

Fanaticism and Barbarism: Synonyms of Dysfunctionality in Nigeria Today

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Abstract: Civility is the language of decency, moderation, honesty, truthfulness, justice, equity, tolerance, mutual understanding, dialogue and mutual responsibility for the development of any society. There are other associated values and virtues, which are imbedded in the cultivation of civility in a polity such as patience and forgiveness. On the other hand, it renounces violence, coercion, destruction of life and property, as well as fanaticism and barbarism in every aspect of societal life. It denounces corruption and disorder. In fact, civility is antithetical to anarchy and lawlessness. But the reality of the Nigerian society manifests a total opposition to all the aforementioned virtues towards development and progress, especially with the current threats of Boko Haram and other political manipulations of the economy. It is in the light of this fact that the paper considers various acts of fanaticism and barbarism inflicted on the country, thus, challenging the sustainability of Nigeria as a nation.

Key words: Fanaticism • Barbarism • Nigeria and Boko Haram

INTRODUCTION

Human history is replete with stories and tales of events and occurrences, which have shaped its development, both positively and negatively. There have been wars and revolutions with their attendant effects. A special attention will be given to fanaticism and barbarism in this paper as practised by Nigerians to the detriment of their own society. They will be considered as negative influences on the lives of people and society, closely associated with extremes in socio-political, economic and particularly, religious issues. This is because it is on record that people have used violence to express their religio-political convictions and coercing others to embrace their ideologies. In the recent times, especially in Nigeria, these fanatical and barbaric approaches to religion and politics have been expressed through various outlets – terrorism, radicalism, ethnicism, greed, corruption and poor leadership. Nigeria has known no peace since July 2009 when Boko Haram, an Islamic sect first struck in the form of a revolution against any type of western influence on Nigeria. The effect of this on-going fanaticism and barbarism on all aspects of national life can be better experienced than told as a mere story: displacement of people, mass exodus from places of abode and trade, fear, mass murder, economic hardship,

political instability, etc In considering these salient issues of destabilization, the paper recommends the need to promote moderation, justice and peaceful co-existence. In fact, it is recommended that no society can achieve much in the face of violence, as perpetrated by the Boko Haram in its bid to isolate Nigeria from the rest of the civilised world, under the camouflage of condemning Western Culture and Education and its influence on developing societies, especially Nigeria. Above all, the reckless effort of various interest groups to destabilize Nigeria are the highest acts of fanaticism and barbarism, which deepens its dysfunctionality as a battered and disorganised nation. In other words, any person or group can be a party to dysfunctionality. Thus, the need for a complete re-orientation and ethical revolution at all levels [1].

Fanaticism and Barbarism: Introducing one of her famous books, *The Great Transformation* (2006), Karen Armstrong wrote, “We seem to lack the wisdom to hold our aggression in check and keep it within safe and appropriate bounds... Religion, which is supposed to help us to cultivate this attitude, often seems to reflect the violence and desperation of our times. Almost every day we see examples of religiously motivated terrorism, hatred and intolerance”[2].

There can be no better and vivid picture of the topic of discussion than what we have just read regarding the lunacy of fanaticism and barbarism in all spheres of our lives in the contemporary period, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular. There is a myriad of political, economic, social and cultural turmoil – all tending to render the polity ungovernable and non-functional. People and groups speak of revolution. But, perhaps, a few realise how much selfishness is behind these agitations. In fact, majority of these outcries are disgusting and repulsive, in spite of the purported good intention to salvage either some religious groups or entire society [3].

Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (7th ed. 2006:531) describes fanaticism as something disapproving, related to extreme beliefs or behaviour especially in connection with religion or politics. Fanaticism is therefore synonymous with extremism, in which case, a fanatic becomes a person or a group of persons who hold(s) extreme or dangerous opinions about religion, politics, etc. From the foregoing, it becomes easy to understand why fanaticism can be identified with barbarism, especially from the point of view of their tendency towards violence and cruelty. Thus, the same dictionary already cited (p.104) refers to a barbaric person as 'cruel and violent and not as expected from people who are educated and respect each other'. This is why we can speak of a 'barbaric act, custom, or ritual'. Barbarism itself, as a noun, is understood as a 'state of not having any education, respect for art', etc. Therefore, one speaks of a cruel or violent behaviour, or the barbarism of war or destruction, as is presently used to describe the mayhem of Boko Haram islamist sect and other related bodies on the Nigerian society, which have rendered the country dysfunctional for so many months. A dysfunctional society is a moribund society. A dysfunctional society is static and cannot enjoy any peace. This is perhaps the best and perfect description of the country presently, hoping that the future would be facing a better perspective [4].

Some Features of Barbarism in a Society (Nigeria as an Example)

Insecurity: A person or a group of persons are said to be insecure when their environment remains porous to threats to life and property. A nation or a country can also be termed to be insecure when there is no adequate provision to protect the citizens from eventual maltreatment or threat to their normal way of carrying out their daily activities. Sometimes, it is argued that the level

of security in any society determines the quality of life of its citizens. The attention given to the security of the people automatically helps to rate the level of governance at all levels (*This Day* 2011:64). Presently, the index is pointing towards a negative development in Nigeria because life is generally threatened and if much precaution is not taken, there might be a total breakdown of law and order. In other words, there is a dangerous trends towards anarchy through acts of barbarism and fanaticism deliberately perpetrated by some fanatical religious bodies and insincere politicians who are have penetrated the government and governmental parastatals with the evil intent of destroying Nigeria as a nation. It is most disheartening to hear and read in the news that some elected and serving state governors promote insecurity by assisting religious extremists in the destabilization of the country. For instance, Yusuf Alli reports, 'A serving governor in one of the northern states is under investigation over alleged sponsorship of the Islamic sect, Boko Haram. Security agencies have already raised a panel to quiz him on the allegation. But he is not the only one under such scrutiny. Security operatives are on the trail of several other politicians from the North to come and say what they have in common with the sect' (2012:3). The veracity of this allegation has been strengthened by the flight of some of the accused and suspected politicians to neighbouring countries like Niger Republic and Chad. The gravity of the situation has been highlighted by President Goodluck Jonathan who has openly admitted that the current state of insecurity has superseded the heinous Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. According to *Saturday Sun Editorial* (2012:8), 'The recent confessional statement by President Goodluck that members of the violent Islamic sect, Boko Haram, have infiltrated his government, is disturbing'. Continuing, the editorial quoted the President as claiming that the members of the group are in the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government as well as the police and the armed forces (p.8). In conclusion, Goodluck Jonathan has admitted that the current security situation in the country is worse than the Nigerian Civil War experience. For him, a comparism of the two situations shows that whereas during the civil war, one knew and could even predict who and where the enemy was and coming from, one cannot in the present dispensation say anything definitive about the enemy and his goal. From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that security is a huge challenge to the continued existence of the country as a corporate body [5].

Poor Management of Economy: The economic situation and growth of any nation points to its development and progress. Nigeria is particularly blessed by Oil and other mineral resources. But it has been the albatross of its under-development and mismanagement. The wrong people have been fundamentally at the helm of its economic management for so many decades with the result that Nigeria as a nation has almost lost the sense of economic direction and orientation. As one of the world's largest producers of Crude Oil, Nigeria has nothing to show for it. Its Oil proceeds have not impacted on other sectors of the economy when compared to other oil producing countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Iraq, etc. Presently, one of the clearest signs of such gross mismanagement of the economy is the National Strike, which started on 9th January, 2012 and has cost many lives and property. The argument that the removal of the existing fuel subsidy, which the government claims would re-inject about N1.3 trillion into the economy for the betterment of the life of the poor masses seems unconvincing to the revolting masses because of decades of mismanagement and ineptitude in wealth distribution in the country [6].

