

# Clash of Civilizations: An Assessment of the Early Origin of Boko Haram

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**Abstract:** *This study seeks to assess the early origin of Boko Haram in a bid to address numerous ambiguities surrounding the early emergence of the sect. Using Samuel Huntington's theory of "clash of civilizations" that stirred the world along cultural line i.e. the West vis-à-vis the Muslim world, this research argued that the rise of Boko Haram as an Islamic movement in Nigeria, which operates within the tenets of Salafist doctrine, is solemnly aimed in part to counter the grips of Western cultural domination. Hence, this has led to "clash of civilization" and a precursor for salafi-jihadism. Nonetheless, there exists little to clearly explain the vivid causes of the Boko Haram Movement. Meanwhile, Foundation Leaders such as Muhammad Ali, a Saudi educated, paid a supreme price as he was killed in early confrontation with the Nigerian security forces. Subsequently, Mohammed Yusuf, widely seen as the spiritual leader took over the mantle of leadership with no experience in the battlefield. This study builds on content analysis through the collection, verification and synthesizing of recorded evidence. In conclusion, the study recommends that the Nigerian Government must place high premium on grassroots education especially in Northern Nigerian and embark on aggressive youth employment.*

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Clash of Civilization, Salafi-jihadism, Early Origin

## 1. Introduction

For decades, resistance to cultures, which are considered alien to another, has remained part of history. The Christian crusades and Islamic revivalist movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century led by Usmanu Danfodio, Hamad Bari and Al Hajj Umar in the Western Sudan are all hallmark of resistance, revolutions and political reforms. At the inception of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Western world around the Mediterranean and the Middle East found itself on the defensive in relation to the growing powers of the Christian Europe. Throughout the Muslim world, scholars were concerned that communities, which had once led the world in the arts, science, government and military prowess, were now in the decline. This decay is attributed to the abandonment of the moral standards, simple living habits and purity of their ancestors. Accordingly, a return to Islam in its purest form is seen as the solution to the ills of Islamic societies and modern society as a whole.

Primarily, it is noteworthy to state that, in the 1980's, Nigeria witnessed the emergence of a revivalist group called Salafist, a conservative sect, originating from the Sunni religious sect. The Salafist are deeply rooted in most of Nigeria's major towns and villages and have been a source of threat to peaceful coexistence. The Salafist doctrine that preaches strict adherence to Islamic tenets quickly spread in the aftermath of the Algerian civil war where some Muslim youth from Northern Nigeria were conscripted to fight against the Algerian government for its role in annulling the 1992 elections in which the Islamists were set to win [1]. The group, which was referred to as the Nigerian Taliban and subsequently, Boko Haram, had been responsible for series of violent clashes in the Northern parts of the country with government institutions like police, army and constituted authorities as their major targets [1].

However, the study of Boko Haram Phenomenon has become imperative, ostensibly due to catastrophe caused in terms of human and material loss. As at March 2015, the

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) reports that Boko Haram conducted 808 attacks, resulting in 3,666 fatalities, which accounted for six percent of terrorist attacks globally [2]. According to the latest United Nations' reports, the insurgency caused more than 13,000 deaths and displaced more than 1.5 million people [3]. In addition to the sheer number and volatility of these incidents, their attacks have been brutal and often directly targeted at civilians. After the 2011 bombing of the United Nations Headquarters, bombings continued throughout 2012 targeting Catholic churches, civilians, and tourists. Amid growing concern about the escalating violence, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in May 2013 in the three northern states where Boko Haram is the strongest - Borno, Yobe and Adamawa [4].

