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Research Article

Neo-Khawārij Menace In Nigeria: Khalīfatu Calī's Sliver Bullet As A Model To Address Bokoharam And Takfīrī Ideologies In The Country

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Abstract. Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* are the two sects in Nigeria with the trait of *Khawārij*. Both have been making the headlines and forming the main topics of discussions on Islam in Nigeria in recent times. Their ideologies, activities, and approaches, especially the Boko Haram have called for more concerns because of their dreadfulness. These have also enabled their equation with the *Khawārij* sect in Islamic history, hence this paper aims to direct attention to the silver bullet of *Khalīfatu* 'Alī in decimating them (*Khawārij*), especially now that the government's efforts in tackling Boko Haram have not been yielding the desired results. The historical method of research was adopted because the discussions are largely related to linking the past to the present. It is discovered that the government's efforts are failing because they focused on the aspects of military onslaught alone, whereas Boko Haram is both terrorism and religious extremism. It is through religion they recruit members for terrorism. Tackling them, therefore, called for dual approaches. Apart from military counter strategies, it also requires intellectual engagement as both were combined by Ali in his fights against *Khawārij*. The

paper, therefore, concluded by recommending the creation of a Ministry for Religious Affairs (MRA) or Religious Affairs Commission (RAC) to coordinate and regulate religious matters, while the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) is duly engaged by the government for intelligence gathering in stamping out *Takfīrī* and BokoHaram problems in the country.

Keywords: BokoHaram, *Takfīrī*, *Khawārij*, Terrorism, Extremism

INTRODUCTION

Apart from ethnic diversity, religion is another major dividing factor in Nigeria in both inter and intra senses. The country exists as a multi-religious one with various sub-sects within each of the religious configurations in the land. Islam is one of the major religions in the country and the foremost in terms of followership. Despite this population, Muslims in Nigeria are divided into various sub-groups and sects with different social and ideological lines. The social divisions are common in the south, especially among the Yoruba Muslims, hence the prevalence of different Muslim societies operate not on an ideological basis. Notwithstanding, there are few traces of ideological fuss in the south, like *Takfīrī* elements, but they are effects of modernity. Also, they are not only a recent development but also not comparable to the trend in the north which is the haven of strange religious ideologies with negative effects on the populace. It ranges from the early eighties (80s) Maitatsine¹ to El-Zakizaki's Shiism elements, *Izalah*² and *Tariqah*³ adherents among others. Boko Haram is the most recent that has been attracting attention. Since both the BokoHaram and *Takfīrī* exhibit *Khawārij*'s attributes, this paper intends to present ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib (d.40AH/661CE),⁴ the fourth *Khalīfah* of the Prophet's approach to disarm, displace and curb their menace in the country, especially when it is discovered that the military onslaught is not yielding the desired results.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method adopted to achieve the objectives of this paper is the historical method. This is imperative considering the need to link the past to the present because both Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* are modern *Khawārij* which existed in the early days of Islam. Apart from taking inspiration from relevant Qur'anic verses and *aḥādīth* of the prophet as the primary sources of Islam, relevant books of history, both in the classical and modern times, including the ones on terrorism and counter-terrorism are consulted to properly digest the existence, ideology, activities, strategies

¹*Maitatsine* is the name of a religious fanatics group which surfaced in Northern Nigeria around 80s. The group founder was Muhammad Marwa, who used to curse whoever did not believe in their ideology saying *Allah Tatsine* (May the curse of Allah be upon them) i.e. those who reject their ideology. For details see Olayiwola, AbdulFatahi, *Islam in Nigeria: One crescent many focuses*, (Lagos, Sakirable Publishers, 2007), 126

²This was founded in 1976 by students and disciples of Shaykh Mahmud Gummi as an anti-Sufi body. The full name is *Izalatul-Bid'ah wa Iqamatu's-Sunnah*.

³ This is an umbrella name for Sufi adherents of Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah Orders. They formed different groups and societies to counter the menace of *Izalah* and to defend Sufism.

⁴ To be referring to as Ali henceforth

and how the threats of *Khawārij* was tackled. This assisted in establishing the nexus between them and the contemporary Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* in Nigeria. It also revealed the feasibility of applying the same method to the present situation.

Background

Islam is a religion that calls for unity among Muslims, regardless of their racial, tribal or geographical variations. It abhors divisions and enjoins the Muslims to do away with divisive tendencies. It encourages collectivism and togetherness at all times. Realizing this has however not been possible since after the death of the Prophet. Muslims have been divided into various divisions on *‘aqīdah* (tenet), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *manhaj* (method). *Khawārij* was the first ever sect to cede away from the main body of Muslims in Islamic history and with traits and tendencies among the Muslims till the present time. In the recent time in Nigeria, there arose Muslims with strange ideologies from both the north and the south with activities that are in tandem with *Khawārij*. This paper, therefore, is to study the approaches of Ali, in decimating them, when they first appeared, to apply the same in contemporary times.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to provide an all-inclusive approach, as could be drawn from Alī against *Khawārij*, in curbing the menace of Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* in the country. It is imperative to redirect the attention of the government and the stakeholders in battle, especially the Boko Haram in the country to these approaches. It has been observed that scholars have little discussion and emphasis on the approach as an appropriate model to proffer a lasting solution to the threats of Boko Haram and Takfirism which is threatening the existence of Nigeria as a country. This can also serve as a template to tackle various forms of resent religious thoughts in the land.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Note on *Khawārij*

Khawārij is the name of the secessionists or the splinter group from the main body of Muslims in the early days of Islam, precisely during the reign of ‘Alī, as one of the effects of the rows that engulfed the Muslim *Ummah*, bordering on leadership and political differences. It would be recalled that the question of the assassination of ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān (d.35AH/656CE), the third *Khalīfah* of Islam, culminated in the refusal of Mu‘awiyah bin ‘Abī Sufyān (48AH/680CE), the governor of Syria, to give his allegiance to ‘Alī, insisting that ‘Alī must identify and punish those responsible for the death of ‘Uthmān, his clan man from ‘*Umayyad* dynasty. This led to the battle of *Ṣiffīn* in 37AH/657CE between the supporters of ‘Alī (*Shi‘atu ‘Alī*)⁵ otherwise known as the people of Iraq (*‘Ahlu’l-Iraq*)⁶ and those of Mu‘awiyah (*Shi‘atu Mu‘awiyah*)⁷

