

“Religious conflicts in Nigeria and the Boko Haram Phenomenon”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my father, the only man of my life who gave me the opportunity of realizing this dream

To my mother, the most important person of my life, I couldn't make it without you!

To my brothers, my sister, and my cousins Caterina and Camilla because we grew up together and you have been there all the steps of the way, I feel so lucky to have you.

To Vittoria, Francesca and Olimpia my real soulmates, I feel so grateful to share this moment with you, you have always been there for me and I couldn't have asked for better friends!

To both my grandmothers whose affection and love have encouraged me to never give up.

And to every single person who gave a special meaning to my life

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world",

N. Mandela

Introduction

LE TERRE DEI BOKO HARAM



Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa.

It follows that it has always been characterized by the presence of hundreds of different ethnic groups as well as an intense religious pluralism.

However, despite the existence of countless religions, the most important ones are Christianity and Islamism.

It is a common belief that religion can be either a source of harmony or a source of violence.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, the opposing ideological views of the two religious groups, Christians and Muslims, have provoked innumerable conflicts with harsh consequences for the whole country.

This long-lasting fight can be traced back to 1914 when the Southern Protectorate and the Northern Protectorate of Nigeria were unified and became a single entity named Nigeria.

¹ “La violenta ascesa dei Boko Haram in Nigeria” D. Matteucci;
<http://www.limesonline.com/la-violenta-ascesa-dei-boko-haram-in-nigeria/31151>

The main problem was that the people living in the North were mainly Muslims while people of the South were principally Christians; they had no intention of cooperating and living peacefully together.

The decision to mingle the different ethnic and religious groups signalled the beginning of the endless bloodshed that has been featured in the Nigerian country over the last 100 years.

In addition to the inter-religious conflicts, also a series of clashes between both Christians and Muslims with the Nigerian police forces became an everyday occurrence.

A clear example of this are the so called “Maitatsine Uprisings”, a chain of violent confrontations between the Nigerian security forces and the Muslims; these episodes lasted from 1980 until 1985; some believe that Boko Haram is a sort of resurrection of the Maitatsine.

It was with the emergence of Boko Haram, a religious extremist group headed by Yusuf Mohammed, that the situation became definitively unsustainable.

Boko Haram emerged peacefully in 2002, but in a matter of years it became extremely violent. The insurgencies organized by this extremist group have been so destructive to prevent the development of the country.

The Nigerian government hasn't been able to manage the situation, making it easier for Boko Haram to spread more and more violence.

In addition to this, as the group undertook a violence stance in 2009, it planned a blitz at the building of the United Nations, situated in the capital city of Abuja. It was the first episode of suicide bombing in all the Nigeria history.

At this point, not only the government but also the whole international community felt threatened by the sect.

The reasons behind the Boko Haram uprisings are various; the people who decided to join Boko Haram were mainly youths, frustrated by their miserable living conditions.

The widespread level of corruption, poverty, the lack of security services together with the strong desire for an Islamic Nigerian State were considered as the driving forces for the eruption of Boko Haram.

It has been estimated that, since 2009, Boko Haram has caused thousands of deaths, countless wounded and has destroyed manifold buildings and churches.

Boko Haram remains without any doubt the biggest issue afflicting Nigeria today; this ongoing campaign of terror needs to be stopped forthwith.

The best point of departure for this thesis is to deeply analyse the historical roots of the country from the famous year 1914 until the recent emergence of Boko Haram, to understand why religious conflicts have always plagued the Nigerian history.

In the second part, having understood the relevance of Boko Haram both nationally and internationally and how it appeared on the scene, it would be proper to examine the history of this group in detail, its ideology and the reasons that push them to behave in such an aggressive way. The question why Boko Haram rebels arise spontaneously and has attracted the attention of the entire global community.

For this reason, to conclude as best as possible, it is interesting to scrutinize the different reactions to this situation both at a national and international level.

How did former President Goodluck Jonathan deal with the Boko Haram menace? Which anti-Boko Haram measures has current President Muhammadu Buhari undertaken?

This would be useful to comprehend what they miscalculated and why Boko Haram's stigma endures.

Most importantly, given the gravity of the situation, how did the world community react?

In this case the role of the United States towards the Nigerian situation should be given proper attention.

Chapter 1 “Historical background: the roots of Nigeria’s religious conflicts”

1.1 Introduction

When talking about the historical background of Nigeria, the first most important thing to be said is that before the year 1914, a country by the name Nigeria did not exist. It is known today that the Federal Republic of Nigeria is divided into 36 states including the capital city of Abuja; before 1914 it was nothing like that; what we now refer to as Nigeria, consisted of four main empires: The Northern Empire, the Calabar Kingdom, the Yoruba Empire and the Benin Empire. As soon as the Europeans colonized and occupied the African territory in the 19th century, all these empires slowly disappeared. It was not until 1914 that Lord Lugard, the British High Commissioner, took the decision to unify the Southern and Northern Protectorates under the common name of Nigeria. The country was able to achieve independence on the 1st of October 1960 and it soon established a Republican system. However, Nigeria experienced military dictatorship especially in the North. It was in 1999 that a democratic system was definitively settled.

1.2 The roots of religious conflicts

Nigeria has always been characterized by a variety of religions and ethnicities; there are more than 250 ethnic groups², the most important being the Hausa, the Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo³. The large number of ethnicities justifies the religious pluralism. However, the two most important religions are Christianity and Islam (45.53% of the population are Muslim, 46.45% are Christians⁴). The main cause of the country’s internal conflicts has always been the ideological difference between these two opposing groups. Over the last 50 years they have provoked countless dead. According to Nigerians this rancorous relationship emerged right after the unification of 1914. Prior to the British colonisation Nigeria was split into two parts a: Southern Nigeria Protectorate and a Northern Nigeria Protectorate; in 1914 the different ethnic groups of the north and the south became a unique entity under the name of Nigeria. Normally the amalgamation should have brought all the people together, sharing a common sense of belonging to the same country and a strong unity.

This was not the case, the only thing these people really had in common was the name of their country.

If, without any doubt, the unification was favourable for the colonizers because they could have a better control of the territory, it also marked the beginning of the historical hatred between Christians and Muslims. Both Christianity and Islam were linked to different geographic and social groups; on

² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2075.html>

³ Hausa/Fulani represents almost 19% of the population; Yoruba 21%; Igbo 18%

⁴ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_166_1.asp

the one hand, with the pre-colonial Islamic empire, the Sokoto Caliphate ruling the Northern part of Nigeria, it followed that also after the colonisation the North was still controlled by Muslims; on the other hand, the south tended to be predominantly Christian.

From 1947 to 1959 many nationalist leaders tried very hard to cooperate peacefully and avoid violence.

However, when the country reached independence in 1960, the colonial unification proved once again to be nothing but a failure because of the variety of ethnicities, beliefs and ideologies existing in Nigeria. The decision taken by Lord Lugard in 1914 was referred to as “the mistake of 1914” (Akomolafe, 2014)⁵.

The country’s independence caused contrasting reactions; Christians were favourable about it and strongly desired national integration and modernization. Muslim leaders of the north were not so convinced about this political independence. They feared that, without any external control, Christians would have tried to occupy all the country. It soon became clear that a peaceful coexistence between the two groups was merely a utopia. The advent of independence was the straw that broke the camel’s back; it signalled the opening of the series of internal religious conflicts that have characterized Nigeria over the last years. These violent attacks usually ended up being real wars. In 1966 there was a first military coup followed by the Civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The civil war brought a chain of reforms balancing the power of Christians and Muslims; in 1976 when General Olusegun Obasanjo⁶ was in power, he fought to take possession of those schools and public services that were controlled by religious organizations. He failed to do so given that the educational system provided by the state turned out to be of a very low quality.

