



POLAC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ECONS & MGT SCIENCE (PIJEMS)
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE
NIGERIA POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO



THE VIRULENT INFLUENCE OF KHAWARIJ PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON BOKO HARAM'S MILITANT LEADER ABU MUHAMMAD ABUBAKAR AL-SHEKAWI (SHEKAU) (1965-2021)

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Abstract

The influence of the Khawarij sect on jihadist movements around the world and within Nigeria has yet to attract scholarly discourse. Khawarijism is one of the oldest extremist Islamic sects, whose origins date back to the early Islamic period. It has been serving as a catalyst for the formation of various jihadist groups operating today in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. This paper aims to explore the sect's influence on Boko Haram's insurgency under the leadership of Abu Muhammad Abubakar Al- Shekawi (Shekau). The essay tries to analyze the manifestation of the sect's ideological and philosophical beliefs on Shekau, which translated to his violent disposition, uncompromising stance, strict adherence to Sharia Law, and condemning anything deviating from his interpretation of Islam. Khawarij's rigid framework and narrow interpretation of Islam shaped Shekau's beliefs, thinking, operational tactics, and strategies.

Key Words: *Khawarij, Boko Haram, Extremism, Terrorism and Ideology.*

Introduction

The *Khawarij* is the earliest sect in Islam, which was prophesied by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (Ali, 2016). According to scholars, an incident happened during the distribution of war bounty when one of the followers named Abdullah bin Dhul Khuwaisirah al-Tamimi disagreed and objected the sharing. Prophet Muhammad prevailed upon his companions to leave him alone and prophesied that from his lineage a group would arise that “will go to the extreme in religion until they abandon it altogether, just like the arrow pierces the body of the game and then abandons it.” In an authentic Hadith, the Messenger of Allah was quoted as saying: “At the end of time, there will appear some people among you who are young in age, immature and senseless; they will use the best of speech of the people in their claims ... Their faith will not go past their throats...” (Al-Bukhari, 1959). They “recite the Quran, thinking it is” theirs. Thus, Dhul Khuwaisirah was the ideological progenitor of *Khawarij*.

This prophesy came to pass with the rise of a contentious group a few years after its proclamation. Thus, the political history of *Khawarij* is linked to a political crisis between the fourth Caliph, Ali Bn Abi Talib, and Mu'awiyah Bn Abu Sufyan over succession to the caliphate leadership following the murder of the third Caliph, Usman Bn Affah, around 656AD. The efforts to resolve the crisis and the ensuing war at Siffin through arbitration, which failed, made the conflict be considered repugnant and a contradiction of the Islamic doctrine. Both factions of Caliph Ali bn Abi Talib and Bn Abu Sufyan and Bani Umayyah companions were considered as having strayed away from Islamic principles. Thus, the name *Khawarij* (Arabic word: "*Kharaja*", which means exit or left) came to be linked to those who withdrew or exited from the main contingent at the arbitration stage to follow its own acclaimed doctrine (Watt, 1973). As a result, the sect's history began with a strong and terrible uprising against the caliphate. At the time, opposing the Caliph meant mounting a revolutionary insurrection (Rahim, (2018).

Thus, from its beginning in 656AD to date, the *Khawarij* has been a political rebel movement, whose main characteristics are *Al-Hakimiyyah* (recognizing Allah's laws and rule only), *Al-Khuruj* (justifying rebellion against leaders identified as unjust according to their perception), *Al-Takfir* (regarding any person holding different views or disagreeing with their tenets as an infidel or an apostate), *Al-Jihad* (seeing *jihad* as obligatory for every Muslim) and believing and having absolute loyalty to the Holy Quran (this idea is the basis of the of present *Quraniyyu* group). In the process of upholding these theological beliefs, the sect sanctions and ex-communicates believers, legitimizes violence, opposes (antiestablishment) and antagonizes constituted authorities (Zubaidah and Zulkifi, 2016 and Al-Arifi 2015). The *Khawarij* has the "most extreme views and believes that they are the most devout and holy people practicing Islam" (Interview: Dr Aminu Umar Farouk, 8-2-2023, Dutsin-ma). The sect wants the doctrines of Islam to be maximally applied and implemented without regard to time, socio-cultural context or *ijtihad* (the understanding or concession of the *ulema*),

