

Undertaking Population-centric Counterinsurgency in the Age of Salafi-driven Insurgencies: A Study of the Boko Haram Conflict

by

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## **Abstract**

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The Boko Haram conflict in northern Nigeria has generated immense scholarly interest since it began in 2010. Much of this interest has centred on advancing counterinsurgency policy prescriptions. There are two dominant approaches in the generic counterinsurgency literature: enemy-centric counterinsurgency, which involves the use of brute force to eliminate insurgents and population-centric counterinsurgency, which entails the use of persuasive means to end an insurgency. The counterinsurgency scholarship on Boko Haram is dominated by scholars that advance the latter approach. These scholars argue that the Boko Haram insurgency is a result of the socio-economic challenges that beset northern Nigeria, hence the government should adopt a policy of dialogue with the group and implement socio-economic reforms. However, there is a disjuncture between this policy prescription and Boko Haram's Salafi-driven objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. Thus, this thesis answers the following question: given the Salafi ideology of BH, can population-centric counterinsurgency be an effective state response? I explored this question based on the theories of Weinstein (2007) and Ugarriza & Craig (2013): the notion that the factors that influence the emergence of an insurgent group continues to shape the group's attitudes, emotions and dispositions. In answering my question, I explored the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria in order to ascertain the outcome of the government's accommodation of Islamist demands in the past. Using textual analysis, I also examined the speeches of Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, in order to identify the group's specific objectives and understand its disposition to dialogue. Based on the historical exploration and analysis of Shekau's speeches, I argued that whereas the implementation of socio-economic reforms can win over potential Boko Haram recruits, neither dialogue nor socio-economic reforms can convince the existing Boko Haram members and leaders to stop fighting.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all victims of the Boko Haram insurgency and the humanitarian aid workers in northern Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Historically, counterinsurgency (COIN) has been undertaken based on either the population-centric or enemy-centric approaches. In the population-centric approach or P-COIN, the focus is on obtaining the support of the civilian population in areas where the insurgency is waged (Khalili, 2011, p. 1472). The goal of counterinsurgent forces is to starve the insurgents of human and material resources (Dixon, 2012, p. 60). In contrast, the enemy-centric COIN (E-COIN) involves focusing entirely on the insurgents themselves and the resources of the counterinsurgents are tailored towards obliterating the insurgent army (Ucko, 2016, p. 52). E-COIN has been dominant in the Nigerian government's war against Boko Haram (BH). Government forces have targeted BH commanders and foot soldiers, raided BH camps, and captured and imprisoned BH fighters and their family members.

Many of the scholars (Bamidele, 2016; Bamidele, 2015; David et al, 2015; Agbibo, 2014; Yusuf, 2013; Aghedo and Osumah, 2012) who have studied the BH insurgency disapprove of the government's approach, because, in their view, it alienates the civilian population whose support can engender the defeat of BH. However, these authors do not sufficiently incorporate the context of the conflict into their analysis of how the government should be responding to the insurgency. A handful of other scholars (Bappah, 2016; Gray and Adeakin, 2015; Fiore, 2014) appear to support the government's response, as their suggestions for policy improvement do not challenge the fundamentals of E-COIN. As shown in chapter two, these scholars recommend better coordination among the armed forces, increased training for asymmetric threats, and the streamlining of military duties to the protection of Nigeria's territorial integrity. Ironically, however, even this latter group of scholars do not integrate the nature of BH - which is shaped by

the environment in which the group developed and the Salafi ideology which informs its worldview – into their analysis of how the Nigerian government should be responding.

The non-inclusion of the Salafi ideology of BH in the works mentioned above is symptomatic of a shortcoming in the broader COIN literature, especially the population-centric variant. According to Gventer et al., there is a tendency among the advocates of P-COIN to assume that the same solution can be applied to all insurgencies (2014, p. 23). Dixon (2012) gets at the same point when he states that “counterinsurgency thought and doctrine may be so generalised that they are flawed guides to, and cannot anticipate, the complexities of diverse conflicts and, therefore, may be more of a hindrance than an advantage in formulating policy” (p. 52). This tendency to ignore the specifics of a conflict in COIN theorizing is a significant gap in the literature, especially given the increase of a new type of insurgency post-9/11. Insurgent groups in the form of Boko Haram, Jabhat al-Nusrah and the Islamic State aim to abolish the modern state system and replace it with a caliphate system of rule (Siebert, von Winterfeldt & John, 2016, p. 26). This objective is different from those of conventional insurgencies, such as the Tamil and FARC insurgents who pursued political and/or economic objectives but did not challenge the legitimacy of the modern state system.

The difference in the objectives of both categories of insurgent groups is traceable to the Salafi-jihadi doctrine that has spread increasingly over the last two decades. The September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre towers in New York was followed by a United States’ (US) led global war on terrorism. As the “war on terror” in the Middle East expanded, the recruitment drive of Islamist militants was equally bolstered. Hegghammer (2006) notes that images depicting the sufferings of Iraqis at the hands of American soldiers became symbols of Muslims’ suffering and employed by militant Islamist groups to facilitate recruitment (p. 22). Similarly, Rubenstein

comments that the conformity of the invasion to “well-established patterns of imperialist intervention, vastly increased the number of local insurgents joining in attempts to expel the occupiers, as well as the number of anti-Western terrorists active in other nations” (2010, p. 501). BH, which began its insurgency against the Nigerian state in 2010, is one of those insurgent groups that emerged within the above milieu. In the light of the difference between older and newer forms of insurgencies, it is imperative that existing conceptualizations and approaches to counterinsurgency are re-examined to ascertain their appropriateness in the emergent contexts. My research seeks to answer the following question: given the Salafi ideology of BH, can population-centric counterinsurgency be an effective state response?

### **Overview of Nigerian State Response to Boko Haram Insurgency**

Overall, the Nigerian state response to the BH insurgency can be classified into the two main counterinsurgency approaches – enemy-centric and population-centric. These approaches are shaped by the state-security and human security paradigms, respectively. In terms of state-security, national security and state sovereignty are paramount at all times and the aim is usually to maintain the status quo. Hence counterinsurgency that is enemy-centric emphasizes the use of the state’s military might to crush an insurgency. In contrast, the human-security driven approach aims to improve the material conditions within conflict communities. The approach is anchored on the need to eliminate relative deprivation and systematic marginalization that are said to give rise to, or fuel, organised a rebellion against state authority (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2006, p. 9; Kivimäki, 2014, p.78-79; Cahill-Ripley, 2016, p. 226). Consequently, a population-centric approach is commonly underpinned by a commitment to dialogue and negotiations about how deep-seated socio-economic and/or political grievances can be resolved.

While the Nigerian state response to the BH insurgency has been a mixture of the two main approaches, the enemy-centric approach has been dominant. National legislation has been enacted to strengthen the state security architecture, and has provided political legitimacy for military operations in the north. For example, the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) 2011 and Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act 2013 provide the legal framework for the military operations in northern Nigeria (Sampson, 2015, p. 36). The TPA (2011 and 2013) criminalizes acts of terrorism and lays down legal procedures for the investigation, a search of premises, the arrest of suspects and seizure of materials in the course of prosecuting terrorism-related cases (Sampson, p. 36). The legislation provided the legal framework for the adoption of the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) in early 2015. The strategy has five cardinal components:

...to forestall – which prevents people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorists; secure - which strengthens protection capacity against terror attacks; identify - pre-emption through detection, early warning and ensuring that terrorist acts are properly investigated; prepare – to mitigate the impact of terrorists attacks by building resilience and redundancies to ensure continuity of business; and implement – a framework for the mobilization of coordinated cross-governmental efforts (PT February 5, 2015).

It provides the legal backing for the military operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which was created in April 2012 and deployed since July 2015 (Sawadogo, 2017). The current counterinsurgency command centre in Maiduguri, Borno state, is also governed by the above legislation.

The first military intervention against BH was necessitated by the inability of the Nigeria police to quell the violent riots of the group from July 25 to 30, 2009 (Oyewole, 2013, p. 257). The escalation of the BH conflict in 2011 prompted the former President, Goodluck Jonathan, to set up a “strong” military command known as the Joint Task Force Operation Restore Order (JTFORO) in the northeast (Strategic Comments, 2013). The establishment of the JTFORO was accompanied by the President’s invocation of his Emergency Powers as enshrined in section 305 of the 1999

Nigerian constitution. The constitution allows a state of emergency to be declared when there is an actual or threatened breakdown of public order and public safety anywhere in the Federation to such extent as to require extraordinary measures to restore peace and security, or where there is any other public danger which clearly constitutes a threat to the Federation's existence (Sampson, 2015, p. 37). Emergency rule was declared on December 31, 2011, in fifteen local government areas across the northern states of Plateau, Niger, Yobe and Borno (Animasawun, 2013, p. 118). As the military lost ground in many parts of the northeast in 2013, the President expanded the scope of the emergency rule to include Adamawa and end the mandate in Niger and Plateau states (Strategic Comments, 2013). Rather than being restricted to selected conflict hotbeds, the new mandate applied to all the local governments in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. Alongside changes in the scope of the emergency rule, JTFORO was replaced as the coordinating unit of Nigeria's counterinsurgency by the newly established Army 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Comolli, 2015, p. 127). The TPA legislation and the invocation of the President's emergency powers provide legal backing for the military's use of extreme force - in line with the coercive counterinsurgency approach - in its battle with Boko Haram.

Furthermore, in order to stifle the ability of BH to regroup in the neighbouring countries of Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, the Nigerian government started to coordinate its counterinsurgency efforts with these states in February 2015. A coalition of 8,700 soldiers, known as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), was set up in June 2015 to replace the previous ad hoc arrangement (Africa Research Bulletin, 2015). Since Nigeria started to coordinate its counterinsurgency operations with its immediate neighbours - initially under an informal arrangement, but currently within a more formalized coordinating framework - BH has suffered substantial military defeat in northeastern Nigeria. For example, as at January 2015, BH was

estimated to be in control of Nigerian territory equivalent in size to Belgium (Bappa, 2015, p. 6). However, by February 2016, the government claimed to have recaptured these areas from BH (Ehikioya, February 11, 2016). Despite being effective in maintaining control of territory in the northeast, enemy-centric COIN is beset with the following challenges: inadequate knowledge of the deployed military personnel of the conflict environment<sup>1</sup>; difficulty distinguishing combatants from non-combatants or terrorists from bystanders; and difficulty in gaining intelligence from the citizens, many of whom are suspicious of state representatives (Hills, 2009).

Counterinsurgency in northeastern Nigeria has also involved efforts to negotiate with BH. However, despite the government's formal announcement of the adoption of a soft counter-terrorism strategy in May 2014 (All Africa May 19, 2014), this strategy, which involves persuading the civilian population and/or insurgent fighters to defect to the side of the government (Plakoudas, 2015, p. 133; Khalili, 2011, p. 1472), is yet to feature meaningfully in the Nigerian government's response. Ironically, there were more attempts to establish channels of communication prior to the policy announcement. The first round of back-channel talks between the government and BH was reported to have taken place in August 2011, based on recommendations by a panel tasked to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with the group. This was followed by a meeting the following month between former president Olusegun Obasanjo and some BH members in Maiduguri (IRIN, 2012). At the meeting, the group purportedly laid down the following demands for a ceasefire: an end to arrests and killings of their members, prosecution of policemen responsible for the killing of group leader Mohammed Yusuf in June 2009, and payments of compensation to families of sect members killed by security personnel (IRIN, 2012). However, it is not clear whether these

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<sup>1</sup> Conflict environment is used here to refer to the geography of the conflict areas.

demands were made by people who had the authority to do so, given that the group's leadership later denounced such moves (IRIN, 2012).

Subsequently, on April 17 2013, the government set up a 26-member "Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North" with a three-month mandate to try to convince Boko Haram to lay down its arms in exchange for state pardon and reintegration into society (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 432). The Committee's objectives were to identify and constructively engage with key BH leaders and develop mutually acceptable modalities for the disarmament and pardon of the group's members (Thurston, 2013). In July, the presidential task force negotiating with Boko Haram announced that the committee had reached a ceasefire agreement with the group. Another announcement one month later stated that BH's Shura council (its highest decision-making body) had agreed to dialogue (SR, July 13, 2013). Also, in early 2014, the government claimed that it was pursuing a comprehensive programme of poverty alleviation, economic development, education and social reforms in order to rid the northeast of extremist tendencies and eliminate the potential for rebellion across the country (Akpan et al., 2014: 152). Then, on October 17, 2014, the Nigerian military announced that they had negotiated an agreement with BH which included a ceasefire and the freedom of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls (Al Jazeera, October 17, 2014). However, none of these ceasefire agreements held, and for each claim of an agreement, BH responded with a counter-claim and a reiteration of their resolve never to negotiate with a corrupt political establishment.<sup>2</sup> The rebuttal suggests that the government was in talks with individuals who lacked the authority to negotiate on behalf of the group.

The efforts to establish communication channels have taken place simultaneously with the military campaign against BH. Pursuing conciliation alongside coercive tactics can be an effective

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<sup>2</sup> See Premium Times, November 1, 2014, for Boko Haram's repudiation of government's extension of an olive branch.

way of dealing with moderate and extremist insurgents. However, it can be challenging to coordinate these two approaches in combating the same insurgent group. In the case of Boko Haram, a mixed response is handicapped by the facelessness of the group and the deficiency in military intelligence that make it difficult to distinguish between moderates and extremists. Or, conciliation might not be a good fit for this insurgent group. Or it might be a good fit, but the government is yet to take necessary steps to develop a rapport with the group and build trust in order to advance and implement such an approach. This study considers these possibilities in evaluating the suitability of P-COIN for ending BH's insurgency.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

The rise in Salafi-driven insurgencies makes identifying and understanding the nature of insurgent groups important when analysing the appropriateness of COIN approaches. In a testimony before the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee in February 2014, RAND researcher, Seth G. Jones, noted that North Africa and the Levant have witnessed an increase in the number, size and activity of Salafi-jihadi groups. He identified “the Mohammad Jamal Network (Egypt), Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Egypt), Mujahideen Shura Council (Egypt), Ansar al-Sharia Libya (Libya), al-Murabitun (Algeria and other countries), Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (Tunisia), Harakat Ansar al-Din (Mali), and Boko Haram (Nigeria)”, as evidence of the increasing scope of Salafi-jihadism (Jones, 2014a, p. 4).

Similarly, in research conducted on behalf of the Office of the US Secretary of Defence, Jones discovered that the number of Salafi-jihadi groups globally more than doubled between 2001 and 2013. Jones reveals that while there were only 20 such groups in 2001, the number had jumped to 49 by 2013 (2014b, p. 27). It is therefore imperative to re-examine COIN approaches. Otherwise, like much of the scholarship on BH, policy prescriptions that flow from them will be tailored for

other kinds of insurgencies. In the last five years, many scholarly works on armed insurgency in Nigeria have focused on approaches to end the Boko Haram conflict (for example, Aghedo & Osumah, 2012; Agbiboa, 2013; Agbiboa, 2014; David et al, 2015; Bamidele, 2016). However, most of this research fails to incorporate BH's religious ideology in their assessment regarding the appropriateness of specific COIN approaches.

The tendency amongst existing scholarship on BH has been to concentrate on analysing the socio-economic and political aspects of the conflict environment, to the exclusion of the Salafi nature of the group itself. Thus, the conclusions reached on how to end the violence do not emanate from an interrogation of the characteristics of the group, but emerge out of a focus on the environmental factors that supposedly produced grievance and subsequently, violence. Consequently, a number of dominant studies on the topic suggest dialogue and negotiations as pathways to peace (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012, p. 866; Sampson, 2016, p. 141). My research suggests that these policy prescriptions are flawed because there is a disjuncture between the assumptions on which they are based and the nature of the insurgent group. Advocates of P-COIN suggest that Boko Haram is largely a product of socio-economic maladies in the country, especially in the north, thus, an improvement in material conditions in the region will weaken the insurgency and lead to its demise (Yusuf, 2013; Bamidele, 2015). However, these studies do not sufficiently demonstrate an association between socio-economic factors and the group's purported objective to substantiate such a claim.<sup>3</sup> And while it is not inconceivable that some members may be motivated by economic objectives, the Salafi nature of BH, an important variable of the conflict context, must be included in the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Boko Haram claim to be fighting for the abolishment of the Western mode of governance and the restoration of the Caliphate system of rule in northern Nigeria.

Consequently, by analysing the suitability of P-COIN based on BH's nature as Salafi-jihadi this project fills a gap in scholarship. In contrast to much of the existing scholarship on BH, this study places BH at the centre of the assessment of P-COIN. By moving the analysis away from the environmental context<sup>4</sup> and concentrating more on group features, such as its ideology and membership, this project avoids obscuring important determinants of whether a P-COIN approach would succeed or fail.

### **Justification of the Study**

The deep and far-reaching effects of the conflict make a study on its resolution significant. BH insurgency has resulted in many deaths and adversely affected agricultural production. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), BH has killed more people than any other terrorist group in the world, including the Islamic State (GTI, 2015, pp. 38-39). BH is also responsible for deaths and deprivation in an indirect way. For example, the insurgency has caused food shortage for an estimated 5.5 million people (Africa Research Bulletin, 2015). And small-scale farmers have witnessed a slump in their revenue since it became unsafe to work on their farms (Adeyemi-Suenu, 2014, p. 32). In addition to the above conditions engendered by the group's activities, there are signs that the insurgency is deepening ethnoreligious and political divides in Nigeria.

BH is known to target Muslims who disagree with their extremist ideology, but the disproportionate attacks on Christians and the destruction of church buildings (Pham, 2016, p. 12) create an appearance of a religious war. It is this impression that makes an increasing number of southerners to fear that northern Muslims residing in the south may be sympathetic to BH (Osumah, 2013, p. 550). In addition, Nigerians' perceptions about the motive of BH mirror pre-

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<sup>4</sup> Environmental context refers to those factors such as socio-economic conditions which dominate explanations of the emergence of Boko Haram.

existing regional and religious divides. For example, while northern Muslims view the group as a creation of southern politicians who seek to destabilize the north, southern Christians believe that the insurgency was engineered by northern politicians who wanted to unsettle the former President, Goodluck Jonathan (Bappah, 2016, p. 153; Olaniyan and Asuelime, 2014, p. 103), a Christian from a minority southern Nigeria ethnic group. Although these ideas may be unfounded, their existence only serves to exacerbate the north-south religio-politico divides. And the longer the insurgency persists, the more widely distributed the ideas will be, and this would take Nigeria closer to a full-blown ethno-religious war. Such deterioration would be a catastrophic outcome for the country as well as the West African sub-region. Given the possibility of refugee flows into other parts of Africa, and into Europe and North America, such a conflict would also have security implications beyond African borders.

The global proliferation of Salafi-jihadi groups post-9/11 also makes this project significant. Indeed, the insurgency in Nigeria is not limited to the country and the group has begun to develop strong ties with other Jihadi groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). For example, “Boko Haram apparently took a cue from ISIS in stoking sectarian conflict between Muslims in Nigeria with its attacks on the small minority of adherents to Shia Islam. This is just as ISIL’s official English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, cited Boko Haram’s kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls as precedence for its enslavement and sexual abuse of Yazidi women and girls in Iraq” (Pham, 2016, p. 13). And, in August 2016, ISIS announced the replacement of BH leader, Abubakar Shekau, by Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, thus, creating a new BH faction (CBS News, August 3, 2016) and cementing the establishment of ISIS’ West African front. Consequent upon these developments, it is more expedient now than ever to re-examine the appropriateness of existing counterinsurgency approaches and advance policy-relevant analysis.

## **Methodology and Approach**

Naturalism constitutes the ontological, epistemological and methodological orientations of this study. Naturalism assumes that there is a Real World out there that exists independently of our senses and that we can gain access to that World by thinking, observing and recording our experiences carefully. For naturalists, something is true when somebody has seen it as true and recorded it as such (Moses & Knutsen 2012, p. 9). The “Real World” may be experienced through systematic sense perception and subsequently communicated through a reliable medium of language – clear and precise observation statements. Inherent in this communication are statements that accurately correspond to the state of affairs in the real world. A statement is said to be true if what it says corresponds to reality (Moses & Knutsen, p. 29). In sum, naturalists assume that the world is real, and is constituted by independent particulars which interact in regular and patterned ways and that these interactions are accessible to human beings by way of sense perception. Regularities in the Real World are uncovered and documented as accumulated associations. It is assumed that human knowledge grows over time through the accumulation of observation statements, of tested and true correlations, and of logical argument (Mill 2002 cited in Moses and Knutsen, p. 30).

My study begins from the assumption that the ‘true’ nature of BH can be known, and that knowing about the group’s nature is necessary to determine appropriate policy responses. As is outlined below, central to my project is Jeremy Weinstein’s (2007) argument that the forces which underpin an insurgent group’s emergence shapes its use of violence and conditions the form that it assumes. My study is founded on this assumption, but also extends Weinstein’s theorizing by suggesting that the viability of a COIN strategy is shaped by the emergent nature of an insurgent group. Given that BH belongs to a category of groups different from older insurgencies, I use the

BH conflict as a case for exploring broader questions around what is the appropriate response to Salafi-driven insurgencies. The findings of this study generate important questions that necessitate further research in other contexts in which the Salafi-jihadi ideology is a factor. Because no other work had explored the issue, this study serves as the first block in building a theory of counterinsurgency against Salafi-driven insurgencies.

I adopt a qualitative approach in this project and use Nigeria as a case study to examine whether countries that are faced with Salafi-driven insurgencies can end them using a P-COIN approach exclusively.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methods**

A potentially effective counterinsurgency approach is one informed by the nature of the insurgency that is being confronted. Further, the nature of an insurgent group is constitutive of the factors that influenced its formation. My project is founded on this premise. Therefore, in this section, I examine works on insurgent group formation and organisational development in order to demonstrate how the factors which enable group formation shape group nature and why it is important to base counterinsurgency on the emergent nature of the group. Jeremy Weinstein's seminal work, which explains the variation in patterns of insurgent violence, provides valuable insights into how the nature of insurgent groups develops. According to Weinstein, insurgent leaders face many barriers in organizing an insurgency to challenge an established government militarily. They must, for example,

raise capital to finance the logistics of a military campaign, recruit foot soldiers willing to risk their lives in battle against a stronger government force, and generate support from civilians who can supply food, information about the location and strategies of government forces, and valuable labour in support of the movement (Weinstein, 2007, p. 7).

To overcome the above challenges, insurgent leaders may exploit two sets of endowments – economic and social. On the one hand, they may extract and sell natural resources, tax the civilian population, indulge in criminal activities or receive external financial support. On the other hand, they may draw on “shared beliefs, expectations, and norms that may exist in (or be mobilised from within) certain ethnic, religious, cultural, or ideological groups” (Weinstein, p. 7).

Of all the barriers mentioned earlier, convincing potential recruits to participate in the insurgency is the most challenging. For example, recruits face potential dangers in confronting the incumbent government, yet the entitlements they are guaranteed if the insurgency is successful is nothing more than the material benefits accruable to an average non-participating civilian (Weinstein, p. 8). Thus, in order to motivate foot soldiers to bear the risks of the insurgency, leaders have to develop appeals beyond the material benefits that are expected to accompany political change. For instance, insurgent leaders may, according to Weinstein, “develop appeals around ethnic, cultural, and ideological claims, playing on the allegiance of potential recruits to a particular set of ideals” (p. 8). Of particular interest in this study is the development of appeals around ideological claims. Here, ideology is used to refer to a set of beliefs “that promotes a particular way of understanding the world and shapes relations between members of a group and outsiders, and among members themselves” (Ugarriza & Craig, 2013, p. 450).

According to the socio-psychological theory of insurgency, ideology proves to be an efficient tool in the establishment of insurgent groups because it enables the development of coercion and domination mechanisms, helps to push people to take violent action, and facilitates the creation of us-versus-them mentality (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001 cited in Ugarriza & Craig, 2013, p. 448). However, ideological or otherwise, initial endowments do not present the same opportunities to potential recruits, hence insurgent groups tend to attract different types of people

depending on their assessment of the costs and benefits of joining. For example, Weinstein notes that

where participation is risky and short-term gains are unlikely, rebel groups tend to attract only the most committed investors - activist rebellions, but where participation involves fewer risks and individuals can expect to be rewarded immediately for their involvement, groups tend to attract consumers - opportunistic rebellions (Weinstein, 2007, p. 9).

The initial endowments determine the membership profile of insurgent groups, as shown in the quote above. In turn, the membership profile affects the internal organisation and group strategies.

In designing the group's organisation, insurgent leaders must decide how best to ensure that orders are followed and how resources would be extracted from the civilian population without undermining their support. Weinstein (2007) notes that the options available to the leaders are "a function of the resource environment in which the group formed and its profile of recruits" (p. 10). He uses the two membership profiles presented above – activist and opportunistic – to describe how the type of recruits affects group organisation. According to the author,

activist movements can maintain internal discipline by drawing on established norms and networks enabling them to decentralize power within their armies; opportunistic rebellions must permit indiscipline in order to maintain their membership while holding on to the reins of military strategy. Activist insurgents can often obtain resources by striking cooperative bargains with non-combatant populations; opportunistic groups tend to employ coercive tactics because they cannot credibly commit to non-abusive behaviour (Weinstein, p. 10).

