



A Dialectical Inquest into the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Exploring the Neoliberal State Thesis

Okolie Aloysius-Michaels

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Nwoke Ikemefuna Sunday

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Enyiazu Chukwuemeka

Department of Political Science, Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria

Ozor Adanne Chioma

Social Science Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Oranye Henry Uchenna

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Nnamani Kelechi Elijah (Corresponding Author)

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Email: kelechi.nnamani@unn.edu.ng

Article History

Received: 5 November, 2020

Revised: 25 November, 2020

Accepted: 4 December, 2020

Published: 8 December, 2020

Copyright © 2020 ARPG &

Author

This work is licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution
International



CC BY: [Creative
Commons Attribution License
4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Abstract

Scholarly opinions have clearly identified governance deficits, Islamization agenda, power contestations among the elite class, heterogeneous character of African states, dysfunctional socio-economic system and external conspiracy as factors fueling and sustaining the recent wave of terrorism in Northeast Nigeria. Although these varied perspectives have been relied on by most scholars to explain the phenomenon of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, they have increasingly appeared insufficient in understanding the evolution, dynamics and seemingly intractable character of the conflict. The present study therefore explores the neoliberal economic link which provides the grand perspective and heuristically excellent foundation for explaining the intensification and seeming intractability of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Using the theory of dialectics, the study argues that the neoliberal economy foisted a failed system which could not provide social safety nets, qualitative education and affordable healthcare delivery to the people. Indeed, the ensuing condition of hopelessness generated by the withdrawal of the state in providing essential services to the citizens undoubtedly provided a fertile ground for the birth of Boko Haram insurgency. The study among other things, recommends an economic reform that prioritizes the development of the productive forces in consonance with the autochthonous development conditions of the polity.

Keywords: Boko haram insurgency; Neoliberal state; Nigeria; economic reform; Theory of dialectics.

1. Introduction

Nigeria's Fourth Republic spanning from 1999 till date is beleaguered with internal security challenges manifesting in Niger Delta militancy, Biafran secessionist movement, armed robbery, maritime piracy and ethno-religious clashes. However, the rise and transmogrification of the Boko Haram sect from a relatively local militia group to a full-blown terrorist organization with international recognition have constituted more serious threats to the lives and property of the citizens than the aforementioned challenges, particularly in the Northern axis of the country. It has equally thrown the entire security architecture into a state of perplexity. Through its tactics, ranging from kidnapping, suicide bombing, hostage-taking, drive-by shooting, hit-and-run, destruction of public infrastructure to the use of improvised explosive devices, the sect has orchestrated violent attacks leading to the death of thousands of people, the displacement of millions of citizens and the destruction of public and private property valued at billions of naira (Okolie and Nnamani, 2015).

Some of the infamous activities of the sect at the early stage of the violent campaign include the Bauchi jail-break in September 2010 which led to the escape of more than seven hundred (700) prisoners including Boko Haram members; the bombing of the Police Headquarters in June 2011 in Abuja which led to the loss of eight lives and destruction of seventy vehicles; the bombing of the UN office in Abuja which killed thirty-four persons in August 2011; the 25th December 2011 bombing of St. Theresa Catholic Church Madalla which led to the death of forty worshippers; the series of bombings in Kano state which led to the death of one hundred and eighty-five people in January 2012; hostage-taking of seven foreign construction workers on February 16, 2013 at Jama're town in Bauchi and the abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in April 2014 in Borno State (Aghedo, 2015; Bintube, 2015; Okolie and Nnamani, 2015). Most fundamentally, UNICEF's report found that the Boko Haram sect masterminded the killings

of 2,300 teachers and the destruction of 1,400 schools in the Northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe between 2009 and 2018 (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Additionally, the recent Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to the notorious Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015 accorded the sect a transnational character and further broadened its operational capacity, funding, strategies, recruitment, logistics, tactics and arms (Cannon and Iyekepolo, 2018; Dim, 2017; Ogbogu, 2015). Regardless of the commitment of the national and international forces in countering and downgrading the rising wave of violent extremism orchestrated by the Boko Haram group, the sect has continued to coordinate highly lethal attacks against the Nigerian state and its neighbours. Official data indicated that the Boko Haram terrorist group has successfully prosecuted more than 2,800 attacks with over 31,000 fatalities (Matfess, 2019). A breakdown of these violent campaigns included: 11,500 fatalities in 2015; 910 fatalities in 2016; 967 deaths in 2017 and 2,700 reported casualties in 2018 (United States Department of State, 2017; Wilson, 2018). These figures excluded the number of hostage-taking, kidnapping, internal displacement and a number of injuries recorded between 2009 and 2018. Given these high-profiled incidences, the Boko Haram has acquired notoriety as the world's deadliest terror organization in 2016, while Nigeria where it has operational base was ranked the world's third most terrorized state in 2017 (Zenn, 2017).

Meanwhile, following the transmutation of Boko Haram from nearly an amorphous local militia to a full-grown terrorist organization with international links, the scientific community has been flooded with divergent but competing theories and approaches primarily evolved to explain the impetus driving and sustaining the deadly organization in Nigeria. An inquest into these varying theories and explanations revealed that the emergence and persistence of the terror sect have been largely linked to factors such as governance deficits, Islamization agenda, dysfunctional socio-economic system, power contestations among the elite, external conspiracy, among others. While the relevance of these explanations cannot be ignored, the study notes that they do not sufficiently address the changing, persistent and intractable character of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Again, although some of these studies explored the nexus between the socio-economic misfortune of the Nigerian state and the emergence of Boko Haram (Abbas, 2013; Khan and Cheri, 2016; Meagher, 2014; Usman, 2015), they seem to have neglected or isolated how the economic foundation (substructure) generated social inequality, illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. Succinctly put, these studies failed to concretely establish how the outcome of an unfitting economic reform can impact on national security.