In the current impasse, many are of the opinion that the government are not sincere enough to convince them otherwise. This is because the economic development of any society goes a long way to pointing to the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens, as well as its civil growth. Moreover, to achieve such a high level of economic growth and advancement, a country needs to dedicate more time and energy towards its attainment. This is where Nigeria has failed woefully. Again, to manage an economy effectively, 'a good mix of policies' (*This Day*, 2012:64) are highly needed. In the absence of this however, disorder might take over as the 'order' of the day, which is anarchy and barbarism [7].

Anti-Poverty Politics: Poverty is a state of deprivation and lack of the ability to provide the basic necessities of life such as portable water, shelter and clothing for the majority of the citizenry. Thus, a country might be well endowed with mineral resources and other natural materials without the ability to transform them into means of improving the life condition of the people. In this case, such a country is basically poor. It is even worse when there is a deliberate effort to keep the already disadvantaged people in a state of penury and want by a refusal to address the issues that help to suppress their well-being. This is what is referred to here as anti-poverty politics. A few rich people collaborate to hoard the

national wealth for their (own) self-aggrandisement with the obvious manifestation of poverty among the populace. In Nigeria today, there is an observable abject poverty whereby people live below \$1 per day. Globally, one of the major indices for determining the quality of life enjoyed in a society is the degree of poverty observable among the people. Thus, a look at the affluence on the high echelon of governance in Nigeria negates any claim of a genuine politics oriented towards the good of the people. The general strike in Nigeria since January 9, 2012 is also protest against the prevailing state of poverty among the generality of the people. Commenting on the implication of the removal of the fuel subsidy on the masses by the government, Omede Idris (President, Nigeria Medical Association, NMA) said, 'We condemn the removal of fuel subsidy because it is insensitivity on the part of government, considering the increase in unemployment, insecurity, poverty, ill-health, diseases and collapsed education system...Things are already hard for the common man, why make it worse' (*Sunday Sun*, 2012:26).

Religious Conflicts: A nation or country is engrossed in religious crisis when people of various religious orientations cannot really co-habit and practice their religious beliefs peacefully, either as a result of triumphalist or defeatist feeling. This kind of situation is characterized by various kinds of distractions and ill-motivated sentiments. It is especially the latter factor of 'sentiments' in religion that constitutes fanaticism and reckless fundamentalist approach to religious issues. But the great Christian historian, Henry Chadwick (1993:285) a re-thinking, thus, "Towards such triumphalist assumptions a twentieth-century Christian (and indeed Muslim) is likely to be cool and reserved" [8].

In other words, when the rational basis of any religious orientation is lost by any person or a group of persons, then disorder takes over the affected persons or people. Eventually, the whole society is rendered barbaric through wanton killings of people and destruction of property, as is presently witnessed in Nigeria with the issue of Boko Haram (western education is haram or forbidden).

The Boko Haram saga is bringing to our consciousness the paucity of governance in Nigeria – insecurity and poverty of mind among the greater majority of the population. Boko Haram has capitalised on the prevalent disorder and lack of civility in the Nigerian society to prejudice poor jobless youth to embrace fanaticism. The situation has turned barbaric and anarchic

through the regular bombing of public institutions, especially the police posts, military installations, government buildings, etc. These are signs that governance has lost grip of the society and may continue to lose hold unless a drastic re-orientation is carried out. Boko Haram sect members have manifested a rare ingenuity in the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people in the past few months, especially in various parts of Northern Nigeria. One of the gory headlines reads, ‘Grief in Anambra: Agony of Igbo community which lost 11 kinsmen in Boko Haram killings’ in Mubi, Adamawa State (*Saturday Sun*, 2012:5-6). What Boko Haram is doing presently in an organised manner is a manifestation

of the anarchic state of things in Nigeria due to poor leadership rooted in insecurity, poverty and poor management of the economy and the people. In fact, the activities of Boko Haram is earning it a new name – the new Al-Qaeda (in reminiscence of what the latter has done globally to cause disorder and anarchy).