Though, the Boko Haram phenomenon has dominated contemporary policy debates among academics and policymakers interested in Nigerian and African politics, yet, many issues about the sect remain unclear and contested; particularly the origin and evolution of the sect, the exact reasons triggering radicalization which includes Islamic fundamentalism and revivalism are all within the scope of discussion. Academicians working on state theories and post-colonial studies understand the group as a symptom of Nigeria is failing state. Sociologists and several social anthropologists attribute it to poverty. Southern Nigerian politicians and lobbyists blame Northerners' domination of the state. Counterterrorism and security experts focus on the international linkages of the group and the threat that poses to the stability of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Largely, there are few verified facts and many issues on which analysts can only speculate about Boko Haram, however, the conflict of opinion have not undermined the motive of the group and what it has turned out to become. For instance, According to Chothia, one Abubakar Lawan from Kano founded Boko Haram in the mid-1990s as a religious group that preached the opposition of Western education and values in northern Nigeria. Another school of

thought stated that Muhammad Yusuf formed Boko Haram in early 2000s [5]. According to Ibrahim, Boko Haram's original name was 'Jama' *atu Ahlis Sunnah Liddaiawati Wal Jihad* (literally translated as the movement for call and striving in the way of God). They are also called 'Yusufiyya' which was adopted from the name of the leader Muhammad Yusuf [6]. Yusufiyya emerged from among the youths that used to congregate at the Muhammad Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno state for Qur'anic exegesis that was conducted by the late Islamic scholar, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, during the month of Ramadan. The attitude of Muhammad Yusuf, which presumably was deviant in nature, put him at loggerheads with Sheikh Ja'afar and the Mosque management [6].

A large body of literature exists on terrorism as shown above with the bulk of these studies focusing mainly on evolution of Boko Haram, few attempts have been made to assess the early origin and conceptual issues about Boko Haram Movement. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap in knowledge and provide adequate assertions in relation to the genesis and infancy of Boko Haram Movement.

## 2. Literature

Many renowned scholars such as Karl Marx and Nietzsche had views that were vitriolic against religion. Marx canvassed for the abolition of religion because it is antithetical to genuine human happiness. For him, therefore, the abolition of religion is required for real happiness. However, since religion is considered as a private affair, the position of Marx and others who share his views have been overlooked. In fact, religion is persisting in modern society and in great variety. More importantly, the importance of religion to humankind cannot be overemphasized [7].

However, with the 9/11 terrorists attacks of United States of America, scholars began to reappraise the importance of religion, having observed its affinity with violent extremism. This apprehension was raised against the backdrop of the increasing incidence of religious violence in several countries around the world. "Religious crisis without doubt is as old as religion itself, but the tendency to promote militancy and intolerance from within extremist religions appears to be much more common now than in times past" [8].

In Nigeria, no account of the state will be complete without reference to religion. This is because; the Nigerian state is one that embodies an extremely complex web of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. A geographic and religious fault line divides its more than 150 million populations into a Christian-dominated south and a Muslim-dominated north. However, religion in Nigeria, at different levels, is mostly mentioned in negative terms or rather, historical events linked to religion tilts more towards its negative than its positive contribution to the Nigerian state. The Jihad, the civil war propaganda, the *Shari'ah* law controversy, the tensions provoked by the Nigerian accession to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the incessant religious crises that have engulfed the Northern part, mainly, indicate the deleterious impact of religion in Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria and many other places, religious violence has

been hugely associated with Islam. "Islam in Northern Nigeria in general, has gone through episodes of radicalization or violent outburst" [9].

Particularly worrisome is the rate at which extreme religious fundamentalist groups have flourished in Nigeria and "are united in the ultimate objective of establishing Nigeria as an Islamic state" [10]. These groups include, among others, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria led by Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky; the Boko Haram led by the late Mohammed Yusuf; the Kala-Kato led by Mallam Badamasi; Darul-islam led by Aminu Bashir Abdullahi; Ahmadiya Movement led by Al Gulam; Khadiyya led by Nasir Kabara; Salafiya (or Izala) led by Late Abubakar Gummi; Tijjaniya led by Isiaku Rabi, and Dahiru Bauchi [11]. The activities of some of these sects now threaten the legitimacy of the Nigerian state as well as undermine the safety of lives and property of its citizens. Of these sects, that of Boko Haram with its radical extremism is the one that Nigerian security architecture has been grappling with. Boko Haram's ideological mission is primarily to overthrow the Nigerian state with its Western values and then impose strict Islamic Shari'ah law in the entire country. This is a violent reaction against the Nigerian state with predominantly western attributes. There is an obvious clash of civilizations. A clash between Islamic values and western values, in fact, the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interest has engendered counter responses [12]. Thus, the rise of Boko Haram with its violent disposition against Western values is a counter response to Western civilization that is fast eclipsing, that is, if it had not eclipsed other civilizations such as Islamic civilization.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Conversely, the Boko Haram emergence and philosophy will be better appreciated within the clash of civilizations theoretical framework. Harvard Professor, Samuel P. Huntington in 1993, originally formulated this theory. His thesis predicted that end of the "Cold War" between the Communist and the Capitalist democratic world was possibly not the end of the conflicts of international nature. However, he concluded that the next conflict or war would not be fought between states but between competing cultures - namely Islam and the Western civilization [12].