Given the unending interconnectedness between economic policies and national security, which has historically formed the locus of intellectual discourses, the present study explores the neoliberal economic reform link in providing logical and grand explanations to the birth, revival and persistence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Nigeria's incorporation into the global capitalist economic system was initially facilitated by colonialism and subsequently through the forced neoliberal economic policy in the 1980s (Nnamani, 2015). A further reincarnation of the market liberalization policy occurred in 2003 following the introduction of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), a purportedly homegrown development strategy which analysts later found to be a renewed edition of the failed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), designed to achieve two core objectives: perpetuate the dominance of Western imperialism and distort the economic development of Nigeria. This ideological shift to neoliberal economic ethos according to Ekanade (2014) and many analysts isolated the state from its statutory and contractual duties of providing public goods to the citizens. As a consequence, the emergent forced neoliberal state orchestrated by the metropolitan states worsened the plight of many Nigerians, increasing inequality, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and social exclusion. It was the apparent despair and frustration generated from this scenario that made Boko Haram's manifestation and survival possible. Therefore, this study, supported with empirical substantiation, presents a logical analysis of the identified nexus.

2. Theory of Dialectics

In exploring the linkage between neoliberal economic reform and the intensification of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the Marxian theory of dialectics suffices. Although the theoretical underpinning of dialectics originated from the early Greek Philosophy, it was Georg F. Hegel who provided the logical expositions of the theory as an analytical tool for apprehending the natural world and its historical progressions. Subsequently, Marx and Engels drew inspiration from the analysis of Hegel and remodelled the approach by isolating its idealistic inclination and treated the natural world in its objective and concrete form. Contemporary usage and application of the theory of dialectics in understanding the internal dynamics of social phenomena were credited to the intellectual exercise of Engels (1968), Lukacs (1972), Lukacs (1975), James (1980), Ake (1981), Levins and Lewontin (1985), Ollman (1993), Anderson (1995), and Dunayevskaya (2002).

Generally, dialectics is a theoretical perspective which, among other things, is perceived thus: wholes as basic parts of connecting systems; change as ensuing from reciprocal causation; and conflict is inherent in every interaction in the society. Also, dialectics is a systematized body of knowledge which deals with the universal laws of motion and the development of nature, human society and thought. It views the phenomenon of nature as one which is constantly moving and experiencing continuous transformation. It further conceptualizes the development of events as the outcome of internal contradictions, as an upshot of the intercourse of the conflicting forces in nature (Swingewood, 1991). The preoccupation of the dialectical theoretic-methodological approach, therefore, is to appreciate more lucidly the real interdependent world.

Meanwhile, the Marxian dialectical theory regards history as a summative activity of human beings in the production process, their deliberate effort to satisfy economic needs and the consequences arising therefrom. The theory argues that the economic structure (the substructure or base) of every society significantly conditions the

nature, character and existence of other elements of superstructure including law, politics, religion, security and morals. Delineating the central thesis of the methodological tool, Marx (1968) averred that:

In the social production of life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.

In his contribution, Ake (1981) identified three fundamental assumptions of the theory of dialectics: the dominance of material conditions, the changing character of reality, and the interconnectedness of different elements of society. The first characteristic of the theory acknowledges that since economic need is critical to man's survival, it becomes imperative for analysts seeking to appreciate the dynamics of conflict and development to focus on the economic structure of a given society. Ake (1981), further argued that once the material assets of the society, its productive and distributive pattern as well as the social relation arising from the organization of the production are understood, an analyst has come a long way in comprehending the societal values, its religious system, its political system, its law and even its mode of thought.

In the second assumption of dialectical theory, Ake (1981) rejected the notion of perceiving aspects of social phenomena as simple identities or discrete elements or as being static. Rather, the approach emphasized the need to think of the world in terms of continuity and relatedness as well as the acceptance that this continuity is basically very multifaceted and highly challenging. The theory suggests treating the world as something full of motion and dynamism, the movement and dynamism being propelled by the contradictions which pervade existence. The third and perhaps the final feature of dialectical viewpoint is the recognition of the interface between the different constituents of social life including social, political economic, legal and the belief structures of the society. The dialectical approach presumes that the relationship between all these social structures must be taken into account systematically before a better clarification of society can be made. Ake (1981), noted that the economic factor, which is decisive among other elements of society, fundamentally determines the character of others.

The basic features of this methodological approach are germane in understanding the evolution, intensification and sustenance of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Indeed, the process of premature integration of Nigeria into global capitalism was initially made possible through colonialism and further driven by the logic of market reform as reflected in the implementation of SAP. Obviously, the nature and character of the neoliberal policies which do not correspond with autochthonous value have had a severe implication on the growth and development of the Nigerian economy. First it distorted and disarticulated the Nigerian economy and perpetually assigned the country a dependent role in the international political economy. Secondly, the incorporation of Nigeria into a global economy through a series of economic reforms was directly responsible for the total alienation of the country from participating in decisions affecting the economic wellbeing or material needs of the people.

