

Boko Haram: “Economic Fundamentalism” and Impoverishment Send Unemployed Youths Into Religious Militias

The economic, political and social dimensions of fundamentalism are ignored by the government to the detriment of Nigerians

By [Prof. Horace Campbell](#)

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The hardline military approach to Boko Haram by the Nigerian government is inadequate. Boko Haram's challenge has economic, political and social dimensions that government ignores to the detriment of Nigerians. All progressive forces will now have to wade in to oppose both Boko Haram and the states that provide the enabling conditions for the growth of terror elements.

“I will sell your girls in the market.” Abubakar Shekau

From time to time in the life of a society, one episode or a series of episodes shock the social system and brings to the fore long festering sores that need resolution. The kidnapping of over 300 young girls and the depravity of those who proclaimed that these youths would be sold into sexual slavery are one of such episodes. Abubakar Shekau's statement about selling the girls in the market brought out the deep contradictions of Nigerian society and called for a firm and clear resolution of the questions of slavery, exploitation, sexual violence, male oppression and the manipulation of religion to serve the needs of particular sections of the looters and zealots of Nigeria. In response to the kidnapping, a global movement started by women in Nigeria has focused on the issues of sexual terrorism, deformed masculinity and the trafficking of women internationally. This movement mobilized under the banner of #Bring Back Our Girls has opened new avenues for political mobilization. The new coalition is led by women and has the potential to serve as the basis for a new mode of politics in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Religious extremism and intolerance, referred to as Islamic fundamentalism, has gained momentum in Northern Nigeria since the start of the century among some followers of the Islamic faith. These fundamentalists distort the teachings of Islam. They represent themselves as anti-imperialists opposing western cultural influences while seeking to institute Islamic law, including strict codes of behavior. Women in Nigeria have been negatively affected by this resort to fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism (whether Christian, Hindu, Islamic or Jewish) is founded on the oppression and humiliation of women.

In the past, the ruling elements have politicized religion and ethnicity to divert and confuse the peoples of Nigeria. The oligarchy in Northern Nigeria took the politicization of religion to a point where 12 Northern states are now under Sharia law. Boko Haram were pawns in a

cold blooded game to control the state in Nigeria. Started in 2002 the movement exploded in the society after the death of President Yar 'Adua in 2010. The pawns have now taken the violence beyond tolerable bounds and even the former sponsors of Boko Haram now denounce the kidnapping of the girls.

It will be argued here that the fight against Boko Haram require not simply troops, but a new mode of politics where the peoples of the society believe that they have a stake, especially the youths. It is here where the traditions of the mobilization of grassroots women will be decisive. Nigerian women from the producing classes have a rich history of resistance to all forms of fundamentalism. When they stir there can be a cascading effect on the politics of the society. This was the experience from the 1929 women's uprisings that set the standards for cooperation against colonialism in Nigeria and West Africa. Advance planners for global capital are very aware of the tenacity of Nigerian women.

Nigeria is a society where the questions of peace, stability and prosperity are clearly linked to the building of a secular society free of religious zealots. Patriarchs will seek to bring this momentum under the war on terror. All progressive forces will now have to wade in to oppose both Boko Haram and the states that provided the enabling conditions for the growth of terror elements such as Boko Haram.

Sexual slavery, sexual terrorism and the context of the kidnapping

When Abubuka Shekau, the self-proclaimed leader of Boko Haram, appeared on the You Tube on May 4 and declared 'I will sell your girls in the market,' those who remembered the horrors of slavery were horrified by the level of backwardness that had overtaken these elements of Nigerian society . This group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of 278 girls aged between 16 and 18 from the Government Girls Secondary School in rural Chibok, Borno State in Northern Nigeria. Shekau threatened to sell the girls as slaves and marry them off because 'God instructed me to sell them, they are his properties and I will carry out his instructions.