The 21st century started with a new phase of struggle for global hegemony, again, centered on religious and civilization issues [13]. The end of the Cold War in early 1990's brought an end to the ideological war between the two blocs led by the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, leaving the former as the sole super power. For a brief period, it brought relief to the Muslim world since most of the Muslim states were allies of the Capitalist bloc to fight the "infidel"— the Communist bloc. This short-lived respite took a turn when Samuel P. Huntington's article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 and later in his book *The Clash of Civilizations* in 1996 stirred the world as it gave new policy direction to the West vis-a-vis the Muslim world.

It is argued that the term, *Clash of Civilizations*, echoed much earlier in the academic circles before Huntington highlighted it. For example, the writings of Arnold Toynbee in 1923 and Basil Mathew in 1926 deliberated on the civilizational conflicts. Similarly, Bernard Lewis, in his essay "The Roots of Muslim Rage", highlighted the rivalry between the West and Islam as the *Clash of Civilizations*. It was, however, Huntington's thesis that attracted global attention. He suggests that the division of the world during the Cold War into, the First, Second and Third World is no longer relevant. It is important to group countries based on their culture and civilization instead of political or economic system or level of economic development. For him, civilizational identity is important as he suggests that the world will be shaped, in large measures, by the interactions among the seven or eight major civilizations. These civilizations include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization, of which the conflict between the Christian West and Islam gets the lion share of his attention [12]. Emphasizing on civilizations, he further writes that religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations [14].

Thus, following the destruction of the World Trade Center in September 2001, the late terrorist Osama bin Laden announced the beginning of what he regarded as a war between civilizations, and many in the West shared the view that the secular Western world and the world of fundamentalist Islam were now on collision course [15].

Therefore, part of the ongoing transformation of Nigerian politics with violent extremism rearing its ugly head can be understood as a clash between Islamic civilization and Western civilization. The driving force of Boko Haram is religion, which Huntington, identified as the most fundamental factor in the clash of civilizations. Islam is violently questioning its vitiation by Western values. This explains why Boko Haram demands for no other thing other than the abolition of western education and globalization that are considered alien and perceived to have adulterated the core morals and teachings of Islam, by extension, rejecting the liberal democratic principles and values in Nigeria.

#### 4. Methodology

In general there are few verified facts and many issues on which analysts can only speculate with regard to Boko Haram. The method of data collection necessary for the study will be both primary and secondary methods. The primary sources are first-hand information from either eyewitness that are orally transmitted or written in documents, while secondary data will be obtained from series of publications such as published and unpublished materials assessable in the library and online.

However, this study builds on literature review, intelligence data and historic document analysis which enables the researcher to systematically and objectively reconstruct the past through the collection, verification and synthesizing of recorded evidence.

