**BOKO HARAM**

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TRENDS AND ISSUES IN MUSLIM EXPERIENCE WITH SECULAR EDUCATON IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**Introduction**

In this first decade of the 21st Century and also, of course, the new (third) millennium of the Gregorian calendar, the Boko Haram episode stands out here in Nigeria among the issues that both attracted and generated the greatest plethora of news, commentaries and discussions in the media (both print and electronic). As naïve as some of the ideas and thoughts of the Boko Haram sounded, what seemed to be more astonishing to all was the kind of appeal they made to a multitude people of especially the educated youth. As a consequence of the massive support it received from a cross section of the Muslim youth, the phenomenon not only retarded or thwarted the march of the already educationally disadvantaged Northern Nigerian Muslims towards meaningful manpower development in a rapidly changing world, but also caused, in the wake of its insurgency and ensuing violence a la carnage, a stupendous and unwarranted loss of lives of hundreds of the most productive segment of the Muslim Ummah – the youth.

A quick review of the overall writings and commentaries made on the incident reveals the fact that it can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and points of view. While some writers tried to examine the veracity of the Boko Haram doctrines from the strictly Islamic scholastic point of view, other tried to question its rationality within the context of the realities of our contemporary and prevailing challenges. The real motives behind the movement and its visions and aspirations constitute another realm of study and commentaries. Then issues kept coming up and overflowing n such a way that a reader or any keen listener may only read, listen or comment on just the issues one was opportune to come across. While all these events were taking place the discourse remained largely confined within the media. Little attempts were made to subject the issues to rigorous as well as purposeful academic and intellectual scrutiny. Besides the efforts of the Da’awah Coordination Council of Nigeria (DCCN) that organized a roundtable discussion on the issue (1st – 12th, 2009) and eventually, also went ahead to publish its proceedings titled – **The Boko Haram Tragedy -,** there does not appear to be any sort of spectacular effort by any locally based reputable academic institution to study the phenomenon until this particular attempt. For this purpose and in this respect, this paper attempts to critically study the Boko Haram views on education within the context of the historical trends and the fundamental ideological, ethical, and even philosophical issues involved in Muslim experience with secular education in Northern Nigeria.

The truth of the matter, however, like Iguda (2009) asserted is that before Boko Haram, many scholars had studied the negative impact and imprint of the secular system of education on our society. In a general sense, the issues raised against Western education by the Boko Haram are not new not only to the enlightened minds of the Muslim intelligentsia but even to laymen. What however happened to be strange was the naïve and rather irrational manner it was advocating total rejection of secular education without necessarily introducing or even suggesting any sort of meaningful and realistic alternative to it. Be that as it may, the Boko Haram phenomenon definitely raised fundamental educational issues and challenges that although they have always been raised or confronted by Muslim scholars and academics, intellectual, thinkers, policy makers, and activists they never seemed to be addressed seriously at the level of policy formulation or practical implementation. It therefore becomes pertinent to review the trends and issues in Muslim experience with secular education in Northern Nigeria against the backdrop of the Boko Haram incident for the purpose of contributing to the search for ideological and ethically compatible and practically viable educational agenda for the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria.

In handling this topic, therefore, this paper first of all to expound a conceptual framework by attempting to define some key concepts in the topic and those that are essentially related or relevant to it even if they do not appear explicitly in it. The paper then presents a brief profile of the fundamental views and thoughts of the Boko Haram with particular reference to secular education. This delineates the scope of the paper. Since the present and indeed even the future can best be understood through a spectacle of the past, it is pertinent to present the historical background to the Northern Nigerian Muslim experience with secular education. This is done by over viewing the relationship between Islam and the history of learning in the area of this study – Northern Nigeria. Against the background presented in the preceding section, a review of the trends in Muslim experience with secular education in Northern Nigeria is then made. For the purpose of broadening our perception and understanding of Muslim experience with secular education and also, in order to situate the phenomenon within global context, the paper tries to review the global perspective of Muslim reaction to secular education comparing it with the local experiences of the Northern Nigerian Muslims. In a critical sense, and as far as the matter of the Boko Haram is concerned, the trends in Muslim experience with secular education essentially only provided us with the historical antecedents to Boko Haram, the most crucial thing however are the issues involved. This paper dwells on these issues albeit fairly elaborately, being the crux of the matter. After discussing these issues the paper finally attempts to propound, within the context of the challenges raised by the issues discussed earlier, what can be described as the educational agenda for Muslims in Northern Nigeria and beyond.