By linking the barriers to organising an insurgency to the variation in group profile and structure, Weinstein is able to explain why the character and level of insurgent violence vary across conflicts. Weinstein's work is instructive for my study, especially with regard to the argument that the factors which influence group formation continue to shape how the group functions in the post-enlistment phase of an insurgency. The above points emanate from Weinstein's study of insurgent groups in Uganda, Mozambique and Peru, and are supported by the findings of Ugarriza and Craig's (2013) study of armed groups in Colombia. According to the authors, "ideology continues

to play a role in the internal dynamics of Colombian armed groups and combatants' ideological development is influenced not only by pre-enlistment experiences but also by participation in a particular group" (Ugarriza & Craig, p. 445). Rather than merely "window-dressing greed-motivated actions" they found that ideology plays a crucial role as an organising and mobilising factor even after fighting has broken out (Ugarriza & Craig, pp. 448-449). In other words, ideology influences who join an insurgent group and also shapes group nature as the insurgency evolves.

The findings of Ugarriza and Craig (2013) lend credence to the idea of using insurgents' statements to verify assumptions about group nature on which counterinsurgency theorising will be based. In their assessment of the ideological dimensions of the Colombian conflict, the authors found discourse, attitudes and emotional responses to be three dimensions of the same phenomenon - ideology (Ugarriza & Craig, p. 50). By discourse, they mean "sets of statements that reveal the use of power and knowledge" (Ugarriza & Craig, p. 450). They understand attitude as "the readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain way, based on an underlined psychological orientation" (Ugarriza and Craig, p. 451). And lastly, the authors view emotions as "psychological states of readiness for action that are triggered by internal and/or external events" (Ugarriza & Craig, p. 451). Given that these concepts are three dimensions of the same phenomenon, it is reasonable to expect that if ideology is a factor in a particular conflict then it will be reflected in the statements of insurgent leaders and followers, and will influence their attitudes and emotions. Going by the definition of attitudes and emotions as "psychological states of readiness for action", these behaviours can be examined to gain an understanding of group nature.

Informed by these scholars, I contend that we can expect to come to a reasonable understanding of the nature of an insurgent group by examining the factors which enabled its

emergence. My work begins with this assumption but goes further by suggesting that counterinsurgency theorising should also be informed by an examination of group nature. I argue that because not all factors that could possibly cause an insurgency will be present in every context, the appropriate way to theorise about how a particular insurgency can be ended is to examine the nature of the insurgent group. Conversely, if we focus exclusively on the conflict environment for clues on the factors that enabled the emergence of an insurgency, and by extension, how to end it, we stand the risk of identifying both relevant and spurious factors. The result will be the development of an inaccurate understanding of the particular insurgency, leading to the development of inappropriate COIN strategies. Therefore, the crucial task for counterinsurgency scholars is to develop the best possible profile of the insurgent group under study. We can begin by identifying the possible factors that influenced the emergence of an insurgency by examining the environment where it formed. Then we can assess the relevance of these factors in each situation by examining the statements of insurgent leaders and/or foot soldiers depending on what is feasible. The statements that reveal motivation will provide clues on the factors at play, and by extension, how governments can best respond. Reaching this conclusion with regard to the BH conflict requires that multiple sources of data are employed.

According to Creswell (2013), the enabling of an in-depth understanding of a case is one quality of a good qualitative case study, and this is achieved by using multiple sources of data (p. 98). Consequently, this project makes use of both secondary and primary sources. Books, journal articles and conference papers on conflict, conflict cycles or processes, conflict resolution procedures and counterinsurgency are used to develop a theoretical framework on how the nature of an insurgent group evolves and its potential impact on conflict resolution processes. The same sources are employed to develop a historical context for the subsequent examination of the nature

of Boko Haram and the counterinsurgency measures deployed by the Nigerian government. I also draw on national and international newspapers, which serve as sources of Boko Haram's communication – messages to potential recruits and active fighters, claims of responsibility for attacks, responses to government's peace overtures, etc.

The national newspapers used were the following: Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Independent, The Nation, The Sun, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, and the Daily Post. The first five were selected because they are national and mostly cover news of national significance. The latter three also cover stories of national significance and have the extra advantage of publishing longer speeches. I sampled all the official statements released by the group between 2010<sup>5</sup> and 2017, and which are electronically available on newspapers' websites. I then analysed the speeches of BH's leader in order to assess the group's disposition to dialogue and negotiations and to uncover connections between their ideology, recruitment mechanism, strategy and approach to the government. Although interviewing captured BH members would likely provide good insights and important data, conducting primary research in Nigeria was impossible for this project due to time, costs and a range of ethical and other challenges that such work would entail. The consistency of some statements in the messages of BH leadership suggests that official press releases are a useful indication of motivation. But even if they are not a reflection of BH's core beliefs, and if these are simply political statements aimed at recruiting foot-soldiers, these messages also provide a window into what is motivating some people to join, an important factor in the analysis of how to respond.

Analysing the speeches of BH's leadership is important because merely acknowledging that BH is a Salafi-jihadi group is insufficient in examining how this ideology affects the prospects

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<sup>5</sup> The insurgency began in 2010.

of P-COIN. The sampled speeches are analysed using textual analysis. The speeches are analysed in order to identify the aspects of the Salafi ideology that is evident in BH's demands and to examine the implication for P-COIN, specifically whether we can realistically expect the Nigerian government to accede to them. With the understanding that the group may not embody all the features of Salafism, I analysed the speeches to first ascertain which of the features the group embodies. By doing so, my analysis is insulated from spurious data, for example, features of Salafism that exist in the literature but irrelevant in assessing the appropriateness of P-COIN in the context of BH insurgency. In addition to analysing the implication of the Salafi-informed demands for the prospects of P-COIN, I examined how the messages are presented, whether the style of presentation is indicative of a group that is disposed to compromising on their objectives. In doing so, I draw on Fairclough's (2003) work on textual analysis for guidance.

Fairclough categorizes speech functions into four primary types - statements, questions, demands, and offers. The author notes that people talk or write for different purposes, to make a statement, ask a question, make a demand or extend an offer. Given the subject of my thesis, demand as a speech function is of particular interest. Fairclough also distinguishes between three forms of grammatical moods - declarative, interrogative, and imperative. According to Fairclough's description of grammatical moods, a mood is imperative when it is an authoritative command, is declarative if it is an explicit announcement of intentions and is interrogative if it elicits a positive or negative response (p. 117). Within each category of speech function identified above are speech acts. For example, "offer includes promising, threatening, apologizing, and thanking, and demand includes ordering, requesting, begging etc." (Fairclough, p. 109). The specific act of a speech function is determined by the grammatical mood adopted by the speaker (Fairclough, p. 117). In essence, we can distinguish between types of demand, based on whether

the language is imperative (authoritative command), declarative (announcement of intentions) or interrogative (eliciting a response). Thus, in order to identify BH objectives in the speeches of the group's leader, I looked out for sentences that are declarative. In order to ascertain BH's disposition to dialogue, I examined the speeches to see whether their demands are presented as "imperatives" or "interrogatives". That is, whether the messages invite dialogue or not. These statements are examined vis-a-vis BH's actual activities in order to ascertain whether they are genuine beliefs.

The project reviewed works on the COIN approach in order to identify the core assumptions that drive scholarship on COIN. I then examine BH-specific COIN literature to identify the main themes and areas of congruence and divergence. Subsequently, the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria is explored to gain insights into the forces that enabled the emergence of Islamist associations in the past, the dynamics of their operations, and the outcome of previous conciliatory efforts by the government. Through an examination of the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria, I discern the motivation of Islamists that existed before BH. Through the same process, I identify the responses of government to the activities of BH's forebears and assess how such measures fared. The historical overview of Islamism in the region also unveils the factors which aid Islamist mobilization there. Through this examination of the history of Islamism in northern Nigeria, from the time of Uthman Dan Fodio to Mohammed Yusuf (BH's founder), I obtained information on the circumstances of BH's emergence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are three main limitations I faced during the study. First, the Boko Haram insurgency is still an evolving war, thus, the trajectory of the conflict remains unpredictable. Therefore, there is the risk that changes in the conflict dynamic might occur which may invalidate some of the

assumptions upon which this study is founded. Second, it would have been useful to conduct interviews of captured or surrendered BH commanders and foot soldiers to gain a better understanding of their motivation. Primary research in Nigeria (including interview) was impossible due to time constraints and the anticipated difficulty of receiving ethics approval.

The third challenge relates to the issue of bracketing. I have been working on related topics on Boko Haram for several years, and thus already had views on some of the issues before beginning my research. Creswell (2013) addresses the issue of how much knowledge of a particular subject is too much or too little before a researcher embarks on a new project. As he notes, the researcher could be drawing conclusions while the research is still on-going, or assessing literature against formed opinions. To guard against these potential challenges, I consciously reflected on my identity as a Nigerian Christian from the south and my opinion on the BH conflict and worked hard to bracket off possible biases or extraneous influences during this research.

### **Positionality**

I feel a sense of obligation as a qualitative researcher to declare my involvement within the site of the research. I am a Nigerian from the mainly Christian south, and while I have not been directly affected by the war, it still is of grave concern to people who live in, or have relatives, in the south. The fear of a possible spillover has been evident since the conflict peaked in 2012. This means that I, like most Nigerians, have a vested interest in its resolution. It is this interest that motivated me to attempt to fill the gaps identified in the COIN literature.

### **Organisation of the Study**

This thesis is organised into three main chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter one reviews the literature on the Boko Haram conflict, and examines the core debates in the broader

COIN and BH-focused COIN literature in order to understand the assumptions on which specific prescriptions are based, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of P-COIN. As I show, the scholarship on how the government should respond to BH is predominantly anchored on the understanding of Boko Haram as socio-economically driven. Chapter two traces the roots of fundamentalism in northern Nigeria with a view to developing the richest possible profile of BH and understand the outcome of previous conciliatory engagements between the government and older Islamist groups in the region. It provides a brief history of Islam in northern Nigeria and the emergence of Islamic sects in the region, followed by an exploration of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the north and the emergence of Boko Haram within this environment. It also examines the factors that shaped the evolution of Boko Haram prior to the July 2009 riots. Chapter three has two sections. The first examines the speeches of BH's leadership in order to determine the extent to which they reflect the Salafi ideology and whether they indicate a willingness to dialogue with the Nigerian government. In the second section, I evaluate the appropriateness of a state response underpinned by P-COIN based on the identified strengths and weaknesses of the approach, the discoveries on the forces that enabled the emergence of Boko Haram and its Salafi-jihadi ideology. The concluding part of the thesis summarises the main points and key conclusions that emerge from the project.

## **Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Counterinsurgency “doctrine” must involve a balance between the focus on theorising about government’s response to insurgencies and understanding the nature of insurgencies. Achieving this balance is pertinent in the light of the fact that no two insurgencies are caused by identical factors and no two contexts are the same. Even two Salafi-driven insurgencies will be different in nature if each is the result of, and shaped by, a unique interplay of factors. By placing emphasis on what the government should or should not do in COIN campaigns, counterinsurgency theorists limit their understanding of the uniqueness of each insurgency (see, for example, Smith, 2014; Gventer, 2014). Conversely, achieving a balance between the focus on counterinsurgents and insurgents will ensure that COIN theory on a particular case is informed by an understanding of the context of that conflict. This chapter demonstrates the importance of refocusing COIN theory in this regard.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I examine the population-centric and enemy-centric schools of counterinsurgency thought in order to identify the main arguments of scholars in both schools as well as the similarities and differences between the approaches. The section examines the works of P-COIN advocates, such as Kitson (1971), Kilcullen (2006), Kalyvas (2006), and Tan (2014) as well as E-COIN advocates like Herring (1982), Luttwak (2007), Cohen (2014), and Ucko (2016). Discussing both schools of thought is important as they inform, albeit to varying degrees, the scholarship on Nigerian state response to BH. The second section examines the P-COIN and E-COIN informed literature on state response to BH in order to identify specific policy prescriptions and understand their strengths and limitations as potential pathways to ending the BH insurgency.

## **Ending Insurgencies: Between Population-centric and Enemy-centric Counterinsurgency Approaches**

Because counterinsurgency is generally viewed as a reaction or response to insurgency (Galula 1964, p. 3), the conceptualisation of the former normally proceeds with an understanding of the latter. Common to most definitions of insurgency is the notion that it involves an attempt by a group to bring about political change. For instance, Kitson (1971) defines insurgency as “the use of armed force by a section of the people against the government for the purpose of overthrowing or changing the way they conduct business” (p. 48). Similarly, insurgency has been defined as a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources - for example, organisational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations - and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics (O’Neill, 1990, p. 13). Given that the concept of “counterinsurgency” is logically contingent on that of “insurgency”, it follows that the concept refers to all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency and reinforce the government (Kilcullen, 2006, p. 112). Such measures may include military force, dialogue and appeasement. Implicit in Kilcullen’s definition is the idea that at the core of any COIN is a basic knowledge of the nature of the insurgent group. The same should be true for state actors who engage in counterinsurgency operations and other conflict scholars who theorize about ending insurgencies.

Within International Relations (IR), COIN’s development is traceable to the works of former military personnel like David Galula (1964), Frank Kitson (1971), and more recently, John Nagl (2002). As noted, there are two main theories of COIN – population-centric and enemy-centric – which offer opposing assumptions about how incumbent governments should act during an insurgency. Of these theories, P-COIN has most consistently been prescribed by COIN scholars

in the West due to its acclaimed role in ending the 1948-1960 insurgency of Malayan communists (Gventer et al., 2014, p. 9; Plakoudas, 2015, p. 133). The acclaimed success of the U.S. COIN effort in Iraq in 2007 also enhanced the reputation of P-COIN as an effective approach (Dixon, 2012, p. 2). The success of the approach is attributed to an interlocking programme of military, economic, and social measures, presumably underpinned by a policy of “winning hearts and minds” (Gventer et al., p. 9).<sup>6</sup> The predominant people-centric nature of the COIN scholarship on Nigeria is influenced by two related developments: the promotion of a Malayan-style approach to all insurgencies post-9/11 by COIN advocates (Hack, 2009, p. 394); and a universal panacea status that apparently emerged out of its implementation by the U.S. in Iraq in 2007 (Ucko, 2009, p. 16). The implication of these influences on analysis by some scholars within the COIN debate is the tendency to decontextualize the application of COIN strategies. The obvious drawback is that it is the context of the insurgency that should inform whether COIN is population-centric, enemy-centric or mixed.

While both the P-COIN and E-COIN approaches focus on ending insurgencies, the schools of thought differ in their assumptions of how this outcome can be achieved. In particular, the approaches are distinguishable by the significance placed on the support of the civilian population in COIN campaigns. For example, adherents of P-COIN understand counterinsurgency as fundamentally a control problem. Hence, gaining control over the population, and the environment (physical, human, and informational) in which that population lives is viewed as the essential task (Kalyvas, 2006). The population is viewed as “‘the sea’ in which the insurgents ‘swim’”, hence sufficient control over the population would starve the insurgents of support, and result in the insurgency withering away (Paul et al., 2016, p. 1022). According to Dixon, counterinsurgency “is

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<sup>6</sup> From 1948 to 1960, British troops were engaged in a counterinsurgency operation to fend off the rebellion of the armed wing of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Malaya was one of the territories that later formed Malaysia.

above all a political activity designed to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the local population to the government side” (Dixon, 2012, p. 12). Thus, to end an insurgency, according to P-COIN theorists, counterinsurgents must strengthen local governments’ capacity to provide essential social services, employ propaganda to persuade the population to abandon the insurgents, and only use minimum force to avoid alienating the population (Kitson, 1971, pp. 71,90). Similar views are expressed by Tan (2014) who notes that protecting the civilian population from violence is the primary “security task” because it is only when this is guaranteed that governments will be able to re-establish institutions of governance and implement developmental programmes (Tan, p. 248). Contrary to this focus on the political situation or material well-being of the local population, the E-COIN approach is marked by the use of overwhelming force to eliminate the enemy (Herring, 1982, p. 58). Although the factors that underlie the outward exhibition of violent rebellion are acknowledged, degrading and ultimately defeating the insurgents is the immediate security objective (Khalili, 2011, p. 1472; Plakoudas, 2015, p. 132).

Both COIN approaches also differ in their assumptions about how the civilian population should be treated and how their support for COIN campaigns can be obtained. P-COIN is premised on the assumption that to be successful in ending an insurgency, the incumbent government “must treat people well” (Asal et al., 2016, p. 53), but adherents of the E-COIN approach think differently. To achieve COIN success, scholars within this school of thought aver that

the military should employ conventional tactics and overwhelming force in an ‘enemy-centric’ campaign to defeat the adversary by destroying the insurgents and intimidating the enemy population. The enemy is to be rooted out and killed, if the enemy fight among the people then those who shelter the enemy are also enemies who are to be killed or terrorised – perhaps by exemplary violence – into either supporting the government side, submitting to its will or being wiped out. This fear will win the ‘rational’ calculating ‘minds’ of the local population, if not the ‘hearts’, to the governments side (Asal et al., p. 52).

Similarly, Luttwak notes that “a massacre once in a while remained an effective warning for decades” (2007, p. 36). The author further argues that for governments to succeed, they must be willing to “employ brute force against civilians to out-terrorize the insurgents, so that the fear of reprisals outweighs the desire to help the insurgents or their threats” (Luttwak, p. 36). In the same vein, Gentile (2009) disagrees with the notion that persuasion can produce counterinsurgency success, and argues that it is deaths, destruction and deportation that historically have caused the defeat of insurgents (p. 122).

Relatedly, French (2011) and Pampinella (2015) note that the realities of the counterinsurgency campaigns which supposedly inform the P-COIN approach belie the assumptions of its advocates. Pampinella, for example, states that the control of the movement of the civilian population in Malaya, Algeria, and Vietnam contradicts the assumptions of the “persuasive theories” (P-COIN) of counterinsurgency which flow from those COIN efforts (p. 506). French succinctly expresses the same perspective. According to the author, “the cornerstones of most British counterinsurgency campaigns were coercion and counter-terror, not kindness and economic development” (French, p. 65). Cohen (2014) also debunks the argument that “being nice” to the local population can deflate an insurgency and secure victory for counterinsurgents. Referencing scholarly research on the Malayan COIN efforts, such as Clutterbuck (1966) and Elliott (2007), Cohen argues that contrary to the widely-held notion that the “winning of hearts and minds” was instrumental in the counterinsurgency success in Malaya, the British government gained popular support among the civilian population only after military force was employed to overpower the insurgents (p. 10). According to Cohen, gratitude for being spared the horrors of war and the fact that the civilian population had no other choice but to support the victorious side

explain the “winning of hearts and minds” (p. 621). In other words, the “winning of hearts and minds” was an effect, rather than a cause, of victory.

Although the idea that “being nice” to the civilian population can help end an insurgency clearly underestimates the harsh realities of war, the notion that military victories against insurgents can “win hearts and minds” does not completely invalidate the argument of P-COIN advocates. For example, Gventer et al. (2014) note that the success of P-COIN in Malaya and Iraq is attributed to a combination of military, economic, and social measures (p. 9). Similarly, Robert Thompson, one of the pioneering advocates of P-COIN, in his comment on negotiations and amnesty implied that it is important that the government demonstrates its military strength before negotiating to end an insurgency. The author noted thus:

...negotiations, however, could undermine the government’s credibility and image of determination, this ‘appeasement’ or ‘weakness’ could undermine the military’s counterinsurgency campaign. An amnesty, for example, could only be offered from a position of overwhelming strength when it could not be presented by the insurgent as ‘weakness’ (Thompson, 1966 cited in Dixon, 2012, p. 59).

Thus, even if it is battlefield success that makes the civilian population support the counterinsurgents, Cohen’s (2014) observation does not fundamentally undermine the idea that “winning hearts and minds” can end an insurgency. After all, additional support, irrespective of how it is gained by the government, means less human resources available to continue with the insurgency. In other words, military victory may win “hearts and minds” which then lead to the end of the insurgency. In this sense, the winning of “hearts and minds” can be an effect as well as a cause of victory.

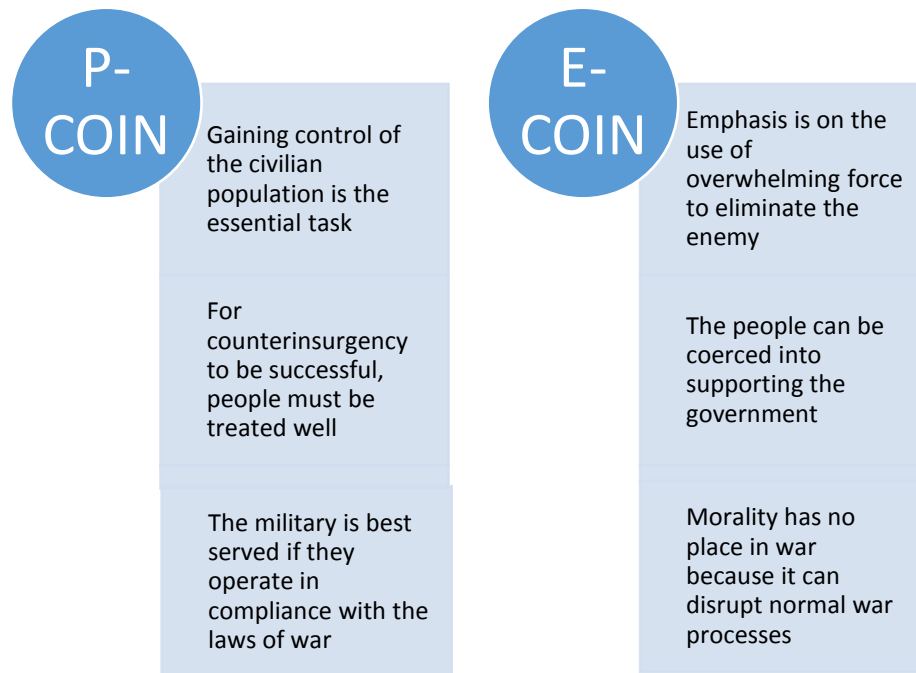
The use of military power to obtain battlefield victories in the context of P-COIN presupposes that it is possible to distinguish between the civilian population and insurgents. In fact, Plakoudas (2015) notes that “partisans of a population-centric approach claim that counterinsurgents must, first and foremost, seize control of the (local) population in order to isolate

and overpower the insurgents” (p. 133). Branch and Wood (2010) also note that one of the claims of P-COIN advocates is that defeating insurgents require that the government wins “‘hearts and minds’ of civilians by engaging in violence only against insurgents, delivering public services to civilians, and carrying out needed reforms to government policy to sustain civilian loyalty and address grievances exploited by insurgents” (p. 3). It is argued that without such separation, the use of military force can alienate the local population to the extent that new insurgent groups would be formed to challenge the government - what Kilcullen (2009, p. 15) refers to as the phenomenon of “accidental guerillas”. In contrast, E-COIN theorists do not believe that it is possible to achieve such separation (Pampinella, 2015, p. 506). Some also argue that indiscriminate use of violence against civilians and insurgents does not make the emergence of “accidental guerillas” inevitable. For instance, Ucko notes that because counterinsurgents who employ E-COIN are disposed to using brute force to end an insurgency, they can deploy more troops to consolidate their battlefield successes against insurgents “and shape whatever remains of the population according to the preferences of the incumbent regime” (2016, p. 45).

The issue of violence against civilians examined above relates to the question of morality on which both schools of thought also differ. From the perspective of P-COIN advocates, militaries are best served in their fight against insurgents if they operate in compliance with the laws of war (Paul, 2016, p. 1022). After all, compliance with the laws of war ensures that COIN forces operate professionally to avoid civilian casualties, thus, helping the government to sustain civilian support. In contrast, scholars who advance the idea of E-COIN argue that morality is undesirable in war. For example, Coates notes that “the idea of a ‘just war’ and the harsh realities of war are too far apart for moral deliberation to be relevant”, and that such incompatibility can disrupt normal war processes and make matters worse (2006, p. 209). Coates’ (2006) assertion mirrors the argument

of realist scholars who see civilian casualties in wartime as unavoidable collateral damage. While Coates is correct in his assessment that COIN effectiveness may be encumbered by the laws of war, he fails to consider the possibility that civilian casualties can completely scuttle a COIN campaign if the international community begins to sanction the state and its military officers. Simply put, paying attention to morality may serve the strategic purpose of obtaining or sustaining international legitimacy more than it restricts COIN effectiveness. These differences are graphically depicted in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Differences Between E-COIN and P-COIN**



Despite the differences in the population-centric and enemy-centric schools of thought, one major criticism that can be levelled against both approaches is the emphasis placed on government's role in combating and defeating insurgencies (Krause, 2009, p. 49), to the exclusion of the targets of COIN - insurgents. As Smith puts it,

the solipsistic nature of much of COIN thinking – focusing exclusively on what the authorities should be thinking and doing – overlooks the necessity of being clear about the nature of the intellectual phenomenon that is being engaged, namely, the idea of insurgency (2014, p. 31).

Smith's contention reinforces the argument that understanding the nature of an insurgent group must constitute the starting point of all COIN analysis. In fact, it is impossible to arrive at an accurate assessment of what may or may not be an appropriate COIN approach without examining specific assumptions in relation to specific types of insurgency. More so, a COIN analysis that is done through pre-existing templates for action risks promoting an inflexible policy response on the part of the government (Smith, 2014, p. 53). Such analytical gap becomes even more problematic when one considers the fact that most insurgent groups are adaptive and unpredictable (Torpy, 2007, p. 21). The unpredictability and adaptive capacity of insurgent groups make it vital for the nature of the particular insurgent group to be factored into COIN analysis.<sup>7</sup> By doing so, counterinsurgency theorists can ensure that their policy prescriptions are based on the current dispositions, attitudes and emotions of insurgents.

