives on a daily basis as a result of ideology which emanated from foreign counterparts (Ostien, 2002).

Religious Ideology and Muslim Youths

Nigeria comprises of different religious sects with different ideologies and many religious sects view one another as a threat with high sense of hostilities and intolerance as a result of external indoctrination and ideology imbibed especially among Muslim youths. The resultant effect of this external influence led to radical promotion of religious beliefs by different Islamic sects which holds on to belligerent behavior with regard to religious matters (Ostien, 2002). Religious crisis is more prominent in Nigeria due to numerous religious sects and different ideologies (Oduyoye, 2000). The crisis emanated as a result of different movements opposition to existing religious traditions and political practices as they perceived others who have different religious views as being on the wrong path. Religious extremism manifests when ideological convictions negates the dictates of divine laws and exemplary teachings of divine messengers as members' usually motivated with desires for rewards both in this life and the hereafter (Elkaim, 2012).

Some violent religious sects consider insurgency to be a religious ideology rooted in subjective interpretations of religious belief systems. The subjective misinterpretations convince them that it is imperative to kill anyone who does not believe in their creed. However, this is unjust as it negates the injunctions of the Quran, which they claim to follow. The Qur'an states clearly that, "Whoever kills a person (unjustly) it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind (Al-Hilali and Khan, 2000).

Several efforts have been made by relevant authorities to counter Islamic insurgency, they deployed military officials, counter insurgency experts and other legal measures that have dire consequences and effects on the entire citizens, often times, rules of military engagements are being violated and jeopardized while the innocent souls paid the supreme price. The compelling method for countering Islamic insurgency is to embrace approaches that counter radical Islamic movements and address the ideological drivers of religious insurgencies among the Islamic sects. Such strategies must distinguish the drivers of Islamic insurgency, thereby decreasing the risk of alienating specific Islamic movements. The government's approach deploys coordinated efforts to counter the stories framed by these radical ideological, religious movements within Islam, which helps them to enlist their followers. Islamic insurgents are usually motivated by ideological divergences within the Islamic space (Ostein, 2002). Hence, the Nigerian government should identify such Islamic movements that are prone to insurgency, address the religious drives for insurgency, and counter the deployment of noticeable Islamic religious radical leaders as intense counter-measures to tame the menace. These measures will serve as a means to exposing the religious extremists and radicals and enable the government to take appropriate steps to deal with them decisively and nip terrorism in the bud.

Extremism and Political Instability in Nigeria

The politicization of the Islamic worldview has assumed a worrisome dimension which portrayed the religion as solely responsible for the creation and promotion of terrorism, radicalism and insurgency. This overestimates religion as a major trigger of insurgencies and uprisings. Meanwhile, analyst who subscribed to this school of thought strongly believed that if religious traditions, doctrines and practices exists not; and political elite class refrain from abuse of office and discrimination against people at the lower rungs of social and religious ladder, and

majority are not abandoned out of school and well educated, then Islamic insurgency would not triumph. More so, assessment revealed that most politicized Islamic ideology associated with radical Islamic movements are not entrenched in Islamic beliefs, doctrines and neither do they originate from Islamic fundamentals nor the authentic traditions of the Prophet (Kassim, 2015).

According to Orintunsin (2012), he asserted that religious politicization among religious leaders is a major influence on Islamic insurgency. There is an element of radicalism in the origin of nations with intra religious politicization within Islam, like Nigeria. Islamic insurgency is likely to crop up in nations that have poor educational systems and other similar indications that are characteristic of nations with profound religious imbalances. Interestingly, this also raises the question of why individuals carry firearms and will embark on missions that would not bring about their religious liberation if, in reality, their grievance was a lack of religious freedom within the same Islamic religious movements. Danjibo (2017) argues that while they may not be roused by individual and religious cum political liberation, the steady flow of incentives given to prospective Islamic insurgents is a source of immense support to religious movements like the Islamic Movement in Nigeria's (IMN) radicalism. The direction of perception that goes into most Islamic insurgent movements makes them attractive forces for people who are on the path to religious extremism. Kleptocrat Islamic leaders in government who aim at promoting religious leadership fashion conspiracies that can furnish these diversifications in Islamic ideologies with strategies for advancing their selfish goals, most of which are geared towards promoting Islamic insurgency and divergence within the society (Olojo, 2017).