Boko Haram and Condemnation of Western Education: Education is the bedrock of any human and societal development. To condemn it is to promote mediocrity and backwardness. In the light of this understanding, it becomes clear why so many people are puzzled at the campaign of destabilization embarked by Boko Haram in

S/N	Invention	Inventor	Country	Year
1	Electricity	Michael Faraday	England	1550
2	Microscope	Hans Lippershey	Germany	1590
3	Submarine	Cornelius Drebbel	Holland	1624
4	Calculator	Blaise Pascal	France	1642
5	Clock	Christian Huygens	Germany	1656
6	Piano	Bartolomew Cristofori	Italy	1709
7	Thermometer	Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit	Germany	1714
8	Train	Richard Trevithick	Britain	1803
9	Stethoscope	Rene Laennec	France	1816
10	Bicycle	Baron Karl von Drais	Germany	1818
11	Computer	Charles Babbage	England	1832
12	Sewing Machine	Elias Howe	USA	1846
13	Typewriter	Christopher Latham Sholes	USA	1873
14	Microphone	Emile Berliner	USA	1876
15	Telephone	Alexander Graham Bell	Scotland	1876
16	Refrigerator	Carl von Linde	Germany	1876
17	Light Bulb	Thomas Alva Edison	USA	1879
18	Electric Iron	Henry W. Seely	USA	1882
19	Car	Karl Benz	Germany	1885
20	Motorbike	Gottlieb Daimler	Germany	1885
21	Camera	George Eastman	USA	1888
22	Diesel Engine	Rudolph Diesel	France	1892
23	Radio	Guglielmo Marconi	Italy	1895
24	X-Ray	Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen	Germany	1895
25	Safety Razor Blade	King Camp Gillette	USA	1901
26	Air-Conditioner	Willis H. Carrier	USA	1902
27	Aeroplane	Orville & Wilbur Wright	USA	1903
28	ElectroCardiograph (ECG)	Willem Einthoven	England	1903
29	Television	John Logie Baird	Scotland	1926
30	Jet Engine	Frank Whittle	England	1931
31	Photocopier	Chester F. Carlson	USA	1938
32	Helicopter	Igor Sikorsky	Russia	1939
33	Microwave oven	Percy LeBaron Spencer	USA	1946
34	Flight Data Recorder (Blackbox)	Dr. David Warren	Australia	1957
35	Laser	Theodore Maiman	USA	1960
36	CT Scanner	Sir Geoffrey Hounsfield	England	1972
37	Cell Phone	Dr. Martin Cooper	USA	1973
38	Video Camera	Steve Sasson	USA	1975
39	Computer Software	Bill Gates	USA	1981
40	Fastest Computer	Philip Emeagwali	Nigeria	1989

the pretext of fighting western education. When we remember that the Prophet, Mohammed, urged his adherents to go in search of knowledge, one wonders why any true Muslim should champion the condemnation of knowledge, especially as it concerns the western world and its century-long contributions to human development. To support the Boko Haram's myopic view against the western world based on the wrong understanding of religion is to deny the long-standing role played by the West in the area of technology and science – cars, aircraft, television, radio, computer, the Internet, agriculture, medicine, etc. In the current menace by the Boko Haram and their use of western technological inventions – even bombs and guns – to attack society, one can say that they simply reject the West without rejecting their inventions and ideas. A cursory look at some of the important inventions in world history would really ask the perpetrators of anarchy in Nigeria and other parts of the world to have a re-think.

It becomes very strange to imagine how any person who is enjoying these inventions which have helped to advance human civilization can regard the inventors and their countries of origin as antithetical to human development. To deny some of the negative influences of these scientific discoveries on man's relationship with his creator is to deny the obvious. Although these great scientific inventions have made some people atheists, sceptics, agnostics and even, a-religious is not disputable. But to use the product of the same controversial inventions, like bombs and nuclear weapons, to threaten human existence, as some religious extremists such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban and Boko Haram sect are doing is to offend the very name, 'God', 'Allah', etc they have vowed to adore and defend.

There is no gainsaying that the West is part of the world and has contributed immensely to the development of human culture, education and civilization. The west deserves the respect its inventions have won it. Its repertoire of knowledge should also be grasped with enthusiasm just as Muslims are proud of the role the world of Islam has played in the development of mankind's knowledge and civilization through science. Such notable figures cannot be wiped out of human history without incurring the wrath of Muslims all over the world. They include Averroes and Avicenna.