It is a common assumption among some scholars and practitioners of P-COIN that specifics of a conflict are irrelevant: all insurgencies have similar dynamics and the solution to each is the same throughout time and space (Gventer et al., 2014, p. 23). For example, Robert Thompson (1965) is quoted as saying: “we can, in fact, talk about a counterinsurgency doctrine that is fungible from one country to another because all insurgencies and insurgency-threatened countries are fundamentally alike” (Thompson, 1965 cited in Dixon, 2012, p. 58). Thompson's argument about the fungibility of COIN doctrine flows from the assumption that the outbreak of resistance is a

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<sup>7</sup> Such adaptive capacity has been evident in the BH conflict. As noted in the review of state response literature, the group was able to switch to female suicide terrorism to adapt to the increasing coerciveness of the government. Boko Haram during the course of its rebellion have also been fluid in switching between conventional and guerilla-style warfare.

reflection of the failure of governance and the absence of material prosperity. According to Jackson (2014), it is this understanding that fosters the belief that a combination of population security, improved local and national governance, and economic development will induce peace and ensure a stable political order (p. 83). A related set of assumptions is that all insurgencies result from social grievances (Gventer et al., 2014, p. 16) and because all socially produced grievances are in some manner legitimate, they deserve to be either remedied or appeased (Nagl & Burton, 2010, p. 135).

The above assumptions are practically problematic in the Nigerian case in a number of ways. Given that BH has declined to negotiate with the Nigerian government to end the insurgency, their grievances will have to be gleaned from their stated objectives and other sources. If we are to infer the group's grievance from its stated objective of establishing an Islamic caliphate in northern Nigeria, can the imposition of governance structures that violate religious beliefs/values be considered a legitimate grievance? And even if it is legitimate, can such a grievance be remedied? More so, if the government pursues the policy alternatives that advocates of P-COIN suggest, what is the likelihood that such policies will be appropriate for addressing the real factors that underpin the insurgency? The only way to tell is by mapping the context of the insurgency. The next section begins that process.

### **BH's Emergence and Nigerian State Response**

The contextualization of BH's emergence is one area that has attracted scholarly interest since the insurgency began in 2010. The debate in this stream revolves around the place of relative deprivation and religion in the emergence of BH. While some scholars emphasise the role of perceived socio-economic and political inequalities (see, for example, Khan and Cheri, 2016; Suleiman and Karim, 2015; and Hansen, 2015), other scholars situate the group's emergence

within the pre-existing climate of Islamic extremism in northern Nigeria (Voll, 2015; Celso, 2015; Gray and Adeakin, 2015; and Alao, 2013). The second stream, which includes Pham, 2016; Olaniyan and Asuelime, 2014; Adeyemi-Suenu, 2014; and Osumah, 2013 focuses on the worsening effect of the insurgency on Christian-Muslim divide in Nigeria. Research in the third stream is focused on assessing how the conflict has affected the economy of the Sahelian region (see, for example, Emobi and Johnson-Rokosu, 2016; Opoku, Sakah and Alupo, 2016; Bakare, 2016; Njoku, 2015; Othman, Sule and Singh, 2015; Awojobi, 2014; Tukur and Fausat, 2014). The fourth stream, the feminism-informed literature, explores the gender dimensions of the conflict's impact (see, for example, Oriola, 2017; Maxfield, 2016; Seedat, 2016; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Jordan, 2015; Abdelwahab & Salisu, 2015; Zenn & Pearson, 2014). The fifth is the IR-focused stream, dominated by state response scholarship.

Debate amongst scholars in the IR stream is primarily concerned with advocating either P-COIN or E-COIN. The studies focused on P-COIN mainly identify dialogue and compromise as the only viable path to sustainable peace (Sampson, 2016; Yusuf, 2013; Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). However, other scholars, such as Nwankpa (2014), consider such proposals to be ill-conceived because they emanate from the relative success of the approach in a different kind of conflict. The E-COIN focused works evaluate the military response and explore the viability of a regional approach to combating Boko Haram. Some scholars within this cluster are critical of the military response to BH. Their critique revolves around lack of expertise and the tendency of coercion to further alienate the civilian population (Bappah, 2016; Aghedo, 2015; Fiore, 2014; Zenn and Pearson, 2014).

Given the focus of this thesis, the sections below focus on the emergence stream and state response cluster. In what follows, I briefly summarise the core arguments advanced by scholars within what I call the emergence stream.

### **Explaining BH's Emergence**

As stated earlier, existing scholarship on how Boko Haram came about are mainly concerned with either socio-economic conditions or pre-existing Jihadi inclinations. With slight variations, the former relies on Gurr's (1970) concept of relative deprivation. Several other scholars have espoused similar economic interpretations of violence (see, for example, Rosati et al., 1990; Evans, 1994; Collier et al., 2003, and Taydas and Peksen, 2012). However, Ted Gurr's "Why Men Rebel" informs much of the scholarship on BH's emergence, thus, warranting some discussion. "Relative deprivation", which was developed to explore the motivations behind the decision to riot, rebel or topple a government (accounting for group violence), builds on Miller's (1939) "frustration-aggression", which explains violence at the individual level and holds that human aggressive behaviour arises from frustration with a particular situation. The term "relative deprivation" was developed by Gurr to buttress his argument that the frustration-aggression explanation of human capacity for violence is not as straightforward as Miller had assumed. Rather, frustration results in anger and eventually violence only when it is sufficiently prolonged and sharply felt (Gurr, p. 24). The concept of relative deprivation indicates that the feeling of deprivation is not necessarily an objective representation of reality. It simply implies the discrepancy between what people think they deserve and what they think they will receive. The idea of relative deprivation is indirectly drawn on in explanations of BH's emergence.

The lack of investment in northern Nigeria is considered culpable in the emergent disconnect between the government and the socially and economically marginalised groups in that

part of the country. Alienation is understood to breed discontent, and this, in turn, leads to rebellion against the state (Maiangwa et al, 2012, p. 44; Bamidele 2015, p. 124). For example, David, Asuelime and Onapajo argue that the feeling of relative deprivation among the majority of Nigerians engenders a general atmosphere of discontent and disillusionment towards and about “the corrupt Nigerian state”. Therefore, anti-state movements like Boko Haram have emerged in response to the social and economic failures of government, thereby entrapping the nation in a web of insecurity, fear and terror (David et al., 2015, p. 103). But the authors are not categorical about the nature of BH’s intervention: they do not specify whether they seek changes to failed economic policies by overthrowing the government alone or overthrowing the government and then abolishing the modern state system. The distinction between these objectives is important in assessing the appropriateness of specific COIN approaches.

Daniel Agbibo advances a related argument but emphasizes rampant government corruption rather than policy failure per se. Corruption, according to him, has created a large pool of alienated citizens in northern Nigeria. Agbibo contrasts poverty in northern and southern Nigeria to support his claim, noting that “the economic disparities between the north and the rest of the country are particularly stark - in the north, 72 percent of people live in poverty, compared to 27 percent in the south and 35 percent in the Niger Delta” (Agbibo, 2014, p. 406). The economically deprived in the north are not only disillusioned with the government but also alienated from southern Christians (Agbibo, 2014, p. 406). Thus, for Agbibo, grievances about political corruption and unfair distribution of wealth are at the roots of the BH conflict. The idea of relative deprivation has more relevance in Agbibo’s contention than in David et al. (2015). However, like David et. al., Agbibo sees Boko Haram as an organisation of alienated youths fighting to redress perceived economic injustices.

On their part, Khan and Cheri (2016) emphasise the role of ineffective governance. Unlike Agbiboa, they do not explain BH's emergence by establishing a link between the unfair resource distribution and the tendency to rebel. Instead, they focus their analysis on the failure of the government to translate the vast amount of mineral resource deposits in northern Nigeria into a source of wealth creation in the region. Thus, although the perception of relative deprivation may produce grievances and potentially strife, Khan and Cheri agree with David et al (2015) that the cycle of violence originates from ineffective governance, not necessarily corruption, as Agbiboa had argued (Khan and Cheri 2016, p. 65). After all, it is assumed that in a system where good governance is entrenched, official corruption will be limited or non-existent. According to Khan and Cheri,

the ineffectiveness of poverty alleviation programmes, poor resource utilisation, lack of private initiative and overdependence on scarce public jobs are the factors that caused and sustained poverty in northern Nigeria to serve as the foundation of the turbulence in all sectors of society (p. 59).

The authors further aver that BH is caused by the same factors that they already noted as accounting for the turbulent political, religious, and social climate in northern Nigeria. In their words, "the Boko Haram crisis is an outcome of a cumulative effect of poverty, unemployment and a series of minor violent events that predate its emergence" (Khan & Cheri, p. 66). By suggesting that BH emerged as a result of the same factors that they also advance as explaining the turbulent climate in the north, Khan and Cheri raise an important question about the nature of BH. The authors' explanation of BH's emergence raises the question of why the BH insurgency is different from other episodes of violence in the region.

Contrary to the idea of self-organisation among alienated northern Nigerians that emanates from the scholarship discussed above, Suleiman and Karim (2015) suggest the active recruitment of disaffected individuals by BH leaders. For example, the authors note thus:

Boko Haram holds a puritanical view in adhering to Islamic injunctions and tends to have strong disdain for Western institutions due to the perceived belief that they support the inequitable political and economic system in Nigeria. This trend was amplified by the perception that the ruling elites perpetrated social injustice through the mismanagement of the collective wealth of the nation. Boko Haram took the opportunity to propagate its doctrines in the heart of the teeming disgruntled population (Suleiman & Karim, p. 2).

Despite noting that BH “sold” its doctrine to the disaffected population, Suleiman and Karim do not consider this factor to be a major reason why people decided to join the group. For instance, they argued that “although Boko Haram has been known for its fundamentalist doctrine, a major reason for its surge of activity has not been religious fervour, but the level of social injustice that gave rise to poverty and unemployment in the country” (Suleiman & Karim, p. 8). Ironically, however, the idea that Boko Haram preached its doctrine to discontented individuals offers a preliminary explanation for the distinctiveness of the nature of BH.

Like Suleiman and Karim, Hansen (2015) identifies Boko Haram as a religious movement but downplays the significance of religion in understanding its emergence. For example, the author notes that “in lieu of substantive political, economic, and social reforms especially poverty alleviation, history will inevitably repeat itself with yet another religiously based uprising” (Hansen, p. 2). By arguing that another religiously based uprising is inevitable in the absence of reforms, Hansen indirectly acknowledges that there is a religious aspect to the conflict. Yet, the author does not consider religion as a significant causal factor. In Hansen’s words, “BH can only be understood as a reaction to more than a half-century of corruption, venality, poverty, and abuse by the post-colonial Nigerian state ruled by a parasitic predator class” (2015, p. 1). Hansen takes the arguments of David et al. (2015) and Khan and Cheri (2016) a step further by viewing corruption as a symptom of the failed transition from an agrarian mode of production to a capitalist economy intertwined with a similar movement from colonial rule to post-colonialism (Hansen, 2015, p. 15). In other words, the emergent system of production is one in which a predatory ruling

class preys on the vast masses (Hansen, p. 15). Hence, the creation of a pool of disaffected youths by the Nigerian political and economic systems is an expected outcome. By attributing BH's emergence to the economic exploitation of the entire post-independent ruling class, Hansen (2015) is advancing Gurr's argument that when frustration is sufficiently prolonged and sharply felt, violence is likely to arise (1970, p. 24).

The question of why BH is different from other northern Nigerian Islamist groups emerges in Khan and Cheri's work but is not sufficiently answered. Suleiman and Karim (2016, p. 6) begin to answer this by explaining the group's relationship with the Salafi doctrine. Ironically, although Hansen's (2015) core argument is that "BH can only be understood as a reaction to more than a half-century of corruption", some of his views indirectly support arguments that BH's emergence can be understood from a religious dimension. For example, in explaining BH's emergence, the author notes that "given these manifest structural obstacles, combined with the lived experience of the vast majority of the northern Nigerian people, it is hardly surprising that movements claiming to have a solution to this vast suffering would emerge" (Hansen, p. 15). Although Hansen downplays the religious influence, the above contention makes a religious explanation more plausible. My point is that if BH's mobilisation power is anchored on its proposition of a better alternative to what the Nigerian state has offered for a century, we can say that BH's proposed alternative is as much a cogent explanation for its emergence as the socio-economic situation which predisposed people to participate in its insurgency. Is the socio-economic situation in the region a sufficient cause of participation, or is it only a necessary cause while BH's prescribed alternative system of rule is the sufficient cause? In other words, does economic despair independently draw people to BH or is the alternative system of governance that BH is fighting for the primary appeal to the group and the reason for its growth and support? Or, is it a

combination of both? These questions are important because understanding what led to its emergence and its growth are directly linked, I argue, to understanding how best to deal with the group.

With some variations, the scholarship discussed thus far has shown how ineffective governance and official corruption have produced poverty, a large pool of disaffected youths, and ultimately, BH insurgency. However, not all explanations follow the “bad governance/corruption – relative deprivation – rebellious tendency” line of argument. One such departure is Brinkel and Ait-Hida’s (2012) research, which establishes a relationship between corruption and insurgency, but bypasses the intersection of relative deprivation. In their explanation, corruption starves the security sector of funds, leading to a security vacuum. But, unlike the general population, corrupt officials have the means to provide their own security. They employ and arm unemployed youths to protect themselves and families, especially during election cycles. Ultimately, the militia groups formed by politicians evolve a logic of their own as patronage declines. As the inflow of money from their political patrons ceases, the groups begin to seek alternative sources of income, including armed robbery and ransom kidnapping (Brinkel and Ait-Hida, pp. 6-7). The authors’ discussion of the role of politicians in the creation of Boko Haram is consistent with existing scholarship on BH’s evolution. As will be shown in chapter two, BH was aided in its development by a mutually-beneficial relationship with politicians before the seemingly symbiotic relationship fell apart. The Boko Haram leadership helped shore up support for politicians but also acted as thugs for intimidating political opponents. The political capital which the group benefitted from this relationship was instrumental in their ability to evade prosecution for several years.

The above explanations of BH’s emergence flow from Ted Gurr’s (1970) research. However, problems emerge when trying to apply the concept of relative deprivation to understand

BH insurgency. Gurr's analysis was designed to apply to riots, rebellions and coups, all of which are distinct from the kind of insurgency that is waged by Boko Haram and other Salafi-driven insurgent groups. The failure to critically examine BH's nature is one reason why scholars continue to advance Gurr's (1970) explanation. And, demonstrating that there is extreme poverty in the north is insufficient on its own to explain why BH emerged and what it is fighting for. Can the scholarship on historical Jihad provide the missing link? To that, we will now turn.

### **Emergence: Historical Jihad**

Another body of scholarship (see, for example, Celso, 2015; Azumah, 2015; Alao, 2013) examines the emergence of Boko Haram in the light of a radicalised religious climate that predates BH's formation. Although also varying in emphasis, the crux of these studies is that the emergence of BH is better explained when situated within a long history of Jihadi tradition in northern Nigeria. These scholars do not discountenance relative deprivation but show that it is Islamism that provides a critical impetus for collective action. For them, Boko Haram emerged within the context of an unresolved history of Jihad but embodies unique features which set it apart from traditional Islamism. In other words, the group conforms to both traditional Islamism and the 21st-century trend of religiously legitimized violence (Voll, 2015). In this sense, although Boko Haram is part of the centuries-long history of Jihad - of militant opposition to rulers viewed as non-Islamic and rejection of political systems and social practices judged not to be in accord with Islam - it is not simply a continuation of this tradition. Rather, "it is a product of contemporary Muslim radical beliefs identified as Salafism" (Voll, p. 1185). In short, Boko Haram is not simply a manifestation of historical Jihad, but a synthesis of old ideas of Islamic rule and modern politics (Juergensmeyer, 2008, p. 263). This view provides a more direct response to the question of why BH is different from previously existing Islamist groups in northern Nigerian.

But other historical analyses of Boko Haram examine the group solely as a recent manifestation of historical Islamism (Alao, 2013; Celso, 2015) rather than a fusion of old and new. Alao's discussion of the causes of BH uprising suggests factors that correspond with the motivations of Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad and the Maitatsine uprising of the early 1800s and 1980s, respectively. First, the desire to prevent a return to the era of Jahiliyya (darkness or idol worship) and to curtail Christian evangelism in northern Nigeria is similar to Dan Fodio's crusade of Islamic purification in 1804 (Alao, p. 131). Second, as a response to the corruption of the religious and political establishments that has engendered social and economic inequalities in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram can be viewed as an heir to the Maitatsine (Alao, p. 132). Furthermore, Boko Haram's rejection of colonially bequeathed territorial boundaries is considered to be an expression of decades-long nostalgia for the caliphate system of rule which was abolished by British colonialists (Celso, 2015, p. 258).

Like Celso and Alao, Azumah (2015) treats the BH insurgency as a manifestation of longstanding inclinations for Jihad. He presents the group as a consequence of a tradition of Islamic absolutism fostered by a romanticised Jihadist legacy and disillusionment arising from failed experiments with Salafi-Wahhabi idealism. In his work, Boko Haram is seen as fourth generation Islamic fundamentalists with Uthman Dan Fodio as the progenitor (Azumah 2015, pp. 33-48). After Dan Fodio (an early 19th-century Islamic scholar) came Abubakar Gumi and Ibrahim Niass, then Mohammed Marwa and Ibrahim El-Zakzakky before Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau in the 21st century. Although unique in terms of the Islamist movements they helped create, all seven clerics are bound together by their shared Jihadi sentiments. Azumah recounts Gumi's obsession with the "golden period of Uthman Dan Fodio" and chastisement of northern emirs (kings) for returning to the very practices that led to Dan Fodio's purification of Islam (2015,

p. 36). According to Azumah, the ideological and doctrinal views of Abubakar Gumi inspired the creation of the Society for Removal of Heretical Innovation and Reestablishment of the Traditions of the Prophet - referring to Prophet Mohammed. This movement provided Gumi with the much needed organizational backing for his religio-politico activism in the 1970s (Azumah, p. 37). The teachings of Gumi's movement, as exemplified by its name, resonate with the activism of Marwa's Maitatsine, El-Zakzakky's Islamic Society and Yusuf's Boko Haram.

The same question that emerged from the discussion of relative deprivation is even more pertinent here. What made BH develop to the extent that it has, whereas those groups under other Islamic clerics after Dan Fodio did not experience such transformation from activism to Jihadism? The question challenges the notion that the group can be viewed solely as a manifestation of age long Jihadi sentiments. Voll's analysis of Boko Haram as a synthesis of traditional Islamism and the 21st-century Jihadi trend provides an answer to the puzzle. In essence, although Boko Haram is heir to Dan Fodio's purification crusade, the BH insurgency is also a departure from the traditional Jihadi mainstream. This departure, according to Voll (2015) is on account of BH's engagement with the modern Salafi idealism that originated in Saudi Arabia.

Gray and Adeakin (2015) take a different route in historicizing BH's emergence. They do not attempt to explain how the group came about but instead show its evolution manifests three elements of Islamism – missionary, activist and Jihadi. Each phase of the group's evolution is said to conform to each of these manifestations of Islamism, thus, illustrating a gradual descent to extremism. Between mid to late-1990s, BH activities were essentially missionary, and during this period the group's doctrine was promoted through “community outreach” (Gray & Adeakin 2015, p. 187). This means that they propagated their ideology through the rendering of “social services such as free health services, aid, and Islamist-based education/propaganda, especially among the

poor and or socially vulnerable” (Gray & Adeakin, p. 187). Between 2000 and 2003, the emphasis shifted from preaching to political engagement through rallies and participation in protests that called for the implementation of sharia in northern Nigeria (activist Islamism). As Gray and Adeakin note, and is well documented, Boko Haram’s descent to violence started in 2003, escalated in 2009 and developed into a full-blown insurgency from 2010. During this latter period, Boko Haram’s operations have been characterized by Jihadist Islamism – marked by the use of open-ended violence invoked by the Islamic concept of “al-jihad” to achieve a particular political objective, the establishment of a Caliphate (Gray and Adeakin, p. 188).

If the notion that the three-phase evolution of Boko Haram corresponds with each of the manifestations of Islamism is accepted, then, as in Voll’s analysis, I argue that we can illustrate how BH manifests the historical patterns of Islamism and at the same time represents modern Jihadi trends. When the dominant emphasis of the group was to Islamize through persuasive sermons and engage the government politically through protests and rallies, Boko Haram was well within the template of traditional Jihadism. Although BH organised protests which snowballed into violence between 2000 and 2003, this is not a fundamental departure from the ethos of activist Islamism. The activities of BH in the second phase of its evolution are similar to the modus operandi of other Islamic movements, such as those founded by Gumi and El-Zakzakky, and sharia law activists whose campaigns between 2000 and 2003 mounted immense political pressure on twelve northern Nigerian governments to expand the jurisdiction of sharia courts. The implication of this development (sharia law expansion) in the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the north and the emergence of Boko Haram within this ferment are both examined in chapter two.

As I show in chapter two, the third and current phase of BH’s evolution reflects a departure from the historical tradition and fits the rubrics of contemporary trends of Islamism – the use of

militancy and terrorism to pursue a political objective. The evolution of the Jihadist phase between 2009 and 2010 is instructive in understanding why BH is different from other Islamist groups in the north. This period coincides with the spread of Jihadi propaganda in response to what was seen as the crusader's invasion (the U.S. war in Iraq). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the invasion of Iraq contributed to the spread of Islamist propaganda across the globe that aimed to rally support for a global Islamist resistance (Rubenstein, 2010; Hegghammer, 2006). During this period, Salafi-driven Islamism metastasized, thus, explaining how Boko Haram evolved differently from other northern Nigerian Islamist groups. Unlike the other mainly Shia groups, BH started off as a Sunni Islamic sect, explaining why the group, rather than the others, would accept the call to Jihad.

The scholarship on the possible forces behind the emergence of Boko Haram presents us with two alternative explanations: relative deprivation engendered by ineffective governance and political corruption; or, the continuation of traditional fundamentalist sentiments, albeit intertwined with 21st-century trends of radical Islamism. Can these perspectives be reconciled to provide context for examining the appropriateness of P-COIN, and if so, how? I argue that although relative deprivation may have created an environment that was conducive for insurgency, the final push to rebel came from BH's Salafi worldview. In advancing this argument, I build on Brinkel and Ait-Hida's contention that "...what can be observed from outside an insurgency is the use of religion as an ideology, as an instrument for recruitment, as a legitimation of extreme violence, and as a criterion for the selection of targets" (Brinkel and Ait-Hida 2012, p. 5). If we can assess the use of Salafism as an instrument for recruitment by BH, then we can begin to understand the role which this ideology may have played in the group's emergence or growth or both. Lastly, if it is possible to observe the role of religious ideology in target selection and

violence legitimation, then we can discern the place of Salafism in BH's nature. The group's nature, I argue, constitutes the foundation for examining the appropriateness of any counterinsurgency approach. Ultimately, however, by directly examining the history of Islamism in northern Nigeria and situating the group's emergence and development within this historical exploration, we can come to a more accurate understanding of the place of relative deprivation and Salafi-jihadism in BH's nature. This discussion will be the focus of the next chapter. But, before turning to this historical overview, a summary of key scholarship on the Nigerian state's response is needed.

### **Nigerian State Response to BH: E-COIN or P-COIN?**

The Nigerian state response to BH insurgency has also been a subject of scholarly research. As noted, scholarship on how the Nigerian government can best respond to BH is informed by assumptions contained in general scholarship on counterinsurgency. E-COIN informed scholarship on BH is focused on assessing the implementation of an E-COIN approach. As noted, E-COIN is anchored on the assumption that a strong or forceful retaliation to group violence will create a reputation that will deter future acts of violence. Conversely, Benjamin (2008 cited in Agbiboa 2014, p.10) notes that when states fail to respond aggressively, or when they accede to "terrorists" demands, they build a reputation of weakness that encourages future insurgent violence. Critics of this approach argue that applying excessive force not only fails to deter insurgents but leads to an escalation of violence and increases opposition to the government (Asal et al, 2016, p. 3). Although subtle in the literature on BH, the above debate dominates counterinsurgency theorizing globally. The sub-sections below flesh out the main arguments of scholars in these schools of thought.

## **Perspectives on E-COIN**

Existing E-COIN focused scholarship on BH discuss the shortcomings of the Nigerian security framework and assess the counter-productiveness of a military-centric approach. Some scholars, such as Gray and Adeakin (2015) and Bappah (2016), examine how pre-existing weaknesses of Nigerian security agencies are hampering the fight against BH. According to Gray and Adeakin, the inability of the Nigerian state to effectively counter BH security threats is symptomatic of pre-existing problems that plague the intelligence community of the country. The authors' analysis does not suggest the appropriateness or otherwise of a military strategy. Rather, it indicates shortcomings within the Nigerian government's national security framework that emanate from inadequate expertise and resources, overlapping responsibilities among Nigeria's security intelligence agencies, and inter-agency rivalry. According to Gray and Adeakin, "within the Nigerian State security apparatus, there is a general lack of resources and effective equipment as well as logistical oversight, and both the intelligence services and military are fundamentally not trained to combat asymmetrical threats" (2015, p. 200). The authors identify the following three factors as the reasons why the Nigerian security forces have failed to end the BH insurgency:

First, Nigerian security agencies, in trying to justify their relevance and budget, all work independently of one another in terms of intelligence gathering. Second, the State Security Service and the Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB) unit within the Nigeria Police Force are very similar and both are mandated to maintain intelligence on individuals and organizations deemed to be of a national security interest. Similarly, in areas of conflict, such as the northeastern part of the country, the military relies on its own internal intelligence unit, the Department of Military Intelligence. The same can also be said of the Nigeria Police Force that gathers most of its intelligence from the FIB. Last, is the struggle for superiority among the security agencies and the personnel clashes which result from this struggle (Gray & Adeakin, p. 201).