The sect believes that a Muslim who commits grave sins is an apostate and deserves to be excommunicated or killed. They justify rebellion and the overthrow of rulers they consider tyrants or unjust. The sect advocates the assassination of these leaders, as well as anyone who supports them or goes against the sect's beliefs. The *Khawarij* easily justify mass murder and the indiscriminate spilling of the blood of Muslims without any remorse (Al-Arifi, 2015) by endorsing the doctrine of *Istilad*, which is the selective killing of non-*Khawarij* Muslims. They also justify the confiscation of the properties of Muslims without any excuses. The sect's most notable assassination was that of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib in 661, whom they accused of not following Allah's injunctions in his rule. Assassination and antagonism against established authorities has, therefore, been a prominent feature in the sect's atrocious history. Spannaus (2007) argues that the doctrine of *Azariqah* is based on principles such as:

i. Condemning and eliminating non-*Azariqah* Muslims and sanctioning the killing and enslavement of women and children.

ii. Considering the commission of any sinful act as a demonstration of atheism. This includes refusing to support the Movement in its rebellion against established authority, which may result in the death penalty.

iii. Even the children of unbelievers are not spared; they are killed indiscriminately just like their parents.

iv. *Taqiya* (dissimulation or hiding true belief of being an *Azariqah* (*Khawarij*) for fear of the consequences in the face of oppression) is prohibited.

The *Khawarij* sect has numerous denominations from the moderate to the most radical (Al-Syahrastani, 1984). Moderates, such as *Al-Ajaridah*, *Al-Najdat*, *Al-Sufriya*, *Al-Ibadiyah*, *Al-Muhakkimah*, *Ibadiyya*, *Najada't*, *ibn Ibād*, *ibn Asfar*, *Bayhasi* and *Sufriyya*, unlike the radical, for example, are known for their involvement in propagandizing their theological dogma. The followers of Nafi ibn Al-Azraq Ibn Qays al-Hanafi al-Bakri's *Azariqah Khawarij* are the most known extremist militant faction that is obsessed with upholding its new tenets of puritanism, moralistic zealotry and violent disposition. Nafi ibn Al-Azraq was an Arab from Banu Hanifa known for being religiously revered by his disciples; those who disagreed with him were accused of apostasy and could thus be justifiably eliminated.

Nafi ibn Al-Azraq was more of a warlord engaged in numerous wars and rebellions than a theologian. He was commanding over a 30,000-strong army with which he waged wars against the Umayyad and the Abassid caliphates. Nafi was killed at the battle of Dulab in 685 AD. Just like other *Khawarij* leaders, such as Ubaid Allah Ibn Mahfuz, Zubair Allah Ibn Mahfuz, Qatari Ibn al-Haja'a, Abdullah bin Yahya, Al-Mustawid bin Olfa and Obaidullah bin Bashir, for instance, Nafi was never identified with intellectual prowess or outputs in the form of books or scripture. Despite being the first politically and revolutionarily minded sect in Islamic history, it is known to be intellectually lazy, unlike the *Salafist* whose scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad Nasir al-Din Albani, Taqi al-Din al-Hilali, Rashid Rida and Sayyid Qutb, are known for their contribution to intellectualism. The sect's extremism and

revolutionary engagements against constituted authorities and violent struggles to impose their tenets probably consumed their time and energy. Terrorism and extremism substitute intellectualism in *Khawarij* dogma. Thus, most of what is being read on the sect is from non-*Khawarij* sources.

Since its medieval beginning, the *Khawarij* has been a revolutionary, fanatical, and extremist sect that has been influencing Islamic history. Their theological ideology has continued to inspire the behavior, actions, and thinking of Muslims to the present day. The sect's extremism has reached the level of authorizing shedding Muslims blood, taking their wives and children as slaves, and identifying those disagreeing with their tenets as apostates. It has a restricted and dogmatic interpretation of Islamic tenets and seeks to impose it on others through violence and fanaticism. "Opposing, defaming and agitating against Muslim leaders and scholars" with different opinions are the central pillars of their creed. The sect is "known for using violence and terrorism as a means of achieving its goals, which is contrary to true Islamic ethics" (Interview: Dr. Hussain Umar, 19- 1-2023, Kano). *Khawarij* philosophy has been resurfacing under various groups despite the constituted authorities' strict policy against the sect and *Salafist* and *Shi'ite* scholars' efforts to dismantle their tenets through *fatwa*. Great Islamic theologians, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, believed that the sect's ideology and influence would continue to exist in Muslim society indefinitely (Taymiyyah, 1995/1416). Boko Haram's temperament, deed and ideological fervor clearly reveal their ideological kinship with the *Azāriqah* denomination of the *Khawarij* creed (Muhammad, 2015). Thus, the appearance of Boko Haram under Abu Muhammad Abubakar Al-Shekawi (Shekau) is a confirmation or testament to such a proclamation.