One can also ask the antagonists of western civilization where humanity, including the Boko Haram sect members in Nigeria, where we would be today without the landslide inventions from the west such as internet, telephone, cars, radio, aircraft, etc. As already

mentioned, some of these critics of western inventions cannot operate effectively in their destructive ingenuity without the use of them, or rather, their misuse of them. To condemn the west and forget the millions of Muslims living among them, as well as enjoying their hard won civilization and inventions is to deny the obvious, which is utter hypocrisy and insincerity.

It is on this note that one can justifiably respond to the repulsive, callous and irreligious actions of Boko Haram by condemning without reservations their implied ignorance of Islam and reality in general. Their erroneous actions have totally negated the supposed errors which they have been vehemently pointing at and condemning in relation to the West. In fact, one can rightly accuse them of simply acting 'from afar'. Could Allah or God praise the heartless destruction of police posts and security agents who are serving the nation to maintain law and order, albeit, their lapses and corrupt practices?

Desecration of Holy Feasts and Celebrations: One of the external acts of religiosity and spiritual practice among religious groups is the ability to hold certain places, persons and periods sacred. The sacredness of such acts is closely related to respect accorded them. But it is not always the case, as has been variously witnessed in human history. Presently, the actions and activities of the religious extremists called Boko Haram, especially with regard to their own religious feasts are like someone shooting himself on the leg. In September 2010, during the Ramadan, the sect carried out a desecrating operation, which by all intent went against the principles of true Islam. The sect has also gone beyond her own Islamic confines to attack and destroy lives during Christian celebration of Christmas in 2012 when Christians were attacked in their own churches. Apart, from the series of deadly attacks on the citizenry and public institutions since the April 2011 general elections, there have been other shameful acts of religious irreverence including the bombing of the United Nations' Offices on August 26, 2011 at Abuja; the reckless killing at Damaturu and Potiskum on November 4 during the *Eid-El-Kabir* (Sallah), exposing the enormity of disregard for Islam, which the sect claims to uphold.

One may ask in this regard if it is also the 'hated' and 'irreligious' western world that is responsible for such acts of defamation against Islam within Nigerian soil and precisely in an Islamic stronghold like Borno and Yobe states? The desecration of the revered Islamic feast by Boko Haram members negated the meaning of *Eid-El-Kabir* or Festival of Sacrifice. *Eid-El-Kabir*, otherwise

known also as *Eid-al-Adha* is an important religious holiday celebrated by faithful Muslims globally to commemorate the readiness and willingness of Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son Ismai'il (Ishmael) as an act of obedience to God. But God intervened by providing him with a ram to sacrifice in its place. The sacrifice of Ibrahim questions the action of Boko Haram as a whole. The destruction of the security posts in Damaturu and Potiskum, as well as the bloodletting experienced during the Sallah of 2011 never portrayed anything positive in relation to Boko Haram. They never also got any injunction from Allah to destroy life. They only obeyed the selfish voice of religious extremism, fanaticism and barbarism. Whereas true Muslims all over the world sacrificed a ram, goat, sheep, cow or camel, with families eating part of the animal and donating the rest to the poor, the Boko Haram extremists separated themselves from true Muslim families and resorted to deserts and caves to plan and execute mass murder. Their gift to the poor during the Sallah was rather fear, anxiety and sadness. This is religious barbarism. The festival which is normally celebrated on the tenth day of *Dhul-Hijjah*, the last month in the Islamic calendar, was a day of mourning for most families in Nigeria, irrespective of religious affiliation[9].

Imposed High Cost of Living: As already mentioned, fanaticism and barbarism are associated with undue violence and manifestation of extreme behaviour. It could be related also to use of religion to make economic life very unbearable for the people, especially as seen in the abnormal hike of prices of commodities during religious feasts such as Sallah and Christmas in Nigeria. This is a form of religious bigotry. It is unimaginable how some people, whether Muslims or Christians, use every means to maximise profit during religious celebrations. For instance, commenting on the price of commodities during the last feast of Eid-el-Kabir, Ezeobi and Akintunde (*This Day*, 2011:46) wrote, 'their actions are not without reason as it has become a common practice by traders to hike up the price of their products once any festive season approaches. So, to counter this, it is now a widely adopted practice for people to stock non-perishable food days before a festive period if not for anything, to defy the trader's seeming greed and exploitation'.