Consequently, education became a religiously contended issue too, with both Christians and Muslims wanting to impose their own ideals.

The worst series of clashes between the two groups broke out during these years and continued throughout all the 1980s. The reasons behind these conflicts were various: political, economic and of course religious. Most of the violent attacks were concentrated in the Kaduna state, an area which belonged to no-one (there was neither a majority of Christians nor Muslims).

They both fought to protect their beliefs and frightened by the idea that one of the two religious groups would have soon conquered all the territory and prevailed over the other one.

These violent demonstrations brought a huge number of deaths on both sides. There were also masses of young students involved, the Fellowship of Christian students on the one side and the Muslim Student Society on the other one. The leaders of the two groups avoided publishing the statistics

⁵ everyone refers to the unification of Nigeria as “the mistake of 1914”; on 2014 both the African magazine and the Sunday Mail published an article celebrating 100 years after “the mistake of 1914”;

<http://newafricanmagazine.com/nigeria-celebrating-the-mistake-of-1914-2/>

<http://www.sundaymail.co.zw/nigeria-celebrating-the-mistake-of-1914/>

⁶ Olusegun Obasanjo served as a military ruler from 13 February 1976 to 1 October 1979; he was then elected as President of Nigeria from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2007.

reporting the number of losses and preferred to blame the other religion for the toll caused. Furthermore, those years featured bloody tensions between Muslims and Christian against the Nigerian police force; “The Maitatsine uprisings” for example are a famous Islamist terrorist attacks against the police that lasted from 1980 to 1985 and provoked a shocking number of deaths.

1.2.1 “The Maitatsine Uprisings” 1980-1985

The 1980s were marked by a major religious crisis; one of the worst waves of revolts that occurred in those years were the Maitatsine Islamic Uprisings covering 1980 to 1985.

Mohammed Marwa best known as “Maitatsine” was the leader who inspired these series of clashes. He was a teacher, originally from Marwa in northern Cameroon, who moved to Kano, Northern Nigeria, in 1945. He had a dominating personality and regarded himself as being a real prophet; Sometimes his teachings resulted as being unconventional and anti-Islamic; he believed that whoever didn’t agree with him would have been punished directly by Allah. A great number of people enthused by his speeches and ideals decided to follow him.

In November 1980 Alhaji Muhammadu Abubakar, headed Kano State in those years, worried about Maitatsine’s influence on citizens and ordered him to destroy every illegal infrastructure he had built in Kano and to stop spreading his anti-Islamic ideas. The consequences were not what Abubakar would have expected; instead the members of the sect, encouraged by Marwa, decided they would kill anyone who was against their beliefs. Therefore, there was a string of violent confrontations between his followers and the police at the end of the same year.

The 18th of December 1980 saw a real battle begin; four police units were ordered to arrest some of Maitatsine’s followers⁷; they went to the Shahauci playground of Kano where Maitatsine usually gave his public speeches.

On them arriving, the Nigerian Police officers were immediately attacked from every angle and killed. The 18th of December is still remembered as one of the bloodiest days in all Nigeria’s history. The revolt continued even the following days; Kano was destroyed and there were corpses everywhere; almost 5,000 thousand people died⁸. Mohammed Marwa himself, fell victim to the massacre. The Kano government believed that as Marwa died so too did the sect.

This couldn’t have been more untrue; the Yan Yatsine promoted the struggle in the name of their prophet. In 1982 they planned another insurgence at Bulumkutu, near Maiduguri⁹; the reason of the outbreak was the same; the police force was still striving to arrest Maitatsine’s followers; another thousand people died (over 3.000 thousand).

⁷ The Maitatsine’s followers were called “Yan Yatsine”

⁸ the precise number of killed was published in the “Journal of Religion in Africa” - pag.194 “The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria-1980-1985 a revolt of the disinherited” by E. Isichei; according to this article the revolt that broke out in Kano provoked precisely 4177 number of deaths.

⁹ Maiduguri is the capital city of Borno State and it is situated in the north-east of Nigeria.

In 1984 after managing to break out from the prison of Jimeta, the sect members that were still alive, decided to start a series of attacks in the city of Yola¹⁰. During these events, Musa Makaniki was recognized as the new leader of the Yan Yatsine and as Maitatsine's successor. The revolts ended thanks to a brutal intervention by the army.

Once again there was an inevitable high number of victims; furthermore, many people were left seriously wounded or homeless.

The last round of battles ensued in 1985 in the city of Gombe, Makaniki's hometown.

At that time, the majority of Yan Yatsine were living in the city with their leader. As the police decided it was time to wipe out the sect once and for all, another bloody fight was foreseeable. Even though this last episode didn't cause a large number of lost lives compared to the others, the death toll from the first attack of 1980 to that of 1985 at Gombe, was in the thousands.

While many members of the sect were caught, others successfully escaped. The revolt of 1985 was the last attempt of the Yan Yatsine to try to impose their sovereignty.

However, some consider Boko Haram, another religious extremist group which emerged in the last years, as being the resurrection of the Maitatsine.

1.2.2 From the 1990's to present day: other significant events

Religious conflicts dominated the scene throughout all the 1990s to the present day; in 1986 when Nigeria was registered as part of the organisation of Islamic countries (O.I.C)¹¹ the situation deteriorated even further. Christians and Muslims usually argued what the real religious nature of the country was.

As democracy was finally established in 1999, the situation clearly reached its limit. At the beginning of 2000, Muslims decided it was time to establish the Sharia legal system¹² as the official system of Nigeria; the programme of implementing this legal code was successful for almost all the northern part of Nigeria; however, this was not possible in the south, dominated by Christians.

Muslims had a clear plan in mind, to transform the country into an Islamic Republic; However, they were conscious that there was no possibility of compromise with Christians, so war was inescapable. The debate over the implementation of the Sharia's law system caused more bloody clashes. Riots occurred principally in Kaduna, Jos and Abuja. Entire villages were sacked, many towns demolished and millions of people didn't survive. Violence became a daily affair.

Many of these insurrections took place also inside universities; in the Federal College of Education of Zaria, Christians and Muslims students argued over who was to become the next president of the college. Similar episodes happened in more other schools. In 2002 some Muslim girls of Queen

¹⁰ Yola is a city of Northern Nigeria; it is the capital of Adamawa State.

¹¹ The O.I.C is an Islamic organisation founded in 1969; it was built to protect the interests of the adhering Muslim states.

¹² The Sharia law is the official Islamic legal system that regulates some public and private aspects of life of those who adhere to Islam. It includes a wide range of topics from politics to economics and law.

Amina College of Kaduna, clashed with some of their classmates because they were thought of having abused the Holy Quran. Furthermore, conflicts emerged likewise for political reasons. In 2002 a major skirmish took place in Yelwa-Shendam; Yelwa was a little town, situated in Plateau State¹³ where the majority of residents were of Islamic faith; this little town was controlled by Shendam which instead was governed by Christians. The first rebellion erupted on June 26, 2002 with an equal number of Christians and Muslims losing their lives. Violence re-emerged on February 2004 with catastrophic consequences. Following these events, the then president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo¹⁴, launched on May 18, 2004 a State of Emergency in Plateau.

In the same year another fight interested the city of Kano.

In February 2006, a Danish newspaper published an article deriding the figure of Prophet Mohammed; the moment the paper was made of public knowledge, a number of riots broke out in the city of Maiduguri. At the end of 2008, a disagreement regarding the election of the government of the city of Kano, resulted in almost 700 people being killed.

Religious tugs-of-war are still overshadowing the Nigerian scene; the emergence of the new extremist group, Boko Haram didn't improve the situation any better.