The Evolution of Boko Haram

Boko Haram, which is the internationally recognized and accepted name of the insurgent group terrorizing the northern part of Nigeria and the neighboring countries of Niger Republic, Chad, Mali, and Cameroon, has never been the official name of the group. The official name according to its known leaders is *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li- l Da'awah wa al-*

Jihad or *Jama'atul Ahlis Sunnah Lidda' Awati Wal-Jihad* or *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li'l-Da'wawa'l-Jihad 'ala Minhaj al- Salaf*. The appellation is translated as "People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and *Jihad*" or "The Association of the People of the *Sunna* (i.e., the tradition of the Prophet) for Preaching and Jihad according to the *Salafi* Method". Thus, the main objective of the group is propagandizing Islam and not terrorism, wanton destruction of lives and properties or usurping political power. The group leadership was never against formal Western education per se but western culture. In fact, not a single leader of this group from Muhammed Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, Maman Nur, Bakura Sahalaba to-date has ever called this religious movement Boko Haram (translated: Westernization (Education) Is Sacrilege or Western Education is a Sin/sinful). Thus, the name Boko Haram is a crude rendition of the group's stand against western influence and culture on Muslim society. It is the name popularized, especially by the Press and International Community.

Nevertheless, *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li- l Da'awah wa al-Jihad* or *Jama'atul Ahlis Sunnah Lidda' Awati Wal-Jihad* or *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li'l-Da'wawa'l-Jihad 'ala Minhaj al- Salaf* as an Islamic propagandizing movement was not the brainchild of all the later leading figures of the group, such as Muhammad Yusuf, Abu Mohammed Abubakar Shekau or Abu Musab al-Barnawi. The precursor of the Boko Haram group or *Ahlulsunna Wal'jama'ah Hijra* was formed in 1995 in Maiduguri, Borno State, northeast Nigeria by a little-known young preacher and proselytizer of the *Izala* movement named Abubakar Lawan (Oyegbile and Lawan, 2007). The group became a rallying point for a Muslim Youth Organization aimed at mobilizing and propagandizing Islam. It easily attracted the youth, thereby becoming a formidable force for proselytizing Islam in the area. It was a "non-violent and non-extremist youth movement" (Interview: Ali G. Zanna, 5-4-2023, Maiduguri). The founder, Abubakar Lawan, left Nigeria in 2002 after running the movement for almost seven years for further studies in Saudi Arabia, leaving a vacuum to be filled by a charismatic, fiery and uprising young scholar, Muhammad Yusuf (Gari, 2012). Yusuf found fertile ground for germinating radical views and propagating his version of Islam.

Within a short period of time, Yusuf had dominated and personalized the group by introducing extremist sermons and interpretation of the *Holy Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. His initial alliance with the existing structure of *Izala*, which opened for him opportunities to relate with renowned Islamic Scholars, crumbled. This transmuted the group to a short-lived *Yusufiyya* movement (Fasure, 2009). His sermons were so critical of westernization seeing it not only as a continuation of foreign domination but a violator of Islamic Laws. His sermons and lectures he disseminated through audio and video channels and his books, such as *Hadhihi Aqidatuna wa Manhaaju Da'awatin (This is Our Creed and the Method of Our Preaching)*, promoted the strict application of Islamic Law, thereby laying the intellectual foundation for a more conservative movement bent on transforming the Nigerian society into a Caliphate through violent uprising (Cook, 2018). This book exposes Yusuf's ideological leaning of anti-western culture and beliefs and the establishment of a pro-*Sharia* society in Nigeria (Kassim 2015).

As most leaders of religious movements, Muhammed Yusuf as the tradition in the North began his vocation as a student and later an Islamic preacher propagating the tenets of the religion after perambulating from one renowned scholar or sect to another. He became a member of *Jama'at Izalatil Bidiawa Iqamatus Sunnah* (in short: *Izala*) (translation: Society for the Support of the Prophet's Tradition and against Innovations), which is the most dominant and influential popular Islamic movement in northern Nigeria. The group is an outpost of *Salafism* (Anzalone, 2018). *Salafi* or *Salafism* is a movement within *Sunni* Islam advocating a return to the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as practised by the *Sahabah* (Companions of the Prophet), *Tabi'in* (their successors) and *Taba al-Tabi'in* (successors of the successors). The Movement aims at eliminating traditional, cultural and heretical innovations and returning the society to the authentic Prophet Muhammad model.