⁵ Ad-Dhahabī, *Siyaru’l-‘A‘lāmi ‘n-Nubalā’* (Cairo, Darul-Hadith, 2006, Vol.12) 205

⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāyah wa’n-Nihāyah*, (Daru ‘l-Ihya’ Turathi ‘l-Arabi, 1988, Vol.7.) 281 & 310

⁷ Ad-Dhahabi,...

also known as the people of Syria (*Ahlu 'sh-Shām*),⁸ where a group from Alī's camp under the headship of 'Abdullah Ibn Wahb Ar-Rasibī,⁹ broke away as a result of their annoyance over Alī's acceptance of arbitration as proposed by Mu'āwiyah's camp. Scholars like 'Abu'l-^cIz Al-Hanafī opined that Khawārij is the group of individuals who assassinated ^cUthmān and led the campaign for the appointment of ^cAlī,¹⁰ hence it was difficult for ^cAlī to heed the demand of Mu'āwiyah. It is also stated that ^cAlī's interest was largely to calm the 'Ummah down from various tensions that the crisis had generated. His (^cAlī) hesitation of hasty actions as demanded by Mu'āwiyah was misconstrued as declination and denial by the Syrian people.¹¹

This sect of irredentist individuals is known with different nomenclatures, each is derived from its peculiarities. Some of these are; *Haruriyyah*,¹² this is taken from where they first camped themselves, '*Ahlu'n-Nahrawān*'¹³ comes from their second settlement where ^cAlī later fought and got them decimated, *Muḥakkimh* (Arbiters)¹⁴ because they upheld the view that arbitration, as one of the effects of *Ṣiffīn*, is outrageous. *Māriqah* (the reneged),¹⁵ and *Shurāh* (the exchangers-Q.2:207).¹⁶ Others include *Mukaffirah* (Excommunicator),¹⁷ and *Bughāh* transgressors).¹⁸ Al-Baghdadi identified about twenty (20) different names of *Khawārij*.¹⁹ It is also pertinent to state that there are various sub-sects within the main *Khawārij* sect. They include *Azāriqah* (Azraqites),²⁰ a name that is taken as a factional leader of the deadliest *Khawārij* sect, *Najdan*, *Ibadiyyah*, and *Surfariyyah* among others.

The element of this separatist existed passively during the lifetime of the Prophet but became an independent sect after his death. The story of Dhu'l-Khuwayṣirah At-Tamīmiyy remains a major reference from various books of *Hadith* as the source of the seed of which Khawarijism was sowed, having been prophesized by the Prophet. It is narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī* among other compilers of *Hadith* thus:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: بَيْنَمَا نَحْنُ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَهُوَ يَقْسِمُ قِسْمًا، أَنَاهُ ذُو الْخُوَيْصِرَةِ، وَهُوَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ بَنِي تَمِيمٍ، فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ اعْدِلْ، فَقَالَ: «وَيْلَكَ، وَمَنْ يَعْدِلُ إِذَا لَمْ أَعْدِلْ، فَذُخِبَتْ وَخَسِرَتْ إِنْ لَمْ أَكُنْ أَعْدِلُ». فَقَالَ عُمَرُ: يَا

⁸ Ibn Kathir,.....

⁹ Ibn Kathir,....316

¹⁰ Compo, Juan, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Newyork, Fact on file Publishing, 2009)242

¹¹ Compo,...

¹² Mustafa, Muhammad, '*Uṣūl wa 't-Tārikhu'l-Firaqi 'l-Islāmiyyah*, (n.p., 2003) 91

¹³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farqu Bayna Al-Firaq*, (Beirut, Darul-Afaqi 'l-Jadid, 1977) 342

¹⁴ Mustafa,....92

¹⁵ Mustafa,....92

¹⁶ Mustafa,....

¹⁷ Al-Jasim, Faisal, *Ḥaqīqatu'l-Khawārij*, Kuwait, Gheras Publishing, 2005, p.33

¹⁸ It is taken from Q.49:9

¹⁹ Al-Baghdādī,....17

²⁰ Al-Baghdādī,....54

رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، ائْذَنْ لِي فِيهِ فَأَضْرِبَ عُنُقَهُ؟ فَقَالَ: «دَعُهُ، فَإِنَّ لَهُ أَصْحَابًا
يُحَقِّرُ أَحَدَكُمْ صَلَاتَهُ مَعَ صَلَاتِهِمْ، وَصِيَامَهُ مَعَ صِيَامِهِمْ، يَقْرَأُونَ الْقُرْآنَ
لَا يُجَاوِزُ تَرَاقِيهِمْ، يَمْرُقُونَ مِنَ الدِّينِ كَمَا يَمْرُقُ السَّهْمُ مِنَ الرَّمِيَّةِ،

Narrated Abu Sa'īd Al-Khudri said: While we were with Allah's Apostle, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, who was distributing some properties when Dhu'l-Khuwayṣirah At- from the tribe of Tamīmi came and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Do Justice." The Prophet said, "Woe to you! Who could do justice if I did not? " Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb said, "O Allah's Apostle! Allow me to chop his head off." The Prophet said, "Leave him, for he has companions who pray and fast in such a way that you will consider your fasting negligible in comparison to theirs. They recite Qur'an but it does not go beyond their throats (i.e. they do not act on it) and they will desert Islam as an arrow goes through a victim's body,..."²¹

This narration is a panorama of ideologies of Khawārij because the action of Dhu'l-Khuwayṣirah who challenged the sense of justice of the Prophet while distributing the booties indicates his revolt against the Prophet as the leader of the entire Muslim 'Ummah. It is in reaction to his display that prompted the Prophet's descriptions and prophecy about the coming of a splinter group in the future, with traits that shall continue to endure till the last day.²² It should be mentioned that another narration is contained in *Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī*²³ wherein the name of the challenger is not mentioned and the person who sought to kill the challenger was said to be Khalid ibn Al-Walīd (d.22AH/642CE), as against Umar (d.24AH/644CE) in the report quoted above. Imam Muslim,²⁴ An-Nasā'i²⁵ and 'Abū Dāwūd²⁶ among others also have the same narration in their compilations. Al-Bānī however, in reconciling the two reports, categorized both as authentic,²⁷ probably because they give detailed descriptions of the group as the time of their emergence was not immediate. Some of those descriptions are listed below.