The problem with security agencies having overlapping mandates is that there is no clear specification as to the jurisdiction of the respective intelligence agencies, which likely results in multiple or even contradictory intelligence on the same cases. However, we cannot arrive at any

plausible conclusion about the appropriateness or otherwise of a military-centric response since the factors identified by Gray and Adeakin do not emanate from an examination of the nature of BH, but the current capacity of the security forces.

Like Gray and Adeakin, Bappah (2016) explains Nigeria's military failure against BH by focusing on factors that are internal to the country's security architecture. The author locates the failure of Nigeria's military strategy in the erosion of professionalism within the military (Bappah, p. 148). There certainly is evidence to support such a claim. During the three decades of military rule, state security personnel frequently abdicated their primary responsibilities and assumed political and economic offices. The involvement of the military in politics for such a long period (1966-1979 and 1983-1999) meant that a whole generation of officers either combined national security and political roles or completely abdicated the former. The transformation of soldiers into government officials also meant that the military was in control of enormous oil rents since military rule also coincided with the boom in the global oil market in the mid-1970s. The purported plunder of oil revenues that accrued during this period suggests that military officers themselves had become infested with the culture of sleaze, the eradication of which military intervention was purportedly anchored. The implication of this history is that by the time BH began its insurgency in 2010, the armed forces lacked the necessary expertise and psyche to effectively respond.<sup>8</sup>

Bappah's analysis extends beyond how the military's assumption of governing roles engendered the erosion of professionalism and expertise. The author also examines how the extension of the military's security roles undermined their ability to perform their core constitutional obligation of maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. In his words,

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<sup>8</sup> For detailed analysis of how the erosion of Nigerian military professionalism occurred see Chehabi and Linz (1998). See Ouedraogo (2014) for analysis on how the lack of military professionalism has undermined COIN effort against BH.

“Military professionalism was damaged by civilian elites, who weakened the military by using them to serve their personal security and political interests” (Bappah, 2016, p. 155). The failure of the police to address the growing insecurity, specifically armed robbery and high profile kidnappings, led politicians to turn to the military to provide private security for themselves and immediate family (Bappah, p. 151). Thus, the inability of the state to respond adequately to BH is viewed as a consequence of the combined effect of the military’s involvement in politics between 1966 and 1999 and the extension of its security roles to include traditional police functions. The resulting inadequacy of Nigeria’s national security apparatus impaired the assessment of the threat that BH posed at its inception, occasioned the mishandling of the initial uprising and created the impetus for a full-scale insurgency, which the military lacked the necessary expertise to contain. The points raised by Gray and Adeakin (2015) and Bappah (2016) are relevant in understanding why the BH insurgency persists. However, their focus on the difficulties in implementing a military strategy does not address the issue of the appropriateness of E-COIN in relation to the BH insurgency. This shortcoming in the authors’ analysis is symptomatic of a broader problem which Smith (2014) identifies as plaguing the COIN scholarship in general: the tendency to emphasise the government’s role in counterinsurgency, to the exclusion of the “intellectual phenomenon” understudy - insurgency.

Other scholarly works that focus on E-COIN provide a critique of the “repressive measures” of the Nigerian government. Authors, such as Aghedo (2015), Weeraratne (2015), Agbibo (2014), and to a lesser extent, Zenn and Pearson (2014), argue that such enemy-centric measures are counterproductive. For example, Zenn and Pearson examine the repercussions of the military strategy pursued thus far, especially in terms of increasing gender-based violence (GBV) by BH. The authors examine the adaptive responses of Boko Haram to the military operations

against them; measures which portend grave danger for the most vulnerable people - women and children. For example, as a response to the military campaign against it, BH began to employ female suicide terrorism, utilise child soldiers, and brutalise women through rape and torture (Zenn and Pearson 2014, p. 49).

According to Zenn and Pearson, “the vulnerability of male BH fighters to detention and abuse” led the group to make the tactical choice of using women as weapons of war (p. 49). The veiled clothing of female BH fighters, which aids the concealing of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), enable them to evade detection by security operatives better than their male counterparts. This ability to evolve strategy-wise demonstrates the complexity of the war against Boko Haram. The works of Agbiboa (2014), Weeraratne (2015) and Aghedo (2015) advance the argument that the use of coercive measures against Boko Haram further radicalizes the group, and is responsible for the escalation of the conflict, first in December 2010, and subsequently since January 2012. Although not explicitly stated, the force-radicalisation argument is anchored on the belief that a coercive response to an insurgency feeds into the narrative of “us” versus “them” that dominates insurgent leadership propaganda. The plausibility of the argument that state repression further radicalizes insurgents is not in doubt, but it is difficult to assess the degree to which brute force exacerbates BH insurgency, particularly if the argument of a “pre-radicalised population” holds.

### **Perspectives on P-COIN**

Other scholars, such as Aghedo and Osumah (2012) and Yusuf (2013), examine the constituent elements of a potentially effective response to the Boko Haram conflict based on an understanding of the insurgency as a manifestation of longstanding effects of governance failure. These studies are founded on the assumption that given the “relative deprivation” roots of the conflict, social and economic reform is the viable strategy. This body of scholarship constitutes the population-centric

stream in the state response literature on Boko Haram. Most scholars within this cluster argue that the government needs to address existing socio-economic conditions in order to resolve the BH conflict. With the assumption that socio-economic factors are responsible for the emergence of BH, the prescribed approach to ending the conflict is often tailored towards long-term economic empowerment and human capacity development strategies. Unlike the E-COIN focused literature, these scholars focus not so much on what the government has done, but on what it should do.

One of the pioneering studies on what the Nigerian government should do with regard to BH is Aghedo and Osumah's 2012 study. The authors suggest that the government should implement institutional reforms and other policies that address the sources of inequality and human insecurity in the region (Aghedo and Osumah 2012, p. 866). According to Aghedo and Osumah, ending the BH insurgency requires that the government implements a policy of development in northern Nigeria as follows:

in collaboration with the state and local governments, the federal government should undertake a grassroots socioeconomic empowerment programme aimed at employment generation and human security. The programme should be anchored on farming, entrepreneurial and vocational skills acquisition and development, as well as provision of soft loans to artisans and traders. In addition, there is a need for improvement in economic opportunity in the region, including greater foreign investment, improvement in infrastructure, federal government intervention, especially in education and healthcare, and greater pressure on the northern political elite to develop the region (p. 867).

Like Aghedo and Osumah, Yusuf (2013) asserts that prioritising governance and institutional reform is the most viable path to achieving sustainable peace. The author notes thus: "securing basic rights of access to food, health and shelter is no longer a matter of choice but ought to be regarded as a priority (Yusuf, p. 383). Yusuf further suggests that because investment in technical and vocational education for "ex-militants" in the Niger Delta "has led to a cognisable reduction of the restiveness in that part of the country", the same programme of social and economic intervention should be adopted to end BH's insurgency (Yusuf, p. 384). In his words, "the results

of the introduction of limited socio-economic measures into the options for achieving peace in the Niger Delta supports the adoption of a similar approach to securing sustainable peace in the country as a whole” (Yusuf, p. 384). According to the author, such intervention “is to be preferred to the continued perniciousness that has characterised the militarization of various sites of political violence in the country” (Yusuf, p. 384). To reiterate, the prescriptions are hinged on the assumption that by intervening economically, and socially, such as investments in education and healthcare, the fertile climate for violent extremism in the region will gradually erode. The argument is based on the view that nothing about BH forecloses the possibility of a peaceful resolution. Instead, it is the ambiguous initial government response that drove the group to become, and remain, uncompromising (Bamidele, 2016, p. 74).

In essence, the P-COIN perspective implies that BH’s aspiration for an Islamic state across the Sahel could have been watered down if the government had intervened economically at the early stages of the conflict. A related view implies that it is the government’s excessive use of force against the group in 2009 that made BH more radicalised and uncompromising, thus complicating the prospects for peace through conciliation (Bamidele, 2015, p. 139; David et al, 2015, p. 105). But it is also plausible to argue that the sect emerged as a more vicious group after 2009 because the government’s response was not as coercive and thorough as it could have been. And the fact that BH is perceived as having become more radical and uncompromising raises an additional question of whether conciliation is still workable. These scholars (see, for example, Bamidele, 2016; Bamidele, 2015) omit the implication of their own observation, one which lies at the core of BH’s nature. In fact, other scholars (see, for example, Voll, 2015; Celso, 2015; Gray and Adeakin, 2015) have argued that BH radicalisation occurred prior to the insurgency, not within

it. Thus, to ignore the group's radical nature is to miss a critical point in our assessment of what constitutes a viable state response.

As stated previously, one shortcoming of P-COIN scholarship on BH is the tendency to promote measures employed to tackle other insurgencies without assessing their suitability in a different context. For example, scholars, such as Nwankpa (2017) have suggested that BH insurgency can be resolved through political negotiations since there is evidence of militant groups that have been convinced to give up fighting through the same process in Nigeria and elsewhere. The author notes that the Nigerian government was relatively successful in achieving peace in the Niger Delta (ND) because it "identified and negotiated with key leaders driving the insurgency" (Nwankpa, p. 118).<sup>9</sup> Nwankpa also uses the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as evidence that the idea of negotiating an end to BH insurgency is not far-fetched. The author notes thus:

The Society of the Muslim Brothers, popularly called The Muslim Brotherhood, is a clear example of a terrorist group that has succeeded politically, particularly in Egypt, the place of its origin. As of 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood gained political recognition and won several electoral positions, including the highest political position. In 2012, President Mohamed Morsi became the first democratically elected president in Egypt under the platform of the Brotherhood's political party: Freedom and Justice Party (Nwankpa, p. 118).

Nwankpa further notes that "we can identify terror group leaders that are inclined to the group's political rather than its military agenda" (p. 18). According to the author, "it is prudent to seek out such politically minded leaders with whom to dialogue and possibly negotiate" (p. 118).

The examples put forward by Nwankpa to buttress his argument that the BH insurgency can be ended through negotiations show why it is problematic to theorise about COIN without examining the nature of the particular insurgent group. For example, the ND militants with whom

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<sup>9</sup> The Niger Delta is an oil-rich region in Nigeria that has been plagued by militancy since early 2000s. Agitations for greater control of the region's resources by its people date back to the late 1960s. See Eke (2016) for the history of the agitations and the factors that enflame the current phase of the crisis.

the Nigerian government negotiated are fighting for economic and social justice, whereas BH aims to establish an Islamic Caliphate across the Sahel. The former can be actualized within the modern state system, whereas the latter requires the abolishment of the modern state. Similarly, although both BH and the Muslim Brotherhood are founded on Salafism, they do not belong to the same Salafi branch. While the Muslim Brotherhood belongs to the political branch of Salafists who believe that Salafi-informed social and political change can be achieved through formal and informal politics, BH belongs to the Jihadi branch who consider involvement in the political process of a state as sinful (Al-Anani and Malik, 2013, p. 58; Lauziere, 2010, p. 370). Thus, citing cases of “terrorist” groups that are disposed to dialogue and negotiations is insufficient in making the case for dialogue and negotiations as viable pathways to ending the BH insurgency.

The limitations of both of the two dominant COIN approaches raises the possibility that these two approaches could be combined into a single policy approach that addresses different aspects of the insurgency. Scholars, such as Maiangwa (2014), Comolli (2015), and Onuoha and George (2016), have explored the possibility and content of such a response. According to Comolli, the viable path to peace is to undertake “a comprehensive campaign – prioritising economic rejuvenation, education and counter-radicalisation” in parallel with military operations (p. 115). Like Comolli, Maiangwa (2014) notes the need to reconcile military operations with development policies in the fight against BH. The author states that the curtailment of BH’s influence in West Africa would require investment in defence, development and peacebuilding (Maiangwa, p. 24). Maiangwa’s research focuses on how such integrated approach can prevent BH from coordinating with other Jihadi groups in West Africa. The author acknowledges the importance of a military strategy but also argues for a cautious use of force, as is common with P-COIN advocates. For example, he notes that

while tougher security approaches to terrorism are important and, indeed, indispensable to rendering the jihadist groups in West Africa incapable of staging coordinated attacks, ECOWAS needs to take a range of measures to ensure that human rights are respected by the military forces of its member states (Maiangwa, p. 25).<sup>10</sup>

Both Comolli (2015) and Maiangwa (2014) have a common understanding of what is fueling the BH insurgency and how the problems can be remedied. For example, Comolli notes that because BH “capitalises on poverty, underdevelopment and social marginalisation”, the provision of employment opportunities among the border communities of Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, and the improvement of the delivery of basic social services, such as health and education, will be instrumental to ending the insurgency (p. 115). Due to the extensive nature of social and economic problems that plague the Sahelian region, Comolli argues that external support, especially from international development agencies, will be needed to simultaneously implement development policies and a military strategy (p. 115). In the same vein, Maiangwa explores the possibility of reducing the appeal of terrorism through development initiatives. According to the author,

*...given that* terrorists recruit foot soldiers from poor, marginalised, and underdeveloped regions, the right kind of aid may well help to resolve some of the socioeconomic issues that enable terrorists to gain a foothold in the region. Granted with the right intentions and administered in an effective manner - with a stated timeline, clear mandate, etc., development aid could help to alleviate the socio-economic problems that create the conditions for the radicalisation and indoctrination of jobless youth in places like northern Mali, Niger, and northern Nigeria (Maiangwa, p. 26).

In addition to the potential benefits derivable from the intervention of development agencies, Maiangwa considers the Nigerian civil society as capable of playing important roles in counterinsurgency. The author notes that civil society organisations (CSOs) can monitor and report on compliance with the laws of war as well as contribute to the resolution of the conflict. According to the author, “civil society actors have a more comparative advantage than states at the societal

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<sup>10</sup> ECOWAS is the acronym for West Africa’s economic grouping, the Economic Community of West African States.

level where terrorist activities are embedded, as terrorists are sometimes more willing to engage in diplomatic talks with representatives of civil society groups than with state authorities” (Maiangwa, p. 27).

Similar to the views expressed by Comolli (2015) and Maiangwa (2014), Onuoha and George (2016) suggest that the Nigerian state should seek to constrain BH militarily while also inhibiting its ability to recruit new fighters. The military component involves a systematic deprivation of BH of access to safe havens utilised for planning and organisation (Onuoha and George, p. 213). The portion of their combined approach which leans towards the “winning of hearts and minds” involves promoting a counter-narrative that delegitimises Boko Haram (Onuoha and George, 2016). This is similar to the British response to the Malayan insurgency. Implicit in the framework is that whereas coercive tactics should be used to constrain or degrade and ultimately defeat Boko Haram, a conciliatory approach should be deployed in relating with the non-combatant population. Smith’s (2016) research supports such an approach, as he argues that informal channels of communication are beginning to open up between the government and the civilian population in order to counter BH’s recruitment propaganda, thereby restricting the group’s ability to replenish its fighting force.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, such as Agbiboa (2014), suggest that in order to end the conflict, the Nigerian government should cut back on its military operations and instead work toward winning the confidence of Boko Haram by implementing some of the group’s demands, as these will demonstrate government’s sincerity and willingness to dialogue.

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<sup>11</sup> In January 2015, a radio station named Dandal Kura – meaning the big public meeting place - was established to broadcast in Hausa and Kanuri languages. The broadcasts are targeted at people residing in northern Nigeria, with the purpose of intimating the people of the purpose for the government’s military deployment against BH in the northeast (Smith 2016, pp. 215-217). The broadcast in Kanuri is significant not only because BH propaganda are mostly in the Kanuri language, but also because many of the residents in the region do not speak or understand English.

The scholars that support a P-COIN approach to end the BH conflict falter on one important point. Most tend to concentrate on the socio-economic conditions that generated the impetus for such a group. Hence, policy recommendations have emerged in response to the conditions in the environment where BH was formed and not the group at the centre of the conflict. In essence, existing research appears to be focused on long-term sustainability of a peace plan, but ironically, neglect how that peace is to be achieved in the first place, especially with a group that is opposed to negotiations. A few, such as Onuoha and George, (2016), have examined the question of what form the short-term response should take, but even their work centre mostly on the conflict scenario with almost complete neglect of the nature of Boko Haram itself. And even when the effort is made to focus on the group itself, it is almost exclusively assumed to be a socio-economically driven insurgency.

Socio-economic grievance exists in a pool of contributory factors. Examining the nature of an insurgency is a useful way to understand the whole gamut of forces that underpin the existence and extant form of the insurgent group, which is important in deciding what constitutes a potentially effective response. Consequently, although my study acknowledges the importance of the conflict environment, it also introduces the emergent group nature to the scholarship on COIN. In doing so, it is better able to assess the feasibility of a population-centric approach.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the key scholarship on BH. It focused on exploring the population-centric and enemy-centric COIN debates. This chapter has demonstrated the importance of implementing a counterinsurgency approach or theorising about it based on a deeper understanding of insurgent group nature. Through an examination of studies on insurgent group formation and organisational development, the chapter showed that the factors that influence the

emergence of insurgent groups also shape the nature they develop. Thus, making the understanding of an insurgent group's nature the appropriate starting point in COIN theorising. More so because although the conflict environment may shape group nature, group nature is not constitutive of the overall condition of the conflict environment. The chapter also explored the broader COIN literature in order to identify the assumptions that underlie the two main approaches of counterinsurgency. It showed that P-COIN is informed by the assumption that the defeat of insurgent groups is contingent upon whether counterinsurgents obtain the support of the civilian population. In contrast, E-COIN is founded on the assumption that the most viable counterinsurgency strategy is one which involves the application of brute force to eliminate the insurgents. The chapter further explored scholarship on BH in order to identify the main assumptions about the causes of the insurgency and the specific policy prescriptions that will be assessed in relation to the nature of the group. It examined two streams of BH focused literature – emergence and state response.

As outlined, the emergence scholarship on BH consists of two main perspectives: relative deprivation and long tradition of Jihadi sentiments. The central theme in the first perspective is that the dearth of pro-poor policies has created a gulf between the government and the socially and economically marginalised categories which emerged as a result. The alienation of the socially and economically-deprived degenerates to the point where rebellion becomes a natural response. Government ineptitude in wealth creation has been identified as a factor of desperation which impels criminality as a means of survival. The situation is further exacerbated by the coincidence of the ineptitude of the political leadership and a failed transition to a capitalist economy. In the second perspective, BH is presented as an Islamic purification movement, devoted to warding off the incursion of Christianity and idol worship as well as eradicating religious and political

corruption. While Boko Haram is considered to be a manifestation of historical Jihad as evidenced by its acclaimed goals, it is also seen as exhibiting contemporary Jihadi features as observable in its approach to Islamic purification.

The scholarship on state response focus on two different approaches: E-COIN and P-COIN. The scholars who focus on E-COIN discuss the constraints to a military approach, such as lack of professionalism in security and defence agencies, the dearth of military personnel with adequate expertise in asymmetric warfare, and undefined jurisdiction within the country's security establishment. These constraints do not fundamentally challenge E-COIN as a suitable strategy. They are presented as limitations that impede its effectiveness in Nigeria. However, E-COIN is considered undesirable when unintended consequences such as increased radicalization of militants and conflict escalation are identified as shortcomings of the approach. Scholarship on conciliation is inspired by the relative deprivation thesis. Thus, an appropriate response is viewed as one which centres on the improvement of social and economic conditions.

In the chapter that follows, I explore the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria in order to identify which of the explanations of BH's emergence has historically been responsible for Islamic uprisings. The chapter also explores the response of the Nigerian government to those uprisings and the results of the government's approach.

## **Chapter Two: Understanding Boko Haram Insurgency from the Prism of “Historical Jihad” in Northern Nigeria**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria in order to show the effect that conciliatory measures by the government have historically had on other Islamic movements in the region. In addition, I explore this history to demonstrate how socio-economic drivers and religious factors have historically interfaced and resulted in Islamic uprisings in Nigeria. I do so because our understanding of how these factors influenced the emergence of BH is an important determinant of the type of policy-relevant analysis that is advanced. As noted in the previous chapter, Boko Haram manifests traits of prior Jihadi inclinations in northern Nigeria. While I agree with the scholars that espouse “historical Jihad”, their explanations do not provide sufficient context for understanding the religio-politico milieu within which BH emerged. This lack of sufficient context is problematic because it prevents the discovery of other less obvious, but important explanations of BH’s emergence, and by extension, how the Nigerian government can best respond. These scholars (see, for example, Celso, 2015; Azumah, 2015; Alao, 2013) omit the specific ways in which the economic situation of northern Nigerian youths was exploited by Islamists and how government’s acceptance of Islamist demands contributed to the growth of the movement in the region. The P-COIN literature focuses on the socio-economic causes of the insurgency but ignores the manipulation of these grievances by leaders of Islamist groups. Consequently, this chapter recasts “historical Jihad” in a way that elaborates on the religious and political circumstances of northern Nigeria prior to BH’s emergence.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the religious and political history of Nigeria and then moves to examining instances of Islamic activism and fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. As shown below, the first recorded manifestation of Islamic extremism in Nigeria was the 1804 Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio in areas that make up present-day northern Nigeria. This took place about a century before the start of British colonial rule. Prior to the emergence of BH, there were other Islamist movements in the north whose agenda is similar to Dan Fodio's Jihad. Thus, the BH uprising is examined to demonstrate how it fits within the historical rubrics of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. To explore the roots of Islamic extremism in Nigeria, the chapter examines the emergence of Islamist movements in the north of the country, and how relations between Islamic groups engendered radicalism. Included in this exploration is the demand for the implementation of a comprehensive sharia code of law across northern Nigerian states, the forces that propelled activism around this issue, and how sharia law activism was transformed into violent extremism. Next, the chapter examines the first Islamist campaign against the religious and political establishment in northern Nigeria, which is similar to, although less successful than the 1804 Jihad. In addition, the Almajiri phenomenon is discussed in order to decipher its role in producing a radicalized youth population which has been instrumental to the fundamentalist ambitions of Islamist associations in northern Nigeria. The chapter ends by tracing the development of Boko Haram as an insurgent group to illustrate how it is situated within the Islamist movement in northern Nigeria. Exploring BH in this way is important because knowing the similarities and/or differences between the group and its progenitors deepens our understanding of whether approaches employed by the government in responding to past Islamists' agitations can be effective in ending BH's insurgency.

## **Brief Overview of Nigeria's Political and Religious History**

The early 19th-century Jihad, Christian missionary activities in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the British colonial legacy all contributed to the shaping of Nigeria's religious character. Today, the country is very religious; it accounts for 4.7 percent of the global Muslim population and is dominated by two main religions – Islam and Christianity (Oloyode, 2014, p. 180). Fifty percent of Nigerians are Muslims, forty percent are Christians and the remaining ten percent practice African Traditional religion (ATR) (Elden, 2014, p. 418, Dowd 2016, p. 621). The northern part of the country is dominated by Muslims, while Christianity is the main religion in the south. Both Christianity and Islam spread throughout the region before British colonial rule, although the colonial powers later played a crucial role in shaping the religious demography of the emergent country. Islam spread to the northern part of Nigeria around the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Fola & Adediran, 1983). At this point, the south had not come in contact with Christian missionaries. It was not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when European traders began trading with the south, that Christian missionary activities slowly started (Onapajo, 2012, p. 45).

Although Islam gained a foothold in the north earlier than Christianity in the south, the practice of Islam was perceived by Uthman Dan Fodio and his followers as having been adulterated by the ruling class and tainted by the incursion of cultural and traditional practices that violate the standards of Sharia law (Onapajo, 2012, p. 45). The 19th-century Jihad (holy war) embarked upon by Uthman Dan Fodio was said to be a reaction to the perceived adulteration of Islam (Uchendu, 2010, p. 65); and as such, was aimed at purifying and reforming Muslim society. This is not different from the motivations of Boko Haram, as the group's name itself translates to Western education is sinful. The result of Dan Fodio's Jihad was the creation of an Islamic state (or caliphate) with the Sultan of Sokoto as the supreme leader. The politico-religious landscape was

altered, as activist Islamic scholars (Ulamas) were transformed from preachers and advisers to rulers in the emergent emirate system (Umar, 2001, p. 128). Because Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio was an adherent of the Qadiriyyah order of Islam, this became the official religious inclination of his kinsmen with whom he replaced the Habe rulers after the 1804 Jihad (Lawal, 2012, p. 9). The caliphate system of rule, which lasted for a century, extended from the northern and south-western regions of precolonial Nigeria to the northern part of present-day Cameroon (Hickey, 1984, 251; Peel, 2003, p. 191). This extension of the caliphate system to northern Cameroon explains Boko Haram's presence in the region and sheds light on the influence of Uthman Dan Fodio on Boko Haram's insurgency much later.