As a corollary, this theory argues that the evolution and intensification of Boko Haram activities cannot be fully comprehended in isolation of the economic structure of Nigeria. The dysfunctionality of Nigeria's economy manifesting in poverty, unemployment, inequality and other social crises cannot be wholly explained outside the nature of its economic structure. Thus, poverty, unemployment, inequality and other social crises cannot exclusively account for the resurgence of Boko Haram in Nigeria, rather a further inquest can establish how the nature and character of an economic reform instigates economic crisis. In the context of this study, we argued that the implementation of SAP and NEEDS in Nigeria weakened the capacity of the state to provide social safety nets, fund health and education programmes, create jobs, implement poverty alleviation strategies and even secure law and order. As a consequence, income inequalities have widened and economic security greatly undermined, thus aggravating social tensions. Indeed, when states abscond from their contractual role of providing public goods to the citizens, they experience dissension from the disadvantaged populace. In other words, failed states are breeding grounds for terrorism, mass migration, drug trafficking, violence, international criminality, disease, mass migration and refugee movements (Sachs, 2003).

3. Evolution, Nature, Character, and Contending Perspectives for Understanding Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Boko Haram literally translated in the Hausa language as 'Western education is evil/forbidden' is a terrorist group based in the Northeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria (Bintube, 2015; Nsukka and Onuoha, 2012; Okolie and Nnamani, 2015; Pérouse de Montclos, 2016). Evidence from the growing body of existing literature suggests that scholars were overtly indecisive over the historical antecedence of the sect. While some saw Boko Haram's emergence as an offshoot and extension of the Maitatsine movement of 1979; others differed, and rather believed that the deadly terror group was initially known as *Sahaba* and founded by Abubakar Lawan in 1995 (Eseoghene and Efanodor, 2016; Liolio, 2013). According to this influential account, the group's initial non-violent approach was short-lived when the pioneer leader, Abubakar Lawan proceeded to the University of Medina for further studies, leaving the group's leadership to Mohammed Yusuf.

Under the guidance of Mohammed Yusuf, the group took up different names such as *Muhajirun*, *Yusufiyyah*, Nigerian Taliban, Boko Haram and *Jama'atu Ahlissunnah lidda'awati wal Jihad* (Nsukka and Onuoha, 2012). Most fundamentally, under the headship of Yusuf, the group established a religious complex which included a mosque and school, and also extended its operation and activities to other states like Kano, Katsina, Yobe, Gombe

and Bauchi. Nonetheless, the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf following confrontations with the security operatives of the Nigerian state opened another chapter in the historical antecedence of the sect. From a relatively peaceful and amorphous local organization, the sect changed its operational tactics and embraced violence as a means of advancing its objectives. By expanding its network of operation from Northeastern Nigeria to other parts of the North and even across international borders of Cameroun, Niger and Chad, the group has acquired a wide reputation as a global terrorist movement. Most importantly, Boko Haram's unholy alliance with other dreaded and renowned international terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab and recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levante has in no small measure deepened its sophistication especially in the areas of recruitment, finance, and operational tactics.

Although Boko Haram metamorphosed from a period of preaching (*da'awah*) under Yusuf between 2003 and 2009 to a local militia, down to a guerrilla movement and finally to a transnational terrorist organization of repute, it has consistently maintained its avowed commitment to the abrogation of the secular status of the Nigerian state as guaranteed by the constitution and subsequent imposition of the Islamic state under Sharia rule (Okolie and Nnamani, 2015). This transmogrification no doubt coincided with a period when the international system was grappling with the challenge of neutralizing the threats posed by the activities of other transnational violent extremist groups such as the Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda, operating across different regions of Africa (Okolie and Nnamani, 2017). More worrisome is the expansion of the strategic base of Boko through its declaration allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a deadly terrorist group renowned for orchestrating terrorist attacks, beheading captors and spreading hatred in major parts of Middle East.

Today, despite the much-acclaimed *technical defeat* of the Boko Haram by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the sect has acquired notoriety as one of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world. Through its tactics/acts of terrorism, the deadly organization has been involved in the kidnapping of school children, women and foreign nationals; suicide bombing where women and children are usually the orchestrators; the destruction of public infrastructures; bombing and attacks of churches, mosques and markets; laying ambush on military personnel; raids on villages and markets; and the killing of people. From 2009 till date, the Boko Haram group has been implicated in several violent attacks such as bomb explosion of St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla Niger state in 2011, Gwoza Massacre in 2014 to Baga bloodbath in 2015. These have undoubtedly led to a loss of lives and property. Between 2015 and 2017, it was reported that Boko Haram violent extremism has led to the death of 18,313 Nigerians. Further breakdowns indicate that while 11,500 deaths were recorded in 2015, 3,484 and 3329 deaths were attributed to Boko Haram's campaign of terror in 2016 and 2017 respectively (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

In view of the foregoing, recent scholarship has made significant efforts in explaining the impetus driving and sustaining Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. While these studies have made obvious and invaluable contributions in understanding the realities of Boko Haram insurgency in the country, they have failed to provide a logical, grand and unified perspective consistent with the historical events that shaped the emergence of the group. An exploration of the intellectual content of these varied approaches seems necessary and timely. The first scholarly attempt in explaining the root causes of Boko Haram insurgency insists that the birth of the sect cannot be divorced from the dysfunctional socio-economic conditions of Northern Nigeria (Abbas, 2013; Amaraegbu, 2013; Haider, 2007; Khan and Cheri, 2016; Meagher, 2014; Uadiale, 2012; Usman, 2015). To this perspective, the emergency of Boko Haram is directly linked to the persistence of poverty, inequality, unemployment and illiteracy. In their study, Khan & Cheri maintained that the evolution of Boko Haram can be attributed to the increasing socio-economic crisis in Northern Nigeria manifesting visibly in unemployment and poverty. Adegbulu (2013), acceded to this position and lamented that though the Nigerian state swims in an ocean of poverty, the northern section remains the worst hit. According to Adegbulu's breakdown, 67% of the Northcentral population is living below the poverty line, Northwest 71.1% while Northeast the birthplace of Boko Haram has 72.2% of its inhabitants living below the poverty line. With this statistics, this group of scholars therefore concluded that the poverty-stricken individuals who felt deprived and alienated were lured into identifying with the Boko Haram sect as a way of expressing their disenchantment against the Nigerian state.