Joining *Izala* availed Yusuf the benefits of coming into contact and the tutelage of great *Sunni Salafist* Islamic scholars and members of the group in Nigeria, such as the late Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, the late Sheikh Muhammad Auwal Albani, Sheikh Muhammad Abba

Aji, Imam Ali Gabchiya and Sheikh Abubakar Mujahid (Kassim, 2015). Yusuf was a regular attendant of Sheikh Adam's *tafsir* at Indimi Mosque, Maiduguri (Smith, 2016). During that period, Yusuf studied Taqi Ad -Din Abu al- Abbas Ahmed Ibn Abd al-Halim Ibn Abd al-Salam al- Numayri al- Harrani Taymiyyah philosophical writings on Islam. This had a lasting influence on his thinking and stance on *jihad* and the *Sharia*. The "influence Ibn Taymiyyah had on Yusuf can be seen in naming his mosque and the center of his sermons, Ibn Taymiyyah Mosque in Maiduguri" (Interview: Bukar Kachalla, 5-7-2023, Maiduguri).

Ibn Taymiyya was a *Salafi* theologian, philosopher, prolific writer, thinker and political figure whose central ideology like all *Salafists* was the eradication of "*Bidi'ah*" (innovation) and the promotion of strict adherence to Islamic principles and the implementation of the *Shari'a* (Islamic Law). His theological position is expressed through some of his books, such as *Al-Siyasa al-Shari'a* (The Book of Governance According to the *Shari'a*), *Minhaj as-Sunah an-Nabawiyyah* (The Way of the Prophet's *Sunnah*), *As-Sarim al-Maslul ala Shatim ar-Rasul* (The Drawn Sword Against those who Insult the Messenger), *Kitab Al-Iman* (Book of Faith), *Ziyarat al-Qubur* (Visits to Tombs), *Tal'his al-Istgasa*, *Ar-Raad alja al-Ihnai*, *At-Tauassul' ual-Uasilja*, *Al-Istikama*, *Al-Mustadrak alja madzhmu al-Fatava*, *Iktida Siratil-Mustakim*, The Religious and Moral Doctrine of Jihad, for instance.

Yusuf's *fatwa* (sermons) followed the "footsteps of Ibn Taymiyyah by challenging and refuting the ideas advocated by various dominant Islamic sects in Nigeria, such as *Shi'ism* and *Sufism*" (Interview: Malam Mahmud Abubakar, 12-4-2023, Kano). His stance on the fundamental tenets of Islam and openness for intellectualism led to his exchange of ideas with a renowned scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Awwal Adam Albani (Saidu, 2012) or even debates with other scholars on religious matters. A case in point was the debate he had with Sheikh Isa Ali Pantemi on June 25, 2006 (Abubakar, 2017) and Dr. Idris Abdul Aziz Bauchi on February, 2008 (Mohammed, 2014).

Transformation from *Ahl Sunna Wal Jama'a* to *Boko Haram*

At the initial stage, Yusuf showed no sign of radicalism, fundamentalism or violent disposition. He was more into the propagation of Islam, cultivating rapport with the authorities than usurping power to implement the *Shari'a*. His sermons and lectures he disseminated through audio and video channels and his books, such as *Hadhihi Aqidatuna wa Manhaaju Da'awatin (This is Our Creed and the Method of Our Preaching)*, promoted the strict application of Islamic Law, thereby laying the intellectual foundation for a more conservative movement bent on transforming the Nigerian society into a Caliphate through violent uprising (Cook, 2018).