Further, the system of rule established through the 1804 Jihad in the north was inherited by the British colonial government and was reinvigorated through the system of indirect rule fostered by Sir Frederick Lugard. The colonial government maintained the northern emirate system for administrative expediency, largely because the British colonial administration lacked the financial and human capital to create and sustain multiple layers of administration (Kirk-Greene, 1968, p. 160). Entering an alliance with the British was politically expedient for the emirs, as they needed the colonial rulers' support if they were to fend off the revolt of Mahdists (Lawal, 2012, p. 9). The emirs who belonged to the Qadiriyyah sect were threatened by revolt orchestrated against them by adherents of Mahdism. By aligning with the British, the emirs were guaranteed assistance from the colonial administration to fend off the Mahdist threat. In 1898, Flora Shaw suggested the name Nigeria for unifying neighbouring, but previously autonomous political entities into one colonial state under British imperial rule (Levin, 1997, p. 135). The unification was concretised in 1914 when the Muslim dominated northern protectorate and the majority Christian southern protectorate were amalgamated. If the British government had not pursued indirect rule through

the emirate system, it is possible that the knowledge of Uthman Dan Fodio's jihad may have been lost in history. By retaining descendants of Dan Fodio's foot soldiers, the British colonial overlords indirectly contributed to the re-emergence of his fundamentalist doctrine.

The impact of colonialism on the breadth of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria is more visible than this. By late 19th century, when Christianity was fairly entrenched in the south and Christian missionary activities began to move northwards, British colonial rule and the Islamization of the north had both been established (Galadima & Turaki, 2001, p. 86). At this time, the British colonial administration had developed a working relationship with the northern ruling elite which they feared could be disrupted by an incursion of Christianity. Christian missionary activities in the north effectively started with the opening of the first mission outstation by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in a village near Zaria in present-day Kaduna state (Ojo, 2007, p. 177). The further penetration of Christian missionaries into the north was prohibited by Sir Lugard and this restrictive policy was sustained by British colonial officers, decades after Lugard's tenure as High Commissioner (Graham, 1966, p. 151).

In northern Nigeria, the structure of governance was based on the emirate political system. The highly centralised and authoritarian emirate system guaranteed the obedience of the people to the emirs (kings) who acted as British proxies (Smith, 1959, p. 93). The authoritarian emirate system accounted for the relative success of the British indirect rule system in the northern protectorate. Thus, the British were worried that allowing Christianity to spread further into the north could lead to the development of Western education in the region. The British feared that the incursion of Christianity into the north could stimulate enlightenment in the region and that this exposure could undermine the smooth running of indirect rule as was the case in the southern protectorate. Consequently, Christian missionary activities in the north were outlawed in the north

in order to protect the emirate system of rule, thereby ensuring the sustainability of indirect rule in the region (Rasmussen, 1980, p. 182). The incorporation of the emirate governing structure into indirect rule strengthened the powers of northern emirs and extended the political influence of Islam in the region (Ojo, 2010, p. 177). One consequence of British interference in the spread of Christianity was that northern Nigeria ended up having little access to western education provided by Christian missions, which holds the key to government jobs in the post-independent era. Thus, the disparity in the economic fortunes of the south and north, which is touted as explaining the development of a feeling of relative deprivation among northerners, was, in part, a result of the embargo placed on Christian missionary activities in that region. Boko Haram's absence from south-western Nigeria and presence in northern Cameroon is possibly a result of the fact that the former has a more balanced mix of Christians and Muslims. The argument is that Islamic fundamentalism developed in northern Nigeria and not in the south because the latter contained more diversity of religious voices than the former.

As was the case during colonial rule, government's intervention in religion for political reasons continued in other forms in post-independent Nigeria, despite being prohibited by the civilian constitution. Prior to their encounter with Islam and Christianity, the various ethnic groups which make up Nigeria today were mostly adherents of ATR (Balogun 1980, p. 210). The gradual decline of ATR was facilitated by the demonization of African culture and tradition by the colonial government. The "paganization" of African modes of worship leads people to identify either as Christian or Muslim even though they seldom practise either of these religions. As noted above, the colonial tendency to intervene in religion was inherited by the post-independent ruling class and continues to influence state policies today. For example, although the Nigerian constitution recognises the country as secular, the government has tended to officially recognise only the two

dominant religions (Ibrahim 1991, p. 116). More so, whereas the pilgrimages of Christians and Muslims who register with the Pilgrims Welfare Board are subsidised to Jerusalem and Mecca, respectively, no such privileges are extended to ATR worshippers. This favouritism is perhaps connected to a grand objective of obtaining legitimacy from the people by systematically appealing to their religious self. Because of the influence of religion in Nigerian politics, the government hesitates to intervene to curtail the proliferation of some religious groups, including inherently subversive ones. Boko Haram, like many other Islamist groups in Nigeria, are beneficiaries of this political climate. This role of the post-independent government is evident in the discussion that follows.

### **Exploring the Roots of Islamic fundamentalism in Northern Nigeria**

The origin of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria does not coincide with the emergence of BH uprising. The discussions below show that Islamic fundamentalism predates Boko Haram. Fundamentalism in Islam existed in the various ethnic nations in Nigeria's northern protectorate prior to the start of colonial rule in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Boko Haram's insurgency has been described as only a recent manifestation of a century-long history of religious extremism (Aghedo, 2014; Bolaji, 2013; Adesoji, 2011). Other scholarly works on developments within Islam in northern Nigeria reveal the existence of decades-old fanatical tendencies that are very similar to BH's fundamentalist behaviour today (Casey, 2014; Pieri et al, 2013; Casey, 2008; Winters, 1987; Kastfelt, 1989; Hickey, 1984). This body of scholarship helps to reinforce the claim that Boko Haram insurgency can be understood as a revival of radical Islam in northern Nigeria.

I explore the roots of fundamentalist Islam in northern Nigeria by examining the tensions between and within different Islamic sects; the politicisation of sharia law implementation; the Maitatsine movement; the preference for traditional Quranic education in northern Nigeria and the

Almajiri phenomenon that emerges therefrom. Although relations between Islamic sects in northern Nigeria have historically been tenuous, the quest for a sharia state seldom features in their rivalry. It is a goal to which the Islamic movement in northern Nigeria is wholly committed. The Maitatsine uprisings erupted in the early to mid-1980s in the midst of inter-sect conflicts. However, the magnitude and effect of the violence set it apart from others that occurred during the same period. The scale and intensity of Maitatsine's revolt make it a significant historical example against which the current manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism can be examined. The inclusion of the Almajiri phenomenon in this exploration is necessitated by the involvement of Quranic school pupils in inter-sect conflicts, religious activism aimed at enthroning a "sharia society", the Maitatsine uprisings, and the BH insurgency.

### **Tenuous Inter/Intra-sect Relations within Islam**

Relations between and within Islamic sects in northern Nigeria have historically been tenuous. As discussed below, disagreements over what constitutes the right path to ordering society and politics have historically degenerated into inter as well as intra-sect disputes. Nevertheless, the Islamic associations in northern Nigeria are bounded by certain overriding goals and exhibit similar patterns of activism. For example, Islamic groups strive to solve the problems of the modern state - problems such as unemployment, crime, poverty etc. - by agitating for the centralisation of religious and social order. Because Islam thrives best under a centralised political system, Islamic groups in northern Nigeria have tended to assume that the problems of the modern state can be solved if state power and authority are also centralised (Ojo, 2010, p. 176). To achieve a centralised state system, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria look to the establishment of an Islamic state and society (Umar, 2001, p. 140). In this sense, BH's demand for the reinstatement of the caliphate system is not a novel desire within the ranks of the Islamist movement in northern Nigeria.

The Islamic movement in northern Nigeria, including Boko Haram, are related by virtue of their shared commitment to “establish, maintain, develop, defend, extend, or re-establish the Islamic State as an instrument to ‘enjoin good and forbid evil’ for the welfare and happiness of mankind in this world and in the hereafter” (Siddiqi, 1981, p. 7). Also central to the doctrinal commitments of the Islamic movement in Nigeria is the celebration of martyrdom; individuals who give up their lives in the course of struggling for the establishment of an Islamic state (Umar, 2001, p. 141). Ulamas in northern Nigeria solicit support for this grand purpose and other aspirations through pamphlets or sermons delivered in Mosques (Casey, 2008 p. 71). It is partly through the process of attracting and sustaining their support base that conflicts between sects – and factions of a sect - erupt, and it is through these conflicts that the seed of fundamentalism is sowed. While some Islamic activists attempt to use democratic processes to achieve their objective of reforming society and politics, many others support despotism as the path to change (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999, p. 29). It is safe to say that Boko Haram insurgents are drawn from this latter category, meaning that the former could become a useful resource to the Nigerian government in its fight against BH.

Today, the Islamic movement in Nigeria is made up of sects whose doctrines correspond to the Sunni and Shiite traditions, the two major denominations of Islam. Sunni Islam includes sub-sects such as Wahhabi/Salafism and Sufism. Salafism emphasises that Islam is nothing more than compliance with the rules of belief and conduct spelt out in the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Hodgson, 1974, p. 196). The Wahhabi/Salafi tradition emphasize textual authority and oppose the ascription of great powers to religious leaders as Sufis do (Masqueliar, 1996). The populist Islamic group, the Izala association, which emerged in the late 1970s in northern Nigeria is founded on the doctrines of the Wahhabi/Salafi Sunni subsect, and are

considered to be Islamic modernists because of their embrace of Ijtihad - the authority to form an independent interpretation of Islamic scriptures on point of law (Umar, 2001, p. 133). The Madinites are another Islamic group that subscribes to Ijtihad, the Arabic word for independent reasoning, although they do not easily fit within the old Izala structure. The Midianites hold more moderate religious views and relate better with the Sufi orders than the Izala do. The soft-line religious positions of the Madinites attracted increased membership but forced the Izala movement to reaffirm their original hard-line positions that had earlier attracted many followers to their fold (Awofeso, 2003, p. 319). In their competition for members, these Islamist groups adopted extreme positions to create a sharp contrast between themselves and others. Thus, BH's difference may be on account of this competition for members and the desire to attract more members which led to the adoption of the most extreme of fundamentalist doctrines – jihadi Salafism.

In contrast to the Wahhabi/Salafi tradition, Sufi doctrines are founded on taqlid; that is, the adherence to established rules of Islamic law rather than seeking to adapt Islamic law to modern conditions. Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah are the two foremost Sufi Tariqah in West Africa.<sup>12</sup> The doctrinal rivalry between the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah dates back to the time of the Kano civil wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Paden, 1973 cited in Lawal, 2012, p. 15). The Tijaniyyah gained more traction among the Hausas in northern Nigeria, while Qadiriyyah had more Fulani followers. The overwhelming adoption of Tijāniyyahism was on account of the smouldering resentment of a section of the indigenous (Hausa) inhabitants against the Fulani conquerors who formed the ruling families in the Emirates of the northern region after Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad (Lawal, p. 17). Thus, in its collaborative rule with the emirs, the British colonial administration placed its thumb on the scale against a force that could potentially have neutralized Uthman Dan Fodio's influence

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<sup>12</sup> Tariqah refers to the path through which a Sufi Sheikh, that is, a religiously pious person, leads his followers (Lawal 2012, p. 13).

in subsequent decades. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the 1940s and 1970s, the Tijaniyyah and Qadiriyyah brotherhoods began to transform from merely religious traditions into civil associations that aggregate, articulate, and promote the material interests of their leaders and members (Loimeier, 1997 cited in Umar, 2001, p. 130). This transformation highlights how religious proselytising began to intersect with economic empowerment, making it difficult to detach economics and religion in the milieu within which Boko Haram was fertilised.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, factional fighting among Sunni Muslims in northern Nigeria found momentum from the activism of Sheikh Abubakar Gumi<sup>13</sup> who eschewed innovation and called for a return to the pure teachings of Prophet Mohammed (Westerlund, 1997 cited in Casey, 2014, p. 5). The conflicts further intensified after Abubakar Gumi's death in 1992, which caused the Izala movement to split into several groups with varying tolerance levels for secularism (Casey, p. 6). In short, beginning in the 1940s, northern Nigeria witnessed an escalation in disputes over Islamic doctrines with these escalating into conflicts over material resources. Such conflicts frequently overlapped with or reinforced ethnic and political tensions. The coincidence of the transformation of the Sufi orders into political groupings and the splintering of the Izala movement after the death of Sheikh Gumi complicated the already tenuous relations within Sunni Islam in northern Nigeria (Casey, 2008, p. 76), and further stoked the flames of fundamentalism as each group tried to outperform the other. Again, this suggests that, historically, fragmentation within the ranks of Islamists is likely to lead to escalation.

The Shiite Islam denomination emerged in Nigeria in the late 1970s and is known nationally as the Islamic Society of Nigeria (ISN). Shiite, also called Shia in the Hausa language, is under the leadership of Ibrahim El-Zakzakky in Nigeria. This sect is seen to draw inspiration

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<sup>13</sup> Abubakar Gumi was a vocal and influential Wahhabi, and the leader of the Izala movement in northern Nigeria.

from the Iranian Shiite movement as they don the garments of Iranian clerics, distribute Shiite literature originating from Iran, and rehash the same teachings in their own publications (Casey, 2008, p. 77). The Shiite movement under Sheikh EL-Zakzakky considers the police and judiciary in Nigeria to be instruments of satan and denounce the Nigerian state as a whole as being grounded in a godless system. Hence, El-Zakzakky and his followers seek to establish an Islamic state governed by the Sharia (Olugboji, 1995, p. 6). Given their subversive messages, use of violence against law enforcement officers, and often violent anti-west protests, members of the Shiite sect, including its leader, were routinely detained and imprisoned on charges of posing a threat to national security (Albert, 1999, p. 286). The historical doctrinal disputes between the Iranian inspired Shia denomination and the Sunni tradition of the Saudis enflame the tenuous relations among Islamic sects in northern Nigerian. In other words, conflicts over “historical Islamic reform, the role of the imam, Muslim umma, the importance of devotion, and legal matters” that dominate inter-sect relations in northern Nigeria are traceable to longstanding Saudi-Iranian religious feuds (Falola, 1998, p. 231). Thus, the emergence of BH can also be situated within the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for influence in the Muslim world. This competition plays out in Nigeria between the Shiite supported by Iran, and Boko Haram, which subscribes to the Salafi doctrine that originates from Saudi Arabia. Thus, a holistic counterinsurgency approach would take into account the influence of external forces and how this can be curtailed. It is imperative to do so, especially if the government is interested in forestalling BH’s ability to reassert itself through assistance from other insurgent groups of the same ideological tradition.

From the early 1990s, Nigeria has witnessed enormous growth in its media and telecommunications industry. The speed and density of information dissemination increased awareness of the worsening economic realities of the country (Ibrahim, 1991). During this same

period, the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), many of whom had previous Izala affiliations, split into the pro-Saudi missionary movement and the pro-Iranian umma which took a firm stance on the establishment of an Islamic state as a panacea to the ambiguities of the modern state. The heightened tension among the Islamic sects in the late 1990s, coupled with the division within the MSSN, led to the scramble for supporters across the north (Hunwick, 1997, p. 39).

Reaffirming doctrinal positions and violent engagement with the religious and political establishments became the natural route for Islamic groups to gain support among the burgeoning cohort of unemployed youths. The worsening economic situation in the 1990s became a rallying point for advancing the religious agenda of the respective Islamic associations in northern Nigeria. For the unemployed northern Nigerian youths, joining the most assertive religious brotherhoods, such as the Tijaniyyah, was a means to self-reassertion (Lawal, 2012, p. 15). While the doctrines of these Islamic groups may not have raised the spectre of fundamentalism, the behaviour of sect leaders did. By willingly employing violence in their religious, political and economic campaigns, leaders of Islamic sects wittingly or unwittingly laid the foundation of violent extremism that today plagues many parts of northern Nigeria (Lawal, p. 13). Above all, it is clear that the economic conditions at the turn of the century enhanced the ability of Islamic clerics to sell their religious ideologies to the disempowered youths in northern Nigeria.

### **Politics of Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria**

The campaign for the implementation of sharia law gained popular support across much of northern Nigeria in the late 1990s. Consequently, Islamic clerics and scholars who demanded its implementation amassed significant political capital that enabled them to pressure northern governors into action. In order to further legitimise their rule, northern governors acceded to the demands for the establishment of Sharia penal codes in the early 2000s. The comprehensive

adoption of sharia law contradicts the spirit behind section 35 of the Nigerian constitution that recognizes the country as secular. The decision of some northern governments to accept the demands for comprehensive Islamic laws, ostensibly because of the potential political benefits, is implicated in the transformation of Islamic activism into extremism between 1999 and 2002 (Elaigwu and Galadima, 2003. pp. 136,137). The success in applying political pressure to secure the adoption of Islamic laws in northern states reinvigorated the demand for the enthronement of a Caliphate system of rule. Fundamentalism peaked in northern Nigeria as a result of the activities of the groups that spearhead the campaign for an Islamic state. The emergence of Boko Haram can be situated within this context of the shift from activism to extremism. These key points are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

At the heart of the campaign for the implementation of sharia law in northern Nigeria is the concept of Hisbah. Hisbah is an Islamic principle that demands the prohibition of vice and enjoining of virtues or the practice of commanding good and forbidding the committal of evil or sin (Cook, 2003). Although the origin of the concept dates back several centuries, reference to the Hisbah principle has resurged in recent decades owing to the perceived effects of globalisation on Muslim cultures. In Muslim communities across the globe, including northern Nigeria, social vices such as indecent dressing, alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, etc., are perceived to originate from the integration of world cultures through processes of globalisation (Pieri et al, 2013, p. 38). The central theme of Hisbah is that it is the responsibility of individual Muslims to correct social misdemeanours, especially when the state is unwilling or unable to do so. Because these vices in Muslim communities are attributed to the infusion of western values, Islamic activism has also focused on the de-westernisation of Muslim cultures (Jacobson et al, 2012). The de-westernising project gained support among devout Muslims in northern Nigeria because the Islamic principle

of Hisbah obligates individual Muslims to take action. In other words, Islamic clerics who championed the campaign for the implementation of sharia law in northern Nigeria gained the support of many Nigerian Muslims because they grounded their activism in the Hisbah principle. More so, northern Nigerian Muslims recognise the sharia as a core aspect of their religious identity, hence gaining support for its implementation was not a difficult task for sharia agitators (Bolaji 2013, p. 99). Moreover, the worsening economic situation of the unemployed youth had created a pool of disaffected youths who attribute their conditions to the drift from the Islamic way of life.

The implementation of sharia law was contentious even before Nigeria attained flag independence in 1960. As it became certain that Nigeria would be granted independence under a federal constitution, the political leaders in the north began to express their right to reinstate some precolonial Islamic laws that were abolished by the British in the early 1900s (Yusuf, 2007). Similarly, the Council of Ulama (Islamic scholars) declared that if a comprehensive sharia law implementation would not be feasible within a federal arrangement, then a confederal alternative should be considered (Suberu 2001, p. 204). Such declaration indicates how prioritized the issue of sharia was among Islamic scholars. Beyond this, the debate showed that both political and religious leaders were aligned in pushing for the Islamisation of the north. The debates around the implementation of sharia were less contentious during the build-up to independence than it was in subsequent constitution drafting conferences. This was the case because the northern regional government had heeded the counsel of the outgoing colonial government that re-enacting a comprehensive code of Islamic laws would further stagnate the region in comparison to the more developed and secular south (Obe, 2005). The advice from the outgoing colonial government shows that the economic consequences of the North's rejection of western education began manifesting, at least, as far back as the late 1950s. Consequent upon the British counsel, the first

major debate only occurred in the constitutional conferences organised by the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo between 1977 and 1979.

The controversy in the constitutional conferences of the late 1970s, as was the case in the late 1950s, centred on the place of sharia law in the 1979 civilian constitution that was being drafted for the incoming civilian administration. The compromise position that arose from the conferences was that any state that desired it could enact Islamic personal laws and establish sharia courts to adjudicate these issues only. Islamic personal laws which relate to issues of marriage and marriage annulment, child care, inheritance, and contracts has existed uninterrupted in northern Nigeria since Dan Fodio's Jihad of 1804, which established the Sokoto Caliphate (Christelow, 2002). Despite this compromise position, the sharia project was abandoned by the northern regional government and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The NPC neither included it in their party manifesto nor pushed for it after gaining national power in 1960 because they were apprehensive about how such move would be received by non-Muslim voters (Laitin 1982, p. 416). In essence, because the political calculation no longer favoured sharia implementation, Islamic activists failed to gain political support as was the case in the late 1950s. Such use of religion for political ends continue to plague Nigerian politics, and even a cursory examination of BH's growth would reveal the effect of politics.

Although the NPC abandoned the sharia project in 1979, the debates on the constitutionality of sharia inadvertently introduced religion into the already ethnicized politics of Nigeria (Suberu, 2001, p. 133). From the mid-1980s up to the unsuccessful transition programme of the late 1980s/early 1990s, religion became a dominant subject in political contests. First, in 1986, the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida changed Nigeria's observer status in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) to a full membership, in violation of the country's

pluralist constitution (Agbaje, 1990, p. 296). The aim was to pacify Islamists in northern Nigeria and sustain their support for his military regime. Second, in order to facilitate the sharia project of his northern constituency, the former Head of State personally selected members of the constitution drafting committee that would promote the sharia agenda. Consequently, the resulting draft expunged “personal law” from the provisions on sharia law, thus, providing constitutional backing for adjudicating both personal and criminal matters based on the sharia (Bolaji, 2013, p. 103). The Babangida transition programme was aborted in 1993 following the annulment of the general elections held on June 12, and the subsequent ascendance of late General Sani Abacha as Head of State. Although the military government allowed the registration of only two political parties, the Social Democratic Party and National Republican Convention, the election is still adjudged the freest and fairest in Nigeria’s political history. Between 1996 and 1997, the administration of General Abacha also manipulated the process of drafting the Fourth Republic constitution to the advantage of the proponents of a comprehensive implementation of sharia by excluding opponents from the process (Kalu, 2003, p. 391). This, like Babangida did with Nigeria’s OIC membership, Abacha’s aim was to cement the loyalty of influential Islamists to the Abacha administration.

Nevertheless, following the death of Sani Abacha in 1998 and the subsequent abandonment of his draft constitution, the situation of the 1970s remained the status quo in northern Nigeria until the early 2000s when the implementation of sharia penal codes was expanded in twelve northern states, in violation of the 1999 constitution. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sharia agenda had been somewhat handicapped, first by the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, and second, by the demise of General Sani Abacha. The full-scale implementation of Islamic laws started with the extension, in January 2000, of the jurisdiction of sharia courts to include criminal

matters in Zamfara state. Initially, sharia implementing states enacted laws that prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol both in public and private spaces. The use of “head covering” or hijab for women was enforced to reassert Muslim identity in the face of the globalization of Western modes of dressing (Pieri et al, 2013, p. 49). At the criminal level, Islamic law prescribes punishment for crimes such as theft, adultery, sodomy, and murder (Bolaji 2013, p. 98). The decision to comprehensively implement sharia law in Zamfara was made in order to fulfil the campaign pledge of former Governor Ahmed Yerima (Pieri et al., p. 46). Ironically, democracy that ought to protect minority rights facilitated the stifling of minority voices. I say so because the legislators in northern states are mostly dominated by Muslims, they were able to exclude Christian legislators from the legislative committees that reviewed the bills for expanding the jurisdiction of sharia courts (Yusuf, 2007, 253). Thus, “majority rule” helped to shut the door against potential antagonists of the sharia project. The foregoing developments must have appeared to extremists within the Islamist movement as signs that the dream of a Caliphate could become a reality.

In the northern states where the jurisdiction of sharia courts was expanded,<sup>14</sup> Hisbah boards with thousands of uniformed personnel were established to combat sin in public places. The duties of the Hisbah boards include to prevent market traders from swindling customers, track down brothels and confiscate alcoholic drinks, and prevent women from riding on commercial motorcycles because it brings them into contact with men. In order to forestall sexual immorality, interactions between men and women in public spaces are monitored, and vehicles carrying men and women are stopped, with the women forced to disembark (Pieri et al, p.48). In theory, the role of female officers in Hisbah boards is to provide moral counselling for women and to encourage

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<sup>14</sup> Sharia law was included in the penal codes of the following twelve northern Nigerian states between January 2000 and June 2001: Zamfara, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, Yobe, Kaduna, Niger and Gombe.

other women to indulge in charitable deeds (Pieri et al, p. 47). For many of the Muslim umma and sharia law activists in northern Nigeria, “the implementation of the Sharia and creation of Hisbah patrols are a way of obliterating sin in the public space and providing an antidote to what was seen as moral decline and an erosion of traditional Muslim culture in the north” (Pieri et al, p. 49). But the use of Hisbah officers in policing communities in northern Nigeria became highly contentious because some of their functions almost parallel the constitutional responsibilities of the Nigerian police (Pieri, p. 47).

Although the duties of the Hisbah officers were purportedly subjected to scrutiny by police, their performance in policing functions bolstered the confidence of Islamic activists that the objective of an Islamic state is also attainable. The achievement of a sharia legal regime through violent agitations also emboldened Muslim youths in northern Nigeria who use violence as a means of asserting themselves as dutiful Muslims or ‘affective citizens’ (Casey, 2008, p. 96). Indeed, not only did the political leadership of sharia implementing states promulgate laws that contravened Nigeria’s secular constitution, they took practical steps to ensure enforcement. The Hisbah police who were responsible for enforcing the new laws may have been instrumental in BH’s rise.

Among all pre-existing Islamic associations in northern Nigeria, only the Maitatsine came close to challenging the legitimacy of the Nigerian state like Boko Haram, hence the next section focuses exclusively on the group.