He further proclaimed: 'I am going to marry out any woman who is twelve-years-old, and if she is younger, I will marry her out at the age of nine. You are all in danger. I am the one who captured all those girls and will sell all of them. Slavery is allowed in my religion, and I shall capture people and make them slaves. We are on our way to Abuja and we shall also visit the South. I am going to kill all the Imams and other Islamic clerics in Nigeria because they are not Muslims since they follow democracy and constitution. It is Allah that instructed us, until we soak the ground of Nigeria with Christian blood, and so-called Muslims contradicting Islam. We will kill and wonder what to do with their smelling corpses. This is a war against Christians and democracy and their constitution.'

These words sent a chill down the spine of decent citizens in all parts of the globe. What religion was he referring to that sanctions slavery in the twenty first century? Sex trafficking and the exploitation of young girls has been on the rise in the past twenty years. In the same period the campaigns against modern forms of enslavement have brought to the fore how neo-liberalism has provided the social and intellectual climate to make bonded labor 'normal.' We know that it is the religion of economic fundamentalism that has given the green light to semi slavery conditions in all parts of the world.

Nigerian men and women from the producing classes suffer from the economic terrorism of market fundamentalism. This terrorism is defined by Eusi Kwayana as follows:

“The placing of human beings in a situation in which they are without hope, space, adequate defence, means of escape and survival or means of overcoming actual or threatening danger, menace or oppressive force is the very definition of terror, which has not only a physical but also a mental element.”

Throughout the Global South, the poor have been suffering from the terrorism of the structural adjustment policies of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The Nigerian government has instituted the policies of the World Bank so that there is the absence of basic services such as the provision of health care, clean water, sanitation, decent and relevant education, housing and food for the poor. It is the inflexibility of this market fundamentalism that heightens insecurity in the society among many poor males who are left marginalized and insecure. Economic terrorism attacks the masculine pride in communities where the structures of collective social solidarity have broken down. Men who are reared under the ideology of patriarchy are vulnerable in the conditions of economic terrorism because in their sense of their humanity, they should be ‘providers’ for their families.

This patriarchy and masculinity is intensified in a condition of increased poverty and exploitation when African males are caught in the bottom of the global division of labor. These males are socialized to consider themselves as providers and as heads of households but cannot provide for the social reproduction of their families. Increasingly, the burdens of care, education, and provision of health devolve to poor women as the state cut back on social expenditures in the period of structural adjustment. Economic fundamentalism attacks masculine pride and in this situation groups such as Boko Haram recruits gullible young males. The kidnapping of the girls bolsters their false sense of masculinity by wreaking havoc in the broader society with the raping and dehumanization of young girls.

The violence and killings of Boko Haram is only the now visible sign of the everyday violence against the poor and disenfranchised in all parts of Nigeria. In this oil rich country the conditions of life is unbearable except for the Nigerian ‘one percent.’ Another ten per cent struggle in the interstices of this social system to live the Nigerian middle class life while about 20 per cent of the population has a steady living wage. In this condition of massive inequalities and structural violence, religious extremists in the North go further to ensure that the violence of harassment, hunger, and long hours of unwaged work are built into the disempowerment of the oppressed, especially women. Gender violence, sexual violence, domestic violence, rape, purdah,, child marriages, violation and other forms of abuse abound in communities where there is no clear leadership to counter deformed masculinity.

Women were accused of adultery at the slightest whim, and in March 2002 Amina Lawal had been accused of adultery. She was then sentenced to death by stoning by a Sharia court for having a child outside of marriage. It is seldom that one hears of men committing adultery. Pregnancy outside of marriage constitutes sufficient evidence for a woman to be convicted of adultery according to some Nigerian states that apply Sharia law. Two cases in 2002 in particular, involving women accused of adultery who were sentenced to death by stoning, brought international condemnation. Although their convictions were later overturned, the damage was done. Hundreds of people lost their lives in inter-religious clashes between hardline Christians and Muslims in Kaduna and Kano state as a direct result of controversial rulings.

Yet, far from being humiliated, the poor and grassroots women of Nigeria have used their wits and knowledge to survive and to struggle to keep body and soul together. Under the

General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's regime, his wife had attempted to use her position as wife of the military dictatorship to blunt the possibilities for women to organize autonomously and independently by seeking to coopt the women's movement and to create a front called 'Better Life for Rural Women.' In this world of cooptation, the religious extremists entered to seek to control the bodies and minds of women.