As his popularity increased, his sermons transformed into radicalism, with a strong emphasis on the necessity for all Muslims to engage in armed *jihad*. His sermons raised awareness about the pervasive poverty and exploitation experienced by his followers and this laid the groundwork for the group's radicalization (Walker, 2012:9). Lewis's (2002:2) assertions accurately describe how "social grievances often find religious expression through fundamentalist appeals to piety or through Islamic challenges to the political status quo..." Therefore, these ideas aptly explain the driving force behind the emergence of subversive religious groups like Boko Haram. Thus, a movement that began and was rooted in Taymiyyah's philosophy for the purpose of enhancing religious scholarship and upholding puritan theological ethics by returning to basic tenets transited into a political tool for the establishment of a caliphate through armed revolution. Its theological undertone was thus mellowed down by political ambition. Its non-normative tactics, such as the use of violence to achieve its objectives, became apparent to the security forces. The group exposed its uncompromising opposition to western democracy, secular education and public employment policy and instantly promoted the *Shari'a* as the system of governance in society. Yusuf's clear disregard to constituted authorities led to the July 2009 confrontation with the security forces in Maiduguri, Borno State which spread across neighboring states of Yobe, Bauchi, Kano, Adamawa, Gombe, Niger and Plateau. The insurrection led to the

death of scores of people. Yusuf was apprehended by the military and handed over to the police. He was killed while under their custody (Michael and Bwala, 2009).

Muhammad Abubakar Shekau and Boko Haram's Transition to the *Khawarij* Creed

With the murder of Muhammed Yusuf, his second-in-command, Muhammad Abubakar al-Shekawi (Shekau), assumed the leadership of the group. He was born in a rural village, Shekau, Tarmuwa Local Government, Yobe State between 1965-1975. His father, Abubakar, was a village *Imam* and an Islamic scholar, while his mother, Falmata Abubakar, was a housewife (Oduah, 2018). As per tradition, he left Shekau to study Islam under the *Almajiranci* (Informal Islamic Education System) so popular in the North. He traversed from one Islamic scholar to another in search of knowledge, as is customary. This took him to Maiduguri, the center of Islamic scholarship in the area. He later joined the Borno State College of Legal and Islamic Studies, Maiduguri (now Mohammed Goni College of Legal and Islamic Studies). He "left the formal education system and joined an uprising scholar, Mohammad Yusuf" (Interview: Kambar Bukar, 7-4-2023, Maiduguri). An ethnic Kanuri, he spoke other languages, such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Arabic and English. Inheriting a movement already in transition, he transformed Boko Haram into one of the most indoctrinated, extremist and deadly religious Movements in the world. As some scholars have argued, the indoctrination process carried out by extremist organizations, such as religious ones like Boko Haram, leads to fanaticism and violence (Webber et al., 2017). Silber and Bhatt (2007) as well as Arena and Arrigo (2005) have argued that religious extremism results in radicalism, violence, and authoritarian leadership. Extremism is fueled by the resentment caused by real or perceived injustice (Sageman, 2005), such as the killing of Muhammad Yusuf by security forces and the pervasive poverty that surrounds the youth despite the abundance (Agbibo, 2013). This perspective appears to be accurate when examining the rise of Shekau as the group's new leader. His extremely violent nature was evident in his ruthless terrorist activities in Nigeria and neighboring countries such as Chad, Cameroon, Mali,

and Niger Republic, which clearly supported this theoretical view. He vowed to seek revenge for the death of Muhammad Yusuf (Tattersall and Maclean, 2010 cited in Pham, 2012:6). True to his word, he transformed the group into an extremist organization that believed their chosen path was the only true one.

Schmid (2014) characterizes religious extremism with blind obedience; quest to establish a utopia, belief in the end justifies the means and the declaration of holy war. Shekau's fanatical ideological beliefs became evident early on when he openly expressed his commitment to dismantling the political system and eliminating perceived enemies. His sermons glorified martyrdom and obedience, which resulted in numerous suicide bombings in crowded places such as marketplaces, mosques, churches, and others. Unlike Muhammad Yusuf, who engaged in theological debates with other scholars as a student of Taymiyyah theology, Shekau relied on audio and video messages to strategically plan his violent campaigns. These messages were effective in mobilizing support, influencing the mindset of his audience, and instilling fear in the general population (Cook, 2018). Instead of being a theologian or religious revivalist, Shekau acted as a warlord, employing violence as a means to undermine authority. His unpredictable and aggressive rhetoric, showcased in video and audio messages, sanctioned massacres, bombings, and the forced marriages, sale, or enslavement of women and children of kidnapped victims. This drew attention from both local and international communities. Through the dissemination of these violent acts on social media platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp, the societal structure became disturbed, resulting in an increase in displaced persons, mass migrations, and a culture of "silent connivance" driven by fear within the community (Braj, 2023). This strategy was reminiscent of the *Khawarij*.