### **The Maitatsine Uprisings**

The Maitatsine uprisings that occurred across northern Nigerian states between 1980 and 1985 were the first significant display of Islamic fundamentalism and constitute the first real attempt to impose a religious ideology on post-independent Nigeria (Isichei, 1987, p. 194). The movement

was founded in the 1960s by a Cameroonian migrant, Mohammed Marwa (Falola, 1998, p. 141), and was made up of immigrants and northern Nigerian Muslims. Mohammed Marwa was trained as an Islamic scholar in the Republic of Niger and Chad before moving to Nigeria to become a preacher (Aghedo 2014, p. 234). The politicking over sharia implementation during the constitution drafting debates of the late 1970s may have incentivised Marwa's campaign for northern Islamisation in the early to mid-1980s. Although Marwa's Islamic tutelage is traceable to Chad and the Niger Republic, and probably northern Cameroon as well, there is the possibility that he picked up some of his extremism during the twenty-year period between his arrival in Kano and the emergence of the Maitatsine (Kastfelt, 1989, p. 84)

The unorthodoxy of the Maitatsine movement put them in conflict with the dominant Islamic movements in northern Nigeria, such as the Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah. The group condemned the generally accepted views on the main principles of Islam as contained in the Quran, for example, the observance of the Salat.<sup>15</sup> Although Marwa practised as a Quranic teacher, he rejected the Hadith and the Sunnah,<sup>16</sup> and condemned the reading of any book but the Quran as 'paganism'. He denounced Muslims for using radios, bicycles, and watches and condemned the possession of money beyond what was required for survival (Kastfelt, 1989, p. 84). Mohammed Marwa labelled those not in his fold, including other Muslims, infidels, and in 1979, elevated himself to the position of the Holy Prophet having questioned the prophethood of Prophet Mohammed, the acclaimed founder of Islam (Imobighe, 2012, p. 323). The Maitatsine leader justified the violent nature of his Mahdist ideology on the grounds that even in 'Prophet' Mohammed's era, there was fighting and killing of unbelievers (Awofeso, 2003, p. 318). Marwa's

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<sup>15</sup> Salat is one the five pillars of the Islamic religion. It is a religious duty which every true Muslim is expected to perform at five prescribed periods daily (Awofeso 2003, p. 318).

<sup>16</sup> The Hadith and Sunnah are records of Prophet Mohammed's teachings and reports about his companions (Brown 2009, p. 1).

frequent castigation of the dominant Muslim sects and the religious establishment in his sermons resulted in violent conflicts between the Maitatsine movement and other Muslim sects in the 1970s (Lavers, 1984, p. 6). Marwa's religious grandstanding may have been aimed at attracting hardliners from other Islamist associations. But it is also likely that the objective was to re-enact Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad against the religious establishment in the north.

Between January 1979 and December 1980, the Maitatsine were involved in 33 separate religious conflicts with the Qadiriyyah, Tijaniyyah, and Izala movements. The violent conflicts between the Maitatsine movement and other Islamic sects, and also between Marwa's group and security agencies, peaked in December 1980. In the seven months prior to these confrontations, the authorities in Kano state had pressed several charges against the Maitatsine leader for stoking violence through his teachings and the conduct of his followers (Falola, 1998, p. 141). The Maitatsine were notorious for harassing Kano indigenes and preventing pupils of western-styled schools from attending classes, especially in Kofar Wambai in Yan Awaki quarters in Kano city, where Marwa and his followers resided (Aghedo, 2014, p. 234). Years earlier, between 1961 and 1975, the belligerence of Marwa and his followers resulted in several arrests, detention, imprisonment and deportation of the Maitatsine leader (Imobighe, 2012, p. 323). However, the group persisted in their agenda to reform the practice of Islam in northern Nigeria, with the project pursued mainly through fighting with rival sects, rioting and other civil disturbances which, at the time, were surpassed in scale only by the 1967 Odumegwu Ojukwu led insurrection in Eastern Nigeria (Aghedo, p. 234). Maitatsine's attempt to restrict school attendance is not different from BH's attack on schools and kidnapping of schoolboys and girls.

Both groups are also similar in terms of how each of the two uprisings began. Like Boko Haram, Maitatsine's uprising began with attacks against security agents. On December 8, 1980,

armed pupils of Mohammed Marwa attacked and killed four police officers that were dispatched to maintain law and order in the group's rally at Shahuci praying ground in Kano (Awofeso, 2003, p. 318). The attack on the police officers resulted in a bloody confrontation between the Maitatsine movement and security agencies. The violent assaults on other Kano residents, the group's attempt to capture the Kano Central Mosque, coupled with the inability of the police to curtail the group precipitated the military intervention and raid on Maitatsine's Kofar Wambai enclave on December 28, 1980 (Hickey, 1984, p. 84). The December 1980 military operation which resulted in thousands of deaths, including Mohammed Marwa, effectively ended the Kano uprisings but did not eliminate the Maitatsine movement (Kastfelt, 1989, p. 84). In October 1982, the Maitatsine uprising resurfaced in Bulumkuttu in Maiduguri, Borno state and Rigassa in Kaduna (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 511). Again, the development of Boko Haram followed the same trajectory: intervention by security agents led to the death of sect members including, Mohammed Yusuf, but the remnants of the sect later regrouped and began their insurgency in 2010. This raises the question: why was such a regrouping possible? Two explanations mentioned earlier may hold the answer to this puzzle. First is the idea that members saw the campaign as a fight against their economic disempowerment - as suggested by Miller's (1939) frustration-aggression theory and the idea of self-organisation). Second, is the notion that these sects can easily draw support from a network of Islamists of the same religious tradition. Similarly, the regrouping may have been facilitated by the existence of an ideology that subsists even after Islamist leaders are exterminated.

The Maitatsine uprisings in Maiduguri and Rigassa further escalated after the attempted intervention by the police failed to contain the group. The disciples of late Marwa resisted police attempt to curtail the riots and inter-sect clashes and prevented security agents from searching Maitatsine enclaves and interrogating group leaders. The police responded with reinforcements

and by cordoning off the entire suburb of Bulumkuttu, where Marwa's followers had concentrated in Borno (Hickey, 1987, p. 251). Similar Maitatsine risings were witnessed in Yola-Jemeta, Adamawa state in 1984 and Bauchi and Gombe states in 1985 (Adesoji, 2010, p. 97; Isichei, 1987, p. 194; Lavers, 1984, p. 7). The resurgence of the Maitatsine in other northern states after the December 1980 clampdown in Kano was facilitated by the amnesty that was granted to 1,000 Maitatsine in 1982 as many of the pardoned ex-convicts continued with Marwa's campaign (Aghedo, 2014, p. 235). This relationship between government's amnesty and Maitatsine's resurgence suggests that a conciliatory measure that stops short of meeting Islamists demands will do little to end their violent campaign.

There are three dominant explanations for the Maitatsine uprisings in northern Nigeria. First is that political considerations inhibited prompt and decisive response by the government. Second, Mohammed Marwa's appeal among many youths and the ease with which he secured recruits for his movement was aided by his acclaimed Islamic reformist agenda. Third, the movement was able to galvanise support because of its antagonism to the religious and political establishments that were widely perceived as responsible for the economic hardship of the 1970s and 1980s. The seeming intractability of the Maitatsine uprisings for more than five years was factored by the government's reluctance to take appropriate action against the group whilst it was still in its formative stages. The Maitatsine festered unhindered in many northern Nigerian states because both a political engagement and early military confrontation were unpopular in the state House of Assembly and in the Nigeria Police headquarters, respectively (Falola, 1998, p. 84). Authorities wanted to remain neutral in the sectarian violence in which the Maitatsine were embroiled, and which the group was exploiting to unleash violence on the populace (FRN Tribunal of Inquiry, 1981 cited in Awofeso, 2003, p. 319).

Also, the Maitatsine leader had gained a significant following to the extent that a confrontation with his group was deemed politically inexpedient. Marwa's followers perceived him as a reformist prophet whose divinely assigned duty was to redeem Islam and lead the umma to righteousness. This perception enabled him to attract thousands of Quranic students to his Yan Awaki residence, which partly explains why the government deemed it inexpedient to curtail his excesses (Awofeso, 2003, p. 318). Marwa's religious doctrine can be situated within the deeply conservative practice of Islam which was introduced in northern Nigeria through Uthman Dan Fodio's early 19th-century Jihad (Hickey, 1984, p. 251). The Maitatsine leader focused his sermons on the corruption of the religious establishment and the ostentatious lifestyle of the political class in the midst of abject poverty across northern Nigeria (Clarke, 1987, p. 93). Thus, he profited from the existence of religious and political leaders who already had negative corruption perception among the Muslim umma in the north (Berger, 1983, p. 224). The successful Islamic revolution in Iran helped reinforce Marwa's teachings about the necessity and feasibility of his objective to abolish the modern state system and reform the corrupted Islamic establishment in northern Nigeria (Stock, 2004, p. 415).

Maitatsine's rebellion against the religious and political establishments in northern Nigeria occurred at the time when the rejection of capitalist development was beginning to resurge in Islamic civil society (Watts, 1996). Thus, there was already growing discontent among the Muslim umma about the adverse consequences of western capitalism, especially as many northerners lacked the requisite training to function in the system's core. In essence, Marwa's campaign against the existing religious and political authorities was aided by his recourse to extremist doctrines as much as did the economic hardship experienced by the urban poor in the north. In other words, while extremist proselytizing is a significant explanation of the uprisings, the

perception of economic inequalities also made the propaganda of “reform through Jihad” attractive to Marwa’s army of jobless youths.

### **Quranic Education and the Almajiri Phenomenon**

Northern Nigeria has been susceptible to violent extremism because there was, and still is, a large pool of unemployed and poorly educated male youths who are easily mobilized for violent causes. This category of northern Nigerian youths are products of an informal system of Islamic tutelage and education. Almajiri is a Hausa word that means Quranic pupil, and is a derivative of the Arabic word Al-muhajir, meaning a student that travels. Almajirai is the plural form of the term Almajiri (Winters, 1987 p. 173). Quranic schools operated by mallams (Islamic teachers) were introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in northern Nigeria (Awofeso et al., 2003, p. 313). Formal Islamic education is provided by the federal government, but informal Quranic schools administered by Islamic scholars also exist in the north. Many children of primary school age attend Quranic schools organised by mallams in the evening, and government administered primary schools in the morning. However, the majority of the children in northern Nigeria, especially those of poor rural families, do not receive any form of formal education (Walters, 1987, p. 179).

Poor Muslim families in the north were attracted to informal Quranic schools because mallams often do not charge any fees for their work, and even when they do, the fees are comparatively less expensive than those of government-administered Islamic schools. Quranic schools serve as 'welcoming structures' for young men who migrate out of the rural areas to urban centres during the dry season. They form a large casual-wage labour pool in urban centres. Migrating during non-farming seasons offers young rural males the opportunity to acquire Islamic learning and scholarship, and also learn a trade or commercial skill or earn money from menial jobs. Many of these young males end up under the care of militant Ulamas and return to the

countryside radicalised, thus, generating a large rural network of youths who spread fundamentalist ideas and Islamic militancy in northern Nigeria (Walters, 1987, pp. 179,183). The mallams who provide informal Islamic education are themselves products of Quranic schools, speak more of Hausa than English and lack the western training to qualify them for jobs in government-sponsored Islamic schools. In Informal Quranic schools, pupils are taught the virtues of discipline and loyalty and to regard the mallam's word as authority, and are taught by their mallams to reject western values essentially because the mallams' lack of western education depletes their status and prestige vis-à-vis western trained Islamic teachers, and due to the abandonment of traditional Islamic values by western-oriented Islamic scholars (Winters 1987, p. 178). Having taught their pupils at a young age that the teacher's word is authority and that western education is a taboo, it is not surprising that Marwa and Yusuf were able to galvanise so much support for their uprisings long after they were gone.

The animosity between the western educated Islamic scholar and the traditional Quranic teacher is primarily a product of the differences in their doctrinal orientations. The traditional mallams are conservative Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah (or Sufis) who focus their curriculum on the Quran, Islamic classics and learning the Arabic language. Western-educated Ulamas, many of whom are products of Al-Azhar University in Egypt and the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia, are mostly progressive Wahhabis, only having a superficial knowledge of Islam (Winters 1987, p. 177). Whereas the conservative nature and lack of western training foreclose the opportunity for government jobs for the traditional Ulamas, western-styled Islamic scholars dominate government-sponsored Islamic schools, universities, and Islamic courts in northern Nigeria. The doctrinal orientation of both categories of Islamic scholars can further be contrasted on the basis of the role ascribed to the individual in their respective Islamic practice. Conservative

Islam, to which most traditional mallams subscribe, tasks the individual to live a righteous life, serve the community and be responsible for the salvation of fellow human beings. On the contrary, Wahhabis place emphasis on ritual as the sole determination of proper Islamic behaviour and do not obligate the individual to be responsible for leading others to the hereafter (Winters, p. 183). In this sense, it is safe to say that much of the rank and file of Boko Haram were radicalised under Yusuf or other traditional Ulamas who, through their teaching, advanced the idea that Jihad against the corrupt Nigerian state is a religious duty.

Because Quranic teachers seldom receive payment for their services, the pupils under their tutelage often resort to street begging in service to the mallams and for their own survival. The reluctance of mallams to demand fees from Quranic pupils is predicated on the belief that their services are provided in fulfilment of the religious obligation to lead fellow human beings unto salvation. As stated earlier, these pupils are taught to be disciplined and loyal to their mallams, and as such, are easily mobilised during inter-sect conflicts which are common in northern Nigeria. Almajiri children have been implicated in numerous religious conflicts in the north, including the several clashes between Christians and Muslims in Zango-Kataf. Quranic pupils are also taught that their sufferings are a result of the corruption of religious and political leaders, and are made to believe that corruption is the consequence of deviating from Islam. Thus, to free themselves from the effects of corruption, they must strive to reassert the supremacy of Islam (Valikiotis 1981, p. 171). The cumulative result of the education received in informal Quranic schools is the production of a large pool of angry and radicalised youths who hold the religious and political establishment responsible for the economic and social inequalities they suffer. This trend could have been moderated if most Quranic pupils were enrolled in government-sponsored schools and did not have to receive Islamic training from conservative mallams.

## **Genealogy of Boko Haram Insurgency**

A discussion of BH's evolution from the late 1990s provides a clearer understanding of the factors of the group's emergence, especially how the support of unemployed and poor youths was obtained. "Islamist movements like Boko Haram have become more politically salient, as well as more popularly supported, since the end of the Cold War, the events of September 11, 2001, in New York, and especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring revolts" (Deckard et al, 2015, p. 514). However, each Islamic organisation is likely a product of a unique historical trajectory. Boko Haram's emergence as a terrorist organisation is a more recent occurrence, but the journey to BH extremism spans several decades. The historical overview provided in this chapter helps to situate the emergence and growth of BH within a century-long history of radical Islam in northern Nigeria. The BH group, like many other Islamist movements in northern Nigeria, was involved in inter-sectional conflicts over doctrinal orientations and was active in sharia agitations. Like other Islamic scholars, the BH leadership (especially Mohammed Yusuf) extolled the features of an Islamic state and propagated the idea that only through this path could the woes of modernity be reversed. Far from being a novel phenomenon, BH insurgency can more accurately be understood in terms of a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. Consequently, any attempt to explain how the insurgency can be ended must include a deep understanding of the dynamics within this Islamist tradition and the relationship of BH's doctrine to it.

The belief system of Yusuf's Islamist movement is deducible from the literary connotations of the two words that represent the group - "boko" and "haram". "Boko" in the Islamic lexicon in northern Nigeria is a derogatory term used to represent western education and to distinguish it from Islamic knowledge. "Haram" refers to an act that is forbidden (Adegbolu, 2013, p. 266). This designation suggests that the BH uprising can also be viewed as emerging within the context of

the animosity between those who pride themselves as “traditional Ulamas” and the “western-styled Islamic scholars”. The grouse among Islamists against western education is that its teachings do not emanate from the Quran and that English, not Arabic, is the language of instruction. Thus, for BH, whereas teachings that derive from the Quran are permissible, western-styled learning is forbidden. However, Yusuf’s teachings did not demonize western education alone, as the entirety of western civilization was considered to be satanic. By extension, the Nigerian state is “haram” or impermissible because it is modelled after the western state system (Zenn et al 2013, pp. 48-49). Yusuf’s radical views and intolerance for western values and modernization were developed in Chad and Niger where his study of the Quran reportedly took place. The former BH leader’s descent to terrorism was accelerated after his radical and provocative sermons wherein he attacked other Ulamas like Jafar Adam, Abba Aji, and Yahaya Jingir, as well as the existing political establishment (Danjibo, 2009, p. 6).

Between the late 1990s and early 2000, Yusuf was one of Jafar Adam Mahmud’s followers. Bitter disputes over doctrinal perspectives led to the split between Jafar and Yusuf. Jafar Mahmud became critical of Yusuf’s “dangerous” doctrinal positions, thus leading the latter to sever the relationship with his former mentor (Loimeier, 2012, p. 148). The theological dispute between Jafar and Yusuf revolved around whether western education was halal (permissible) or haram (impermissible). Adam’s position was that western education was not forbidden and that it is only through acquiring western education that the Muslim world can challenge the “western enemy” (Brigaglia 2012, p. 22). Adam’s perspective was in direct contrast to Yusuf’s, as he viewed the whole of western civilization as sinful, and those who adopt it as infidels. The difference between the above perspectives on western education is important in that whereas other groups may be defeated through cooptation of moderate insurgents, such a process may not be possible with BH

because the group itself is a fundamentalist fragment of a so-called moderate association. In 2002, Mohammed Yusuf formed his Islamic association, called Yusufiya, meaning the followers of Yusuf.<sup>17</sup> His group was founded on the basis of the Salafi strand of Sunni Islam (Pieri and Zenn 2016, p. 71). Mohammed Yusuf's desire to create a radical Islamist movement in northern Nigeria was obvious in sermons wherein he decried the non-existence of a Sunni Islamic sect that would readily take on secularism in the north, like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Zenn et al 2013, p. 49). Thus, forming the Yusufiya was Mohammed Yusuf's response to his craving for "radical Islamism" in northern Nigeria.

The profile of Yusuf's organisation within the Islamist community was bolstered by the political partnership that existed between the BH founder and a politician, Alhaji Ali Modu Sheriff (who later became the governor of Borno state in 2003, and now a factional chairman of the People's Democratic Party). The extent of the relationship between both men became obvious when Governor Sheriff appointed a close friend and financier of Yusuf, Alhaji Buji Foi, as a commissioner in the state cabinet (Onuoha, 2014, p. 166). Subsequently, Boko Haram was granted permission to construct their Mosque close to a train station and establish a microfinance scheme. The former aided the commuting of Yusuf's followers, while the latter provided Yusuf with the means to attract the urban poor into his fold. Governor Sheriff's gestures were payback for the BH leader's support during his political campaigns. Yusuf's large youth following was said to have been instrumental to Sheriff's success at the polls. The BH leader's political support for Sheriff's gubernatorial ambition took the form of praises in lectures and sermons (Pieri & Zenn, 2016, p.

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<sup>17</sup> Boko Haram never refer to themselves by that name, nor was it created by the group. The designation is a nickname derived from the dominant themes in the teachings of its founder Yusuf, which symbolizes the essence of the movement.

71). Mohammed Yusuf's charismatic qualities, militant appearance and method of preaching<sup>18</sup> lured many young Muslims to join his group (Sandig, 2015, p. 51). Given that Yusuf had considerable influence over a significant youth population in Maiduguri, his endorsement likely swayed many young voters to support Sheriff. While Sheriff's use of a religious cleric to gain political advantage is instructive, it is Yusuf's strategic employment of this relationship to meet the economic needs of his congregation and would-be followers that is of utmost relevance here. It suggests, I argue, that Yusuf was aware that the economic condition of the youths in Borno state would help expand his support base if he could leverage his political capital in a way that enabled him to meet the financial needs of the economically deprived. And previous studies have shown that much of the people that listened to the sermons of the late BH leader were poor and unemployed youths (see, for example, Last, 2009; Sandig, 2015).

In the long run, Nigerian security agencies became increasingly intolerant of Mohammed Yusuf because of the subversive content in his sermons. The first recorded confrontation between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces occurred between December 2003 and January 2004 in Kanamma, Yobe state and Maiduguri. Mohammed Yusuf then fled the country to Saudi Arabia in order to evade arrest, and only returned after receiving assurances of pardon from Sheriff's deputy, Adamu Dibal (Loimeier, 2012, p. 150). Upon his return, Yusuf continued to radicalise his followers with subversive anti-establishment sermons. Between June and July 2009, the Nigerian police raided BH's camps in Dutsen Tanshi (Bauchi state) and Biu (Borno state) (Last, 2009, pp. 7-10). Similar to the case of the Maitatsine, the clashes that subsequently ensued between security agents and BH members resulted in more than 800 deaths, including Mohammed Yusuf (Bourne, 2015, p. 629). Accounts of the reasons behind the raid on BH's camps and subsequent murder of

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<sup>18</sup> BH disseminated the teachings of their leader through loudspeakers, audio and video recordings, and by using roaming preachers.

the group's leader while in police custody vary. One such account says the crackdown was necessitated by intelligence which suggested that the group were arming themselves to wage a war (Pieri and Zenn, 2016, p. 74). This account helps to debunk the argument that it was the brutality of the government's raid that radicalised BH. As stated above, the relationship between Yusuf and Borno state politicians was financially rewarding for BH. Thus, explaining why the group could afford the procurement of arms (Pieri and Zenn, 2016, p. 71). Another account holds that Yusuf had become recalcitrant and was calling for the downfall of the same politicians he had previously supported (Onuoha, 2014, p. 166). This latter explanation of Yusuf's extrajudicial execution shows that politicians advanced BH's religious objectives when it was politically expedient, and dissociated themselves from the group when the relationship was no longer beneficial. It is clear that at the time of Yusuf's execution, the political establishment in Borno had no use for his group. Governor Sheriff was already serving his second and last term in office, so Yusuf was no longer of much political relevance to him. Moreover, the BH leader had started to publicly denounce the government for their failure to institute further Islamic reforms beyond the enactment of Sharia law (Onuoha, 2014, p. 166). Thus, at the time of his execution, Yusuf had lost the political protection he was accustomed to receiving from the Governor.

Following the crackdown on BH membership in mid-2009, many of the group's leaders fled to Somalia and Sudan where they became more radicalised. In July 2010, Abubakar Shekau, the current head of BH Shura council,<sup>19</sup> declared a Jihad against the Nigerian state. Since September 2010, the Nigerian military has been embroiled in bloody fighting with Boko Haram, resulting in more than 15,000 deaths. The attack on the United Nations country office in Nigeria in August 2012; the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno state, in April 2014;

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<sup>19</sup> The Shura council is the highest decision making organ of Boko Haram.

the declaration of a caliphate across 14 local governments in Borno, north-eastern Nigeria in October 2014; and the pledge of allegiance to Daesh<sup>20</sup> in 2015 are some of the most significant happenings since BH insurgency was launched. Although BH has come under a barrage of attacks since the new administration of President Muhammadu Buhari was inaugurated, the group is yet to lose its capacity to hit at soft targets (schools, marketplaces, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, motor parks, etc.). Thus, the discussion of how the insurgency can be brought to a final conclusion is as important today as it was in 2010.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the fundamentalist roots of BH in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the group emerged and the outcome of conciliatory measures implemented by the government in response to BH's progenitors. Specifically, the examination of the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria produced two main findings. First, the poor economic situation of northern Nigerian youths facilitated the recruitment of foot soldiers by Islamists, including Boko Haram. Second, the Islamist movement metastasised in northern Nigeria as a result of the government's accommodation of Islamists' demands. Together, these findings show that historical Jihad cannot independently explain BH's emergence, and that conciliation towards BH can end the insurgency is ahistorical. Conciliation is ahistorical because it directly contradicts the history of Islamist agitations in the region that shows that government's accession to the demands of some Islamist associations has resulted in greater demands and bolstered the movements rather than end their agitations. One example is the establishment of Sharia legal codes across many

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<sup>20</sup> Daesh is the Arabic word commonly used in reference to the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East.

northern Nigerian states that inspired the increasing demand for the reinstatement of the Caliphate system of rule in the region.

As we have seen, some components of the Caliphate system of rule established in early 19<sup>th</sup> century were sustained by the British colonial government, while others were undermined. Boko Haram's insurgency is aimed at reinstating the defunct Caliphate. The alliance between northern emirs of the Qadiriyyah sect and the British colonial government was informed by the latter's desire to minimise the cost of running the northern protectorate. But the emirs also benefited from the emergent relationship: they became shielded against potential opposition to their rule, especially from members of the Tijaniyyah denomination. Thus, the colonial government's partnership with emirs exacerbated historical animosity between the Tijaniyyah that were dethroned by Uthman Dan Fodio and the Qadiriyyah emirs that were enthroned after Dan Fodio's Jihad.

The colonial government's interference in religion strengthened Islam in the north and shaped the religious demography in post-independent Nigeria. Because the colonial government restricted Christian missionary activities in the north, there was little moderation of the forces that propelled violent extremism in northern Nigeria. For political reasons, the colonial government prevented western education from taking a foothold in the region. The restrictive policy prevented the spread of a counter-narrative against the teachings of radical Ulamas. More significantly, the policy inadvertently restricted access to government jobs, thus beginning the cycle of poverty that has been implicated in BH terrorism. As was the case with the Maitatsine, BH uprising was enabled by poverty and politics. Both risings benefitted from the existence of a large pool of Muslim youths who attributed their misery and suffering to governance failures.