In the past thirty years fundamentalism of the Christian and Islamic variant have arisen in Nigeria with the specific task of blunting the organizational capabilities of the women of the society. Boko Haram has carried this fundamentalism to its ultimate level and created the conditions for a turning point in the political organizing in Nigeria against all forms of enslavement. The kidnapping took the matter to the international level and the Nigerian political leadership could no longer 'manage' the horrors of the insurgency within the bounds of political competition.

The succession of dictatorships in Nigeria had generated a massive anti-dictatorship alliance, and after the eighties, Chief M.K.O Abiola (a prominent business person who had made millions), had joined the anti-military crusade and placed himself at the head of the electoral contest in 1993. Abiola had also worked within the wider African continental body to bring to the fore discussions of past and present forms of enslavement by becoming Chairperson of the Eminent Persons Group for Reparations of the Organization of African Unity. Abiola was elected President of Nigeria in 1993 in the June 12 elections and had committed himself and Nigeria to repairing the damage of enslavement. Abiola was never able to assume power in Nigeria. There was a coup. The elections were annulled by the military, Abiola was imprisoned and five years later 'died' under mysterious circumstances in July 1998. Millions of youths in Nigeria were deprived of the ideas of reparative justice and the conditions of the Black Holocaust that inspired radical Pan Africanism. Those who planned the coup and the disposal of the Reparations campaign within Nigeria wanted to ensure that Nigerians were not deeply sensitized about the crimes against humanity of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Abubakar Shekau and those who are afraid of real knowledge about past exploitation and enslavement were among the Nigerians denied access to information about Reparations for enslavement.

Boko Haram was never able to emerge under the military dictatorship because the state under General Abacha carried out the violence at that time. Religiosity and extremism were promoted within the North but kept under wraps by the military commanders whose lifestyles could not conform to the strict taboos of the fundamentalists. The same forces that prevented M.K.O Abiola from accessing the Presidency in 1993 are the same ones that inspire the intellectual, social and economic conditions that birthed Boko Haram. There is no shortage of reports and studies on Boko Haram, but many of these studies seek to reinforce the idea that Nigeria is a society broken by regional, ethnic and religious struggles. These reports studiously avoid discussions on the cultural strengths of Nigeria and the powerful role played by Nigeria in the larger struggles for African dignity and emancipation.

Many of the unemployed youths who have been attracted to fundamentalist movements are from the section of the society where marginalization and impoverishment is everywhere evident. Young women in Northern Nigeria have borne the physical and sexual violence from religious extremists and the promise to sell girls into enslavement brought back the reality of the interconnections between enslavement and sexual terrorism. The violence against women in Africa takes many forms and the form that is most hidden is that of sexual terrorism and other obscene patriarchal and misogynistic behavior.

Dorothy Roberts, the African American feminist writer, has explored the relationship between misogynistic behavior and sexual terrorism and she defined sexual terrorism as, 'willful denial of female reproductive and bodily rights and wholesale suppression of one half of humanity on grounds of socially constructed gender norms.'

Intensified exploitation of women in Nigeria and Africa

The imposition of Sharia law in the Northern States of Nigeria at the end of the military dictatorship in 1999 provided the context for the rise and open support for groups such as Boko Haram. As long as there was a military dictatorship to crush opposition to exploitation and economic terrorism, state terror supplemented domestic violence and the exploitation of young girls. However, the anti-dictatorship struggle had taken such deep roots that the resort to religion was deemed the most expedient force to divide the working peoples of Nigeria and to enforce the super exploitation of women.