- Age description wherein the Prophet stated that the Khawārij will be young in age, youthful and immature, but full of strange thoughts and ideas.²⁸
- Eloquent, persuasive, and captivating in speaking but with ignorance.²⁹

²¹*Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī*, 3610, 6163, 6933,

²²Ibn Majah, No.174

²³*Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī*,...no.3344

²⁴*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no.1064

²⁵ An-Nasai, no. 2578 & 4101

²⁶ Abu Dawud, no. 4764

²⁷ Al-Bani, *Silsilatu'l-Aḥādithi's-Sahihah*, (Al-Maktabah Ash-Shāmilah, Vol.5, No.2406)530

²⁸*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, No.1066

²⁹*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,...1066

- Excellent in recitation or reading of the Qur'an, some even memorised it, but it would not go beyond their throat.³⁰ In other words, they would not understand it, hence they twist the meaning to establish their pervasive ideology.
- Advocacy for *Sunnah* of the Prophet but in reality, they do not know what *Sunnah* is all about, let alone practising it correctly.³¹
- Self-study of Islam. In other words, Khawārij members do not learn Islam from scholars and have no regard for scholars and scholarship except for what and who supports their ideology.³²
- Assumptive perfections in observing *Ṣalāh* (prayer), *Ṣawm* (fasting), and other religious rites are not only extreme about religious thoughts but also excessive in their activities.³³
- Presumptuous piety and righteousness in religious matters than the generality of Muslims.³⁴
- They are good in speaking but evil in actions.³⁵
- They are the worst creation of Allah and should be killed anywhere they are found.³⁶
- They dance to the tunes of their whims, whoever is not among them is not a believer.³⁷
- Arbitrary declaration of Muslims as *Kāfir* on issues that do not constitute *Kufr*.³⁸ Even, they declared themselves as *Kuffār* because of disagreement among themselves.
- They kill the believers and the people of *Dhimmi*³⁹ but spare and excuse the idolaters.⁴⁰ They quote and apply verses on idolaters of Muslims to justify their actions against them.
- They insult and defame Muslim leaders for not implementing *Sharī'ah*. They even declared them as *Kuffār* and misguided who lead people astray.⁴¹
- They are described by the Prophet as the dogs of hellfire.⁴²

³⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī*, no.6930

³¹ صفات الخوارج في السنة النبوية - طريق الإسلام (islamway.net) Retrieved on 17/07/2022

³² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, No.1066

³³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, No.1066

³⁴ This is one of Ali's descriptions of the Khawārij. For details See Ibn Kathir,....Vol.7, p.321 also, صفات الخوارج في السنة النبوية - طريق الإسلام (islamway.net) Retrieved on 17/07/2022 And Musnad of

Imam Ahmad, No.12886 & 12972,

³⁵ 'Abū Dāwūd, No. 4765

³⁶ 'Abū Dāwūd, no. 4765

³⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, No.1066

³⁸ Al-Baghdadī,...55

³⁹ This refers to people of the Book (Jews and Christians) that live in an Islamic state.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥu'l-Bukhārī*, 3344

⁴¹ Just as Dhul-Quwayṣirah did to the Prophet when he challenged his sense of justice. They also based this on Q.5: 44, 45 and 47

⁴² At-Tirmidhī, No.3000

The above descriptions of Khawārij are compiled from the descriptions of the Prophet and the explanations of the scholars both in classical and modern times. It should be stated that ʿAlī did not initially declare them as Khawārij, even after they seceded from the body of Muslims. They were referred to as either *Harūriyyūn* or *Ahlu ʿn-Nahrawṣn*, until when the descriptions of the Prophet like *Takfīr* and killing Muslims became manifest in them. Alī, Muʿāwiyah, ʿUthmān, Āʾishah, Talha, Zubair, and all those who took part in the battle of Camel among others were declared as *Kuffār* by them.⁴³ The assassination of a companion, 'Abdullāh Ibn Khabāb, and his pregnant wife, who was ambushed and killed for affirming both the faith and leadership of ʿAlī on the Muslim *ʿUmmah* remains a major reference.⁴⁴ It should also be noted that they were just a small group at the time of their secession at the *Ṣiffīn* but got more membership when the outcome of arbitration was not favourable to ʿAlī.

The *Khawārij* had doctrines that included secession from leaders who do not share views with them.⁴⁵ Also, they do not differentiate between sins and *Shirk* (polytheism), hence whoever is guilty of any sin is declared as a *Kāfir* by them, instead of calling him a sinner.⁴⁶ *Khawārij* also distanced and rejected the Caliphate of ʿUthman and ʿAlī for various reasons. To them, the grand *Khalīfah* of Muslims can emerge from non-Qurayshi tribes, contrary to the popular hadith of the prophet that *Khalīfah* should always come from the Quraysh.⁴⁷ Rejection of stoning to death of an adulterer and canning of defamation concerning man also constitute part of their doctrinal views. The sect also denied *Sūratu Yūsuf* as part of the Qur'an. They held that behoves Qur'an contains love and infatuations. They are also of the strong view that females should repay the missed *Ṣalāh* during menstruation. However, their cardinal principles include the ex-communication of Muslims that fail to fail to subscribe to their ideology, revolt against any erring leader and legalization of the blood of non-participants in their activities.