Contrastingly, some group of scholars argues that the socio-economic dysfunctionality of a state at any given time is logically an outcome of misgovernance. Indeed, this perspective agrees that Boko Haram insurgency is a manifestation of misgovernance which has in no small measure, imposed gross injustice and poverty across the country. Contributing, Osita-Njoku and Chikere (2015) insist that Boko Haram insurgency is an indication that the political environment is tainted with indices of misgovernance such as human right abuses, endemic corruption, administrative injustices, inequality and negligence. As a corollary of this development, they maintain that the natural response to an unjust social formation occasioned by misgovernance is for the downtrodden to seek redemption and refuge in a terror organization.

To the third school of thought, Boko Haram is nothing but an extension of age-long quest by the foremost jihadist Usman dan Fodio to bring the entire Nigeria under a caliphate rule. According to this viewpoint, Boko Haram has not hidden the obvious motive of enthroning Sharia system of governance throughout Nigeria. Given that the group is averse to the Western way of life including education, liberal democratic principles, religion and western social life and values, these scholars conclude that Boko Haram emerged to challenge and execute holy wars against the infidels (Buah and Adelakun, 2009; Ezeani and Chilaka, 2013).

Meanwhile, scholars like Ahokeyh (2012), Maiangwa and Uzodike (2012), Okpaga *et al.* (2012), Sani (2011), Chukwumeka (2013), Mbah *et al.* (2017) believe that the ethno-regional power contestations among the political elite are the mask behind the birth of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This group of scholars contend that the present form of radicalism was fuelled by the recent power shift to Southern Nigeria as exemplified in the emergence

of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the President of Nigeria. According to Mbah *et al.* (2017), the Nigerian political space became over-heated when President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua died in 2010, and in accordance with the Nigerian Constitution, the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as the substantive President with an unwritten agreement to complete the remaining tenure of the late Yar'Adua and relinquish power to a candidate of Northern extraction. The alleged pact was said to conform with the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) principle of zoning. When Jonathan exhausted the four-year tenure of Yar'Adua, contested and won presidential election in 2011, some powerful forces in the north threatened to make the country ungovernable for the president (Chukwuemeka, 2013). With this threat, many pundits believe that Boko Haram violent campaign was to intimidate the former president out of office and replace him with a Muslim Northern President.

4. Implication of the Contending Approaches on the Counter-Insurgency Measures of the Nigerian State: The Missing Gap

Given the devastating outcome of Boko Haram's insurgency, the Nigerian state has developed and implemented a number of strategies for countering terrorism and violent extremism. One of the major counterterrorism measures include intensified offensive crackdown by the coercive apparatus and other security agencies of the Nigerian state, a strategy usually relied on by most nations who still uphold the state-centric notion of national security in containing internal or external aggressive behaviour directed against a sovereign state. This military approach led to the inauguration of Joint Task Force comprising mainly of Nigerian Army, Navy, Air-Force, Police, Directorate of State Security, Immigration and Directorate of Intelligence Agency. The Joint Task Force was empowered to conduct a military operation in most Boko Haram-infested areas in order to tame, degrade and over-run the group. Meanwhile, the local military campaign was further boosted by the assistance of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a multilateral contingent drawn from Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Also, the local youths operating under the umbrella of Civilian Joint Task Force were enlisted to assist the conventional military operation in information gathering and arrest of suspected Boko Haram members.

Other non-military tactics for countering terrorism and violent extremism in Nigeria include: declaration of the state of emergency, enactment of Terrorism Prevention Act in 2011, launching of National Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2014, strengthening of bilateral and multilateral military ties and engagements with the neighbouring countries, subtle move to grant amnesty to the members of the sect, inauguration of the Presidential Committee on the Northeast Initiative, and finally the enactment of the National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. Although the foregoing measures for countering terrorism and violent extremism have recorded little progress in degrading Boko Haram operational capacity, facilitating better situational knowledge of the battlespace and rescuing of civilian captors; they are fundamentally flawed and contextually unfitting.

Apart from serial cases of gross human right breaches, prolonged detention of suspects, extra-judicial killings, induced fears, and excessive use of force against the civilians, the initial counter-insurgency measures were generally faulty, ineffective, incoherent, inappropriate and amorphous as they neglected the generic context that birthed and sustained Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This is further exacerbated by the increasing cost of prosecuting the kinetic-driven counterinsurgency. For instance, Nigeria's defence appropriation sky-rocketed from ₦233 billion in 2009 to ₦264 billion in 2010, appreciated further to ₦348 billion in 2011, ₦921.91 billion in 2012, and finally ₦1.055 trillion in 2013 (Ndujihe, 2018). As a country grappling with the twin challenges of extreme poverty and social inequality, the continuous appropriation and diversion of enormous public fund for counter-insurgency operations might instigate human security crisis in Nigeria.