Schools, cultural centers and other places of social interaction had been the networking base for the anti-dictatorship campaign that (had predated and later) was called the June 12th movement in Nigeria. In the midst of the campaigns to bring back popular democratic participation, there was the rapid growth of cults within the Universities to act as a counterweight to the student unions that had become organizing centers for democracy within the University and within the wider society. Fundamentalist churches from North America started a booming business to cash in on the oil boom in Nigeria. In Nigeria, Christian fundamentalists penetrated social spaces with massive proselytizing. Ethnic militias and communal clashes drained the energies of the poor as young men were treated as disposable bodies. In order to blunt the emergence of alternative forms of organizing the State embarked on political assassinations. The well-publicized assassination of Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 was one other episode in the militarization of politics and the closing of spaces for opposition forces. This killing as well as the kidnapping and execution of prominent leaders fighting for democracy were deployed so that there could not be sustained mobilization and clarity on the questions of social and economic transformation. Religious ideas, ethnic chauvinism and religious fervor ensured that the analyses of the gendered, social and economic conditions in Nigeria were rendered in religious and ethnic terms. These discourses shielded the oligarchs who looted the society.

Regional differentiation and class formation in Nigeria had meant that the educational and social institutions in the South and West were more developed than in the North. Yet, it is in the same Northern regions of Nigeria where the oligarchs had given themselves the mandate to lead Nigeria. From a historical point of view, the Northern oligarchs had organized using Islam as the front to mask their power grab. After the return to 'democracy' in 1999, these same oligarchs resorted to the introduction of Sharia Law in 12 Northern States. Under Sharia law the oppression of workers intensified so that while the oligarchs stole billions of dollars and sent their children to schools in Europe and America, poor workers were amputated for stealing food to survive.

The rise of Boko Haram

It was in the same year as the conviction of Amina Lawal that the new organization of armed youths emerged and called itself Boko Haram. Its very name was a reflection of the educational differentiation between the North and the South. Boko Haram emerged in the social and economic milieu of cults on university campuses and militias among secondary school leavers and madrassas (Almajiris) in the North. In most cases the cults were

comprised of young men who faced a future of marginalization and unemployment and found masculinist violence and thuggery as outlets for their frustrations. By 2002 some of these unemployed persons began to make their own interpretation of religion and politics in order to hold sway over the same authoritarian Northern elites. This symbiotic relationship between politicians and unemployed youths was not confined to the North. Politicians in all regions manipulated youths to fight each other and youth militias became one component of the political organizing of mainstream parties within Nigeria. Boko Haram was founded by an unemployed youth Mohamed Yusuf. He was killed by the Nigerian state in 2009. In the corrupted political climate Mohammed Yusuf had sought to become a prominent religious leader because the politicization of religion in the North had shown this youth that becoming a famous preacher was the only way he would earn the money to drive SUV's like the oligarchs. The role of these militias in different parts of the country is brought out in the book by Olusegun Adeniyi, 'Power, Politics and Death- A front-row account of Nigeria under the late President Yar 'Adua.'

Adeniyi's description of the origins of Boko Haram is significant because as an insider within the corridors of power, those within the Yar 'Adua administration were aware of the sponsors of Boko Haram and there was no statement that Boko Haram was a branch of a wider 'terror' network. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was the President of Nigeria from April 2007 to May 2010. He was from Katsina state, the same state as the late Pan Africanist Tajudeen Abdul Raheem. Adeniyi in the book also brought out the reaction of the head of state to the extra judicial killing of Yusuf in 2009. This book that sheds light on the first period of the Boko Haram formation is also significant because it was written at a moment when the Boko Haram had not yet embarked on the extreme forms of violence and bombings that now dominate the landscape of Nigeria. The other important distinguishing feature of the work of Adeniyi is that it avoids the provocative labels that were attached to Boko Haram by western intelligence agencies. Boko Haram was a tiny and obscure sect with the official name of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, which in Arabic translates as: 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'.

There were many school leavers who were attracted to this group that would emerge as religious extremists and Mohammed Yusuf sought to represent himself as the extreme one. Yusuf represented himself as a champion of the unemployed males of the North and he most specifically appealed to students and primary school pupils who abandoned their studies on the ground that western education ('boko') was a sin ('haram'), hence the name Boko Haram. It should be stated that Yusuf was not operating in a religious vacuum. There was a link between the teachings of Boko Haram and the Salafi Islamic religious circle (Wahabites). Wahabism is one sect of Islam with its base in Saudi Arabia. This Wahabism is now wreaking havoc in many parts of Africa, undermining social peace and the respect for values of social peace and religious tolerance. Nigerian women can learn a lot from the Ethiopian women who were oppressed in Saudi Arabia as migrant domestic workers and who have rallied to defend poor Ethiopian workers who are abused physically and psychologically. Boko Haram draws inspiration from the rich in the seat of Islam where human trafficking is rampant.