Khalīfatu ʿAlī and Khawārij

As it is briefly stated before in this paper, Khawārij surfaced as an independent sect from the main body of Muslims during the era of *Khalīfatu ʿAlī*. Before the time of Alī, it has been observed that the seed that germinated to Khawārij was planted in the days of the Prophet but started to germinate during the reign of ʿUthman, the third *Khalīfah*, before producing fruits in the days of ʿAlī. Records hold that the sect had wanted to cede from the main body of Muslims immediately after the battle of Jamal (Camel), due to their dissatisfaction with ʿAlī's manner of handling the post-battle activities, especially the booties, but stomached their grievances. Another avenue presented itself at the battle of *Siffīn* when ʿAlī accepted arbitration as proposed by Muʿāwiyah who was the leader of the Syrian army, but some army in his (ʿAlī) camp objected to it. They were later known as Khawārij for their secession

⁴³ Al-Baghdadi,...55

⁴⁴ Ibn Kathir,...Vol.7, p.318

⁴⁵ This is the basis of their name and this is demonstrated by Dhul-Quwaysirah against the Prophet

⁴⁶ Mustafa,...128

⁴⁷ Mustafa,...132, & الأئمة من قریش Musnad of Imam Ahmad, No. 12900

from the Muslims. Alī engaged them in intellectual discourse on different occasions which yielded positive results, because at each engagement, they got decimated.

The First was at the height of fighting in the battle of *Siffin* when Mu'awiyah called for arbitration, and Alī noticed dissatisfaction from some members of his camp, he called for deliberation and resolve to a common ground.⁴⁸ He explained the content of Q.49:9 which provided legitimacy for stemming the tide of notorious Muslims against fellow Muslims, and that once there is a retreat, there should be surrender. A group of individuals led by 'Abdullāh Ibn Wahb Ar-Rāsibī⁴⁹ rejected 'Alī's position stating that only Allah has the judgment.⁵⁰ This is based on several verses of the Glorious Qur'an such as Q.6:57, 12:40, and 67. Ad-Dhahabī puts their number at 8,000⁵¹, while Ibn Kathīr puts the figure between 12,000 and 16,000.⁵² They walked out of Alī to settle themselves at a place called: *Harūra'u*,⁵³ hence their name as secessionists and the people of *Harūriyyah*. Some got convinced by the explanation of Alī, hence they declined to walk out with others, but later joined Ar-Rāsibī when the outcome of the arbitration turned against 'Alī. They, therefore, settled down at Nahrawān.

The second engagement was when 'Alī returned to Kufah after the *Siffin* expedition and he was not satisfied with the divisions among the Muslims, he then invited the separatists for a re-engagement but they refused to heed his call. Alī, therefore, appointed Ibn 'Abbās for intellectual discourse with them. When he met them, IbnAbbās requested them to list their grievances with Alī. Ibn Kathīr and Ad-Dhahabī⁵⁴ among other historians highlighted three complaints that were put forward by Khawārij to Ibn 'Abbās. The first is the refusal of 'Alī to take captives and booties at the Battle of Camel. The second is his agreement to erase the lofty title of *A'mīrul-Mu'minīn* upon demand by Mu'āwiyah's arbitrator. It translates to the fact that since he agreed to do that, he ceased to be *A'mīrul-Mu'minīn* but became *A'mīrul-Kāfirīn*. The third on the list was his acceptance of arbitration (*Taḥkīm*). It is only the right of Allah to do that and not any of His creations. They cited Qur'an 5:44, 45, 47, and 50 among others.

In response to their arguments, IbnAbbās explained that Alī refused to take booties and captives because the encounter of Camel was a mere *fitnah* among the Muslims. Booties and captives are taken only from battles between the Muslims and *Kuffār* (infidels). More so, among what could have formed the captives was 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet, who was described in the Qur'an as the mother of the faithful (Q.33:6), because she was also conquered. Taking her as either captive or booty would amount to sin. Since she cannot be taken as either, what goes for her, goes for others, including properties. Ibn 'Abbās dismantled the second argument by stating that what happened to 'Alī had been predicted by the Prophet when he ('Alī) refused to

⁴⁸ Ad-Dhahabī,...Vol.2, p.525 and 530

⁴⁹ IbnKathīr,...Vol.7, p.308

⁵⁰ Ad-Dhahabi,...525 and 530

⁵¹ Ad-Dhahabi,...Vol.2, p.536

⁵² Ibn Kathir,...Vol.7, p.310

⁵³ Ibn Kathir,...Vol.7, 309

⁵⁴ Adh-Dhahabi,...Vol.2, p.535

erase *Muhammad Rasūlullāhi* upon the demand of Sahl during the treaty of *Hudaybiyyah*. So, the prediction of the Prophet must come to pass. On the third argument, IbnAbbās cited several verses of the Qur'an including Q.4:35 and 5:95 where Allah legislates human arbitration in matters of marriage and divorce and in determining the restitution for gaming in the state of *ihram* while performing hajj operation. With these arguments, two-third (8000) of them rescinded and renounced Khawarijism to reunite with the main group of Muslims.⁵⁵ This, therefore, enabled Alī to displace the remaining ones in the battle of Nahrawan where the majority of them were killed, but a few of them fled to different places, hence their ideology still endures today.

The third intellectual engagement with regards to ʿAlī on Khawārij was when the community of Muslims were fed up with their (Khawārij) activities and wanted to get a clear-cut directive from Alī on them, as the leader and commander of the faithful. He was asked who the Khawārij were, *Mushrikūn* (idolaters) or *Munāfiqūn* (hypocrites)? To the surprise of everyone, Alī's response confirmed their firm faith and did not align them with either of the two (idolaters and hypocrites). He submitted further that they were brothers in faith, who committed wrongs against us and we fought them for that purpose.⁵⁶ What was expected from ʿAlī is to declare as either of those two nomenclatures, to displace them from among the Muslims, but ʿAlī declined, having thought that the oneness and brotherhood of the Muslims were germane.