In 2009 the appearance of the group in the city of Bauchi brought about the first real damages. Once more in Nigerian history, the security forces had to deal with another Islamic terrorist group having many similarities with the Yan Yatsine of the 1980s. From 2009 there have been innumerable revolts; Boko Haram alone had provoked more victims than the civil war of 1967-1970.

The gravity of the situation forced many northern states to declare a state of emergency in 2011 and 2012.

In 2011 Boko Haram was considered responsible for a suicide bombing in the capital city of Abuja; the interesting thing about this event is that it was the first suicide bombing attack¹⁵ in all Nigeria's history. Two months later, on August 26th¹⁶, there was another car explosion carried out by Boko Haram; the episode took place in the U.N building located in Abuja. The entire building was destroyed and almost 20 people died. Again, it was the first bombing against an international organization in all the country's history. From 2011 to 2015 there have been many others bloody offensives; Although the main actor behind this violence of the last years is the Boko Haram, the disputes between the different religious factions have never left the scene.

¹³ Plateau is a very large state situated in the centre of Nigeria; the capital city is Jos.

¹⁴ Olusegun Obasanjo was appointed president of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007; he had no other choices but declaring the state of emergency because of the damages the revolts have caused to Plateau State.

¹⁵ On 16 June 2011 there was a suicide bombing attack in the capital city of Abuja; A suicide bomber was driving a car bomb near the headquarters of the Nigerian Police force. The bomber died together with another person. The Boko Haram declared itself to be accountable for the explosion. It was the first suicide bombing in all Nigeria's history.

¹⁶ More references about the attack of 26 August 2011 : BBC news: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14677957>; The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/26/nigeria-attack-islamists-claim-responsibility>

Most important religious conflicts from 1999 to 2012

When?	Where? (State)	Who?
1 st of July 1999	Ogun	Violent clashes between two major ethnic groups, Yoruba and Hausa
20 th of December 1999	Kwara	Muslims destroyed around 14 churches in Ilorin
21 st of February 2000	Kaduna	Muslim revolts for the implementation of Sharia
8 th of September 2000	Gombe	The Kaltungo religious crisis; always for implementation of Sharia
12 th of October 2000	Kano	Bloody clashes erupted for religious reasons in Kano
7 th until 17 th of September 2001	Jos	A series of religious conflicts exploded between Muslims and Christians and lasted two weeks
16 th of November 2002	Kaduna	The “Miss World” crisis occurred in which Muslims attacked Christians for having publicly derided Prophet Mohammed.
18 th February 2006	Borno	Christians vs Muslims in Maiduguri again for having insulted Prophet Mohammed
28 th of November 2008	Plateau	More religious violence between Christians and Muslims provoked by a local election
26-30 of July 2009	Bauchi/Borno/Kano/Yobe	First attacks of Boko Haram on Christians; hundreds of people being killed and many properties destroyed
17-20 of January 2009	Plateau	One more religious crisis in Jos
11 th of April 2010	Plateau	Some Fulani members assaulted a Christian village of Berom Stock
22 th of May 2010	Plateau	Some Christians who were returning home from work were attacked on Bauchi road in Jos.
29 th of August 2011	Plateau	Muslims vs Christians at Rukuba road during the Ramadan prayers
16 th of June 2011	Abuja, the police headquarter	First suicide bombing in all Nigerian history; Boko Haram, responsible for the fact, bombed the police headquarter.
26 th of August 2011	Abuja, the UN building	Boko Haram planned a suicide bombing at the UN building; it was once again the first suicide bombing involving the whole international community in all Nigerian history.
5 th of November 2011	Damaturu/Maiduguri	Boko Haram terrorist group attacked some police stations and destroyed various churches
5-6 January 2012	Mubi, Adamawa State	Boko Haram killed numerous Christian, following an ultimatum the sect gave to some Christians leaving in the North to leave the territory.

Chapter 2 “What is Boko Haram? What do we really know about it?”

2.1 Why Boko Haram?

It is very interesting to notice that the official name of this famous terrorist group is not Boko Haram; The real name is “Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad” which means “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and Jihad”. However, the group is globally recognized under the name Boko Haram; this name originates from Hausa dialect and wants to emphasise the group’s pessimistic view of the Western world. The meaning of Boko is vague; some believe it descended from the Arabic world “book”; a more accepted view defined Boko as something inauthentic or fake usually associated with the Western world. Haram literally means “something that is prohibited”. Consequently, Boko Haram has been interpreted as “Western education is forbidden”¹⁷ (Agbiboa, 2013), highlighting the rejection of everything that is associated with Western values.

2.2 Historical evolution of the group

The appearance of the group in the scene is not very clear; while most argue that the group is a renaissance of the Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s, others hold that it emerged in 1995.

The general belief states that it was not before 2002.

Despite these diverse and confused theories regarding the historical origins of this religious sect, it is well known that it begun posing threats to the Nigerian government in 2003.

Mohammed Yusuf¹⁸ was recognized as being the first leader of Boko Haram; the moment he took control over the group in 2003, he intended to establish a new government based on the Sharia legal system; he thought it was time to fight the Nigeria government, held responsible for the disastrous economic and political conditions present in Nigeria.

Yusuf begun his rise to power from the city of Maiduguri; the first step he made was to found a mosque and a school in Maiduguri where lots of families from all over Nigeria registered their sons, because of it being deemed a novelty.

The aim was to instruct the future members of the group as best as possible. Furthermore, the group, which at the time used to be called “Nigerian Taliban”, constructed a militant base in Kanama village¹⁹, an area situated in the north-east of Nigeria. Kanama was chosen thanks to its strategic position: it was isolated and unknown. What Boko Haram had in common with the Maitatsine of the 1980s was the way of life; the members of the group wished to live alienated from the corrupt society, without any external influences, so it was easier to plan in details how to bring a definitive change in Nigeria; this would have soon resulted in a violent overthrow of the Nigerian State.

¹⁷ Agbiboa, D. Egiegba: "The Nigerian Burden: religious identity, conflict and the current terrorism of Boko Haram."

¹⁸ Mohammed Yusuf was the Boko Haram leader from 2002 to 2009; he came from the Girgir village, collocated in the current Yobe State of Nigeria. He was illegally executed by the Nigerian police force in Maiduguri.

¹⁹ Kanama is an area located in the north-east part of Yobe State.

When the group emerged in 2003, it was not yet strong enough to compete with the state. The year that signalled the dangerous advent of Yusuf's sect is considered to be 2009.

During the first years, numerous strife between Boko Haram members and the police followed one after the other in Yobe State. As Yusuf attracted a considerable number of members (the group was also known with the appellation "Yusufiyya" as a tribute to the leader), especially youths, Nigerian politicians became very fascinated by it. Once the elections took place in 2003, many politicians employed some Yusufiyya's members as their personal army against the other political candidates.

However, since it was evident that the line undertaken by the Yusufiyya was dangerous, the state government ordered the group to suspend this kind of political activity.

Ali Modu Sheriff²⁰ was a Nigerian politician who was not satisfied with the current governor of Borno State, Mala Kachalla. He aspired to winning the elections but the help of Yusufiyya's men was essential.

In exchange for that, he assured to fully establish the Sharia and to provide them with the most important positions inside the government.

As soon as Modu managed to become governor in 2003, the relationship with Yusuf immediately broke down. The reasons were several; Yusuf was disappointed mainly because the Sheriff didn't maintain all the promises he made regarding the implementation of Sharia.

The exploitation of youths to collect more votes during political campaigns was a common practise in Nigeria; furthermore, once the objective was realized, they were abandoned without obtaining the promised compensation.