Extreme Islamic fundamentalism had been used by Northern oligarchs to hold sway over the youths and had turned to a variant of Islam that suggested that education was a weapon of the West. In the context of the world wide cultural crusade by western proselytizers in the years after 2001, the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial rhetoric of the religious zealots grew. This is how one of the communiqués expressed the zealotry.

‘We want to re-emphasize that our main objective is the restoration of the Sharia Legal System in line with the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. We want the Nigerian Constitution to be abrogated and Democracy suspended and a full-fledged Islamic State established. We want to emphasize that trouble started in this part of the world when the white men came, colonised our land, chased away the Emirs and righteous leaders and then replaced the system with Western Legislative, Judicial and Executive procedures. They also changed our pattern of learning and upbringing to the detriment of moral teachings; that was exactly what prompted the establishment of our organization.’

Boko Haram as pawns

At the moment of its public declaration of war against Nigeria and its desire for Nigeria to become a full-fledged Islamic state, Boko Haram enjoyed the moral and financial support of many Northern Nigerian oligarchs who viewed Boko Haram as a tool to make their claims of the political leadership of Nigeria. By 1999 at the dawn of the new party politics in Nigeria after military rule there had been an agreement within the ruling PDP party that the Presidency of the country would rotate between the North and the South. Olusegun Obasanjo the President 1999-2007 was the first leader to emerge from this zoning arrangement and the elevation of Umaru Musa Yar’Adua to the Presidency in 2007 was supposed to be in the spirit of the sharing of power in so far as Yar ‘Adua hailed from Katsina state. When Yar Adua passed in 2010, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as president, after meeting some resistance from key Northern elites. For some of the oligarchs in the North this swearing in was simply holding the seat until the elections in 2011. There were sporadic attacks by Boko Haram during the period of the Presidency of Yar Adua but from the intensity of the negotiations between the President and the elements of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) from the Niger Delta, it was clear that the security services saw the insurgency in the Niger Delta as a greater threat to the future of Nigeria than the Boko Haram. Many armed members of MEND were granted amnesty and returned to their communities.

When Goodluck Jonathan decided to run for the Presidency in 2011 and actually won, the attacks of Boko Haram intensified. This intensification demonstrate that there were elements with influence over this group that felt that they could turn this organization on and off. In fact, some Northern oligarchs had vowed to make Nigeria ungovernable if Jonathan won the presidency. In the second round of the massive killings by Boko Haram, there were debates within Nigeria and outside whether Boko Haram was simply a home grown organization or one linked to international terrorism. In 2011 The US State Department refused to label Boko Haram as international terrorists because it was well known within the US intelligence services that Boko Haram had sponsors at the highest levels of the oligarchs in Nigeria. The debate on labelling Boko Haram as international terrorists also took place at a moment when the Obama Administration was debating whether the USA should halt the global war on terror and use police methods to curb violent extremism.

Internationalization of the Boko Haram phenomenon

The divisions within the western establishment over the exact nature of Boko Haram can be seen from the writings on this organization. Think tanks and policy centers from the top imperial centers all commissioned studies on Boko Haram. One former US ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, writing in the Journal Foreign Affairs in 2013 stated, ‘To Battle Nigeria’s Boko Haram, Put Down Your Guns: How to Undermine the Growing Islamist Threat.’

In this article, John Campbell maintained that, 'Instead of associating itself with Abuja's heavy-handed military response, the Obama administration should urge Jonathan to address what are essentially political problems: poverty and the corruption-driven alienation felt by the population of northern Nigeria, factors that contribute to Boko Haram's popular support.'