Shekau gained international attention and notoriety with the bombing of important targets, such as the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria on 22 August 2011. He razed down and destroyed 56 police stations, formations, and facilities (Akintola, 2015) while also showing the beheading of hostages. Displaying sophisticated weaponry, such as anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank weapons, mortars, machine guns,

rocket-propelled grenades, and mines that were smuggled through the nation's porous borders, Shekau convinced the world that the group was a threat not only to Nigeria but also to neighboring countries. Despite his seemingly abnormal impulse and emotional insensitivity to destruction and killing, Shekau was able to solidify the bond among the group's members, as witnessed in other religious extremist groups (Saroglou, 2011). Shekau justified terrorism by considering all other Muslims and non-Muslims as heretics who should be eliminated. His ruthlessness made the international community designate him as a wanted terrorist.

In his quest for international support, Shekau aligned himself with Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) (Ogbogu, 2015). As a result, the group's name was changed to *al-Dawla al-Islamiyya Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya* (The Islamic State's West African Province, ISWAP). However, this allegiance to ISIL in late 2014 was short-lived. ISIL accused Shekau of carrying out unimaginable violence and adhering to the teachings of the *Khawarij* sect (Akerle, 2020). They viewed him as someone who had deviated from the path, engaging in indiscriminate and unrestrained killings.

Shekau's actions and utterances in videos and audios reflected and promoted *Khawarij* creeds. This explains his rigidity and obsession with the elimination, assassination or slaughtering identified enemies as well as his frequent and indiscriminate violence against the society. To assert his leadership, he started with the elimination of his close associates (Kassim and Nwankpa (eds) 2018), such as Sheikh Abd al-Malek al-Kadunawi, Abu al-Abbas al-Bankiwani, Abu Ammar, Taasi'u Abu Osama al-Ansari, Mustapha Chad, Kaka Allai, Abu Mujahid, Malam Umar, Abu Fatma and Abu Maryam. The group legalizes and justifies killing or assassinating identified individuals in authority, such as village/ward heads, emirs and Local Government leaders, as well as the police and other prominent members of the security forces, as witnessed for example, in Maiduguri, Gwoza, Mubi, Bama in 2004 and Kano in 2007 (Walker, 2012). The Borno State Emirate Council, for example, lost around 60 chiefs, royal family members, district and village heads, palace courtiers, local government chairmen

and a host of others through assassinations right from the start of the insurgency (Braji, 2023).

Shekau's propaganda was carried out through *fatwas*, numerous audio and video messages in YouTube and other social media outlets, which contained religious rhetoric proclaiming that non-followers of his group and those who do not support the establishment of a caliphate are infidels. Under his leadership, the group was effective in disseminating and articulating its messages to the world using the social media. This tool became the means for the recruitment of fighters and supporters while instilling fear among both the members and none-members of the group.

His indiscriminate campaign of violence, murder, confiscating properties, robbing banks and enslaving, kidnapping, assassinating and beheading victims frightened the society into "silent connivance". Cases worth noting were the Kano Central Mosque attack on 28 November 2014 which led to the death of over 100 people and 150 wounded, the 31 October 2018 attacks and burning down of Bulaburin Ward, Kofa Village as well as Dalori Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, Borno State and the killing of over 50 people and bombing of Sabon Gari market on 11 August 2015. The execution of around 70 agricultural workers at Zabarmari village, near the Borno state capital, Maiduguri (Alfa and Maclean, 2020) led to mass displacement of farmers and the abandonment of farmland. For years, the farmers had an agreement with the group to tend their farms as far as they did not report the fighters' presence in the area to the Nigerian military. Attacking and eliminating a few group members by the Military convinced the group that the farmers had betrayed them. This led to a gruesome reprisal on November 28, 2020. Thus, most communities had no alternative but to collaborate, shield or even provide relevant information to the group against state interests. This explains the acclaimed invincibility of the group, which hoisted its flag and administratively controlled 20 of the 27 Local Government areas of Borno State from 2014-2015. The seven Local Governments not under the flag of Boko Haram during that period were Maiduguri Metropolitan, Jere, Biu, Hawul, Shani, Bayo and Kwaya-Kusar. The group's continuous attacks in neighboring Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna,

Gombe, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states destabilized them and made farming and other economic and social activities impossible. The crisis also went beyond Nigeria's border and dripped into the Chad Basin region of West Africa.