The historical memory of the usurpation of Tijaniyyah political power by Dan Fodio's Qadiriyyah sect fuels contemporary animosity between both denominations. Competition for relevance among Islamic sects resulted in increased radicalisation as each group toughened its position in order to sustain its base of followers. In the 1980s, religious activism among Islamic sects was combined with agitations for the improvement of the material well-being of their followers. This transformation contributed to their ability to mobilise. Also, because this period coincided with the economic crisis that accompanied the oil glut of the 1980s and the depletion in oil rents, antagonism to established authority became the gateway to popularity among the Muslim Umma. The respective sects advanced their religious agenda by appearing to champion the cause of the downtrodden. The most vulnerable took solace in religion, hence they became subject to the influence of activist Ulamas and Islamic clerics.

Securing a greater role for Islam in ordering society and politics remains the end game of Islamists in northern Nigeria. In short, the establishment of an Islamic state is the goal. Islamic fundamentalism as exemplified by "Boko Haram" in contemporary northern Nigeria is similar to previous episodes of religious extremism in the region, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tone and tenor of BH fundamentalism do not diverge from the script of previous Islamists in the region. Boko Haram pursue the same goal achieved by Uthman Dan Fodio more than a century ago and share commonalities with the Maitatsine of the 1980s. Just like Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad, BH is fighting for the enthronement of an Islamic state; and like the botched attempt by the Maitatsine, they do so in order to remedy the problems of the modern state. Activism around the issue of sharia and the desire for the establishment of an Islamic state are themes in discussions about Islamic fundamentalism in the north of Nigeria. The decision of the northern ruling class to reinstate sharia criminal law satisfied some Islamist groups but emboldened others in their agitations for the

abolition of secularism. The idea of martyrdom that underpins BH suicide terrorism have sometimes been celebrated by Islamists in northern Nigeria. The rewards of martyrs are propagated by Islamic clerics and Ulamas in sermons and lectures to the Muslim umma.

The Maitatsine and Boko exhibit similar patterns of revolt: mobilization of Quranic pupils by Marwa and Yusuf, confrontational attitude towards other Islamic movements, and clashes with security agencies. Although no record of reference to the Maitatsine movement exists, these similarities suggest that Mohammed Yusuf was following Marwa's footsteps. There is also convergence between both groups in relation to the forces that facilitated their ability to mobilise and revolt against the state. Both rebellions were founded on specific ideologies that are rooted in Islam and secured the following of a considerable number of disenchanted male youths. The historical contextualisation of the BH uprising shows the existence of a pre-radicalised youth population that are easily mobilized by Islamists in northern Nigeria. In sum, I argue that if Boko Haram is understood as also operating within an existing Islamic fundamentalist template, this factor must be included in the attempt to understand its nature, and by extension, the analysis of how to combat the group.

## **Chapter Three: Examining Population-centric Counterinsurgency as a Pathway to Ending BH Insurgency**

### **Introduction**

Boko Haram can be viewed as constitutive of individuals whose social and economic situation made them receptive to the group's ideological messaging that situates the deplorable conditions in northern Nigeria in the region's deviation from God's ordained system of rule. The implication of this understanding of BH's constituting membership is that there are two categories of individuals in the region whose profiles are relevant for examining the viability of P-COIN. First, individuals (BH members themselves) who are actively involved in the insurgency because they have bought into the idea that the remedy to their deprivations lies in the abolishment of the Nigerian state and the reinstatement of the divinely prescribed system of rule. Second, individuals who, because of their social and economic situation, are potential BH recruits. The similarity between the situation of the latter group and the socio-economic profile of BH's membership makes it possible that the group's redemptive message will also resonate with them. This distinction is significant in that the former group has been indoctrinated into the Salafi worldview whereas the latter are potential targets for indoctrination.

Distinguishing between the BH members who have been indoctrinated into Salafism from the unindoctrinated civilian population is necessary for examining the two main prescriptions of P-COIN advocates – dialoguing with BH and implementing social and economic reforms. As noted, scholars, such as Yusuf (2013) and Aghedo and Osumah (2012) have advocated for economic and social reforms as pathways to ending BH insurgency. Other advocates of P-COIN, such as Nwankpa (2017) and Agbibo (2014) argue that the Nigerian government will succeed in its effort to end the BH insurgency if it dialogues with the group. Even when some P-COIN

advocates acknowledge the importance of a military component in counterinsurgency, they never completely abandon dialogue with an insurgent group as a policy option. For example, in his explanation of how the Nigerian government can pursue a military strategy alongside implementing developmental programmes, Maiangwa (2014) argued that CSOs can be important players in the effort to end the BH insurgency, as terrorists are more willing to engage diplomatically with civil society actors than with officials of the state.

This chapter explores the appropriateness of the above policy prescriptions in relation to the BH insurgency. In doing so, I distinguish between the BH core and potential recruits. The chapter is made up of two sections. First, I examine the speeches of BH leadership in order to identify the group's objectives, examine how these objectives relate to the Salafi ideology and discuss the implications for dialogue as a policy option. Second, I revisit the factors that created a large pool of potential BH recruits in northern Nigeria in order to ascertain the place of social and economic reforms in the effort to end the group's insurgency.

### **Examining the Appropriateness of Dialogue and Socio-economic Reforms as Policy Options for Ending BH Insurgency**

The appropriateness of dialogue as a policy option in ending the BH insurgency is ascertainable by examining the assumptions that underpin the policy approach alongside BH's objectives and the group's disposition to dialogue as revealed in its press releases. As noted, an insurgency is said to be in effect when "a non-ruling group struggles for power with the ruling authority, using political resources and violence to destroy or reformulate the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics" (O'Neill, 1990, p. 13). The fact that the BH insurgency embodies the above characteristics has led scholars to erroneously assume that the organisation is similar to insurgent groups in other parts of Nigeria and elsewhere (see, for example, Nwankpa, 2017). However, upon

closer examination, the particularities of Boko Haram's insurgency reveal striking differences between the group and insurgent groups in other parts of the country, making it unlikely that approaches employed in ending those insurgencies would suffice for the current one. For example, although BH is constituted by individuals who may have been socially and economically marginalised, merely implementing economic and social reforms is insufficient to appease the group because of their perception of the real cause of the region's problems: the abandonment between the 1950s and 1960s of the caliphate system of rule. In short, unlike many insurgent groups, BH does not merely seek changes to how the political system functions, but aims to abolish it.

Mohammed Yusuf, the BH founder, was not the only northern Islamic cleric to have pursued a religious objective by targeting economically marginalised individuals. The same approach to mobilisation was used by Mohammed Marwa as well as the leaders of the Tijaniyyah and Qadiriyyah brotherhoods (Loimeier, 1997 as cited in Umar, 2001, p. 130). However, BH's specific messaging, founded on an uncompromising extremist ideology, makes the group different from other Islamic sects in the region and explains why only the group has metamorphosed from a religious sect to an insurgent group. The BH insurgency, in general, is shaped by an ideology - Salafism - that admonishes the "pious" Muslim to redirect "infidels" unto a path of righteousness. According to Haykel (2009), returning to the practices of the earliest prophets and "fighting unbelievers actively" are core features of Salafism (p. 41). Similarly, Hoigilt and Nome (2014) note that to Salafis, "true believers could only express belief and the sincerity of their faith by demonstrating open enmity towards 'idolaters', including other Muslims who do not share in their worldview" (p. 35). Boko Haram was formed in order to undertake this task of fighting unbelief and its leader has expressed delight in and commitment to pursuing this objective. For example, in

a videotaped message released by BH on August 12, 2013, Abubakar Shekau made the following statement:

Let the world know that we have been enjoined by Allah to kill the unbelievers just like how we were enjoined to slaughter rams during Eidel Kabir. And we shall continue to kill those who strive to stand against the will of Allah by opposing Sharia. We don't mind if we die doing this because it is even a blessing for us to die in this cause and gain paradise. So, we are winning on either side. So, it is never too late for you to repent and join us on the path of righteousness (Audu, August 12, 2013).

Similarly, on January 12, 2012, the BH leader expressed his hatred for non-Islamic worship in a videotaped message addressed to former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan. Shekau was quoted as saying:

This religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion of God - it is paganism. God frowns at it. What you are practicing is not religion. I have no objective than to help the religion of God, that is all I can explain (Sahara Reporters, January 12, 2012).

These comments reflect Shekau's commitment to fighting unbelief, belief that he is fighting God's battle and great disposition to employing brute force to achieve group goals. They reveal the thinking behind the group's insurgency, at least that of its leader: the belief that even if they die in the course of fighting for the establishment of a Caliphate, they will be rewarded with paradise. So, for Shekau, the insurgency can only produce one outcome – a win for BH fighters. BH's core objective, as reflected in the above quotes, sets it apart from other insurgent groups, but so does the scope of its aspirations. According to Zenn, Barkindo and Heras (2013), the desire to organise an Islamic resistance to secularism in northern Nigeria, in the fashion of Al-Qaeda's global campaign, was evident in much of Mohammed Yusuf's teachings long before the start of the insurgency (p. 49). But the comments of the current leader of BH show that he sees the group as involved in a global campaign, rather than just undertaking an Al-Qaeda-styled Jihad in northern Nigeria. For example, on November 29, 2012, Shekau released a statement in which he expressed

BH's support for the "cause of Allah everywhere". The BH leader is quoted as making the following comment:

The world should witness, and America, Britain, Nigeria and other crusaders, meaning America and Britain, should witness, and the Jews of Israel who are killing the Muslims in Palestine should witness... that we are with our Mujahideen brothers in the cause of Allah everywhere". "O Britain, America, Israel and Nigeria: Don't think that Jihad stops with the death of imams". "Because imams are individuals. Jihad started now, Jihad started now, O enemies of Allah (Vanguard, November 29, 2012).

Similarly, in a videotaped message in which Shekau vilified West African governments for undertaking joint military operations against his group, the BH leader expressly claimed that the group's mission is global. The BH leader stated thus:

We never rose up to fight Africa. We rose up to fight the world. We are going to fight the world on the principle that whoever doesn't obey Allah and the Prophet to either obey or die or become a slave (Vanguard, February 9, 2015).

Also, Shekau's July 14, 2014, statement in which he extended greetings to foreign Jihadists is additional indication that the BH leader has a global vision for his group. In the beginning of the videotaped message released to ridicule the #BringBackOurGirls Campaign, the BH leader stated thus:

To you my dear brethren, Muslims, those who are true believers and not those that practice democracy, not those who believe in constitution, not those who believe in western education. My regards to my leaders like Mullar Umar, the Amirul Muminin in Afghanistan, great minds like Sheikh Al Zawahiri; those like Amir of Yemen, Abu Bashir; the likes of Abu Mosab Abdul Wudud; and others in Pakistan and Iran, like Al-Baghdadi. My greetings go to you all. I thank you all. We give thanks to almighty Allah; here we are in the land called Nigeria; but we don't see it as Nigeria. "May God's wrath befall the name Nigeria; all we know is the land of God. We are doing the religion of God and no one will stop us from practising the religion of Allah, even if it is going to be only for a few millions of people (Sahara Reporters, July 14, 2014).

Shekau's reference to western nations as crusaders and acknowledgement of other Jihadists in the speeches quoted above suggest that he sees BH as part of the global network of Jihadists fighting to rid Islam of foreign influences. The quotes show BH's desire for the dethronement of secularism, the enthronement of Islamic rule, and Shekau's belief that employing violence to bring

people to the ways of God is a “holy” duty. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect that merely implementing social and economic reforms in northern Nigeria can bring an end to the group’s insurgency. Given that the BH leader views the insurgency as divinely ordained, it is difficult to believe that the group can be made to give up its violent Jihad through dialogue with the same people they refer to as infidels. The unlikelihood that the insurgency can be ended through dialogue is made clearer when one considers that the policy itself stands in direct contrast to the ideology of the group. According to Gauvain (2010), the beliefs and practices of the earliest believers have been distilled into a sort of educational curriculum to propagate the Salafi worldview (p. 805). Olsson (2014) notes that in spreading these teachings, Salafis consider the use of logic and human reasoning as unnecessary, given that the sources are regarded as self-explanatory and authority lies in the text and not the preacher (p. 177). They view the prescriptions of religious texts as self-evident, hence they do not require further interpretation. As long as there are explicit and unequivocal verses in the Quran or prophetic traditions documented in the Sunna regarding any issue, the role of a pious Muslim is not to interpret or employ human reasoning but to strictly apply those verses and traditions to the letter (Hafez, 2010, p. 366). The import of the above doctrine is that whereas dialogue requires that representatives of conflicting parties assess the proposals of either side based on their merits, Salafism does not permit the analysis of the merits or lack thereof of Quranic prescriptions.

The above observation about the Salafi principle of textual authority is evidently true of Boko Haram, as Abubakar Shekau has on several occasions stated that the group works only by the dictates of the Quran. For example, on January 12, 2012, the BH leader stated thus:

We follow the tenets of the Quran and anybody that thinks he can fight God shouldn't think his prayer or praying in the mosque can save him! Any Muslim that cheats and hides under the cloak of religion, if we know such person, we won't hesitate to eliminate him. Yes, I am saying so because it doesn't take 5 minutes to kill just as we're

being killed. We follow the teachings of the Quran. This is what God has told me to explain (Sahara Reporters, January 12, 2012).

The BH leader made a similar comment on November 1, 2014, saying:

You people should understand that we only obey Allah, we tread the path of the Prophet. We hope to die on this path and get eternal rest in our graves, rise up in bliss before our Lord and enter paradise. Our goal is the garden of eternal bliss. May Allah protect us (Audu, November 1, 2014).

Shekau's claim that BH operates only according to the dictates of the Quran is an indication that the group views its fight to change the system of rule in Nigeria as a display of their obedience to Allah. The idea that government should be based only on Islamic laws and principles is a core feature of Salafism. In fact, Salafis do not believe that there are aspects of human activity that are independent of the scope of Islam. For them, Islam is a complete code of life (Cottee, 2010, p. 334). Included in that code are divine prescriptions of how people should be governed. The emphasis in the branch of the Salafi movement to which BH belongs is on a militant interpretation of the Salafi creed which suggests that the current global religious and political milieu calls for violence and revolution (Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 208). This explains BH's disposition to employ extreme violence in pursuit of the establishment of a caliphate, a commitment that is reflected in Shekau's comments and observable in their targeting of civilians and the religious and political elites in northern Nigeria. One such comment of Shekau which reflects BH's disposition to extreme violence is the March 24, 2014, speech in which he admonished BH fighters to attack members of the Civilian Joint Task Force vigilante group. The BH leader stated as follows:

I call on all my followers and brethren wherever you are, to rise and take up arms and start killing the vagabond. Kill them, kill them and kill them. Now our religion and our way of worship is nothing but killings, killings and killings! (Audu, March 24, 2014).

One central philosophy that underpins the violence of Salafi-jihadists against the Muslim establishment and the modern state system emanates from the belief that the application of human-made laws is a violation of God's absolute sovereignty in legislation, that itself derives from their

interpretation of Quran 5:44 that states that “whosoever judges not (man lam yahkum) according to God’s revelation - they are the infidels (al-kafirun)” (Salah International Version). Thus, unless the Nigerian government is willing to restore Allah’s sovereignty in legislation, it is unrealistic to expect that the same group whose duty has become the purification of Islam would be willing to negotiate with the people who they hold responsible for violating Allah’s rule. Even more so, as Abubakar Shekau has on several occasions denounced the idea of compromising on the group’s quest for an Islamic state. One such instances was on November 1, 2014, when Shekau denied claims by the Federal Government that the group had agreed to a pause in fighting. To quote at length, the BH leader responded to the claims in the following words:

In what way did we make truce? Which kind of negotiation, with whom? That your Danladi, the infidel like you, who we will not spare and will decapitate if he falls into our hands today? Where do we know him, not to talk of him representing us? Who is Danladi on this earth? Allah knows everything. Allah is witness. Therefore, I tell you (that) we have not made ceasefire with anyone. Only battle, hitting, striking and killing with gun which we long for like tasty meal. This is what we believe in and fight for. We did not negotiate with anyone. We did not negotiate with anyone. We did not negotiate with Chad. We did not negotiate with Cameroon. We did not negotiate with Nigeria. We did not negotiate with the Chadian ambassador. We did not negotiate with Africa. We did not negotiate with Asia. We did not negotiate with Europe. We did not negotiate with America. We did not negotiate with the United Nations. “What is negotiation? We did not negotiate with anyone. It is a lie. It is a lie. We will not negotiate. What is our business with negotiation? Allah said we should not. We follow the Quran. We will not be teased by any infidel (Audu, November 1, 2014).

The quote above demonstrates BH’s unwillingness to compromise, and its objectives also make compromise practically impossible on the part of the Nigerian government. These objectives – the eradication of western education and democratic practices – are deducible from comments made by Shekau. Between 2012 and 2015, the group’s leader expressed his disdain for western civilisation in nine different videotaped messages. On January 12, 2012, he noted that “everyone knows that democracy and the constitution is paganism and everyone knows there are some things that God has forbidden in the Quran that cannot be counted even western education” (Sahara

Reporters, January 12, 2012). On July 13, 2013, he voiced his support for the murder of 42 schoolboys in Yobe state, saying, “we fully support the attack on this Western education school in Mamudo. Western education schools are a plot against Islam” (Vanguard, July 13, 2013). Shekau also indicated his desire to see Nigeria detached from all non-Islamic practices in his August 12, 2013, speech in which he claimed that BH was winning the war against the Nigerian military. The leader was quoted as saying: “We call on you all to repent and come to the ways of Allah. Forget about constitution and accept Sharia. We don’t have socialism, we don’t know communism, we don’t want federalism, but we are Muslims (Audu, August 12, 2013). Also, in a message released on March 24, 2014, in which Shekau threatened to attack universities, the leader was more explicit in expressing his hatred for western education. He stated thus:

Glory be to Allah. The world has changed! Work has started. And for your information, western education is forbidden. University is forbidden, you should vacate university! You should leave university, I hate university. You should quit university, I hate it, bastard. Western education is totally forbidden. Girls, you should return to your homes (Audu, March 24, 2014).

BH’s abhorrence of the influence of western civilisation in Nigeria does not exist only in their leader’s comments. The group’s actions manifest the hatred. For example, three weeks after the above statement almost 300 schoolgirls were abducted in Chibok, Borno state. On May 6, 2014, the BH leader reiterated his belief that girls should not be educated and reaffirmed his desire to see western influences in the country eradicated. He stated as follows:

Just because I took some little girls who were in western education everyone is making noise. Let me tell you: I took the girls. Girls: Go get married. We are against western education, and I say stop western education...In every nation, in every region, there is a decision to make. Either you are with us, I mean real Muslims who are following Salafism, or you are with Obama, Francois Hollande, George Bush, Clinton...And any unbeliever, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill. This war is against Christians, I mean it (Guardian, May 6, 2014).

In his July 14, 2014, message to the organisers of the #BringBackOurGirls Campaign, Shekau also implied that the Quran is the ultimate source of laws rather than the Nigerian

constitution. “I am reading the Quran, and you are reading the constitution; I am reading the rules and regulations of the Quran, and you are doing that of the constitution, the book of Lord Lugard, the book of Tafawa Balewa” (Sahara Reporters, July 14, 2014). Similar views were expressed in a videotaped message in which Shekau vowed to attack Emir Sanusi Lamido, a reformist northern king and former head of Nigeria’s Central Bank. The BH leader commenced his speech with the following words:

Before I start talking to my brothers who believe in me and the religion of Allah not the religion of democracy, not that of western education, those who believe in the religion of the Quran not that of the constitution and not religion of the Emir of Kano Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, Jonathan, Obasanjo, Atiku, Babangida, Obama, Bush, Clinton, but the religion of Allah. Our own government is defined as government of Allah by Allah and for Allah not as you define your own government as the government of the people by the people and for the people” (Lere, December 17, 2014).

On January 21, 2015, the leader denounced the Nigerian state and reworded the Nigerian pledge in a way that expresses his allegiance to Allah rather than the Nigerian state. Shekau made the following comment in the videotaped message:

I pledge to Allah, my God. To be Faithful Loyal and Honest. To serve Allah with all my strength. To defend his Islam... Allahu Akbar!! Nigeria is dead; her constitution is dead!! Islam and Islam; war by war upon the Kafir who is the unbeliever (Audu, January 21, 2015).

In a statement released one week earlier, the leader also indicated that the purpose of the insurgency is to rid Nigeria of western influences. In the statement in which the group claimed responsibility for the massacre of more than 1,000 people in Baga, Shekau is quoted as saying:

This is just the beginning of the killings; what you’ve just witnessed is a tip of the iceberg; more deaths are coming. This will mark the end of politics and democracy in Nigeria. This is to confirm to you that we carried out the Baga massacre, and we are going to do more. “Nigerians are busy with politics, hailing Buhari! Buhari, Jonathan! Jonathan! Do you think the two of them are spared? Do you think even Buhari is a good Muslim? Buhari is not a Muslim as far as we are concerned – He is nothing but an infidel and our enemy... (Audu, January 12, 2015).

While announcing that BH had established a caliphate over Gwoza in Borno state in August 2014, also hinted that the group views the Nigerian state as illegitimate because it deviates from Allah's prescribed system of rule. The BH leader stated thus:

For us there is nothing like Nigeria but Islamic Caliphate; because Allah the creator of the world and the earth we are all standing is the sole owner of the earth and no one else. So we have no option but obey the owner of the sky that is above us, even as He is the owner of the earth. We Muslims obey our Creator" (Odunsi, August 25, 2014).

The consistent disdain for western civilisation in Nigerian politics and society indicates that eradicating its influence is at the core of the group's insurgency. Further, Shekau's uncompromising tone makes dialogue an unrealistic policy option. However, what is most important in assessing the appropriateness of dialogue is the fact that the group's position on western influences in Nigeria is not a random policy choice - as it flows from the Salafi creed. Thus, when Shekau denounces democracy, Nigeria's secular constitution and the Nigerian state itself, he is abiding by the Salafi principle of forbidding innovation and modernity. As Gauvain (2010) notes, one of the characteristics of Salafis is "striving to rid Muslims of 'reprehensible innovations' (bida) in belief and practice, those things that one does not find in the Quran, Sunna and consensus of the Companions" (p. 806). In the same vein, Lauziere (2010) notes that Salafis "advocate an expansive definition of innovation (bida), which narrows the scope of acceptable Islamic practice, and remain wary of extra-scriptural influences and sources of knowledge in religious matters (p. 170). Cottee's (2010) study on Salafism provides a similar explanation for BH's abhorrence of the secular nature of the Nigerian state.

...Salafism is thus fundamentally, unappeasable, and self-consciously opposed to the political ideals of Western liberalism. Not only does it reject the idea of the "private sphere," where individuals are free to think and act as they wish (so long as they inflict no direct material harm on others); it also repudiates the secular ideal of a public space free from religious dictates or influence (p. 335).

In addition to informing the substance of the above BH messages, Salafism also shapes Shekau's uncompromising tone. According to Cottee,

Salafism directly challenges the liberal ideal of skeptical inquiry, according to which "truth" is never final but is contested, dialectical, and constantly revisable in the light of empirical evidence and the free exchange of conflicting ideas. Salafis are also vehemently opposed to the liberal politics of compromise and the connected idea that progressive change can be achieved through reforming existing political institutions. Indeed, they are radically and defiantly utopian, in that their avowed ambition is to break completely and totally with existing practices and to re-establish the order of the Prophet's early community (Cottee, 2010, pp. 335-336).

The fact that BH's objectives are ideology based and that the ideology itself is completely inconsistent with incremental change, suggest that a negotiated settlement is impossible.

The works of Lauziere (2010) and Gauvain (2010) confirm that BH's founding and current objectives are indeed informed by Salafism, and Cottee's (2010) study helps to explain Shekau's uncompromising tone. The fact that the pattern of BH's operations reflects the group's core objectives further demonstrates that the stated commitments are not empty threats. For instance, in keeping with their commitment to eradicating western education, the group has attacked western-styled schools and murdered pupils in cold blood (Kermeliotis, December 23, 2015). In showing its disdain for institutions that do not emanate from the Quran, BH attacked the United Nations compound in Abuja, Nigeria, in August 2011 (Murray & Nossiter, August 26, 2011; Mshelizza, August 29, 2011). And, in pursuit of their coercive proselytizing agenda, BH members frequently attack churches and kill worshippers who refuse to convert to Islam (Amnesty International, April 14, 2015).

The release of 21 and 82 Chibok schoolgirls on October 13, 2016, and May 7, 2017, respectively is a welcomed development (see The Guardian, May 7, 2017; CBC News, October 13, 2016). But this is insufficient proof that BH is disposed to negotiating an end to the conflict. More than anything, it shows that the group would negotiate only when it serves their strategic

interest of establishing a caliphate. For example, the BH commanders who were released from Nigerian prisons in exchange for the schoolgirls returned to the battlefield barely one week after the swap deal. Speaking in a videotaped message released to the media on May 12, 2017, one of the released commanders, Shaibu Moni, stated thus: “more bomb attacks are on the way, including Abuja that you feel is secured” (Vanguard, May 13, 2017). The swap deal also shows that the Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped for the strategic purpose of securing the release of the BH commanders. Further, exactly two months after the girls were kidnapped, Shekau demanded the release of his “warriors” in exchange for the schoolgirls. In the same video in which he mocked the #BringBackOurGirls campaigners, the BH leader commented as follows: “Nigerians are saying bring back our girls, and we are telling Jonathan to bring back our arrested warriors, our army” (Sahara Reporters, July 14, 2014). Based on this, I argue that the Chibok girls were kidnapped because of the outrage this would cause and the pressure that it would exert on the Nigerian government to secure their release. Thus, rather than seen as a move toward compromise, the release of the girls through a swap deal should be viewed as a strategic move, and the incentivising of more kidnappings by Boko Haram.