Boko Haram and Takfīrī in Nigeria

Boko Haram is a group of Muslim youth in Nigeria that violently operates majorly around the North Eastern but spread across the northern parts of the country. The group's tentacles also covered neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Its original and preferred name is *Jam'atu Ahli's-Sunnah Li 'd-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād*⁵⁷ but famous as Bokoharam due to the public declaration of hostility against Western education.⁵⁸ It is therefore a Hausa colloquial pronunciation of the book as *Boko*, which is an umbrella name for school or where Western education is taking place. Also, *haram* is a name for unlawful or forbidden things in Islam. The two were then combined to propel the ideology that Western education is forbidden. The group as described by Campbell is sectarian, radical, and violent in its activities.⁵⁹ It has unleashed terror on people in the areas of its activities with socio-political and economic implications. Mosques, Churches, and other public places have been attacked on several occasions by this group across the country. Brinkel and Soumia described Boko Haram as a Jihadist terrorist. The former shows their intent to spread

⁵⁵ Ad-Dhahabi,...Vol.2, 532

⁵⁶ Ibn Kathir,...Vol.7, 289

⁵⁷ Sule, Muhammad, Shetima, Abubakar and Alkali, Kasim, "Boko Haram: New Brand of Khawarij and its Manifestation in Nigeria" *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (SJHSS)*, 2018, Vol.3, No.2, p.170

⁵⁸ Sule, Shetima and Alkali,...170

⁵⁹ Campbell, John, *Boko Haram: Origins, Challenges and Responses*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resources Centre, 2014

the religion of Islam, while the latter indicates their adoption of violent means in the pursuit of their agenda. This brings nexus between Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda network.⁶⁰

Boko Haram was created by Muhammad Yusuf (d.2009) from a youth organization founded and headed by Mallam Lawal but Yusuf became the leader upon Lawal's admission into a Saudi Arabian University to further his studies in 2002.⁶¹ Right from the onset, the trait of violence has been in Yusuf but got manifested with his emergence as the head of the organisation.⁶² Yusuf was succeeded by AbubakarShekau who is more dreaded than his master.⁶³ The violent activities of the group started to gather momentum in 2004 when it clashed with police in Yobe state.⁶⁴ The group has wreaked much havoc on society, regardless of religious or ethnic lines, and is still growing wings because the government has not been able to retrench them, despite the billions voted for security which engender different military strategies to combat and flush them out of the society.

The group, according to some scholars, takes its tenets from the violent extremist *Salafiyyah*, -*Wahhābiyyah* faction while some other scholars argue that they draw their ideology from Jihadi Salafism which is predicated on the belief that Islamic government can only be established through bullet and violent means.⁶⁵ The ideology is said to have stemmed from the teachings of IbnTaymiyyah to Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb down to AbulAla Al-Mawdudi and SayyidQutb.⁶⁶ In recent times, Al-Qaeda, As-Shabab, the most recent Islamic State (IS), and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) are seen to be propagating violent ideology with the intent of establishing an Islamic state.⁶⁷ Many Muslims have been declared as *Kuffār* including the government and traditional rulers and institutions. Rasheed and Rabiū⁶⁸ identified five major ideologies as specific to Boko Haram given their operations and activities in Nigeria. The first is the stiff condemnation of secularism, democracy, and politics as the system of tyrants(idolaters or polytheists), and the declaration of whoever is involved in those systems through any means as a *Kāfir* (infidel). The second centres on Western education which is considered as anti-Islam because it is capable of drifting Muslims close to *Kufr*. They have a reservation for science courses but argued mainly against educational theories and philosophies that run contrary to the fundamentals of Islam like Darwinism, the theory of evolution, co-educational system among others. They see them be of Westernization. The sect did not smile at

⁶⁰Brinkel theo, and Soumia, Aithida, *Boko Haram and Jihad in Nigeria, ScientiaMilitaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol 40, NO. 2, 2012,p.3

⁶¹ Sule, Shetima and Alkali,...170

⁶² Rasheed, Abdulganiy and Rabiū, Aliyu, "The Nexus between the Khawārij Theological Misconception

of *Īmān* (Faith) and Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria" *Journal of Usuluddin*48 (1) 2020, p.125

⁶³ Rasheed and Rabiū,...128

⁶⁴ Sule, Shetima and Alkali,...170

⁶⁵ Campbell,...2

⁶⁶ Datti, Muhammaed, "Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria: A Maududian Legacy", <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/og/article/view/161156/150717/> Retrieved on 17/07/2022

⁶⁷ Brinkel and Soumia,...3

⁶⁸ Rasheed and Rabiū,...131

Muslims working for a government that is not running on Islamic principles. This is the third major ideology of Bokoharam as it operates in the country. The fourth on the list is the charge of Khawārijism against the group by Islamic scholars, especially the *Izalah*, which is a major Muslim group in the northern part of the country. At the inception of the sect, there was a mixed feeling in the land as many people thought Bokoharam is synonymous with *Izalah*. It was in response to this insinuation that *Izalah* scholars declared them as Khawārij to clear themselves of any complexity. Fifth and lastly, the sect is noted for excessive and arbitrary declaration of Muslims as *Kuffār* (infidels) or *Murtadūn* (apostates), the two restricted terms in Islam by scholars. Outside that, Bokoharam takes to violence as the only means through which it believes its objectives can be achieved.