The same happened to Yusuf and his sect. Following these events, he planned a chain of violent demonstrations against the police throughout all 2003 and 2004. The first areas subjected to this havoc were Yobe State and Borno State. A major riot occurred in December 2003 in the cities of Kanama and Geidam, Yobe State, where almost 200 members of Boko Haram ravaged the police stations, seized the police cars and weapons, and killed most of the policemen. Something similar happened in September 2004 in Gwoza and Bama, two major cities of Borno State.

In the wake of this, the Yusufiyya intended to cross the Mandara Mountains²¹, collocated between Nigeria and Cameroon. Some militaries were sent to the mountains and were able, after two days of armed confrontations, to kill some of the sect members. Furthermore, some of them, who managed to escape to Cameroon, were imprisoned by Cameroonian police forces.

²⁰ Ali Modu Sheriff grew up in Ngala Town, Borno State; he was born in 1956. In 2003 he was appointed as governor of Borno State; he was re-elected in 2007.

²⁰ Kala Balge is one of the 27 local government areas of Borno State.

²¹ The Mandara Mountains are a mountain range which flags the northern part of Cameroon-Nigeria border.

As a reaction, at the end of 2004 they captured 12 policemen in Kala Balge²².

In addition to this hostile relationship with both the Nigerian government and the police, the Boko Harm ended up having problems also with some northern Islamic scholars.

Yusuf had a radical ideology which often resulted to be in contrast with the traditional Islam. This led to new religious hostilities between him and other Islamic believers.

The threat posed by Boko Haram became even more alarming from 2004, when some students from Borno and Yobe State decided to give up their studies to join the group.

The outbreaks persisted with various intermissions from 2004 until the dramatic uprising of 2009.

In July 2009 some of Boko Haram's men were held in custody by the police forces simply because they had violated a traffic helmet law. Since they were held during a funeral procession²³, it was perceived by Yusuf as a real provocation. From that moment, an armed revolt broadened from Bauchi to Borno, Yobe and Kano states. Among thousands and thousands of victims there was also Mohammed Yusuf; on one hand some said he was shot to death while he was running away from the police; on the other, Boko Harm believes he was killed by the police during an illegal execution.

In 2010, after a short break, the group re-emerged determined to vindicate their leader's death. Abubakar Shekau was chosen as the new leader of Boko Haram.

In the same way as it happened years before, a cycle of violent brawls exploded all over Nigeria. This time Boko Haram was more prepared and had developed new warfare strategies.

With a blitz in Maiduguri, the sect managed to release almost 800 prisoners, most of them being Boko Haram members. Boko Haram demonstrated to be really powerful when, in 2011, it realized for the first time in Nigeria's history, two suicide bombings in the capital city of Abuja.

Since the second explosion destroyed the UN buildings situated in Abuja, not only Nigerian government recognised Boko Haram supremacy, but for the first time the international community felt menaced by the sect. The government responded to these events by proclaiming an anti-terror war against the group.

Boko Haram was not ready to give up; there were sincere motivations behind their actions. The group major requests were, for their incarcerated members to be released, and for those responsible for Yusuf's death to be prosecuted. However, the main goal remained always the same: remove once and for all the Nigerian government from power and create a new Islamic state.

Between 2012 and 2013, the intensification of bloody assaults, not only caused irreversible damages and countless victims, but also forced three states Borno, Yobe and Adamawa to declare a state of emergency.

In the last years, Boko Haram has intensified this aggressive religious campaign against the Nigerian government. These insurgencies have brought about an extraordinary humanitarian crisis inside the country. If we don't take into consideration the civil war of 1967/1970, no other episode alone has provoked as many casualties as the Boko Haram did in the last decade.

²³ It was a funeral procession because they were heading to the cemetery to bury four of their members.

Up to know is clear that a definitive solution to fight Boko Haram is far from being reached; however, the Nigerian government is endeavouring to calm the atmosphere down.

2.3 The ideology of Boko Haram

After observing the above, i.e.: how Boko Haram transitioned from being a minor religious group into a major international threat, it is necessary to outline the group's ideological aspect, that is the basis of its foundation.

First of all, Boko Haram was originally a Salafist group. Salafism is a traditionalist movement which appeared in the 19th century; it promoted a strict observance of the Sharia and emphasized the importance of the Islamic traditions transmitted by the first Islamic generations. Indeed, Salaf refers to the first three generations of Muslims: The Sahabah of Prophet Muhammed, the Tabi'un and the Tabi'al-Tabi'in²⁴.

Yusuf was deeply inspired by much of Salafist's scripts and teachings.

The key point that distinguishes Boko Haram philosophy from Islam is the complete rejection of the Western world. While Muslims permit the influence of the Western education on condition that it does not violate the Qur'an, Boko Haram as it can be deduced from the name, regards Western education as a sin. Furthermore, according to Yusuf, whoever contradicts or infringes Islamic law, deserves to be punished, if it is required, even by corporal punishment.

According to Boko Haram's leader, the establishment of a Salafist government replacing the existing corrupted one, was fundamental to put an end to all the political, social and economic difficulties.

The first goal to be achieved, was to spread Sharia system all over Nigeria.

The sect evolved with the idea that state and religion were interdependent: the Nigerian government in order to be perfectly functional was to be created on an Islamic basis.

However, one more important aspect of Boko Haram's ideology is the awareness that the majority of Muslims are not real believers. Following this statement, the group has subdivided Muslims into four different classes: the first one embraces all those Islamic regimes which, since they have ruled to not follow the Sharia law, should no longer be considered as Muslims; the second category interests those Muslims that have contradicted the principle of "Al Wala' Wal Bara"²⁵; these people are corrupt since they work for the state or for other immoral entities such as the police. The third is that of the heretics who believe in the existence of more than one god, thus violating the monotheism dogma. The last group consists of those men who Boko Haram deem as true unbeliever for other reasons. The sect recognised as legitimate the use of violence toward the first three categories.

²⁴ The Sahabah is a term that indicates the first Islamic generation of Prophet Muhammad; The Tabi'un is the second generation of Muslims, regarded as fundamental for the advancement of the Islamic doctrine; The third generation is called the Tabi' al-Tabi'in and it came right after the Tabi'.

²⁵ "Al Wala' Wal Bara" is an Arabic expression which translated means "faithfulness and disavowal"; it means that a real Islamic believer must behave in accordance to God's will, and must oppose those people who act in such a way that they are considered as "Kafirs" (misbelievers).

The identification of a Muslim as a “kafir”²⁶ has usually been used as a justification for Boko Haram’s insurrections.

According to Boko Haram, the perfect form of Islam was that transmitted by Prophet Mohammed, the founder, who followed throughout all his life, a severe and precise interpretation of the Quran.

Therefore, it was of primary importance to revolutionize the behaviour of every Islam believer according to Mohammed’s example. Yusuf had the duty to persuade the other Muslims to change their lifestyle in the same direction.

Along these lines, Yusuf encouraged his followers by affirming that, since the Nigerian State was dead, the best thing for a devoted Muslim to do, was to adhere to his sect in order to escape the depraved government and to try to establish a perfect Islamic society, without any political corruption or ethical deprivation.

In 2009, when Yusuf was killed by Nigerian police forces, Boko Haram turned from being a Salafist to a Salafist Jihadist group; the main differences were, a definitive rejection of the democratic form of government present in Nigeria, and the introduction of military actions as something compulsory and inevitable to bring a radical and decisive change in the Nigerian government.

They believed that, struggling for the sake of their religion would have changed the historical course once and for all, saving them from their current condition of misery.

Plus, a desire for revenge emerged right after the murderer of Mohammed Yusuf; since that moment the situation inevitably took an alarming turn.

2.4 The structure of the group

Before 2009 Boko Haram didn’t have a precise structural organisation; Basically it was composed of its leader Mohammed Yusuf, who ruled over the sect’s members.