Added to the possibility of promoting the weaponisation of kidnapping, we also need to look at how the release of Islamist militants, especially while fighting is still ongoing, has affected the trajectory of war elsewhere. For example, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the so-called Islamic State (IS), was a prisoner in Camp Bucca, a facility where al-Qaeda insurgents were imprisoned by United States forces (BBC, May 15, 2015). The activities of the group led by Baghdadi prompted the transformation of what was supposed to be the winding down of the War in Iraq into the establishment of a large coalition of western and allied military air offensive. In fact, IS practically pressed reset on ex-President Obama’s effort to cut down on US’ military

expenditure in the Middle East. Although the exact time that Baghdadi changed from being a regular Islamic cleric to a Jihadi militant is contestable, the fact that years after his release, he spearheads a serious threat to global peace and security is not in dispute. Thus, rather than seeing the swap deal as a step towards compromise, it should be viewed as boosting the ranks of the insurgents.

If BH is so disinclined to compromising on its objectives, then a policy of dialogue is impracticable as the idea itself is founded on the belief that both disputing parties are disposed to granting concessions. It is this understanding that makes disputants agree to negotiate an end to their conflict. However, in theory, the Nigerian government can unilaterally accede to BH's demands and bring the insurgency to an end. But this too is practically unrealistic in the light of BH's demands. The practices which BH seeks to abolish in Nigeria are so deeply entrenched in the fabric of the state that granting them would be a violation of the Nigerian constitution. For example, establishing an Islamic state would be a direct violation of Part 1, Section 10 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution which states that "the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion" (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999). Moreover, granting these demands would impinge on the freedom of Nigerians, many of whom would lose the right to practice their faith if the country's secular constitution is abolished. These rights are enshrined in the country's constitution. For instance, Section 38 (1) states that

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999).

The nature of BH and, by extension, the type of demands it places on the Nigerian state undermine the prospects that pursuing a policy of dialogue is a viable pathway to ending the insurgency. However, given the social and economic problems in the region where BH operates,

implementing socio-economic reforms and a policy of counter-radicalization can win the “hearts and minds” of potential BH recruits and engender long-term peace and stability in the region. In essence, this aspect of P-COIN is appropriate and its application is discussed further in the next section.

### **Exploring the Role of “Hearts and Minds” in Achieving Peace in Northern Nigeria**

The spread of extremist ideology in northern Nigeria might be curtailed if the region’s education sector is reformed. Consequent upon the influence of the extremist ideology that is trafficked by BH, the dissemination of a counter-narrative that undermines the credibility of such fundamentalist doctrine will be instrumental to guaranteeing long-term peace in the region. Such counter-narratives can dissuade potential recruits from joining the group. Given that there are groups of Islamists in northern Nigeria who historically have supported democratic processes of change (see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999, p. 29), such associations can be mobilised by the Nigerian government to advance narratives that indirectly counter fundamentalist doctrines in the region. Thus, in contrast to the argument that co-option of moderate insurgents can lead to the demise of an insurgency (see, for example, Driscoll, 2012, p. 121; Staniland, 2012, p. 19), it is cooption of moderate Islamic clerics who operate outside BH that can contribute to ending extremism in northern Nigeria.

If the messaging of moderate Islamic clerics succeeds in limiting the influence of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria, then the region will have been rid of the major factor that enabled BH to fester. However, the persistence of economic and social problems in the region makes it more likely that remnants of fundamentalist ideologues will resurge and that their messaging will resonate. Even Abubakar Shekau appears to be aware of the intrinsic power of ideology. For example, in expressing support for global Jihad, the BH leader stated thus: “O

Britain, America, Israel and Nigeria: Don't think that Jihad stops with the death of imams". "Because imams are individuals. Jihad started now, Jihad started now, O enemies of Allah (Vanguard, November 29, 2012). Implicit in Shekau's reference to imams<sup>21</sup> as individuals whose death does not mean the end of Jihad is the understanding of global Jihad as ideological and the belief that the ideology behind it outlives individual Islamists.

Scholars (see, for example, Ucko, 2016) have shown that leadership decapitation can end insurgencies. However, it is also true that ideologically founded ones can outlive their leaders. For example, the targeting of Al Shabaab leaders may have weakened the group, but it has failed to end the insurgency in Somalia. Thus, ensuring that BH's ideology dies with the group is critical to sustainable peace in northern Nigeria. But solely pursuing a counter-narrative while socio-economic maladies persist in the region is inadequate to undermine the influence of Salafism. Thus, in addition to promoting a counter-narrative, changes must be made in the economic and educational sectors of northern Nigeria. The informal system of education which is prevalent in northern Nigeria exposes the region's children to extremist indoctrination at a very tender age. Conservative Islam, which is not so distant from BH's ideological leaning, constitutes the doctrinal foundation of the curriculum based on which the pupils are taught. Combined with teachings which suggest that the mallam's word is authority (Winters, 1987, pp. 178,183), informal Quranic schools literally serve as recruitment grounds for Islamic militants in northern Nigeria.

The government must incentivize enrolment in formal Quranic schools in order to reduce or eliminate the production of such pool of youths and children. Outlawing the informal Quranic schools that are run by mallams is not an option because this may result in a backlash from religious leaders. Because the system has existed for centuries, outlawing it now would be perceived as an

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<sup>21</sup> Meaning Islamic clerics, but in the context of the speech, Shekau is referring to leaders of Jihadi groups.

affront against a cultural practice, thus, confirming the narrative of us (poor Muslims) versus them (the religious and political elite). The less complicated and more viable approach is to produce incentives which will popularise formal Quranic education and result in a voluntary withdrawal from informal Quranic schools. Such an approach must take into account the fact that the prevailing economic conditions of the region contribute to the popularity of informal Quranic education. Ironically, although parents are motivated to send their children to informal Quranic schools due to financial constraints, the mallams themselves are so poor to the extent that their pupils resort to street begging for survival (see Winters, 1987, p. 179).

In essence, poor economic conditions expose children to extremist indoctrination under conservative mallams, and the economic situation they face whilst living with the mallams lead them to fend for themselves on the street, causing the production of experiences which fertilize the “the call to action”. Thus, if education is made truly free at the primary and secondary school levels and existing school feeding programmes are expanded across northern Nigeria, indigent parents will be motivated to enrol their children in formal Quranic schools, making the withdrawal from informal Quranic education a voluntary process. But the economic response of government must go beyond promoting formal Quranic school enrolment. In order to reconfigure the environment that fertilized BH’s messaging, a holistic economic strategy that addresses relative deprivation must be pursued.

In a situation where 72 percent of northerners live below the poverty threshold of \$1.25 a day whereas only 27 percent of southerners have similar experiences (Agbibo, 2014, p. 406), it is easy to fuel ingroup and outgroup comparison (see Korostelina, 2010, p. 101), and inspire violent action against the perceived cause of deprivation – that is, the religious and political establishments. Thus, in order to deprive extremist ideologues of a fertile audience or a pool of

potential foot soldiers, government's response must include an economic plan aimed at producing productive economic engagement for northern Nigerian youths. And because the educational backwardness of the region in comparison with the south limits the access of northerners to good-paying jobs, bridging the educational gap is also critical to the success of the economic component of government's response.

The importance of the above discussion is that "winning hearts and minds" can help end the long history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria, but this strategy must entail much more than promoting economic development. It requires an interwoven intervention in the economy and education of the region.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the speeches of BH leader, Abubakar Shekau, in order to understand the group's disposition to dialogue with the Nigerian government. Based on this exploration, it is safe to say that BH is not disposed to dialogue. Because the group understands the insurgency as a divinely assigned responsibility, it is unrealistic to expect that they would be disposed to dialogue without being guaranteed that the demand for the establishment of a caliphate will be met. Also, because BH considers both the establishment of their caliphate and dying while fighting for its establishment as wins, there is great incentive to continue to wage war against the Nigerian state. The chapter also examined the group's objectives as reflected in the statements of the group's leader in order to ascertain the feasibility of compromise on the part of the Nigerian government. The plausible conclusion to draw from the examination of BH's objectives is that the idea of compromise by the Nigerian government is unfeasible. The idea is unfeasible because the demands of BH, such as the eradication of democratic principles and the implementation of Sharia law

across Nigeria, are antithetical to provisions of Nigeria's constitution on the country's system of governance and religious freedom.

Based on the factors that enabled the emergence of Boko Haram, the chapter also explored the question of whether the "winning of hearts and minds" by the Nigerian government can stem the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. The conclusion reached is that "winning hearts and minds" through a coordinated educational and economic intervention can help to deflate the burgeoning influence of fundamentalist ideologues in the region. Neither the dissemination of a counter-narrative nor economic empowerment or reform in education can independently undermine the influence of Salafism in the region. It is all three interventions working together that can undermine BH's ability to recruit new members but will do little to stop the leadership and existing members.

## Conclusion

### Introduction

Based on the understanding that BH's activities against the Nigerian state are shaped by Salafism, this study answered the following research question: is population-centric counterinsurgency the appropriate approach to ending Boko Haram insurgency? The dearth of scholarship that examines how the Salafi ideology can affect the COIN effort against BH provided the impetus to explore this topic. While some scholars base their prescription of conciliation on drivers of the conflict, such as the socio-economic problems in northern Nigeria, none included the group's Salafi ideology. In fact, none of the existing works truly examines the appropriateness of conciliation towards the group as much as they prescribe how the government should respond. Thus, rather than merely add to the already vast scholarship on what the government should do, this thesis evaluated the suitability of what some researchers think the government should be doing: engaging in conciliation toward BH. By basing the assessment on the features of the group itself, the study avoids a flaw that characterises some of the scholarship on P-COIN - the assumption that all insurgencies are alike.

The thesis first presented a theoretical framework to examine the conflict and assess responses to the insurgency. Drawing extensively on Weinstein's (2007) work on how the nature of an insurgent group comes about, I argued that the forces which enabled insurgent leaders to organise ultimately shape the form the group assumes in the future. In chapter one, I explored the broader counterinsurgency literature and then explored the BH-focused scholarship. The purpose of the chapter was to present the debate between the two dominant schools of thought and situate my work within it. Included in the broader COIN literature is a debate between advocates of enemy-centric COIN (the use of brute force to suppress an insurgency) and adherents of

population-centric COIN (the use of persuasion to end an insurgency). The clusters of BH-focused scholarship that were examined include the literature on BH's emergence and the IR informed state response literature. The exploration of the debate on the factors of BH's emergence led to a tentative claim about an interface between socio-economic drivers and religious forces. The chapter reviewed scholarship on Boko Haram in order to identify the factors of its emergence. Relative deprivation and the long history of Jihadi indoctrination in northern Nigeria emerged as the dominant explanation regarding the origin of the group.

Chapter two explored the history of the Islamist movements in northern Nigeria. The overview indicated that not only did previous conciliatory measures toward Islamist movements not end their uprisings, but also emboldened such groups and incentivised their demand for the expansion of Islamic laws and principles. The historical review also indicated that the two dominant explanations of BH's origin are accurate, but goes further to show that neither, on its own, could account for the group's emergence. Thus, my understanding of BH's nature, as shaped by the historical overview, is that the group is partly made up of individuals that view the establishment of an Islamic state as the pathway to ending the socio-economic problems of northern Nigeria. In chapter three I examined the speeches of BH's leadership and found that the overarching goal of the group is to eradicate western influences from Nigeria. With this understanding, I conclude that the group is comprised of other members that view the establishment of a caliphate as their pathway to religious purification. Chapter three also showed that, contrary to the prescription of P-COIN advocates, BH is unwilling to compromise on this goal and neither can the Nigerian government meet the group's demand. I argue that the unwillingness to compromise applies not only to the members that view the establishment of a caliphate as the way to attain religious purification, but also those that view the reinstatement of

the caliphate system of rule as the means to alleviating the socio-economic problems of the region. I reached this conclusion based on the understanding that the factors of a group's emergence not only influence participation but also shapes the attitude and emotion of individuals that elect to participate in an insurgency.

The section that follows summarizes the key findings of the research based on which I conclude that a conciliatory policy toward BH is inappropriate for ending the group's insurgency.

### **Key Research Findings**

My conclusion about the inappropriateness of dialogue and negotiation for ending the BH insurgency was reached by exploring the history of fundamentalism in northern Nigeria and examining the speeches of BH's leader. In chapter two, the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria was examined, and it showed that, historically, economic and religious factors have influenced Islamist uprisings. The exploration of the history of Islamic fundamentalism in the region showed that Islamic sects actively targeted individuals that existed in the margins of northern Nigerian society and economy by claiming that a sharia regime would lead to their redemption. In order to be certain that this interface is true for Boko Haram as it was for other Islamist groups, the evolution of Boko Haram was included in the historical exploration. This revealed that not only did the Boko Haram leader promise the economically marginalised a better life under an Islamic state, he obtained the followership and loyalty of this category of people by establishing a microfinance bank. Consequently, the examination of P-COIN prescriptions was carried out with the understanding that although the prevailing socio-economic situation in northern Nigeria contributed to BH's ability to organise an insurgency against the Nigerian state, it is the group's Salafi ideology that provided the main impetus for action. Hence, it is the main determinant of what is an appropriate COIN approach.

Among the specific socio-economic factors identified as accounting for the emergence of Boko Haram was the inability of the Nigerian government to formulate and implement wealth creation policies (Maiangwa et al, 2012, p. 44; Bamidele 2015, p. 124), the inability of government to transform the country's rich natural resource endowment into economic prosperity for all (Khan & Cheri 2016, p. 65), and official corruption, including the corollary of unfair distribution of wealth (Agbibo, 2014, p. 406; Suleiman & Karim, 2015, p. 1). These factors are said to have created a pool of economically and socially marginalised individuals who held the state and its custodians responsible for their situation, thus, allowing BH's redemptive messaging to resonate. Although not explicit, the notion that Boko Haram may have targeted this category of individuals by employing a religious messaging which connected doctrinal commitments with economic prosperity was first highlighted in the review of scholarship on relative deprivation (see, for example, Suleiman & Karim, 2015; Hansen, 2017). This idea was expanded in the review of studies that explain BH as part of a long lineage of Jihadists. In some scholarship (see, for example, Voll, 2015) BH is viewed not merely as a continuation of the long history of Jihad, but as a distinct group due to the influence of Salafism on its operations. I aligned with Voll's argument that the group embodies the features of older Islamist groups, but also exhibits distinct characteristics. For example, the objectives of curtailing the infiltration of non-Islamic practices into Muslim society and politics, challenging the corrupt religious and political elite, and rejecting colonially bequeathed territorial boundaries, are longstanding traits of Islamism in northern Nigeria (see, for example, Alao, 2013, pp. 131,132; Celso, 2015, p. 258). However, BH's uncompromising nature and aversion to progressive change set it apart from other northern Nigerian Islamists that pushed for and accepted incremental change; for example, the establishment of state-wide Islamic courts.

Chapter two shows that in 1804, an Islamic cleric, Uthman Dan Fodio, embarked on a Jihad with the objective of ridding Islam of external influences and succeeded in establishing an Islamic Caliphate and the rule of Islamic clerics (Umar, 2001, p. 128; Uchendu, 2010, p. 65). This system of rule was retained by the British colonial government for administrative reasons (Kirk-Greene, 1968, p. 160). On their part, the Islamic rulers (emirs) saw the partnership with the British as an opportunity to consolidate power (Lawal, 2012, p. 9). The success of the alliance between the emirs and the British made the latter to prohibit Christian missionary activities in the region in the late 19th century (Ojo, 2007, p. 177; Graham, 1966, p. 151). The dearth of Christian missionaries deprived the people of access to western education (Rasmussen, 1980, p. 182), and made a significant proportion of the population less relevant in the post-independent Nigerian economy. Thus, it was argued that British colonial rule helped sustain extremist proselytizing and create economically disadvantaged individuals in northern Nigeria. This history is important for understanding why BH was able to recruit foot soldiers and supports my argument that the government must intervene educationally and advance a counter-narrative in the region in order to undermine the group's ability to recruit new members.

Chapter two also indicates that the Islamic movement in the north view the prevailing socio-economic situation as a product of the modern state (Ojo, 2010, p. 176), and see the centralisation of power under a caliphate as a possible panacea (Umar, 2001, p. 140). In particular, the Shiite sect under Sheikh El-Zakzakky denounced modern state institutions such as the police and judiciary as satanic and preached that the Nigerian state was founded on a godless system (Olugboji, 1995, p. 6). In addition, I found that the act of sacrificing one's life for a cause, as BH practices through suicide terrorism, was long promoted by Islamic scholars in sermons delivered in Mosques across the region (Umar, 2001, p. 141; Casey, 2008 p. 71). The study also reveals that

in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these Islamist groups began to aggregate and promote the economic interests of their members in addition to catering for their spiritual needs (Loimeier, 1997 cited in Umar, 2001, p. 130).

The chapter also identified the different ways in which economic condition and religion interfaced in accounting for Islamic radicalisation in northern Nigeria. I found that Islamist groups in the 1990s challenged the religious and political establishments in a bid to gain followership (Hunwick, 1997, p. 39). For the unemployed northern Nigerian youth, joining the most assertive Islamic brotherhood was a means to self-reassertion (Lawal, 2012, p. 15). And because these associations had gained so much popularity, the northern political class, especially those in power, started to accede to their demands for political reasons. The enactment of sharia civil and criminal laws across nine northern Nigerian states is one of such accepted demands (see, for example, Elaigwu and Galadima, 2003). The findings on the agitation for a sharia penal code show that much of this was done violently. Thus, ostensibly emboldening Islamists that other objectives could be achieved through similar methods (Casey, 2008, p. 96).

The historical overview also showed that the Maitatsine uprising was a result of economic factors intertwined with religious forces (see, for example, Aghedo, 2014). I view the group's disruption of school activities as a manifestation of their disdain for western influences. Also, in focusing much of his sermons on the corruption of the religious and political establishment (Clarke, 1987, p. 93), the group's leader, Mohammed Marwa, was either playing to the gallery or expressing his deep concern for the economically marginalized. Either way, Marwa's sermons suggest the salience of economic factors in explaining the group's uprisings between 1980 and 1985. Also, the study reveals that similar to other Islamist groups, Mohammed Marwa saw the abolishment of the Nigerian state and the overthrow of the Islamic establishment as a panacea to

the existing economic challenges (Stock, 2004, p. 415). The research shows that under the tutelage of mallams, northern Nigerian children begin to develop anti-west and anti-establishment sentiments at a very young age as well as receive indoctrination into the idea that it is only when Islam assumes supremacy that freedom from the effects of corruption can be attained (Valikiotis, 1981, p. 171). Under a mallam like Mohammed Yusuf, the BH founder, Quranic pupils were taught that it is the whole of western civilization that is satanic, not its education alone (Zenn, Barkindo & Heras, 2013, pp. 48-49). In fact, the magnitude of Yusuf's disdain for the west, at least as revealed by his demonization of western culture, is the reason the group was dubbed Boko Haram, meaning western education is sinful (Adegbolu, 2013, p. 266).

Based on the above points, specifically the fact that BH is a Salafi-jihadi group that exploits the socio-economic conditions of northern Nigeria to its advantage, chapter three examined the viability of population-centric counterinsurgency. In this chapter, I examined the speeches of the current leader of BH, Abubakar Shekau, in order to ascertain the group's willingness to compromise on its demands. The examination of these speeches indicated that the group is averse to dialogue with the Nigerian government. Apart from the explicit rejection of the notion of dialogue by BH's leader, several other findings support this claim. For example, BH members and leaders believe that they are fighting God's battle by killing unbelievers, including other Muslims that do not subscribe to Salafism. Also, the group sees itself as being part of a global network of Jihadists fighting against the "crusaders". In addition, BH is fighting against the religious and political establishments because they usurped God's supreme authority in legislation. Based on these points, it is unrealistic to expect that such a group will dialogue with the same "infidels" that they are supposed to eliminate in obedience to God. In the same chapter, I examined the Salafi-based objectives of BH, such as the eradication western education, the establishment of sharia, the

abolishment of democratic principles etc. Because these objectives are antithetical to deeply entrenched systems and are directly opposed to principles of the Nigerian constitution, I argued that the Nigerian government cannot accede to BH's demands. In other words, due to BH's Salafi nature, it is unrealistic to expect that the group can be persuaded to give up fighting and because of the Nigerian constitution, the government cannot implement any of the group's demands. In essence, a policy of dialogue with BH is an unviable policy option because there is no realistic middle ground.

However, because the socio-economic situation in northern Nigeria enables the festering of Islamic fundamentalism, it was also concluded that the Nigerian government must intervene socio-economically in the region in order to reduce the pool of potential BH recruits. Although such an intervention cannot placate BH members who believe that their redemption lies in the establishment of an Islamic state, it can begin to eradicate the pool of disenchanting individuals that are targeted for extremist indoctrination. However, I argue that it is unrealistic to expect that current BH members and leaders can be convinced to end the insurgency through the implementation of socio-economic reforms in northern Nigeria. Even the members that view the establishment of a caliphate as the means to their economic rejuvenation are unlikely to abandon BH if economic reforms are implemented outside the Islamic state. I make this argument because the uncompromising Salafi ideology that provided the impetus for the insurgency continues to shape the attitude and emotion of all members and leaders irrespective of whether the caliphate is viewed as a pathway to economic renewal or religious purification.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Most counterinsurgency scholars tend to overlook the need to uncover the specifics of an insurgency when theorising COIN (Gventer et al., 2014, p. 23). In the case of Boko Haram, this

study has shown that understanding the specifics of the group's environment of birth and of its evolution is critical to ascertaining the viability of specific COIN approaches. In other words, employing a pre-existing template will be ineffective except the particularities of the insurgency are uncovered to enable the determination of what is needed, but missing from the template or what is included, but of no use. For example, the examination of the viability of P-COIN vis-à-vis the BH insurgency shows that whereas adopting a conciliatory policy towards the group is an unviable strategy, the government can stem future Islamic risings if it works towards placating the economically and socially disadvantaged individuals in northern Nigeria. In this sense, it is not the adoption of assumptions from the generic COIN literature that is problematic, but the failure of COIN scholars to do so with the specifics of BH insurgency in mind. The research finding does not substantiate the assumption that all insurgencies are a product of local grievances (Gventer et al 2014, p. 16), neither does it contradict the claim. What it reveals is that, unlike other insurgencies in which local grievance may directly influence the decision to organise an insurgency, the case of Boko Haram involves the manipulation of the grievances of others to pursue a religious objective. Although this situation is not unique to BH, it is important that COIN scholars understand this dynamic of the group's emergence as it is central to making appropriate policy prescriptions.

Another dominant assumption in the generic COIN literature is this: insurgencies result from governance failure and the absence of material prosperity, thus, peace and stability can be restored through a programme of intervention that combines population security, improved local and national governance and economic development (see, for example, Jackson, 2014). The research findings show that historically, the absence of material prosperity has facilitated the organisation of Islamist uprisings in northern Nigeria, including BH's insurgency. However, the programmes of intervention mentioned above are inadequate responses to BH insurgency because

although they might be able to prevent the emergence of other insurgent groups in the future, they cannot address the substance of the current conflict.

### **Policy Implications**

As noted, because desperate poverty in northern Nigeria contributed to BH's ability to organise to challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian state, appeasement has an important role to play in achieving sustainable peace in the region. However, based on the findings, such appeasement is to be extended to the civilian population, rather than BH members. The findings indicate that BH does not desire appeasement that stops short of the establishment of an Islamic state. The Nigerian government is unable to institute any programme of appeasement that can meet the aspirations of BH. In fact, if history is significant in our effort to understand the present, then the history of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria teaches that appeasement provides the impetus for the Islamist movement to make greater demands on the system. The history of extremism in the region also leads one to the conclusion that because the implementation of sharia law was achieved through violent protests and the employment of propaganda, fundamentalist elements became emboldened, believing that the dream of an Islamic state can also be actualized via a combination of violence and religious propaganda.

Thus, if a conciliatory policy is advanced in response to BH insurgency, there is the possibility that similar insurgent groups would emerge in the region, as was the case in the Niger Delta. Moreover, nothing in the nature of BH suggests that the group is open to dialogue. If anything, its nature is suggestive of a group that is uncompromising. Hence, it is unrealistic to expect the group will abandon its campaign through negotiations. Thus, the international community should assist the Nigerian government to effectively implement its existing E-COIN leaning approach.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that like other Islamist groups in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram was aided by the socio-economic, political, and religious milieu of the region. These forces on their own do not account for BH's emergent nature. However, Salafism is the most significant factor of the insurgency, as it was based on this religious ideology that the BH leadership garnered support and because it continues to influence the group's operations and shape their dispositions. Thus, in exploring the appropriateness of specific policy responses to BH's insurgency, conflict researchers must endeavour to base their analysis on this dynamic of the insurgency. This is the route adopted in this project, and the outcome is the conclusion that whereas addressing the poor living conditions of the civilian population is important for long-term peace in northern Nigeria, appeasing BH is not a viable approach for achieving the short-term security objective of ending the group's insurgency.

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