In the southern part of Nigeria, especially the Yoruba-speaking areas of South West and Ilorin, Kwara State, different *Takfīrī* groups are scattered across the land. There is Shaykh Muhammad ‘Alī Jabata⁶⁹ in the ancient Islamic city of Ilorin and Shaykh Rashid Mustapha popularly called Abu-Ibeji in Ibadan.⁷⁰ There is also a splinter group of Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Obafemi Awolowo University Campus, where a group of MSSN brothers exhibited *Khawārij* traits by excluding themselves from the activities of the main body of the society under the pretence of "holier than you", declare whoever does not belong to them as an infidel and excommunicate them.⁷¹ According to the studies by Shittu⁷² and Noibi,⁷³ Jabata and Abu-Ibeji exhibited those ideologies of Boko Haram as identified above, except for the fourth one which seems peculiar due to the variation of places. Also, they do not subscribe to violence but to the excommunication of Muslims. Both of them shared attributes and connections and have disciples in major towns and cities across the Yorubaland, including Erin-Ile, Offa, Ikorodu Lagos, Saki, Oyo, Ede, Port Novo, and the Republic of Benin among others.⁷⁴ They declare Muslims, including scholars like Shaykh Professor Alaro, and Dr Sirajudeen Al-Asra among other *Salafīyyah* scholars as *Kuffār* over issues of division of *bid‘ah*, voting, and political participation.⁷⁵

The profiles and dispositions of members of these sects, either Boko Haram or *Takfīrī* reveal how in tandem they are with the descriptions of *Khawārij* as highlighted above. They are mostly youth, outspoken, excellent in the recitation of the Qur'an, and *Sunnah* advocates. It is also known that many of them conducted a self-study of Islam or are experts in areas outside of Islamic studies. There is no clear record of the nature and status of Yusuf's education. Jabata was expelled from the famous Azhar University, Cairo, while Abu-Ibeji did not attend University. All they know about Islam is what they taught among themselves with restricted studies, restricted to

⁶⁹ Shittu Abdul-Wahhab and Idowu, Ridwanullahi, "Trends in Da‘wah Activities in Ilorin: An Appraisal of the Jabata Group" *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.8, No.1 2018, 56

⁷⁰ Noibi Mubarak and Abdulsalam, Minkail, "Abu-Ibeji's Salafi Movement and the Muslim Ummah in Ibadan" *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 48, No.2, 2016, p.293

⁷¹ Yusuph, Dauda, *An Examination of selected Salafīyyah Scholars' Discourse on Sufism*, A PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, 2018, P.193

⁷² Shittu and Idowu,...

⁷³ Noibi and Abdulsalam,...P.306

⁷⁴ <https://voiceofthesalaf.wordpress.com/audios/> Retrieved on 16/07/2022

⁷⁵ Yusuph,...201

Mallams, hence they do not respect scholars and Islamic scholarship except those that are in line with their ideology. They hold the view that the modern setting of the Madrasah is an imitation of Jews and Christians which Islamic education must not be taken through that means.⁷⁶ They conceived themselves as the most pious while others are not. Rasheed and Rabiū⁷⁷ also identified some other basic nexuses between Boko Haram and *Khawārij*. These include *Takfīr* (declaring other Muslims as infidels), disregard for man-made law and the constituted authority, camping and isolation from the larger community of Muslims, confrontational approach, and excessiveness in devotions.

The problem of *Khawārij* is one of the major events that shaped Islamic history. This is because the sect was the first splinter group from mainstream Islam and the first to declare fellow Muslims as *Kuffār* thereby making their lives lawful for taking or execution. Boko Haram has demonstrated a replication of *Khawārij*'s activities in Nigeria. They have killed and still killing people indiscriminately, including Muslims. Mosques and Churches have been attacked over time and governments have not been able to curtail their heinous activities in the country. Rashid and Rabiū presented the catalogues of about sixty-eight (68) violent attacks of Boko Haram in Nigeria between 2002 and 2019 with a high concentration in the North Eastern states of the country and with activities covering killing, bombing, kidnapping, and others.⁷⁸ Even, the current spate of banditry in the country has been attributed to Boko Haram, though prevailing evidence shows that the bandits are criminals on their own who operate for monetary purposes.⁷⁹ They have also declared many Muslims as *Kuffār*, like Professor Isa Alī Pantami, the current minister of Communication and Digital Economy, and threatened to kill him for his moves to block unregistered sim cards in Nigeria.⁸⁰ Though without violent activities, the *Takfīr* groups in Yorubaland, have also declared many as *Kuffār* across the land as observed previously in this paper and they are still growing and spreading like wildfire. The non-violent nature of this group makes them less dreaded compare to Boko Haram.

Previous Efforts to Interface with Boko Haram in Nigeria

There have been moves both at individual and government levels to interface with Boko Haram in the bid to understand them and find a lasting solution to their menace. Initially, there were calls from both individuals and groups on the need for government to engage Boko Haram in discussions, probably to know what they want exactly and to design how their activities can be halted. The former president Olusegun Obasanjo is credited to have suggested the "carrot and stick" model⁸¹ at the down of Boko Haram violent attacks but was ignored. Kasim Shetima, the Governor

⁷⁶ Rasheed and Rabiū,...132

⁷⁷ Rasheed and Rabiū,...134

⁷⁸ Rasheed and Rabiū,...136

⁷⁹Omitola, Bukola, Adedire, Sunday and others, "The Triangle of Terror: Boko Haram, Fulani Herdersmen Bandits and Organised Insecurity" *Studia Securitatis*, Vol.XV, No.1., 2021, 24

⁸⁰<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/02/breaking-dont-spare-pantami-boko-haram-leader-says-threatens-buhari-again/> Retrieved on 16/07/2022

⁸¹<https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/05/28/boko-haram-obasanjo-urges-carrot-and-stick-policy-again/> Retrieved on 26/07/2022

of Bornu state in 2011, called on Boko Haram to surrender, assuring them of amnesty. It was followed by a public apology to the group on behalf of Nigeria by Governor Danjuma Goje of Gombe state, then YisaYuguda of Bauchi state, all of which yielded no positive result.⁸²