While what John Campbell said about poverty and corruption may be true, it is very difficult to take this former US ambassador seriously since he was one of those US pundits who had been predicting the breakup of Nigeria.

The theme that poverty and corruption driven alienation was at the root of the problem dominated many of the reports on Boko Haram. A bibliographic essay published in the magazine National Geographic brings out the division between those writers who viewed Boko Haram as part of a wider international 'terror' network and those who viewed poverty and alienation as the oxygen that kept Boko Haram alive. Those writers who belonged to the sections of the United States of America and French establishment that wanted a continuation of the Global War on Terror pushed for Boko Haram to be labelled as a terrorist threat. France that had superior experience in manipulating the threat of terrorism waded in on the subject after the Mali uprisings in 2012 and 2013. After that time there were constant reports that Boko Haram constituted a branch of Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM). In 2013 after the bombings and killings reached into the thousands the US Department of State finally declared Boko Haram as an international terrorist organization. Neighboring states of Niger, Chad, and the Cameroon were called upon to cooperate with the Nigerian authorities in fighting against Boko Haram. . Some of the same African leaders who have been at the helm of states generating structural violence declared at a news conference in Paris on 17 May 2014 that, 'there is determination [between the governments of Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin and France] to tackle this situation head on... to launch a war, a total war on Boko Haram.' Would this total war include the war against economic fundamentalism and the impoverishment that send unemployed youths into religious militias? Why will small contingent of forces from France, Canada, Britain and the USA succeed when the half a million strong security forces failed in Nigeria?

The declaration of the Paris meeting of May 17, 2014 that there would be Total War represented a victory for those who wanted to internationalize and militarize the kidnapping to serve the wider counter terror infrastructure of western militarism. In the new push for the remilitarization of Nigeria, Britain, France, Canada, China and Israel have also sent specialist teams and equipment to help the search. In an ideal situation where utmost Pan African cooperation takes precedence over France Afrique loyalty in West Africa, Niger, Cameroon and Chad did not have to wait for any security conference in France nor wait till Boko Haram pose a direct threat to them before cooperating with Nigeria deal with the menace of this group.

Although the United States media made much out of the promised support from the USA to track down Boko Haram the first deployment was simply 27 'specialists.' White House Press Secretary Jay Carney outlined in the second week of May that all but one of the 27-member team of advisers and security personnel have set up office in the capital Abuja to oversee their operations in Nigeria. Those in place include five State Department officials, ten Pentagon planners and advisers, seven African Command troops, and four FBI kidnap recovery specialists. Later on May 20, the United States deployed one hundred air force personnel into Chad to man the drones to be deployed in the search for the girls. According to Yahoo News the 'newly deployed forces will help expand drone searches of the region. About 40 of the troops make up the launch and recovering teams for the drone being

deployed there and the other 40 make up the security force for the team.'

One week after this massive buzz by international security officials the UN imposed sanctions on Boko Haram. Boko Haram was added to the al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee's list of designated entities on Thursday at the request of Nigeria.

The intervention of Nigerian women

After the kidnapping, the Nigerian state continued to treat the question of Boko haram as a low level insurgency. It was full three weeks before the President of Nigeria made a substantial statement on the kidnappings in Chibok after women of Nigeria protested that the government was not doing enough. The mass abduction and the military's failure to rescue the girls and young women had ignited national outrage with demonstrations in major cities. These demonstrations intensified after Shekau declared that he would sell the girls in the market. The levels of the insensitivity of the political leadership to the kidnapping and plans for selling the girls into slavery was manifest in the reaction of Patience Jonathan, the wife of President Goodluck Jonathan. An organizer of a demonstration calling for the release of the girls said that Jonathan's wife, Patience, ordered the arrests of two protest leaders, accused them of belonging to Boko Haram and expressed doubts there was any kidnapping.

