

Boko Haram in Nigeria: Historical and Political-Economic Exploration

Review of Kola Ibrahim's Recently Released Book

By [Lawal Rafiu Adeniran](#)

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As a testament to Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilisation theory, which is also manifesting in what Mary Kaldor describes as 'new wars', a new dimension of conflicts has established itself in International politics. These conflicts now come in form of armed insurgency, violent secessionist, ethno-religious conflicts etc. Africa, no doubt occupies an important seat in the theatre of war.

In Nigeria, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda' Awati Wal-Jihad popularly called Boko Haram has been responsible for the death of over 14,000 people (both combatants and civilians), displacement of over 1.5 million persons, destruction and loot of properties worth billions of naira, abduction of over 220 school girls from Chibok secondary school, bombings of several high profile institutions amongst others. With the Nigerian government and their International principals bereft of any practical solution on how to curb the menace, Kola Ibrahim's work '*Boko Haram in Nigeria: Historical and Political-Economic Exploration*' comes to their rescue.

The book provides a scientific analysis of the causes, escalatory factors, response efforts targeted at the conflict and chart a way forward out of this seemingly hopeless state. In what appears to be a complete departure from the conventional method of analysing the conflict, he contends that any investigation into the conflict should not be done outside of the political economy of the society. In total conformity to his hypothesis, Boko Haram and other various ethno-religious terrorist groups are offspring of capitalism and imperialism, the current socioeconomic system embraced by Nigeria and their international principals and not until this system is overthrown all efforts at combating terrorism will only be tantamount to enclosing water in a basket. Even if the government manages to defeat Boko Haram under this current arrangement, it will only enthrone negative peace if the underlining causes of the conflict are not addressed.

However, it is my view that any effort at understanding the trajectory of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria should not ignore the rise and fall of the Maitatsine movement. In the same manner that Boko Haram rise was traced in scientific details to the Uthman dan Fodio Jihad, a detailed analysis of the Maitatsine movement should be done while drawing out similarities with Boko Haram. This work provides little insight into the movement. Of course, this is compensated for by the deep and detailed analyses from various angles, of the rise of terrorism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism, and Boko Haram in particular. This gives a general understanding of various strands of religious fundamentalism and

terrorism, including Maitatsine movement.

Also, the use of the word tribe in describing the uniqueness of our culture and relations may not be accurate. Of course, the author used 'tribe' and 'ethnic groups' interchangeably, which may seem simple and easy to use, especially when writing for general and varied readers, it is however necessary to state that there is a serious debate on the use of tribes in Africa ethnographic analysis. In my view, tribalism is an important element in the racist ideology of colonialism and imperialism. If not what is it that make about 14 million Hausa/Fulani a tribe and less than 4 million Norwegians an ethnic group. If looked at properly, all the characteristics that qualify a group to be tagged as a tribe also existed among the colonial/European people, ethnic groups not tribe is used to describe them. Therefore, tribalism, as much as it is not used to describe western ethnography should not be used in Africa.

Irrespective of these few observations, the book passes as a reference and important library material for understanding our society, even beyond the Boko Haram terrorism or global terrorism. The book utilized various tools to analyzing terrorism and the rise of Boko Haram. Starting with the philosophical, historical and sociological analysis of religion and the tendency of violent and fundamentalist trends developing religions, the book gave a brilliant insight into understanding religious terrorism.

Terrorism is not only a feature in Nigeria; therefore, the effort of the writer in analyzing terrorism from a global perspective gives a better understanding of the rise of religious terrorism in Nigeria in recent times. The role of capitalist geopolitics and imperialism in the rise of religious terrorism and especially Boko Haram is well documented and explained in Chapter 3 of the book.

Furthermore, a deep analysis of the rise of radical religious consciousness in the northern Nigeria, tracing it to the Usman dan Fodio jihad campaign also helps to understand the sociology and historical background to rise of various religious tendencies in the north, and the role of various actors. The book also did a political-economic analysis of Nigeria from the colonial period to the current period. This understanding is necessary in order to understand how Nigeria's political economy provides the background to radical religious consciousness and the use of religion for political purposes.

The book also looks at the immediate causes of the rise of Boko Haram tendency especially since the beginning of civil rule in 1999 in Nigeria. It explains the role of the political actors and the Nigerian state in providing the breeding ground for the rise of Boko Haram. Furthermore, the military terror against the group, mirroring the neo-colonial and repressive nature of capitalist armed forces, is a refreshing and vivid angle to understanding the rise of Boko Haram tendency.

The book, in conclusion, just like it has provided the clues in the two articles of the Introduction, gave various proposals to the working class, labour movement and civil society in defeating the ogre of terrorism in Nigeria on a permanent basis.

By and large, in a period when scholars in terrorism studies are lost on whether terrorism could ever be abolished or defeated from our society, whether negotiations and mediations, or the killing of the leaders of terrorist organisations could save the world from its self-made mess, Kola Ibrahim brings to spotlight once again that for Boko Haram and global terrorism

to be defeated on a permanent basis, we must first of all defeat capitalism. This can only be done when workers take over their unions and rebuild on democratic, anti-capitalist and revolutionary basis. Only a revolutionary socialist government that will put the commanding heights of the economy under workers control can guarantee positive and lasting peace.

I therefore recommend this classic book to students, researchers, policy makers, journalists, politicians and all those who seek alternate narrative and crave for a deeper understanding of Boko Haram, global terrorism and its relationship with capitalism beyond the current peripheral analysis found in literature.

Lawal Rafiu Adeniran, M.A Peace and Conflict Studies, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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