Ideally, viable measures for countering terrorism and violent extremism is usually based on contextual or situational analysis, identification of incubating factors and finally the evolution of feasible and holistic strategies designed to synchronize with the prevailing realities. Indeed, it is the contention of the present study that a result-oriented counterterrorism and de-radicalization tactics always focus on identifying, uprooting and overhauling the political cum socio-economic structure(s) known for bequeathing and sustaining untoward outcomes to the society. In this context, the study argues that poverty, ethno-regional power contestation and misgovernance constantly adduced as factors birthing and sustaining the violent campaign of Boko Haram sect are only but manifestations of the inappropriateness and emptiness of the ideas espoused by the neoliberal economic policies. Thus a context-driven counterterrorism and de-radicalization tactics should prioritize people-centered economic reform aimed at meeting the growing needs of the people concretely defined in job availability, affordable education, critical infrastructure, an enhanced welfare packages and other basic necessities vital to the wellbeing of the citizens. This viewpoint corresponds with the submission of the Pakistani High Commissioner to Nigeria, Retired Lt. Gen. Agha Farooq, who admonished the Nigerian government to focus greatly on the non-kinetic counterterrorism strategies involving careful identification of the root causes of terrorism, fault lines and inefficiencies in the society (Daily Post, 2016). Indeed, the missing gap in the present counter-terrorism warfare in Nigeria can be located in this scenario.

5. Neoliberal Economic Reform-Boko Haram nexus in Nigeria: An exploration

The unending interconnectedness between economic reforms and national security outcome, though germane, has often been neglected in the intellectual discourses of Boko Haram. Although several studies identified unemployment, poverty and illiteracy as the causes of insecurity, what has often been ignored is the expansion of the frontier of research to ascertain how the nature and character of the prevailing economic regime can trigger security challenges in a state. Exploring the economic reform-security challenges nexus is, therefore vital given that the

nature of the economy according to the Marxian persuasion, has great implication for the functioning and stability of the socio-political fabrics of the state. While some economic policies produce favourable outcomes, others may be replete with untoward consequences. Thus, the evolution and persistence of social challenges are mostly attributed to the ineffectiveness of the economy policy.

Nigeria's foray into the mainstream of neoliberal economic framework which was witnessed in the early 1980s under the SAP marked a paradigm shift from a development state model of the economy to a market-driven economy. Series of economic reforms enshrined in the Washington Consensus and promoted by the multilateral international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were implemented and greatly emphasized. These include: deregulation of market, trade liberalization, wage control, rationalization of public sector, privatization, subsidy removal, currency devaluation, and cut in public expenditure. With the IMF imposing austere budget and the consequent cut in public expenditure, critical areas such as health, agriculture, and education were negatively affected. Also, the privatization of public enterprises ensured that most government workers were laid off and forcefully thrown into a state of hopelessness.

Thus, the ensuing consequences of the neoliberal economic reform were enormous, devastating, glaring and negative in all spheres of human development. According to Babalola *et al.* (1999), the Nigerian state under the SAP regime experienced about 8 percent reduction in the share of education in the national budget, leading to 60 percent cut in public spending per student. The high rate of inflation in Nigeria during this period accounted for the drastic decline in purchasing power with an obvious negative impact on the overall performance in examinations, gross enrolment ratio, completion rate, pupil-teacher ratio, girl-child education and pupil per school ratio. Similarly, Bond and Dor (2003) observed that the substantial cuts in public social expenditures resulted in increased malnutrition and other health challenges, deterioration in per capita income and real wages, expansion of social inequalities, high unemployment and underemployment rates, increased illiteracy rate, rising food crisis, declining standard of living, decayed infrastructural facilities and increased cost of living. Worse still, women, children and the aged were identified as being at the receiving end of the harsh economic conditions imposed by the neoliberal economic regime.

Despite the hardship, outcry, disappointment and criticisms which greeted the dismal and disastrous SAP outing in Nigeria in the 1980s, the country through the NEEDS reinvigorated the neoliberal development models in 2003. At the core of this framework is the government's subtle desire once again to drive the economy through the interaction of market forces of demand and supply. Although the promoters of NEEDS had dismissed the notion in certain quarters that the policy frameworks were externally imposed on the country by the multilateral financial agencies, a closer analysis of the constituent programs revealed that it was nothing but old wine in new wine skins. In line with this finding, Onuoha (2008) submitted that the NEEDS programme of action corresponds with the neoliberal policy frameworks which emphasize the withdrawal of the state from superintending the economy. In the same vein Okonkwo (2014) maintained that the NEEDS was the latest version of the neoliberal policy as well as the new subtle move to imperialize developing nations.

Meanwhile, an appraisal of the NEEDS framework revealed that the impact of the sixteen years of adjustment has railroaded the country from development crisis into a development tragedy. In fact the reform failed to satisfactorily address problematic issues of growing poverty and unemployment, putrefied infrastructural facilities, poor healthcare and sanitation, lopsided income distribution, and debt crisis. Within these years, Nigeria's debt profile rose from \$17.3 billion in 2006 to a whopping sum of \$73 billion in 2017 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2013; Debt Management Office, 2015; Olanrewaju and Adejokun, 2018; Premium Times, 2013). Similarly, data generated from the United Nations Development Programme have shown that with a figure of 0.504 Human Development Index (HDI) in 2014, Nigeria is currently ranked among countries with low HDI (World Bank, 2016). In the same vein, the unemployment rate estimation stood at 26.5% while about 70% percent of Nigerians live in abject poverty (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015; National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Moreover, with the figure of 75 and 88 per 1,000 live births, Nigeria ranks among the highest in infant and child mortality rate while maternal mortality stood at 630 deaths per 100,000 live births. On the other hand, only about 56% of Nigerians have access to potable water.