As Yusuf died in 2009, Abubakar Shekau succeeded. From then, Boko Haram was reorganized into a decentralized cell system.

At the top of this hierarchical organisation there is the leader²⁷ who sets the group goals; he is considered as the most important member of the group. The leader governs upon a system of more or less 26 cells; these units comprise between 300 and 500 members each.

Additionally, the sect is supported by a well-organized leadership structure, so each department is supervised by people with a great training background. Below the leader, the most important executive body is the Shura Council which is made up of 30 members and has a total hegemony over the various cells. Each cell is assigned a different task; some are ordered to carry out dangerous actions such as suicide bombings or surveillance activities; others deal with easier tasks such as taking control of the medical care or the group’s financial status.

²⁶ “Kafir” translated means “unbeliever”; it refers to a person who denies both the existence of God and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed; “Takfir” is the Arabic term used for the practice of “excommunication”; it denotes a situation when one Muslim proclaims another Muslim as a kafir, non-believer.

²⁷ Abubakar Shekau was the leader of Boko Haram until his recent death on the 26th of August 2016.

This dispersed structure has demonstrated to be perfectly functioning; it follows that each cell operates regardless of one another's modus operandi. The Shura Council rarely sets up meetings with the other departments.

Although this complex organisation makes it difficult to define the actual size of the group, it has been estimated that it reaches the thousands.



2.5 Where does the group get its financial resources?

One might well wonder, where Boko Haram gets all its funding; The question arises spontaneously especially because the group operates without the support from the banking system.

Boko Haram obtains its financial reserves in different ways; the most popular ones are the following:

- 1) *Kidnapping*: this is considered as the primary source of revenue for the group; thanks to this kind of criminal activity, Boko Haram earns millions of dollars each year. It is worth mentioning a case involving a French family; In 2013, during a holiday in Cameroon, an entire French family was kidnapped by a gunman who was a member of Boko Haram.

About two months later the sect released both the whole French family and 16 more prisoners receiving in exchange a ransom of 3.15 million²⁹ from the French government.

Added to this, it has been supposed that they receive more or less 1 million dollars for each rich person they take as a hostage.

²⁸ <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/nigeria-examining-boko-haram>

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/19/french-family-kidnapped-cameroon-freed>

Focus: “The kidnapping of Chibok schoolgirls”³⁰

The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls is the clear demonstration of how much this kind of practice is spread among Boko Haram members. Moreover, it deserves special attention because it has involved the entire world community as well.

At the beginning of 2013, after having realised that abduction could provide a great source of wealth, the sect opted for creating some “special kidnapping squads”. Since that moment it became a daily affair which granted huge amounts of funds to the sect.

However, the gravity of the situation became evident not only nationally but also internationally with the famous case of the Chibok girls.

At the beginning of 2014, several schools in Borno state were closed down for security reasons, following the intensification of Boko Haram attacks.

For this reason, many parents decided to send their daughters to take their final exam in a high school in Chibok³¹. On April 2014, Boko Haram insurgents, pretending to be security forces, entered the school and kidnapped around 270 girls, though some of them managed to escape.

It was reported that these girls were shifted to different locations from Nigeria to Cameroon, Sudan and Chad.

The President Jonathan government was widely criticized for not having responded immediately to this attack; as a result, a global campaign named “Bring back our girls” was initiated; the whole international community took part in this movement, offering direct support to the Nigerian government.

At this point, the Nigerian President, who had remained silent for almost one month, spoke to the entire global community, promising he would have used all the possible available instruments to find the kidnapped girls.

The day after the President speech, the 5th of May, 2014 Abubakar Shekau, publicly claimed, in a video, to be responsible for the kidnappings. He argued that, unless the government was willing to pay a substantial ransom and free members of Boko Haram kept prisoners in the states of Borno, Yobe and Kano he would have sold the women into slavery.

President Goodluck Jonathan, agreed with foreign ministers of US, France and Great Britain that making compromises with the terrorist group was not an option; they reached the conclusion that the only way out of this situation involved the use of force.

³⁰ The case of the Chibok girls was so shocking that it attracted the attention of the entire world; many have written about this case. A recent book, published in 2016, named “Ragazze rubate. Le storie delle ragazze rapite da Boko Haram” by Viana Mazza and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, is a very interesting book which tries to recreate the whole story of what happened in that famous 14th of April 2014.

³¹ Chibok is a Local Government Area which is situated in Borno State. Originally it was inhabited by a majority of Christians; however, in 2014 Boko Haram took control over the village and established the Sharia law. The locality is internationally known for the abduction of hundreds of girls by the terrorist group.

On May 2015, one year after the fact, the Nigerian army announced to have discovered some areas where the girls had been kept in custody; however, none of the abducted girls was found. Some were sold into the slave market, others had no other choice but marrying Boko Haram men and yet others were killed.

The case of the kidnapped girls of Chibok highlighted how such criminal activity turned into a real threat for both Nigeria and the world at large.

- 2) *Robbing banks*: another well-known practice thanks to which Boko Haram obtains a huge sum of money is bank robberies. The sect has been able to rob hundreds of banks of the Northern part of Nigeria.
- 3) *Contributions from other Islamic militant organizations*: Boko Haram receives a limited amount of funding also from other Islamic terrorist groups. As the group emerged in 2002, it obtained an outstanding fund from Osama bin Laden; he sent to Africa 3 million dollars for militant organisations which shared his point of view. It is believed that the relationship between Boko Haram and al Qaeda started when Yusuf escaped from Nigeria to Saudi Arabia following the first problems between the group and the Nigerian government.
- 4) *Other sources*: there are other methods whereby Boko Haram inflates its coffers. Drug traffic is one of these; it is well-known that the sect is widely involved with trafficking of heavy drugs. It is worth mentioning that countless corrupt Nigerian politicians provide the group with direct financial support.

2.6 Main causes behind Boko Haram violence

Many scholars have tried to understand the factors accountable for Boko Haram violent actions. It has been concluded that there are innumerable ones, ranging from politics to economy and obviously religion. However, the below are the most widespread:

- a. *Total islamization of Nigeria*: it is commonly-known that the total islamization of Nigeria has always been the main cause of most religious riots occurring in Nigeria since the first civil war of 1967 and even prior. There are both a religious perspective and a political one at the root of the desire to establish a government based on Sharia law. According to the religious perspective, Boko Haram principal want is to establish an Islamic state in order to eliminate Christians from the scene, so as to create a new government were Islam is the only and predominant religion. From the political one, the violent outbreaks are perceived as a tool to exonerate corrupt politicians, most of whom being Christians. Indeed, when a non-Muslim man, Goodluck Jonathan³², was elected

³² Goodluck Jonathan was born in Bayelsa State; he is a Christian and he is part of the Ijaw ethnic group. He was President of Nigeria from 2010 until 2015 when Muhammadu Buhari became the new president.

president of Nigeria in 2010, this political aspect of the insurgency became even more obvious; they intensified the brutal attacks to demonstrate the governmental incompetence of the Christian president.

- b. *Boko Haram violence as a result of poverty*: Another face of the Boko Haram insurrections is to deem it as a response to the extreme conditions of poverty that have always characterized the northern part of Nigeria. Boko Haram developed its aggressive trait even because of the unsuccessful attempts of every government from 2000 until today, to deal with this huge and problematic issue which mainly concerns Muslim people of the north.

Many consider the Boko Haram phenomenon as a reaction to the social problems affecting the Nigerian country, most important of which is indeed poverty.

Furthermore, Boko Haram retains the government to be responsible for the existing inequalities in the distribution of resources to the disadvantage of the northern part of Nigeria, thus further increasing the gap between the north and the south.