#### 5. Early Origin of Boko Haram

The Boko Haram phenomenon or the Yusuffiyya movement is an upshoot of the Nigerian Taliban that came to limelight in the early 1990's, ostensibly aimed at Islamic revivalism. The Taliban "students" in Pashto, is an Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan currently waging war (an insurgency or jihad) within that country. According to security intelligence, the emergence of the current day Boko Haram sect is traced to the activities of one Ammi Hassan (now late), an Algerian national and his son Ali Hassan who were banished by the Algerian Government for alleged links with the Al-Qaeda terrorist group in 1991 [16]. Ammi and his son, Ali thereafter took refuge in Niger Republic, but were immediately expelled based on the warning by the Algerian Government. Thereafter, they moved into Nigeria and were received by one Yakubu Musa Kafanchan, a Nigerian Islamic Cleric who hails from Bauchi State but resides in Katsina. (It should be noted here that Kafanchan, is uncle to Abu Mohammed, late factional leader of the Boko Haram sect) [16].

Considering Hassan's antecedents, the sheer number of youngsters (Almajiri pupils) under the guardianship of Yakubu Musa Kafanchan portrays a fertile ground for extremism to thrive. Immediately, the Hassans, facilitated the sponsorship of several Nigerian youths for arms training under the guise of seeking for scholarship in Malian desert. Two batches of about Thirty (30) young men each were trained and later became radical arrowheads of the Boko Haram Movement. Notable among them were [16]:

- 1) Mohammed Aminu (aka Abu Dauda)-believed to be hiding in Kano;
- 2) Mohammed Adam (aka Abu Bilal)- also hiding in Kano; and
- 3) Lawal Ayodeji – A Yoruba by tribe. Ayodeji dropped out from University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) to pursue extremism;
- 4) Sa'ad Marid- a sickler who worked in a bakery in Abuja.
- 5) Tahir (aka Abu DIMA)
- 6) Khalid Al-Barnawi
- 7) Mohammed Mudashiru Adam (aka Abu Miqdad)
- 8) Adam kamar

In no time, the Hassans became the rallying point for both local and hitherto foreign based Nigerians who had a stint with the Al-Qaeda terrorist group. Among this set were [16];

- 1) Rabi'u Afghani- trained and sojourned in Afghanistan and fought on the side of the Afghan Taliban;
- 2) Saud - a black Saudi citizen banished by his home government;
- 3) Mohammed Ali (late); -Nigerian returnee from Saudi Arabia soon became a leader under whom Mohammed Yusuf, (late Boko Haram leader) was groomed;
- 4) AbulBarrah( aka Ibrahim Haroon) -was schooled in Saudi Arabia
- 5) Hamza- Nigerian returnee from the Republic of Eritrea; and
- 6) Yusuf Abu Dujana; -Nigerian returnee from Saudi Arabia.

Given their early radical indoctrination, AbulBarrah, and Abu Dujana were actively utilized by the Hassans to lead Nigerian trainees, at most eight (8) persons per trip, for trainings in the Malian desert through Maradi-Tawa-Chinta-Barades town all in Niger Republic, from where the recruits are made to trek several hours into the vast desert to be received by the younger Hassan for onward movement to Mali [16].

Ultimately, during one of their clandestine movement into Niger Republic, Ammi Hassan, Abu Dujana and Mohammed Salahadeen (Nigerian) were shot and killed, while the Nigerian forces at the border post arrested Najib Sadding, an Algerian [16]. Meanwhile, high-level security report indicated that, members of the group were surreptitiously conscripted hitherto by the Algerian based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) to fight the then Algerian Government over its annulment of the 1992 election which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win [1].

In early 2000, these minute clique of individuals, came together to pursue a life of radical Islam under the leadership of Mohammed Ali. The group named itself "Taliban" - an Arabic word meaning "Students"; a name they adopted in solidarity with the militant Afghanistan Taliban [16]. Moreover, in 2002, Mohammed Ali and some of his followers declared the city of Maiduguri to be irredeemably corrupt and embarked on *hijra* (a withdrawal along the lines of the Prophet Muhammad's withdrawal from Mecca to Medina) to a village called Kanama, Yunusari Local Government Area, Yobe state, near the Nigeria-Niger border. This is in a bid to set up a separatist community run on hardline Islamic principles. Its leader, Mohammed Ali, espoused anti-state ideology and called on other Muslims to join the group and return to a life under "true" Islamic law, with the aim of making a perfect society away from the corrupt establishment [17].