Given the foregoing scenario, it is evident that the neoliberal economic strategies have not only been implicated in the worsening economic situation of Nigeria but has once again reproduced its incapacity to reposition the country to the path of sustainable development. By privatizing public corporations, the neoliberal economic model facilitated the retrenchment of public servants and thereafter, exposed them and their children to the vagaries of joblessness, poverty and poor health condition. In the same vein, the concentration of public decisions in the hands of private individuals on the guise of efficiency, effectiveness and social delivery only helps in increasing inequality by making the rich richer at the expense of the poor. Also, by withdrawing subsidies particularly in the agricultural sectors, the government has not only dispossessed farmers their means of livelihood, but equally encouraged the negligence of the sector at the expense of food crisis and over-reliance on imported foods which have adverse effects on the economy. By emphasizing cut in education, public health, and other social safety nets, the neoliberal economic reforms have undermined the educational system and increased the illiteracy rate, exposed the citizens to deadly diseases and untold hardship and misery.

Thus, the present study notes that the natural response to the harsh socio-economic conditions imposed on the citizens by the state's withdrawal from the discharge of its contractual and statutory duties remains the appropriation of outlawed means to vent their frustration. The resort to kidnapping, violent extremism, armed robbery, child-trafficking and other unlawful acts are subtle alternatives through which the citizens register their grievances against the state. Therefore, Boko Haram terrorist organization is a platform through which the neglected and deprived segment of the Nigerian population protest against the harsh economic condition imposed on them by the

instrumentality of neoliberal development strategies. Although the phenomenon of globalization has continued to dismiss the state as being inconsequential in the development process, it is apposite to note that states in the developing economies are the epicentre for the pursuit of development agenda. Allowing the forces of demand and supply to superintend over the development agenda of the states in developing societies is tantamount to denuding the disadvantaged majority of the citizens their viable means of existence. This is because people in the developing economies largely depend on the state and its social programmes to attain good life. As a corollary, it is safe to submit that by prescribing state withdrawal from social and welfare programmes, the neoliberal economic agenda is incongruence with the peculiarities and character of the Nigerian state.

6. Demystifying the Contending Theories on the Emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria

To satisfactorily achieve the aim of this study, it is apposite at this juncture to clearly identify the contradictions and shortcomings inherent in the competing explanations of the emergence and intensification of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Firstly, while the present study generally agrees with the school of thought which identified poverty, illiteracy, social inequality and unemployment as the cause of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, it is equally pertinent to critique this perspective for lack of thoroughness as it failed to unravel the root of the continuous socio-economic dysfunctionality in Nigeria. To us therefore, the emergence of Boko Haram and other violent extremists can be located in the nature and character of neoliberal economic reform which prescribed development strategies which are not in tandem with the existing realities. By emphasizing privatization, public expenditure cut, subsidy withdrawal and trade liberalization, neoliberal economic framework distorts and disarticulates the economy and engender retrenchment, poverty, unemployment, infrastructural decay, poor health delivery and food crisis on the people. Naturally, when people are deprived of means of subsistence, there is a tendency for violent reactions.

Secondly, contrary to the conventional belief that premised the emergence of Boko Haram on indices of misgovernance such as endemic corruption, human rights abuse and unjust social formation, we contend that this unilateral perspective is erroneous and incapable of explaining the birth of the terror group. As a result, we state that neo-liberalism created room for primitive capital accumulation which negates good governance and provides an opportunity for the disadvantaged people to ventilate their anger against social and economic injustices. In addition, by encouraging a market-driven economy where the forces of demand and supply play vital role, the state tactically concentrated access to means of subsistence to privileged few and at the same time deprived the majority of the people who are disadvantaged in the production process access to quality life.

Thirdly, on the perspective which hinged the Boko Haram's emergence on the heterogeneous composition of the Nigerian state, the present study notes that it was essentially the primitive capital accumulation tendency and authoritarian character inherent in the neoliberal economic strategies which watered the ground for rent-seeking behaviour among politicians. This invariably created room for struggle among the elite to capture power for self-service rather than the good of the majority, thus leading to the alienation of the people. Also, it has been reported that neoliberal reforms have generated and widened social exclusion, economic inequality, poverty and other social crises among the poor and the informal workers (Okolie and Nnamani, 2017). In Nigeria, political ascendancy is a means for economic enrichment and survival. Conflicts of interest exist between and among the elite of diverse nationalities who are struggling for access to state power. As such, ethnicity is politicized while politics assumes a zero-sum game. Since politics is based on *win-win* principle, governance provides a platform to reward and consolidate ethnic loyalty and affiliation. Minority ethnic groups who bear the burdens of social, economic and political exclusions are disenchanting and motivated to vent their anger, hatred and frustrations on the unjust political system. These conditions motivate the marginalized minority ethnic groups to either try to secede from the federation or engage in acts that threaten security.

Fourthly and most fundamentally, we also found the popular insinuation that the creation of Boko Haram was to serve as a tool for the Islamization of Nigeria erroneous. To us, the rise of religious identity is often linked to the incident of increased economic hardship under the neoliberal economic frameworks, which accounts for a sharp rise in religious activities, and the mobilization of religious identities in competitive politics. Indeed, the increasing rate of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment arising from the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms provided a veritable ground for some religious and political leaders to indoctrinate distorted and false belief in the armies of pauperized youths, who have been subjugated as a willing tool for the advancement of their individual interests.

7. Conclusion

Since the emergence of the dreaded Boko Haram Islamist sect, efforts aimed at evolving the suitable theoretical background for explaining the root causes of the terrorist group have been futile. This was largely due to the inability of the extant literature to achieve a consensus, thereby leading to the peripheralization of explanations by scholars. By peripheralization, we mean that the existing knowledge was bereft of an in-depth explanation capable of unravelling the impetus behind the emergence of the Islamist group. Hence, the need for a practicable approach that would identify and address the root causes of Boko Haram and other militia groups in Nigeria formed the *raison d'être* for this present study.