This theory developed as a consequence of the Muslims beliefs that Nigerian political economy has always favoured the south; while the political scenario has seen the alternation of both Christians and Muslims presidents in office, the south has always maintained the economic power.

- c. *Violation of Human Rights, Mohammed Yusuf's death*: After 2009 when the sect became truly aggressive and a series of bloodbaths followed, the members begun justifying their actions in the name of their leader's death. According to them, the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf by the Nigerian police was to be considered as a violation of Human Rights. As the right to life of their leader was infringed, they held that violence was legitimated and feasible. One more motivation arose to spread violence against the Nigerian central government.
- d. *The lack of an efficient security system*: the almost complete absence of security checks in Nigeria is another relevant aspect linked to Boko Haram expansion. It is much easier for Boko Haram to plan their attacks if there is such a weak security system; moreover, the proliferation and immediate access to weapons in the last years, creates an optimal situation for extremist groups such as Boko Haram, to pick up artillery and initiate fighting.
- e. *The high unemployment rate*³³: the high level of unemployment present in Nigeria should be considered as one of the key reasons of revolt. The unemployment rate, as well, is higher in the north than it is in the south. The Islam radicals, taking advantage of this delicate situation, promise to those youths living in the Northern part of Nigeria a more prosperous life for those who fight in the

³³ The Nigeria Unemployment Rate reached 13.3% at the beginning of 2016, the highest one since 2009.

name of their religion. It followed that it was very simple for both Yusuf and then Shekau, to manipulate northern Muslims youths to take part in Boko Haram's military actions.

These young men and women exasperated by their current conditions, found in the sect the only way out of this crisis. One of the members of Oxford Research Group, A.R. Mustapha, underlines this fact by defining Boko Haram as *“the symptom of the failure of nation-building and democratic politics in Nigeria. It is the misguided cry of a disgruntled youth crushed by the socio-economic system on the one hand and then repressed by the state on the other”*. (Agbibo D. , 2013, p. 9)

f. Violence employed to destabilize the President Goodluck Jonathan administration: When in 2010, a Christian man, Goodluck Jonathan was appointed as President of Nigeria, Boko Haram claimed this motivation for intensifying its attacks.

This recent theory came up during the election campaign of President Jonathan. It was a common belief especially between Christians, that, since the Muslims of the North felt threatened by the possibility of a new Christian President, they decided to join Boko Haram in order to try to destabilize his candidature. Once he was elected, violent insurgencies were still being planned by Boko Haram as an instrument to weaken his power.

Many think that if Jonathan hadn't been elected as President of Nigeria, the Boko Haram uprisings would have been far fewer.

However, this view is not always accepted since the majority of outbreaks have taken place in the Northern part of the country.

It is clear that the logic behind Boko Haram's insurgencies is very complicated to understand; many scholars, analysing the Nigerian political and economic situation have striven to provide some answers; Why does Boko Haram rebel?

Of course both the political situation and the high level of poverty of Nigeria could serve as a justification of the eruption of this group; however, it is not enough; the damage provoked by the sect is enormous compared to these meagre justifications.

Among the factors enumerated above, the killing of Yusuf was clearly the straw that broke the camel's back. In 2010, Boko Haram broadcast a video where its leader, Abubakar Shekau, publicly pledged he would take revenge for the illegal murder of Yusuf and most of Boko Haram members. All these factors that have been used to justify Boko Haram violent attitude, reveal the ethnoreligious and political cleavages that dominate the Nigerian scenario.

Chapter 3 “The government responses to the Boko Haram threat both nationally and internationally”

Boko Haram has become an issue of both national and international concern due to the great amounts of havoc it has provoked in the last decades.

The Nigerian government has tried throughout the years to develop new strategies to alleviate the problem; nevertheless, most measures have proved to be ineffective.

Even some politicians from other countries have become involved in the fight against the spread of Boko Haram. The most active has been the US, where the policymakers have reached the conclusion that it is of their international interest to assist the Nigerian government in the counter-terrorist war against Boko Haram.

3.1 The responses of the Nigerian government

Given the fact that Boko Haram shows no signs of surrender, the Nigerian authorities are combating to break the group’s activities down. From 2003 until 2009 Boko Haram was not perceived as a menace for the country however, when in 2009 it undertook a violent stance, President Goodluck Jonathan had no other choice but endeavouring to reinforce the security system.

3.1.1 The Jonathan government strategies against Boko Haram

Endless approaches have been undertaken by president Jonathan to defeat the Boko Haram menace. He experimented both a peaceful and a violent line.

The first step he took to restore the order was to try a non-violent one with the members of the very sect. The Nigerian political authorities attempted a series of direct contacts with Shekau’s members, by way of dialogues and friendly confrontations; they wanted to persuade the group that the long-lasting fight against the state would have brought nothing good for them but casualties and more troubles for the Nigerian State. The response of the sect was as imagined, negative; they were still convinced of the need to carry on with the struggle especially because they would never have, under any circumstances, accepted the Christian faith of the Nigerian government (President Jonathan was indeed a Christian).

At the beginning of 2013, since the situation gave no signs of improvement, President Goodluck Jonathan decided to set up an agency called “Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North”³⁴. The committee was made up of 26, being either government authorities or religious members which were supervised by Minister Kabiru Tanimu.

The Committee goal was to try to convince, within a period of three months, Boko Haram to sign an amnesty, admitting its responsibilities for the damage provoked, and also to surrender their weapons. Foreseeably, the leader of the group, Abubakar Shekau, had no intention to accept these conditions.

³⁴ “The Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North” was founded on April 24, 2013 by the current President Goodluck Jonathan; the head of this Committee was Kabiru Tanimu which in the President’s Office was appointed as Minister of special duties.

Again, he believed that Boko Haram had no reasons to sign an amnesty since it was the Nigerian government to be blamed for the country's current situation.

According to Shekau, it was the government that should have begged for Boko Haram's forgiveness and not the contrary. The dramatic economic and political situation of Nigeria had nothing to do with Boko Haram. In the following months, Shekau transmitted a video reaffirming that Boko Haram was not giving up its extreme campaign towards the creation of a Nigerian Islamic State.

Indeed, what happened next was expectable; once again, Boko Haram provoked a bloodbath in the Northern part of the country.

The uncontrollable situation forced President Jonathan to announce a state of emergency in three Northern states: Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. He justified this decision by arguing that *"These actions amount to a declaration of war and a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of the Nigerian State and threaten its territorial integrity. As a responsible government we will not tolerate this"*. (Agbiboa D. , 2013, p. 12)

It was at this point, since Boko Haram was not open to dialogues, that the Jonathan government engaged itself to the violent line. First of all, the government voted to close the borders between the Northern part of the country and the other states to prevent the expansion of Boko Haram abroad as well as to avoid other jihadist groups providing reinforcements to the sect.

Mr Jonathan realised in this second phase, that violence could only be contrasted with more violence. For this reason, he reorganized all the state security forces- the army, the police and the security services- into a unique Joint Task Force (JTF)³⁵, named JTF Operation Restore Order. The aim of this organization was to help the Northern part of Nigeria, especially Borno State, to escape this terrible situation and to restore order as far as it was possible. Of course the first step consisted of the elimination of Boko Haram from the scene. Thousands of military were being employed for this Anti-Boko Haram counter-terrorism movement; it was the first time since the Civil War of 1967, that such a large number of people were forced to join up in the military service.

However, the JTF modus operandi was confused and disorganized; adding to that, they were very often reported for killing innocent people. Thus, instead of work things out, the JFT created even more problems. During an armed confrontation between Boko Haram and the JFT in the city of Baga,³⁶ many people lost their lives; the surprising aspect was that the Baga population blamed the JFT and not Boko Haram for the huge number of losses. Indeed, JFT was recognized responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians. The same occurred in the following year; as Boko Haram continued with its insurrections, the JTF responses brought countless victims, living in the North, who had no connection with Boko Haram. The counter-terrorism campaign implemented by the security forces brought about destructive and harsh consequences.