In 2011, Jonathan set up a committee chaired by Usman Galtimari,⁸³ a retired Ambassador, with terms of reference including finding ways of reaching out to Boko Haram, but failed. Another committee was put in place around 2012 headed by Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmad, the chairman of Nigeria Supreme Council for Shariah, where Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram was a member. Boko Haram accepted to dialogue but issued the first set of conditions, which bordered on the release of their members in government custody. Datti withdrew when he noticed the untoward attitudes of the government.⁸⁴ Former president Obasanjo also made a personal move by contacting prominent individuals in Bornu who are relatives or close to Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram, like Baba Fugu Muhammad's family, as the family-in-law to Yusuf.⁸⁵ This also failed. Jonathan in 2013 set up another committee under the headship of Kabiru Turaki, minister of special duties and inter-governmental affairs. While efforts were going on, the President went to Yobe state to give a counter-narrative stating that Boko Haram cannot be negotiated with, unless they come out publicly. This made Turaki's committee describe the group as faceless,⁸⁶ thereby ending their committee's responsibility to solve the Boko Haram problem through dialogue or negotiation.

It is clear from the accounts given above that government is interested in bringing the menace of Boko Haram to an end, but adopted the wrong methods or approaches, many of which did not give any positive results. Firstly, the government failed to understand the nature of the existence of Boko Haram as a religious terrorist group that needs more of a religious approach through specialists among Islamic scholars than military or political means. That is why all those moves failed. The Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmad is the only one that has a religious undertone that would have gone a long way in reducing the threats and bringing the Boko Haram to the table but was truncated by the government itself, due to interference and mismanagement of information on the activities of the committee. Secondly, Boko Haram is an insurgent group which has committed many crimes; they, therefore, find it difficult to trust the government for the promise of amnesty. It would be recalled that controversies even trailed the demand to free their members as a condition for dialogue or ceasefire. Thirdly, trust issues. The government does not trust the individuals who made moves to dialogue with Boko Haram. This borders on the sincerity and assurances on the real identity of the Boko Haram members to be engaged in talks. Those personalities too, who have the mandate from the government, did not trust the commitment of

⁸²Thurston, Alexander, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2018, 185

⁸³Thurston,...187

⁸⁴ Thurston,...188

⁸⁵ Thurston,...189

⁸⁶ Fahm Abdulgafar, and Thani, Muhammad, "Mutual Moderation as a panacea for Boko Haram Insurrection", *Voyage Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, 20215, 74

the government to the assignment given to them. These among others make all the moves to engage the group in a talk to hit the rock.

The southern *Takfīrī* on the other hand accepted and engaged in many dialogues with adherents of other configurations, like Salafis and Sufis. Jabata and Abu-Ibeji have engaged in many debates with the likes of Shaykh Abdul-GaniyyJumah, Abdul-FatahiSarumi, and Dr Sirajudeen Bilal Al-Asra' among others. Each of these debates was organized by individuals based on personal interactions. They are targeted at making them realize their derailment and possibly change their ways. The debates yielded some positive results as they lose members after each intellectual engagement. The deliberation of 2019 between Jabata and Abu-Ibeji in Ilorin culminated in the former's parting ways with his boss and was followed by a public apology to many scholars that he has hitherto accused of wrongdoings or declared as *Kuffār*.

The Way Forward

The government needs to realise the fact that Boko Haram is a combination of two elements and both must be tackled accordingly. The various reports cited above including Campbell, Brinkel and Soumia described BokoHaram as Jihadist terrorists. It implies that the group combined religious extremism with terrorism. Therefore tackling their predicaments requires two main and independent strategies. This is because they used religious fundamentalism to recruit people for the realisation of their terrorist agenda. The same was exhibited by Khawārij, hence they killed Muslims, attacked many, and even went into a battle with Alī, the leader of the Muslims, who defeated them but was later killed by them.⁸⁷ The government therefore should not concentrate on military onslaught alone but include intellectual engagements to disarm and curb them.

In line with Alī's approach, the government should engage trained Islamic scholars through the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), which is the apex Islamic body in Nigeria, to organize genuine and sincere intellectual engagements with BokoHaram. This must be devoid of any political undertone as it is responsible for the failure of the previous efforts. Government should intensify efforts on reaching out to BokoHaram through scholars of Islam as may be approved by NSCIA, not politicians who do not know the religious dimensions of BokoHaram. As could be understood from above, the moves for dialogue are to negotiate, and appeal to BokoHaram's emotional intelligence and not necessarily to intellectually correct their wrong impressions, just as IbnAbbās did when he engaged *Khawārij*.

Debates and intellectual engagements were repeated strategies by Alī in decimating the Khawārij. He (Alī) was smart early enough to realize their erroneous understanding of Islamic texts, hence he engaged them in talks to explain the misconstrued texts to them on several occasions, each of which yielded positive results. There was no record of direct engagement between Boko Haram and scholars in Nigeria. The only one-on-one engagement was between Mallam (now Professor)

⁸⁷ Compo,...33

Isa Ali Pantami in 2006 before the group became more radicalised.⁸⁸ Rasheed and Rabiū⁸⁹ also listed names of some scholars who have engaged in discussions about Boko Haram, such as Professor Isa Ali Pantami, Abdul Wahhab Abdallah, Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam, Muhammad Auwal Adam Albani, Mal. Idris Abdulaziz, Mal. Muhammad bin Uthman, and Imam Ali Gabchiya among other scholars. They discussed and sensitised people about Boko Haram on different platforms. They released audio lectures, pamphlets, and organized public lectures among others to sensitise people against the danger of Boko Haram. These moves were however personal to each of them. There was no government support or encouragement. Perhaps, Boko Haram was not initially seen as a serious security issue by the government and later the government did not believe in talks with them but to militarily crush them. So, government involvement and coordination this time around are very central to getting them eradicated. The effectiveness of intellectual engagement upon noticing strange ideology in society is shown in the recent case of Shaykh Abdul-Jabbar Nasiru Kabara in Kano state whose preaching centred on the denigration of the companions of the Prophet.⁹⁰