Arising from the logical deduction made in this study, we propose that the adoption of the neoliberal economic frameworks as the catalyst that birthed and fuelled Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This finding was informed by the observation which submitted that given its ideological biases, the neoliberal development strategies were inconsistent with the peculiarities of the Nigerian state. Secondly, the study found that since neoliberal economic

policies are built around marketization principles, commercialism, privatization and other prescriptions enshrined in the Washington Consensus, the framework has only thrived in pushing the poor and defenceless segment of Nigerian population to the abyss of greater deprivation and neglect which, in turn, created room for a platform to vent their anger against the state.

Thirdly, the paper noted that neoliberal development strategies neglect critical aspects of human development such as income disparity, environmental well-being, universal health coverage, equity, consumer security, and cultural difference. Fourthly, the neoliberal economic reforms disregarded the premature capitalist development in the peripheral social formation (Okolie and Nnamani, 2015). Finally, the study found that the neoliberal economic policies placed a greater premium on the reduction of public expenditure for essential social services, which among other things were responsible for the increase in illiteracy, poverty, unemployment rates and poor healthcare programmes.

In the light of the above, the present study suggests a review of the counter-insurgency measures for tackling the threats posed by the activities of Boko Haram. Given the situational analysis of the nature and foundation of Boko Haram insurgency, a paradigm shift from kinetic to non-kinetic counter-terrorism strategies suffice. In doing this, a policy reappraisal becomes necessary. Having unravelled the deficiencies in the neoliberal economic framework, we recommend an economic blueprint that will not only correspond with the peculiarities of the Nigerian state but also prioritize the welfare of the citizens. The pursuit of national economic policy which will prioritize the development of the productive forces, reintroduction of Welfarist programmes, industrialization, diversification of the economy and the strengthening of the institutional mechanisms of governance is indeed canvassed by this study.

References

- Abbas, F., 2013. "Terrorism: Its genesis, causes, effects and solution." In *Being a paper delivered at NIREC conference held in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State on Monday, 11 February, 2013*.
- Adegbulu, F. (2013). Boko Haram: the emergence of a terrorist sect in Nigeria 2009-2013. *African Identities*, 11(3): 260-73.
- Aghedo, I. (2015). Nigeria's Boko Haram: from guerrilla strategy to conventional war? *The Round Table*, 104(4): 515-16.
- Ahokegh, A. F. (2012). Boko Haram: A 21st century challenge in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(21): 46-55.
- Ake, C. (1981). *A political economy of Africa*. Longman Group: London.
- Amaraegbu, D. C. (2013). Failure of human intelligence, boko haram and terrorism in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 15(4): 66-85.
- Anderson, K. (1995). *Lenin, hegel, and western marxism*. University of Illinois Press: Chicago.
- Babalola, J. B., Lungwangwa, G. and Adeyinka, A. A. (1999). Report from the field: Education under structural adjustment in Nigeria and Zambia. *MCGILL Journal of Education*, 43(1): 79-98.
- Bintube, M. (2015). Boko Haram phenomenon: Genesis and development in North Eastern region Nigeria. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Research*, 1(1): 1-22.
- Bond, P. and Dor, G. (2003). Neoliberalism and poverty reduction strategies in africa. Discussion paper for the regional network for equity in health in Southern Africa (equinet).
- Buah, J. and Adalakun, A. (2009). *The Boko Haram tragedy and other issues*. The Punch Newspaper. 40.
- Cannon, B. and Iyekekpolo, W. (2018). Explaining transborderterrorist attacks: The cases of boko haram and al-shabaab. *African Security*, 11(4): 370-96.
- Central Bank of Nigeria (2013). *Annual statistical bulletin*. Abuja. 24:
- Central Bank of Nigeria (2015). Quarterly statistical bulletin. Available: <http://www.cenbank.org/documents/QuarterlyStatbulletin.asp>
- Chukwuemeka, E. M. (2013). Boko haram insurgency: A northern Agenda for regime change and islamization in Nigeria, 2007-2013. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Political Science*, 13(5): 86-93.
- Daily Post (2016). *Boko Haram: Pakistan envoy advises Nigeria to adopt non-kinetic warfare*. Daily Post Newspaper. <http://dailypost.ng/2016/04/26/boko-haram-pakistan-envoy-advises-nigeria-to-adopt-non-kinetic-warfare/>
- Debt Management Office (2015). Debt profile of Nigeria in 2015. Available: www.dmo.gov.ng
- Dim, E. E. (2017). An integrated theoretical approach to the persistence of boko haram violent extremism in Nigeria. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 12(2): 36-50.
- Dunayevskaya, R. (2002). *The power of negativity*. Lexington: New York.
- Ekanade, O. V. (2014). The dynamics of forced neoliberalism in nigeria since the 1980s. *Journal of Retracing Africa*, 1(1): 1-24.
- Engels, F. (1968). *Dialectics of nature*. International Publishers: New York.
- Eseoghene, V. E. and Efanodor, H. O. (2016). Boko Haram insurgency and its impact on Nigeria's external image. *Research and Discussion*, 9(1-3): 309-45.
- Ezeani, E. O. and Chilaka, F. C. (2013). Islamic fundamentalism and the problem of insecurity in Nigeria: The Boko Haram phenomenon. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 15(3): 43-53.
- Felbab-Brown, V. (2018). *Nigeria's troubling counterinsurgency strategy against Boko Haram (1)*. Punch Newspaper. <https://punchng.com/nigerias-troubling-counterinsurgency-strategy-against-boko-haram-1/>
- Haider, H. (2007). *Drivers of extremism*. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre: Birmingham, Al. 3-6.