³⁵ The Joint Task Force (JTF) comprised the Nigerian Police Force; the Nigerian Customs Service; the Department of State Security; the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Nigeria Immigration Service.

³⁶ Baga is a city situated in Borno State near Lake Chad.

The JFT was held responsible for acting in violation of the Human Rights, for committing acts of violence even when it was not required, for illegal imprisonments and for burning hundreds of buildings. They ended up incrementing this climate of extremism and tension.

The failure of the military force, established by President Jonathan, to counter-attack Boko Haram expansion, was connected to various factors; the major problems were the scarce communication between the various security apparatus, the widespread level of corruption, the lack of effective security controls of the borders and the secret collaboration of some Nigerian politicians with the sect.

President Goodluck Jonathan was very often criticized because of the failing anti-Boko Haram responses he had experimented during the last years of his office.

3.1.2 How is the Nigerian government facing the problem with new elected President Muhammadu Buhari?

In the elections of April 2015, Muhammadu Buhari³⁷ managed to defeat Jonathan and became the new Nigerian head of state.

He was the former Major General of the Nigerian army and as such he participated in the suppression of the Maitatsine Uprisings. Furthermore, with a military coup d'état he became president of Nigeria from 1983 to 1985.

As he was elected in 2015, it was a common belief that, considering his previous career as a general he would have faced the Boko Haram problem better than the former President Jonathan did.

Upon election, he vowed to develop innovative tactics against Boko Haram, the primary threat for the development of the Nigerian state.

He set a list of goals to defeat Boko Haram once and for all, declaring that by December 2015, the group was to be considered eliminated.

He firstly appointed new leaders of the army, the navy and the air force.

He wanted to create a new efficient coalition against Boko Haram.

In order to do that, much needed to be improved starting from the reduction of the widespread level of corruption and the development of an efficient security system.

On top of this, with the new President in command, the army base was transferred from Abuja to Maiduguri, and the soldiers developed new warfare tactics.

Muhammadu has been in power for only one year and a problematic issue such as the religious terrorism of Boko Haram necessitates far more time to be resolved, it is not something you can eliminate in such a short period.

The Nigerian security services will not be adjusted overnight even if Buhari is in power.

³⁷ Muhammadu Buhari became President of Nigeria on 29 May 2015 although he ran for the office also in year 2003, 2007 and 2011.

The immediate solution is to set short-term goals. For example, a good point of departure would be the reorganization of the security services, exonerating those accountable for the past humanitarian crisis that have affected the country.

In addition to this, it is important to cooperate internationally with the other states; Muhammadu Buhari understood that the support of great powers such as US or France could prove to be the key for a successful anti-Boko Haram movement.

In this last year, Boko Haram has demonstrated to be slightly less violent but it is still on the scene, capable of provoking massive violence whenever it wants.

Even though Buhari turned out to be successful in improving some aspects of the Nigerian government, defeating violent extremism will require a lot more effort and patience.

It is worth analysing the global community reaction to this delicate situation which has dominated the most populated state of Africa in the last decade.

3.2 The US intervention

The US government deems fundamental its relationship with the Nigerian country, especially for the economic sector, because of the strategic position occupied by the country, its countless resources, and also because it is well-known that Nigeria is the prime producer of oil of the entire African continent.

Having understood the gravity of the situation relating to the Nigerian country, the United States has been offering its support in various ways, by suggesting new initiatives to slow-down the extending corruption problem, by advancing new reforms for the economic sector and by implementing new peace and development programs for the country.

Since 2010, when Goodluck Jonathan was still in charge, U.S. and Nigeria have intensified their relationship by creating a U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC), a bilateral agreement on topics of mutual concern.

Summed to this, the United States has later on taken part in the counterterrorism struggle against the Islamic militant organisation known as Boko Haram.

The main preoccupation of Obama, the current President of U.S., has always been the strengthening of the Nigerian security system considered to be the main factor accountable for the rapid expansion of Boko Haram.

For this reason, the African country has been pushed to join the TSCTP (Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership)³⁸, a U.S program which aims at destroying all the militant terrorist organizations which are destabilizing and threatening the entire African territory.

³⁸ The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, is an American programme which has been developed to counter-attack the spreading out of terrorist and extremist groups in Africa; this initiative involves the following states: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Nigeria.

The organization's main goals are to reinforce the regional warfare capabilities, to increase the cooperation between the security forces of the different regions, to support the democratic form of government, to denounce the Islamic ideology of the extremist groups and to empower the two-sided relations between the single African countries and the United States.

The U.S. has offered its help in diverse situations; at the end of 2015, for instance, when Boko Haram planned to attack Cameroon, the United States deployed hundreds of troops to support the locals.

Since Muhammed Buhari has become President of Nigeria, his approach to counterattack the terrorist group has received positive opinions from U.S.

For this reason, the Obama Administration has been collaborating with the Nigerian State to find new counterterrorism tactics.

As a point of departure, the U.S Department of Defense has been sending group of soldiers to Nigeria, to teach advanced warfare tactics to the local army which is still a lot backward.

Furthermore, since the impact of the Boko Haram phenomena has had its repercussions also in the neighbouring states such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the U.S. has been encouraging each country to develop new programs to improve the anti-Boko Haram campaign.

However, since the regions lack the basic instruments to counterattack the powerful group, the U.S has been offering together with military aids also huge amounts of monetary supports to each single region.

In September 2015, the U.S Secretary of State John Forbes Kerry³⁹, during a visit in Nigeria, had planned to meet with President Muhammed Buhari to discuss about the Boko Haram problem; they mutually agreed to cooperate and put all the possible effort to defeat Boko Haram.

Since 2016, the U.S Department of Defense is also taking into consideration the possibility of sending military troops to the Nigerian State just for ordinary surveillance activities in order to improve the security system.

Despite both the national and international responses to Boko Haram have been extremely positive in the last years with President Muhammadu Buhari in charge, the group is still being recognized as one of the major international threat.

The United States should extend its knowledge about this terroristic group- its structure, its sources of supports, the external contacts with other terroristic groups, the areas most subjected to terroristic attacks from the group- to develop more appropriate counterterrorism strategies.

However, U.S efforts alone will never be enough to defeat the religious sect because what has been afflicting Nigeria since 2002 has turned to be a real war.

The logic long-term solution would be for the United States to encourage other big powers such as France or Great Britain to take part to this anti-terroristic war.

³⁹ John Forbes Kerry is a diplomat and member of the American Democratic Party; he is the 68th United States Secretary of State.

CONCLUSION

There is a famous concept the so-called “Historic Recurrence”, which means the repetition of similar events more than one time in history, which can be applied in some sense to the Nigerian case.

What do I mean by this affirmation? The Boko Haram Phenomenon that has characterized the Nigerian history in the last decade is not something that came out of the blue. Indeed, religious violence has always been the most relevant aspect of the history of this country. As it has been analysed in this paper, the historical hatred between Christians and Muslims has provoked since 1914 and even before countless victims.

This happened for one main reason, most of the people living in Nigeria has always defined their identities based on their religious preferences. So it has become very important whether you are Christian or Muslim.

It follows that this religious fanaticism can turn out to be dangerous as it has been demonstrated; most of the believers have justified their violent actions in the name of their religion.

The emergence of Boko Haram is just a direct consequence of the historical background of this country together with the miserable living conditions which people are obligated to face in their everyday lives.

This paper has tried to give a clear image of what is the problematic situation that has been afflicting Nigeria for hundred years.