The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported in 2018 that more than 1000 children had since 2013 been abducted, including the 276 Chibok School girls. In the process of the "abduction of the students at Dapchi Girls Secondary School, Yobe State, 5 girls lost their lives and the closure of all schools in the neighborhood" (Interview: Bukar Modu, 15-6-2023, Damaturu). Within a short period, 2,295 teachers were killed and more than 1,400 schools destroyed by the group in different locations in the north east (Obaji, 2021). The group deployed 117 children as suicide bombers in different parts of the country (Allen-Ebrahimian, (2017).

Thus, Shekau's justification for violence, enslavement, assassination and looting the properties of people (Imrana (2015) clearly made him an *Azāriqah Khawarij* follower and the promoter of its dogma and not a follower of Abul A'la Maududi as categorized by Dikki (2017) or Ibn Taymiyyah. Maududi (1903-1979), a Pakistani Islamic scholar, philosopher, jurist, ideologue and an activist, was a purist but not an armed struggle *jihadist* like Boko Haram. Politics, according to him, is a lawful medium for the materialization of Islamic revolution. He was thus a political activist and a realist, who greatly contributed to the transformation of Pakistan into an Islamic state without taking arms.

Shekau's character of violence and zealotry were considered by mainstream Islamists heretical. He was not identified with any intellectual prowess, being a *Khawarij* or the knowledge of the religion, but with bombing, assassinating, massacre, looting, and arson. ISIL disagreed with his extremism and the orchestration of the mass murder of Muslims and Non-Muslims (Pisa and Hume, (2015). This led to ISIL's recognition and appointment of Abu Musa al-Barnawi in August 2016 to lead the organization under the name of Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). Refusing his disposition and this change of leadership, Shekau renamed his faction *Jamaat Ahlus*

Sunnah li Dawah wal Jihad (Community for the Propagation of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) Practices and *Jihad*). This led to a schism and intra wars, which in the end caused him his life. He killed himself using a suicide vest on 19 May 2021 at the negotiation meeting for a truce with ISIL representatives. His suicide led to capturing over 30 of Shekau's commanders and officers by ISWAP, such as Alai Bukr, Mina Ngawri, Abdul Bash and Abu Mujiheed (David, 2021).

With the death of Shekau, the violence against the state and civilians subsided and most of the areas formerly under the complete control of the sect were freed by the Nigerian Military with the support and collaboration of the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) and Multinational Joint Task Force (composed of military personnel from the neighboring Chad, Cameroon, Benin and Niger Republic). The intensity of state pressure and internal squabbles among the Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, such as Ansaru and ISWAP, forced them to reposition their fighters to the rural and desolate parts of the northeast, such as the craggy Sambisa Forest and the swamplands south and southwest of Lake Chad. The groups changed their strategies from the direct attacks of security forces, villages and urban centers to planting landmines, establishing checkpoints, sabotaging electricity power supply, attacking and kidnapping travelers on the highway and schools for ransom or summarily executing for noncompliance to pay ransom (Duerksen, 2021). They have, thus, "concentrated on attacking civilians and other soft spots as a new strategy" (Interview: Babagana, Dapchi, 7-10-2023,

Babbangida). However, Shekau's death may not necessarily signal the end of the Boko Haram crisis, but rather the start of a new, more lethal phase, or perhaps the rise of other terrorist organizations from its ashes.

Conclusion

The study examined the theological viewpoints of the *Khawarij* and related their impact to the origins, ideology, and strategies of Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau. Based on the above discussion, we conclude the essay by identifying Boko Haram as one of the *Azāriqah Khawarij* uprisings. Boko Haram, under Shekau and the *Khawarij*, shared the same opposition against religious and cultural liberalism, viewed *jihad* as a religious obligation, supported fundamentalism and violence strategies to achieve their aims, and was populated by young and immature people with religious egocentrism, defaming and disregarding religious and constituted authorities. Both believe in the strict implementation of the *Sharia*, the purification of the religion and justifying the killing of anyone who opposes their views and propagation. This belief has led to a campaign of violence that has killed thousands of people and displaced millions more. This qualifies them as terrorists. Like the *Khawarij*, Boko Haram also frequently uses *takfir* to declare their enemies apostates. Equally, they are political movements aimed at revolutionizing and changing the existing system to establish their own system, a caliphate run under Nafi Ibn Al-Azra's *Azāriqah Khawarij* philosophy.

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