Thurston's (2015) points of view on religious superiority and inferiority stem from convergent points. According to him, largely populated Islamic nations, particularly those with aggrieved religious Islamic minority movements and different portions of the general public who tolerate Islamic ideological rejection, can propel movements towards Islamic insurgency. Shehu (2011) supports this by pointing out that developed countries which do not have radical religious instructions and inclined politics within religious movements will not be fit for reproducing radical Islamic insurgency and other similar radical Islamic ideologies.

Fafowora's (2012) assertion implies that the members of the (Islamic) religious community who thereafter became insurgents feel alienated from the mainstream of the society because of the introduction of modern ideas such as democracy and its principles. These principles are followed by the elite Muslim leaders as against Islamic principles which the insurgents believe should be imperatively adopted by these leaders. This consequently gave the aggrieved religious enthusiasts (they are called "fanatics" in Nigeria) the impression that the leaders are no more religious, therefore, they and all those who share their views should be violently dealt with.

In Nigeria, where different Islamic religious movements, like Boko Haram, Ansaru, the Izala Movement, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), and the Movement for the Islamic Revival (MIR) have developed religious superiority, the abuse of religious tenets features in the historical development of such movements. In the case of the MIR in the mid-80s, its devotees promoted their religious ideology and treated other religious movements as inferior. As a result, large numbers of people in Kaduna, North Central Nigeria put laws into their hands by blocking the

roads and disturbing the peace of the community whenever they performed their religious rites (Umar, 2001). In the more recent case of Boko Haram, the Islamic insurgency movement, issues such as the politicization of religion among Muslim political leaders and members of other Islamic religious movements, as well as the impartial sharing of asset rents in the region, were the core issues which propelled the cause.

To some extent, Boko Haram, Ansaru and the Izala Movement are believed to have been formed by many corrupt Islamic leaders for whom the absence of liberal Islamic or Quranic education guaranteed that they were unequipped for an autonomous Islamic society, and that subsequently, they were not well-equipped for testing the present state of affairs in Northeastern, Nigeria (Kassim, 2015). The Islamic insurgent movements are created as a result of religious underplays (such as overenthusiasm for religion) within Islam and other numerous factors such as feelings of being alienated from the mainstream of the society.

Without doubt, as an Islamic insurgency movement, Boko Haram has become a religion indoctrinating and religion freedom insurgency movement, regardless of its stance on faithful responsibility to religious flexibility. Finally, as indicated by Kassim (2015), while Boko Haram Islamic insurgents may outline their debate in terms of religious ideological grievances as opposed to political religious terms, political grievances are no less in charge of their arrangement. Without doubt, radical insurgent convictions and establishments in the Northeastern region states are proximate components that pulverise the common state. Be that as it may, the wide administration mismanagement has propelled a mass of furious, disappointed, and baffled youngsters who feel they do not have anything to lose; hence, their participation in the Boko Haram Islamic insurgency. Kassim (2015) also argued that the disappointments with Islamic religious indoctrination conditions can cause a high level of disappointment and dissatisfaction with Islamic religious ideological struggle.

Foreign indoctrination and religious ideologies propagated in Nigeria by self-acclaimed Islamic scholars and rulers had significant effect on religious and political stability in the Country. The campaign of establishing full-fledged Islamic states against western democratic dispensation has led to religious and political violence and instability, the role foreign sponsors played on ensuring that their objectives are achieved cannot be overemphasized while such ideology continue to hamper the development, peace and security of the nation.

Effects of Foreign Ideologies

The consequent effects of allowing external ideology to penetrate the religious and political space of our nation could be felt in following ways:

i. Insurgency: The penetration of extreme indoctrination on Muslim youths in Nigeria led to the insurgent activities that threaten the lives and properties of the people. The strong ideology rooted in fighting for a freedom from oppressors and deliverance from aristocratic western democracy. They were instigated against constituted authorities to take arms and other dangerous weapons to fight for their rights regardless of number of lives and properties lost. The activities of insurgent continue to threaten the collective peace and development of our nation, while the

foreign initiators had little or no knowledge about the implications of promoting extreme ideology in the country. "Whoever saves a soul, it is like he has saved entire human race".

ii. Brewing of hatred and enormity among different religious sects: The effect of foreign ideology set various Islamic sects apart, perceiving one another as an enemy or outright unbelievers that deserves no relation or interaction. Muslim youths usually throw the explicit injunction of the Holy Qur'an that states that "The believers are brethren in faith" and anybody who shares differing views or ideology are tagged as kufar. The differing ideology usually breeds unguarded statement, attacks, hatred and enormity among Muslim youths and such practice continue to divide the brotherhood and unity of Islam.