The point of departure of this thesis has been an historical excursus from year 1914 until today to understand how the country has arrived to this critical situation.

The second chapter tries to answer some fundamental questions regarding this religious groups: Who is Boko Haram? How it has evolved so rapidly? What is the ideology of this group? and Why Boko Haram rebels?

Having understood the roots of this sect and the logic behind its insurgencies, the paper has shifted the attention to the various reactions to this phenomenon.

In the first place it has been examined the response of the Nigerian government with both former President Goodluck Jonathan and then current President Muhammadu Buhari; after that, since Boko Haram has been recognized also as a worldwide threat, the focus has moved to the international horizon, precisely to the U.S reaction to Boko Haram considered as being very important.

However, the paper also underlines the fact that a further international reaction from other great power such as France would be the winning solution against Boko Haram.

Despite all the progresses that have been made recently, Boko Haram remains the major security problem challenging the Nigerian State today.

It follows that a major effort and new strategies are needed to at least calm the situation down. As we have seen the people joining Boko Haram throughout the years have always been youths living in the North, tired of their miserable living conditions; these young men and women have motivated their terrorist actions in the name of “justice”.

I guess that given this situation, the Nigerian government should begin the rebuilt of the Nigerian state by trying to resolve problems that have nothing to do with Boko Haram such as poverty or the widespread level of corruption.

Maybe, once the living conditions of Northern part of Nigeria are being improved the members of Boko Haram could be more motivated for a hypothetical peaceful amnesty.

Furthermore, the State should collaborate transnationally also with other super-powers as it has done with U.S to achieve the results as soon as possible.

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Summary of the Paper in Italian

La seguente tesi tratta della violenza religiosa in Nigeria focalizzandosi nel dettaglio sull'evoluzione del gruppo terroristico noto con il nome di Boko Haram.

Per arrivare a parlare di Boko Haram bisogna partire da un discorso più ampio.

La storia della Nigeria in questo particolare contesto deve essere approfondita maggiormente.

Bisogna necessariamente procedere per gradi; prima di spiegare nel dettaglio lo sviluppo di Boko Haram è opportuno focalizzarsi su quei conflitti religiosi interni al paese che lo hanno caratterizzato sin dal 1900.

La Nigeria è il paese più popolato dell'Africa, ne consegue quindi che è sempre stato caratterizzato dalla presenza di centinaia di gruppi etnici e da un intenso pluralismo religioso.

La varietà di etnie e di religioni hanno provocato una serie di scontri violenti le cui conseguenze sono visibili ancora oggi.

La tesi è stata suddivisa in modo tal da rendere il più chiaro possibile l'exkursus storico che ha portato la Nigeria a dover affrontare la situazione critica in cui si trova oggi con la recente esplosione di Boko Haram.

Il primo capitolo si focalizza sul background storico della Nigeria e in particolare sui conflitti religiosi che hanno colpito questo paese dal 1914 fino ad oggi.

Prima del 1914 non esisteva nessun paese chiamato Nigeria; la Nigeria consisteva principalmente in quattro differenti imperi; con l'arrivo degli Europei in Africa questi imperi iniziarono lentamente a scomparire.

Proprio nel 1914 il commissario inglese Lord Lugard prese la decisione di unire il Protettorato della Nigeria del Nord e quello del Sud in un unico territorio conosciuto da noi oggi con il nome di Nigeria.

In un altro contesto questa unificazione territoriale avrebbe dovuto creare un senso di appartenenza e unità tra le persone, ma non fu questo il caso; infatti la decisione presa da Lord Lugard venne definita da molti come "l'errore del 1914".

Le persone si resero subito conto che l'unica cosa che veramente le accomunava era il nome del paese. Senza dubbio l'amalgamazione si dimostrò favorevole per i colonizzatori perché potevano vantare di un controllo maggiore sul territorio; dall'altra parte però diede inizio a quella serie di scontri religiosi tra Musulmani e Cristiani che hanno caratterizzato la storia della Nigeria degli ultimi 100 anni.

Il motivo principale era che queste due correnti religiose avevano delle ideologie e tradizioni completamente opposte e difficilmente avrebbero deciso di raggiungere un compromesso e di vivere pacificamente; inoltre mentre i Cristiani risiedevano nel Sud della Nigeria, i Musulmani comandavano la parte del Nord.

Quando la Nigeria ottenne l'indipendenza nel 1960 la situazione precipitò ulteriormente; sia i Musulmani che i Cristiani temevano che uno dei due avrebbe in breve tempo ottenuto l'egemonia su tutto il paese.

Per questo motivo ciò che accadde era prevedibile, una serie di rivolte si susseguirono una dopo l'altra, rivolte che, molto spesso finivano per essere delle vere e proprie guerre.

La dimostrazione più eclatante fu la guerra civile che durò dal 1967 al 1970 e che provocò la morte di migliaia di persone.

A seguito della guerra civile altri scontri continuarono a dilaniare il territorio Africano senza sosta.

Un altro episodio che deve essere necessariamente analizzato sono le Rivolte Maitatsine del 1980.

Queste rivolte che hanno coinvolto i Musulmani e le forze di sicurezza Nigeriane sono sorte per motivi politici, religiosi ed economici.

Boko Haram viene spesso definito come una risurrezione delle rivolte Maitatsine.

Dal 1980 fino ad oggi si è stimato che queste faide inter-religiose abbiano provocato più di 25.000 morti.

Dopo aver affrontato nel dettaglio gli eventi più eclatanti che hanno riguardato la storia della Nigeria dagli inizi del Novecento fino ad oggi, il secondo capitolo si concentra esclusivamente su Boko Haram. Si cerca di

dare una risposta ad alcune domande fondamentali che riguardano questo gruppo religioso: chi è Boko Haram? Qual è l'ideologia di questo gruppo? Qual è la sua struttura? Chi l'ha fondato?

Il capitolo inizia narrando in breve la storia di questa setta religiosa; mentre alcuni studiosi sostengono essere nato nel 1995, la teoria più diffusa afferma che sia stato fondato nel 2002 dal suo leader, Mohammed Yusuf.

Nonostante ciò, è opinione comune il fatto che prima del 2009 Boko Haram operasse in maniera pacifica e che abbia iniziato a creare problemi al governo Nigeriano solo dopo quell'anno.

Avendo più chiara la situazione vengono poi messe in risalto l'ideologia su cui si fonda questo gruppo e la sua struttura interna.

Concludendo l'analisi nel miglior modo possibile, viene naturale chiedersi da dove provengano le risorse finanziarie di Boko Haram che gli permettono di mettere in atto delle azioni violente così ben organizzate e quali siano le motivazioni che spingono i suoi membri a comportarsi in questa maniera così estrema.

Boko Haram è stato recentemente classificato come una vera e propria minaccia non solo per la Nigeria ma anche per tutta la comunità internazionale.

Per questo motivo il terzo e ultimo capitolo prima analizza la reazione del governo Nigeriano- sia con l'ex Presidente Goodluck Jonathan che con quello attuale Muhammadu Buhari- alla diffusione del fenomeno di Boko Haram, poi mette in luce anche le risposte dei governi internazionali e in particolar modo quella degli Stati Uniti d'America.

Si è provato in questo documento a fornire una descrizione chiara di quale sia la situazione che affligge il paese Nigeriano ormai da molti anni.

Inoltre avendo osservato le radici di questo gruppo e le diverse reazioni a tale fenomeno, lo scopo principale ora rimane quello di provare a cercare una soluzione definitiva per eliminare Boko Haram dalla scena.

Ovviamente questo sarà un processo lungo che richiederà un maggiore sforzo non solo da parte del governo Nigeriano e Americano, ma anche da altre grandi potenze ad esempio la Francia o la Gran Bretagna.