Patience Jonathan belongs to that section of Nigerian society that does not suffer the day to day exploitation of society. Her insensitivity was not matched by other women throughout the world who grasped the chill of the call to sell the girls into sexual slavery. Michelle Obama and Angelina Jolie in the USA became two of the most visible celebrities in the global campaign as demonstrators took to the streets in all parts of the world demanding the release of the girls. This international mobilization by women has complicated the planning of those internal and external forces who wanted to use the militarization of fight against Boko Haram to breathe new life into the discredited campaign that had been called the War on Terror. African working people everywhere understood that this attack on the girls was just one more attack on the poor. From South Africa the trade union federation COSATU stated firmly,

"COSATU, representing 2.2million members, wants to come out unequivocally condemning Boko Haram's horrendous act of using girl children. We strongly condemn these acts of terror and demand for the unconditional release of the girls. We further denounce the patriarchal nature of this act whereby children, more especially girls, are used as battlefields to further political agendas."

Is this a turning point in Nigerian politics?

There has been no shortage of advisers to Nigeria on how to resolve the quagmire of Boko Haram. From the start of the insurgency there were progressive Nigerians who proclaimed that the corrupt political system was at the root of the insurgency. The popular and democratic forces that had been at the forefront of the opposition to the military regimes of Babingida and Abacha identified elements who gave support for Boko Haram. Today these calls continue for Nigerians who call for political solutions to the questions of fundamentalism and extremism. Writing in Premium Times on May 6, 2014 one writer said, first, government must admit its solely military approach is inadequate. Boko Haram's challenge has economic, political and social dimensions that government ignores at our collective national peril. Citing the economic depression in parts of Nigeria this writer

pointed to the differential in access to resources in different parts of Nigeria. Nigerian women from the grassroots have taken the leadership in the fight to link and clarify the religious extremism and sexual terror in Nigeria.

The failure of the mainstream political leadership since the winning of independence has brought the society to a point where the old forms of politics cannot resolve the deep alienation and exploitation of the Nigerian peoples. Hence, there are murmurs of a coup d'état. Rumors of a military intervention by soldiers have moved from the gossip and cocktail circuits in Abuja and Lagos to the pages of respected blogs. This author wants to state unequivocally that a military intervention by soldiers to replace the politicians would only compound the political crisis in the society. New forms of politics from the grassroots are now needed to ensure accountability and democratic participation at all levels of the society. The kidnapping has brought a new stage in the politics of Nigeria and Africa. The poor know that the electoral game is rigged and the struggle over zoning is only one more contention among the rich about which set of looters will occupy state power.

The ethics of Ubuntu and social collectivism are now needed to be the basis for the renewal of the society. Military action alone will not bring back the girls. Yet, the military is needed to combat Boko Haram. This is a real contradiction in a country where the corruption of the oligarchs deprive sections of the military even the resources necessary for them to have proper ordinance. The current Nigerian government is now operating from a position of embarrassment and humiliation both at the hands of Boko Haram and for their inaction and bungling of the kidnapping by threatening to arresting protesters.

The Nigerian peoples cannot now await the machinations of the political elites to change their society. Rooting out deformed masculinity, religious extremism and economic terrorism requires the kind of cooperation that cannot come from the ethic of greed, individualism and obscene consumerism.

Community leaders, religious leaders, ordinary people as well as those who aspire for a peaceful society in Nigeria must mobilize at the grassroots to isolate and root out zealots who want to sell young girls into slavery. Committed and patriotic Nigerians in the North have to put politics aside and come clean – Boko Haram members are not ghosts. They are members of the same society that these same people live in. Any society that nurture or remain indifferent to the nurturing of monstrous phenomena could end up consumed by the same monsters.

Trade Unions and other sectors of the producing classes have joined these women, and although at the moment the #Bring back our girls remain an all class affair the Nigerian situation will soon throw up its own Asma Mahfouz. Readers will remember that in the midst of the Egyptian struggles the young women of Egypt emerged as leaders and organizers at a crucial moment. Those who want to fight Boko Haram on the basis of simply military personnel will now face a renewed women's movement in Nigeria. Religious extremism and sexual terror must be confronted and decent men everywhere will have to join and be in solidarity with the women who are taking the lead.

Horace G. Campbell, a veteran Pan Africanist is a Professor of African American Studies and Political Science at Syracuse University. He is the author of Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya', Monthly Review Press, 2013

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