Recommendation: Fanaticism and Barbarism are real manifestations of religious bigotry, either in Islam or Christianity, which should be given serious attention in order to minimise their negative effects on the society as a whole. They are also closely connected with terrorism,

especially as it is widely experienced all over the world since a decade. In other words, it is reasonable for the world to accept the fact of the existence of terrorism, however, in various forms and degrees.

One of the ways to overcome the negative impacts of fanaticism and barbaric expression of religio-political ideologies is to intensify educational advancement, especially among the highly disadvantaged parts of the society. To forestall the use of poor youths and unemployed by various fanatical groups like the Boko Haram and the Al-Qaeda to perpetrate evil in the society, they must be motivated to go to school. This is because education is the bedrock of personal and social development.

Again, poverty should be aggressively fought in order to improve the quality of life of the people. If poverty is not reduced and constant palliatives provided until its eventual complete eradication then the poor masses would always fall victim to superficial inducements provided by fanatical religious and political groups. In fact, poverty should be fought in order to destroy the avenue for creating destructive equipment for the perpetration of regrettable loss of life.

The government should strive to educate the populace on the need to respect each other's religion and culture, especially in a diverse society like Nigeria. The curriculum of studies in secondary and higher institutions should reflect the need for inter-cultural and inter-religious studies. This is to create a deep-rooted awareness for tolerance and mutual understanding for one another.

It would be a thing of great positive impact on the society to impose a reasonable punishment, rooted in the constitution, for all acts of religious bigotry, fanaticism and barbarism. It would go a long way towards discouraging intending militancy and brutality of any kind across the length and breadth of the country.

Political aspirants should be much more scrutinized to ascertain their level of tolerance and sense of understanding for people of different religions and cultural orientations. This is because both the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government require mature people to work for the objective development of the people and the country as a whole.

A similar orientation towards an open-minded view of the global community should form a part and parcel of the curriculum of studies. Such a programme of studies should help to educate the citizens on the need to view the world as a global village, discouraging children and youth from growing up with bias and prejudice. To do so

would help to de-emphasize the type of hatred preached and propagated by extremist religious groups like Boko Haram. In other words, the dignity of human life should be emphasised at all times and in all circumstances.

Above all, the isolationist philosophy of Muslim world and the rest of the world should be intensively discouraged. This would help to promote a sense of appreciation for ingenious contributions made to world development, irrespective of the religious or cultural background of the inventors. In this regard, the western world should be exceptionally appreciated for its scientific contribution to humanity. The west should at the same time learn to accommodate the rest of the world in spite of its high level of scientific civilization. No part of the world should enslave the other, based on any type of advantage or disadvantage it has over others.

CONCLUSION

A society is dysfunctional when there is an under-utilization of its manpower, resources and creative ability to transform its environment for the development of the people. A people can also work against itself through various acts of antagonism, acrimony, discrimination, greed and corruption. It could also make itself redundant by acts of religious terrorism, fanaticism and barbarism as this paper has tried to establish. The events of the last few months, especially rooted in the Boko Haram menace have destroyed a lot in the economy through the bombing of public institutions and persons. Insecurity of life and property has cost nation a fortune. But the blame should be shifted to any external group or persons. Nigerians should take the bull by the horn by working harmoniously with the government to achieve some sanity in the polity. Since it has been established that some bad eggs are in government, the onus falls on the same government to extricate itself from the accusation that it is shooting itself on its own foot by bringing those involved to justice. To shy away from this responsibility is to be part and parcel of the current fanaticism and barbarism which are enveloping the society. Altruism might be a special virtue to be cultivated in order to overcome the current drive towards selfishness and global destruction.

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