**Shaping a Conceptual Framework: Operational Definition of Key Concepts**

* Secular Education
* Islamic Education
* Muslim Education (Shehu, 2005)
* Interaction
* Trends
* Issues

**Boko Haram in Perspective: Delineating the Scope of Study**

“Boko Haram” a name derived from only one aspect of the mainstream dogmas of a movement that claims to preach return to pristine Islam of the early generations of Muslims (the Prophet (SAW), his companions (the **sahaba**) and the two generations after – the **tabi’un** and **tabi’al-tabi’un**). By implication, it propagates untainted monotheism that invited absolute and ultimate supremacy, sovereignty and authority with Allah and His Laws – the Shari’ah, and also total rejection of innovations (bid’ah) and unflinching and unreserved followership to the traditions of the Prophet (SAW) – the **Sunnah**. (**Ref: Hazhihi Aqeetatuna wa Manhaju Da’awatina** – by Muhammad Yusuf).

In the light of the above, Boko Haram claims to be a **Salafi** movement. But it has been dismissed and disowned by all renowned **salafi** scholars and preachers in Nigeria (e.g. the Late Shaik Ja’afar Mahmud Adam) because of some of their deviant a la heretical views on especially the concept and methods of Jihad, and also the issue of education (Boko).

As is common with all ideological and religious movements, splinter groups usually emerge overtime from the original or mainstream. This is also applicable with the **salafiyyah** movement. Thus Munib (2010) identified four different strands of **salafiyyah** namely, **al-salafiyyah al-ilmiyyah, al-salafiyyaj al-harkiyyah** and **al-salafiyyah al-jihadiyyah** (all these identifiable at and traceable to the initial hub and mainstay of the **salafiyyah** movement – Egypt) and the fourth strand being what the writer (Munib, 2010) calls the |Saudi version of **salafiyyah**. A critical study of the views and the fault lines of the different strands identified above by Munib (2009) may compel one to situate the Boko Haram within the **salafiyyah jihadiyyah**.

It would require a lengthy and elaborate study and analysis to present a comprehensive exposition of the views of the Boko Haram. As it were and as earlier asserted, Boko Haram derives from their views towards secular education. This really representatives only a segment/branch of the cardinal and essential principles of their mainstream doctrines. For the purpose of this paper it also forms the area of our study.

In a board sense the view of Boko Haram on secular education can be described in two dimensions namely, the philosophical/ideological and the domain of practice. The ideological conflicts identified by them at the level of the first plane and the problems, especially of indiscriminate mixing of the sexes in schools and classrooms and its attendant moral and spiritual detriments are not new nor strange.

**The strange thing however, is the solution they advocate or preach, that is total and unequivocal rejection of secular education – hook, line and sinker.**

**Alternative?** Vague, nebulous and poorly conceptualized. No designed curriculum, no articulate educational vision or mission. Nothing on ground in terms of goals, aspirations, manpower development strategies, etc. (DCCN, 2009).

**Islam and the History f Learning in Northern Nigeria: Shaping the Historical Background to Muslim Interaction with Secular Education**

* With reference to Ghana and Borno empires Islam dates back to a millennium in Central Bilad al-Sudan.
* With the arrival of Wangarawa traders to Hausaland Islam dates back, in this region that today forms a very large part of N/N, to the 13th century A.D. (Smith, 1987)
* Great centres of learning and grate scholars of Islam were established/introduced in this region since pre-Sokoto Jihad times,, and in this regard the influence of Timbuktu was very significant and prominent (Kani, 1985, Albasu, 1995, Jeppie and Diagne, 2005).
* The book in West Africa/Central Bilad al-Sudan lasted for over 300 years before the printing Press (Last, 2005).
* The Sokoto Jihad Triumvirates left behind well over 250 authored works (Bobboyi, 2005).
* Then there were the assertions/testimonies of both Clapperton and Miller.
* With all these, a sense identity, pride and even superiority was well instilled at least within the circle of the elites before the arrival of the white man. Refer to Sultan Attahiru’s: Wakar Zuwan Annasara”.
* This explains the ideological, psychological and even intellectual dispositions with which secular education, as first introduction by the missionaries and then the colonialists, was confronted.

**Overview of the Trends in Muslim Interaction with Secular Education in Northern Nigeria.**

**Muslim Reaction to Secular Education: Global and Local Perspectives**

**Issues in Muslim Interaction with Secular Education in Northern Nigeria**

* **Philosophical Conflicts and the Essential Epistemological Matters Arising**
* **Education and Values: Negotiating Priorities**
* **Duality in Education and its Attendant Problems**
* **Gender Issues in Muslim Education in Northern Nigeria**
* **Utility of Secular Education and the Problem of social Inequality and Alienation**

**Boko Haram and the Educational Challenges of Muslims in Northern Nigeria**