iii. Extra judicial killings: The Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) for military and paramilitary forces is not strictly adhered to by Nigeria forces, innocent souls are being cut short and this resulted to extra judicial killings which breeds another disenchantment by concerned aggrieved groups. Boko Haram are aggrieved and became more dreaded after the alleged killing of their leader Muhammad Yusuf by the Nigerian Police Force.

iv. Recruitment of Young Muslims into terrorist group: The effects can be felt in illegal recruitment of young Muslim youths in to terrorist groups. The unsuspected youths are brainwashed, cajoled and enlisted in to terrorist groups without having deep understanding of the course they are fighting for, they turned young Muslim children in to suicide bombers and equipped them with arms and other dangerous weapons to unleash mayhem on the citizens.

v. Human trafficking: The menace gave opportunity to Human trafficking of Muslim youths to foreign lands and other international insurgent hideouts, youths are deceived in the guise of offering international scholarship to pursue their study, but the reverse is the case when they eventually arrived at their destination.

vi. Religious and political upheaval: The effect of foreign ideology and emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria had caused the Nigerian government and her entire citizens a huge number of resources that could be channeled to other sector apart from security. It has thrown the country in to decades of religious and political tension which kinetic measures cannot effectively tackle. Reports show that several millions of dollars had been appropriated to tackle terrorism and insurgency, but little or no success has been recorded due to increase in membership and activities of the dreaded Boko Haram sects.

vii. Destroying the International Image of Muslims and Islam: The insecurity caused by the extreme ideological sects has scared away potential investors and other relevant individuals willing to invest and establish companies and organizations in Nigeria. The effect has destroyed the international credibility of the nation as befitted space to stay or visit in the sight of international community.

viii. Unhealthy suspicion of Foreign Islamic leaders and practitioners: The effect of Foreign ideology has created palpable tension and fear in the heart Nigerian government as well as their security agents, immediately a foreign Islamic preacher's especially from Middle eastern countries touches down on Nigeria soil, they automatically sustain such preacher's on strict monitoring on both his movements and activities till he finally departs the shores of the country. The extreme ideology of Boko Haram and other subversive elements such Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) led the agents to activate stringent measures to prevent acceptance and wider membership of the dreaded groups.

However, the Nigerian government in response to the challenges activated kinetic measures to clampdown on the groups, arresting their members, destroying their base, proscription of membership and all other curative measures to tackle the menace. Unfortunately, the strategy employed by the authorities and concern stakeholders proved little or not significant in mitigating the effects of foreign indoctrination and ideologies in Nigeria. Significant number of lives and properties have been lost because of the ideology embraced by the extremist group and they usually vowed not to surrender their weapons even in the theatre of their own death because of the influence and power of strange ideology that has been rooted in their blood and veins. The psychological effect of such indoctrination propelled the members to carry out all forms of nefarious activities without considering the negative consequence of such acts on the peace, progress and security of the country.

Recommendations

- i. Intensive de radicalization and reorientation programmes should be organized for Muslim youths across religious centers and it should be a routine activities to checkmate religious extremism.
- ii. Non kinetic measures such as constructive perception management should be prioritized. They should be enlightened about the plans and programmes of Nigerian government in order to instill sense of patriotism and confidence in them.
- iii. The government and religious stakeholders should prioritize the genuine less privileged in their poverty alleviation programmes as the people at lower rungs of social ladder could be easily lured to crime when abject poverty overtakes their senses.
- iv. A bill should be sponsored in National Assembly in collaboration with Nigeria Supreme Council of Islamic affairs to regulate public preaching and sermon activities especially on social media platforms to prevent promotion of extreme ideologies in the country among scholars influenced by foreign indoctrination.
- v. Counter measures and counter narrative campaigns should be embarked upon by government, religious leaders and traditional institutions to deradicalize the mind of the brainwashed youths at the local level before it snowballed to state or nationwide menace.
- vi. Establishment of National Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) should be adequately supervised by relevant agencies and religious stakeholders to ensure the funds reach the targeted group in order to make the foreign grants and scholarship less attractive to Muslim youths.
- vii. Religious organizations should be sensitized about the nefarious activities of some religious bodies and Non-governmental Organization.

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