Eventually, in December 2003, following a community dispute regarding fishing rights in a local pond, the group got into a conflict with the police. Group members overpowered a squad of officers and took their weapons. This confrontation led to a siege of its mosque by the army that lasted into the New Year. The siege ended in a shootout, leaving about Thirty (30) people dead, including Mohammed Ali, giving rise to the emergence of Mohammed Yusuf (Late) as the sect leader in tandem with the fleeing members from Kanamma [18].

At this point, the group had gained press attention in Nigeria, and interest from the International community, due to its catchy name "Nigerian Taliban". Similarly, many of the group's members were alleged to be the sons of wealthy and influential people in Northern Nigeria. In a 2004 U.S. State Department cable, revealed by WikiLeaks, the U.S. embassy in Abuja concluded that, the group did not present an international threat and likely had no links to international jihadist organizations [19].

However, in 2005 one Abubakar Adam kamar and Khalid Al-Barnawi with directives from the Algerian-based GSPC anointed Mohammed Yusuf as the Amir *Daulatal Islam fin*

*Nigeria* (Leader of Islamic Republic in Nigeria). This promptly changed the nomenclature of the group from "Taliban" to "Jama'atul Ahlus Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad", which means "Brothers of Sunni United in the fight of Holy War". The group then embarked on the process of establishing its own mosque in Maiduguri. This new mosque, named *Ibn Taimiyyah Masjid*, was built on a piece of land owned by Yusuf's father-in-law, Baba Fugu Mohammed [16].

The authorities apparently left Yusuf alone as he went viral into other states, including Bauchi, Yobe, and Niger states. For Yusuf, the West represents secularism and is spreading it to the domain of Islam around the world, including Nigeria. Thus, Yusuf claimed that Muslims who were supposed to guard against such "destructive" infiltration were now embracing it in the name of democracy or education. He therefore saw it as incumbent on him and his followers to correct such teachings and return Muslims to the true, pure religion they were abandoning. The vehemence and intransigence that characterized the way he preached against Western values was the basis upon which the people in Maiduguri, Borno State where the sect was based, nicknamed it Boko Haram which roughly translates as "Western education is forbidden" in Hausa [20].

To this end, Yusuf constructed a "state within a state," with a cabinet, religious police, and serves as the supreme judge in the advent of dispute amongst his members. He attracted multitudes of followers most of whom were refugees from the wars over the border in Chad and jobless Nigerian youths by offering them welfare handouts, food, shelter and other social incentives. Subsequently, Yusuf aggressively brainwashed large number of ill-informed youths who immediately found resonance with the creed of the sect. Moreover, Yusuf released several video sermons in which he explicitly threatened the state and the police with violence. They were circulated on DVD and gained a widespread audience [20]. Efforts to mop-up the circulation of the aforementioned by Security Forces and other relevant stakeholders proved abortive, ostensibly due to the level of piracy and lack of proper enforcement of copyright laws [21]. At this point, he already had as immediate lieutenants in the likes of Abubakar Shekau, MammanNur, KabiruBanki and Ibrahim Agaji [16].

Meanwhile, the sources of funding of the sect were unclear at this stage of its existence. Members of the Borno religious establishment asserted that, Yusuf received funds from Salafist contacts in Saudi Arabia following two hajj trips he undertook during the period [19]. Another source claimed that, the funding during this period was donations from wealthy northern Nigerians. A case in point was the arrest of a wealthy northern businessman in 2006 over alleged connection in the sponsoring of some youth to an al-Qaeda training camp in Mauritania [19].

Furthermore, on the eve of the 2007 presidential elections, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam, a prominent, cleric and the erstwhile mentor of Yusuf, was assassinated as he was praying at the mosque he administered in Kano. The killing remains a mystery for some time, but many acknowledged that it was carried out on the orders of Mohammed Yusuf.

Sheikh Ja'afar had earlier criticized the group for its hardline ideology, predicting a clash with the state. The killing is now seen by some as a key point in the development of Boko Haram, because there was no longer the possibility of turning Yusuf and his followers back to the mainstream of the northern Islamic establishment [19].