The importance of intellectual engagement with the Boko Haram and the *Takfīrī* groups can never be over-emphasized. It is clear from every indication that they misconstrued some Islamic fundamentals and sources of Islam. For instance, the Boko Haram take terrorism for *Jihad*, hence they used to debunk the claim that they are *Khawārij*. They do not see their activities as such, but as engaging in *Jihad* to spread *Kalimatu 's-Shahadah* and to establish an Islamic government. They also misunderstood the concept of martyrdom. They believed that once they die in the process of their erroneous struggles, paradise is sure for them. They do not understand the rule of *Jihad*, hence they killed indiscriminately, including children, females, and the old among others whom Islamic *Jihad* stipulates their exclusion from killing during *Jihad*. Also, the sect mistook polytheism (*Shirk*) for sin (*Ithm*), hence their quick declaration of Muslims who sin *Kuffār*. The same goes for whoever did not support or belong to them. Such a person would be declared as a *Murtad* (apostate), or *Kāfir* (infidel) among other heinous names. The implication of these declarations is making the blood of such a Muslim lawful for arbitrary execution. However, there are rules for taking the life of a Muslim. All the conditions of *Takfir* and the execution of a *Kāfir* were jettisoned by them and they see the perfection of Islam in the perfection of the Muslims.

Still, on the debate with Boko Haram, chances are that they may decline to honour the invitation or may not be reached out to. The same was demonstrated when Ibn Abbās went to *Khawārij* in their camp. They declined attendance stating that he just came to debate with them, but he convinced them by saying he only came as a companion of the Prophet to discuss matters with them, having discovered that

⁸⁸<https://punchng.com/why-isa-pantami-engaged-boko-haram-leader-in-a-debate-lawyer/>
Retrieved on 16/07/2022

⁸⁹ Rasheed and Rabiū, ...126

⁹⁰<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/02/08/ganduje-organises-debate-for-controversial-islamic-preacher-abduljabbar-other-scholars/> Retrieved on 16/07/2022

there was no single companion of the Prophet in their midst.⁹¹ However, the highlights of the dialogues above, especially that of DrDatti, show their readiness to accept a genuine interface. If the government is sincere, individuals who can interface with Boko Haram genuinely can be identified and will be ready to engage them in talks.

Also, as part of a mechanism to strengthen the strategies of Alī in diminishing *Khawārij*, concerted efforts should be geared toward improving intellectualism and awareness among the Muslims about the Boko Haram and *Takfīrī*. This is necessary to equip Nigerians, especially Muslims with knowledge about the deadly group. Many people joined them out of ignorance. This can be achieved through developing a special curriculum for schools at various levels which will educate Muslims about the concept of *Jihād*, and emphasise the tenets of Islam and religious integration while de-emphasising extremism tendencies. The media should also be used to sensitise the public about Boko Haram activities and their strategies. Doing these will have effects on their means of recruiting members through misinformation. Also, the government needs to take religious matters seriously by regulating religious activities. This can be achieved by creating a Ministry for Religious Affairs (MRA) at various levels or a Religious Affairs Commission (RAC) with offices across the states of the federation. This will enhance the coordination of religious activities and checkmating extremism tendencies. Even in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, religious activities, especially preaching are regulated. The preachers and preaching activities will be regulated by the ministry through certification of the preachers after ascertaining the level of their scholarship.

The insurgent squad in the military and other paramilitary outfits that engage in tackling Boko Haram should be trained in the aspect of religious radicalism. This will go a long way in handling the arrested members with care and professionalism. The Prophet's handling of war refugees should be a template this in regard. Better information about their group their strength and weakness of them can be obtained from them, just as the Prophet and the people of the early community of Islam used to do with the prisoners of war. Government should also adopt technology in its fight against Boko Haram. Mallick⁹² and Jeffery⁹³ in their respective articles have highlighted various ways and identified various technologies that can be used for the effective defeat of insurgents across the globe. So, instead of a huge budgetary allocation for weapons and ammunition to fight insurgency, those monies could be spent on the procurement of fighter drones and other modern technological equipment. This will reduce the rate of casualties among the military and enhance effectiveness in the fight.

⁹¹ Ad-Dhahabi,...Vol.2, 534

⁹²Mallick, Pik, *Leveraging Technology in the Counter Insurgency Operations*, retrieved from www.researchgate.net/ 29/07/2022

⁹³Jeffery, Barnett, *Defeating Insurgents with Technology*, *Airpower Journal*, 1996. Retrieved from <http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=697385> on 29/07/2022

CONCLUSION

Nigeria as a country has witnessed the springing of different religious ideologies, especially among Muslims, many of which are not only strange but also radical. Most recent are the experiences of Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* which have ravaged both the north and south respectively. The most dreadful is Boko Haram due to its violent approach to the Islamization of the country. Apart from the arbitrary declaration of Muslims as *Kuffār* by both clusters, Boko Haram is also violent in approach, which has accounted for indiscriminate killing without recourse to gender, age or religious affiliation, especially in the North East and other parts of the country. The *Takfīrī* like Jabata and Abu-Ibeji, in the south, are civil in their approach but found of declaring Muslims as *Kuffār*. These horrendous activities depict their fulfilment of the attributes of *Khawārij*, the first secessionist group in Islamic history, precisely during the reign of Alī as the *Khalīfah*. Their insubordination and excesses were checkmated and reduced by Alī, using intellectual engagements and military invasions. It is the same intellectual engagement model that this paper called for its adoption by the government in the bid to eradicate Boko Haram in the county, especially when the military onslaughts alone yielded no desired result. The failure of the previous efforts to dialogue with Boko Haram lies in the mishandling by the government. MRA or RAC should be created for effective regulation of religious matters as a whole, while NSCIA should be engaged in Islamic intelligence gathering in tackling both the Boko Haram and *Takfīrī* elements in the country.

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