- International Crisis Group (2018). Preventing boko haram abductions of schoolchildren in Nigeria. Available: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/b137-preventing-boko-haram-abductions-schoolchildren-nigeria>
- James, C. L. R. (1980). *Notes on dialectics*. Lawrence Hill: Westport, CT.
- Khan, A. and Cheri, L. (2016). An examination of poverty as the foundation of crisis in Northern Nigeria. *Insight on Africa*, 8(1): 59-71.
- Levins, R. and Lewontin, R. (1985). *The dialectical biologist*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge.
- Liolio, S. E. (2013). *Rethinking counter insurgency: A case study Boko Haram in Nigeria*. A thesis submitted. European Peace University Stadtschlaing: Austria. www.culturaldiplomacy.org/case-studies-of-boko-haram.pdf
- Lukacs, G. (1972). *History and class consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics*. The MIT Press: Cambridge.
- Lukacs, G. (1975). *The young hegel*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Maiangwa, B. and Uzodike, U. O. (2012). *The changing dynamics of Boko Haram terrorism. Report*. Aljazeera Centre for Studies. 1-6.
- Marx, K. (1968). *Preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy*. In *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Their selected works*. International Publishers: New York. 181-85.
- Matfess, H. (2019). The new normal: Continuity and boko haram's violence in North East Nigeria. Relief web. Available: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/new-normal-continuity-and-boko-haram-s-violence-north-east-nigeria>
- Mbah, P., Nwangwu, C. and Edeh, H. (2017). Elite politics and the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. *TRAMES: A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21(2): 173-90.
- Meagher, K. (2014). Beyond terror: Addressing the boko haram challenge in nigeria. The norwegian peacebuilding resources centre (NOREF) policy brief.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2014). Review of the Nigerian economy. Available: www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pages/NBSeLibrary
- Ndujihe, C. (2018). *Security: FG spends N6trn on defence in 11 years*. Vanguard Newspaper. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/07/security-fg-spends-n6trn-on-defence-in-11-years/>
- Nnamani, K. E., 2015. "International monetary fund and crises of development in Nigeria, 2000-2014." In *An MSc Thesis presented to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka*.
- Nsukka and Onuoha, F. C. (2012). *Boko Haram: Nigeria's extremist Islamic sect*. Aljazeera Center for Studies.
- Ogbogu, J. (2015). Analysing the threat of boko haram and the ISIS alliance in Nigeria. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 7(8): 16-21.
- Okolie, A. M. and Nnamani, K. E. (2015). Neoliberal economic reform and boko haram insurgency in Nigeria. *Studies in Politics and Society*, 3(1): 38-66.
- Okolie, A. M. and Nnamani, K. E. (2017). Neoliberal economic reforms and challenges of insecurity in Africa. *South East Journal of Political Science*, 3(1): 300-32.
- Okonkwo, C. E. (2014). National economic empowerment development strategies (NEEDS) and labour in Nigeria, 2003-2007. *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa*, 2(2): 152-61.
- Okpaga, A., Chijioke, U. S. and Innocent, O. (2012). Activities of boko haram and insecurity question in Nigeria. *Theorising Insecurity Question in Nigeria*, 1(9): 77-99.
- Olanrewaju, S. and Adejokun, S. (2018). *Nigeria borrows N10trn in 30 months*. Tribune Newspaper. <https://www.tribuneonlineng.com/135964/>
- Ollman, B. (1993). *Dialectical investigations*. Routledge: New York.
- Onuoha, J. (2008). *The state and economic reforms in Nigeria: An exploratory note on the capture theory of politics*. Great AP Express Publishers Ltd: Nsukka.
- Osita-Njoku, A. and Chikere, P. (2015). Consequences of Boko Haram terrorism on women in northern Nigeria. *Applied Research Journal*, 1(3): 101-07. Available: <http://arjournal.org/files/2015/05/ARJ-V.1n.3.101-107.pdf>
- Pérouse de Montclos, M. A. (2016). A sectarian Jihad in Nigeria: The case of Boko Haram. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 27(5): 878-95.
- Premium Times (2013). *Clarifying Nigeria's debt status, by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala*. Premium Times Newspaper. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/137951-clarifying-nigerias-debt-status-by-ngozi-okonjo-iweala.html>
- Sachs, J. D. (2003). The strategic significance of global inequality. Ecsf report 9. Washington, dc: Woodrow wilson international center for scholars, environmental change and security program. Available: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/commentaries_povsec_27-39.pdf
- Sani, S. (2011). *Boko Haram: History, ideas and revolt (6)*. Vanguard Newspaper.
- Swingewood, A. (1991). *Marxism and sociology*. In: *A short history of sociological thought*. Palgrave: London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21642-0_7
- Uadiale, M. (2012). Implication of the political and economic factors in the rise of boko haram insurgence in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Legal Studies and Governance*, 3(3): 81-100.
- United States Department of State (2017). Annex of statistical information country reports on terrorism 2016. Available: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/272485.pdf>

- Usman, S. A. (2015). Unemployment and poverty as sources and consequence of insecurity in Nigeria: The Boko Haram insurgency revisited. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 9(3): 90-99.
- Wilson, M. (2018). *Nigeria's Boko Haram attacks in numbers - as lethal as ever*. British Broadcasting Service. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42735414>
- World Bank (2016). *From oil to cities: Nigeria's next transformation*. World Bank: Washington DC.
- Zenn, J. (2017). Demystifying al-qaida in Nigeria: Cases from boko haram's founding, launch of Jihad and suicide bombings. *Perspectives On Terrorism*, 11(6): Available: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/666>