Subsequently, In July 2009 the group came into conflict with the authorities in a strikingly similar way to the events of six years before. Traveling en masse to the funeral of a fellow member, the group was stopped by police traffic officers, who were enforcing a tightened restriction on motorcycle helmets, and an argument ensued. The circumstances were unclear, but a member of the group is reported to have fired on the police, injuring several officers. The group then attacked police stations in Bauchi and Yobe, killing scores of police officers [19].

These events led the Bauchi government to crack down on the group, arresting more than seven hundred members. In Maiduguri, the police surrounded the group's mosque, but members of the sect managed to break out and fled the town. They roamed the city acting independently, fighting police when they came across them and killing Muslim and Christian civilians indiscriminately [21]. The police eventually regained control of Maiduguri, and then embarked on a bloody purge of the group's members and anyone they suspected of being a Boko Haram supporter or sympathizer. Dozens of people were rounded up and executed without trial, including Yusuf's father-in-law. Mohammed Yusuf was also arrested by the army and handed over to the police, who killed him within hours. However, the circumstances surrounding the death of Yusuf, with the frenzy of criticism it elicited from civil society organizations, the media, and international human rights bodies, is a fundamental turning point in the post 2009 insurrection to the hierarchy of the sect [19].

By way of isolating the group and creating effective basis for affirmative trial of its members, the Borno state government passed a legislation outlawing the group in 2010. However, this initiative was more of an impetus than deterrence, the runaway remnants of the sect members who took hiding in other states, like Bauchi, Taraba, Yobe and border countries such as Cameroon and Chad gradually regrouped under a new leader, Abubakar SHEKAU, with a resolve to avenge the deaths of their "Martyred" leader (Yusuf) and perpetuate the sect's missions [16]. This uprising undoubtedly brought its members to the attention of global jihadist movements and rebel groups based around the Sahel. During this time, several dozens were traced to insurgent training camps in Algeria by UN security sources in a Tuareg rebel camp in Mali [21].

Nevertheless, under the leadership of SHEKAU, an indigene of Yobe state, the sect became more clandestine, conducting its activities subtly but aggressively. This secretive outlook of the group is explained by the aftermaths of the 2009 crisis, which instantly established legal basis for security hunt for elements of the group as enemies of state who must be made to face justice [16].

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has provided a comprehensive assessment and conceptual discourse on the early origin of Boko Haram movement in a bid to (arguably) address numerous ambiguities surrounding the evolution of the sect. Nonetheless, there exists little to clearly explain the vivid causes of the Boko Haram Movement. However, external factors from the annulment of the 1991 elections in Algerian where the Islamist had landslide win was claimed as the remote cause of the Boko Haram emergence. The then contact between Algerian dissidents and Northern Nigerian Youth also provided the impetus to the creation of Nigerian Taliban, which, metamorphosed into the Boko Haram. The movement is borne-out of the desire to establish an Islamic Caliphate where pure Islamic culture and jurisprudence is practiced. Meanwhile, Foundation Leaders such as Muhammad Ali, a Saudi educated, paid a supreme price as he was killed in early confrontation with the Nigerian security forces.

Mohammed Yusuf, widely seen as the spiritual leader took over the mantle of leadership with no experience in the battlefield. However, the death of Mohammed Yusuf in the hands of the security forces created a vacuum in the succession of the sect leadership and thus by extension, contributed to the factionalization and protractile nature of the Boko Haram insurgency.

## 7. Future Scope

Due to the broadness of the study, the scope of the paper is limited to content analysis from 18<sup>th</sup> century regarding the historical origin of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria within the context of clash between Western and Islamic civilization. The research dwells on the early origin of Boko Haram; an insurgent group with ideological belief propelled by fundamentalism and perceived adulteration of Islam. However, the research is constrained with limited resources, lack of quantitative analysis through statistical survey as well as discussions of conceptual issues which led to the emergence of the subject.

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