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Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa (ed), *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*. London: Hurst, 2018, pp. xvi + 529. ISBN: 978 1849 048 842.

Review by: Professor Amidu Sanni, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

This is the product of a project (2011-2018) that was funded by the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, Houston, USA. A public discussion of the book under review was held at the Institute in 2017 (https://youtu.be/e_kdEQ2ch1E). In spite of the rich and growing literature on militant and millenarian *Salafism* and indeed Boko Haram (henceforth BH), this is the first comprehensive attempt at bringing together the original, authentic voices of the BH, exemplified by writings in Arabic and local languages, video and audio materials, and the theoretical and practical nuances of its discursive tradition and actions. The enlightening introduction by David Cook (1-5) underpins my earlier characterization of BH as a moving train on an undulating terrain which continuously generates varying images to beholders from close and distant positions (Sanni 2016; Sanni 2017).

From the northeastern corner of Nigeria, a young lad with a reasonable training in the Islamic sciences from home and the Arab world, Muhammad Yusuf (Maiduguri) (29 January 1970-30 July 2009), started a preaching and revivalist outfit which claimed commitment to returning the society to pristine and true Islam as its goal. His familiarity with Western ideas and “Grand Narratives”, namely, secularism, capitalism etc, was doubtless through secondary (most likely Arabic) translations, and it was from his opprobrium for Western ideas and institutions: “[T]his system of Western education, we do not agree with it at all . . . (p. 98)” that the appellation “Boko Haram” (Western literacy is forbidden) was stamped on his group by critics and opponents. Until his state-inspired murder, Muhammad Yusuf was the *spirit auctores* of the movement.

The title under review is divided into five parts. **Part One** (Nigerian Preachers 2006-2008, pp. 7-81) contains a rendition of the debate between Muhammad Yusuf (MY) and Isa Ali Pantami on Western education; selections from *Hādh-hī ‘Aqīdatunā*, the ideological *Grundlage* of the BH; an exegesis of certain Qur’anic chapters and ideas as expounded by MY; a film and an interview by MY, all in a pleasant English translation. **Part Two** (Reaching a Verdict 2008-2009, pp. 85-201) brings together, under various groups, the thematic undercurrents of sermons by MY; the interpretation of Western civilization as atheism by Abubakar Shekau, the *alter ego* of MY; an advocacy for return to foundational texts of Islam; an open declaration of war against the Nigerian government joining which security services by any Muslim was strongly opposed by MY; and a narrative on the state security interrogation of MY.

Part Three (Making Nigeria Ungovernable 2009-2012), pp. 207-283) relates the immediate aftermath of the death of MY as Abubakar Shekau took over the reins. This part gives the theatric of exchanges between Shekau and the Nigerian State, particularly President Goodluck Jonathan; war against Christians and Western education; narratives on attacks against

media houses, prison facilities; condolences to sponsors of jihadi martyrdom; correspondence with the global network of Osama bin Laden, and solidarity messages to regional insurgent cells. **Part Four** (Boko Haram State 2013-2015, pp. 289-395). With the ascension of Shekau to the leadership of BH came the ascendancy of militancy and violence against innocent citizens, public facilities, religious establishments, and military formations, among other deviant activities. Materials treated in this part include the Hausa anthem of the BH; message about the 2014 abducted Chibok school girls and the alleged negotiations on their freedom; messages of defiance and threat to West African leaders and traditional Muslim rulers, for instance, President Paul Biya of Cameroon, Idriss Deby of Chad, and Emir of Kano; declaration of an Islamic Caliphate and the applications of the rulings of Islam in the Islamic State of Africa; inquisition of the Nigerian Army and decapitation of Airforce officers.

Part Five (West African Islamic State 2015-2016, pp. 403-480). Oath of Allegiance (*bay'a*) to the Caliph of the Islamic State by Abubakar Shekau; arrival of the Caliphate soldiers in West Africa, following on the declaration of the sub-regional flank of the 'great' Caliphate; exchanges between factional leaders, namely, Abubakar Shekau and Mamman Nūr on the one hand, and between *Mujāhidūn* of West Africa and Somalia on the other; 'Īd al-ḥajj and 'Īd al-Aḍḥā rites and atmosphere in the West African Province of the Islamic State (Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqiyyā) which was given the task of investigating 'atrocities' against the movement; and Shekau's response to his critics.

Since the appearance of this book and indeed 10 years after the death of MY, its patron saint, the movement, its regional, and transregional 'consortium' remain as deadly as ever. BH has often been characterized inaccurately though, as a Salafi-Jihadi group. This is without consideration for the local, traditional, historical, rival ideology it implicitly represents, namely, the Kanuri versus Fulani/Hausa counterhegemonic crosscurrents from the 14thC, but more significantly in the Usman Dan Fodio's 19thC Jihadism and Caliphate. For instance, MY said that ". . . we do not view the Sultan [of Sokoto] as the leader of the Muslims; rather, we view him [merely] as the Sultan of Sokoto" (p. 74). Nonetheless, the characterization of BH as a Salafi group is true to the extent of its appropriation of the views of the trio of Saudi quietist 'Abd al-Azīz Ibn Bāz (1995), Ibn 'Uthaymīn (d. 2001), and the Syrian Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d.1999). The militant dose in the BH discourse derived from the Jordanian Salafi-Jihadist Abu Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī (d. 2006) which dose was further accentuated by local, economic, and political discontent.

The ideology and activities of BH and indeed its local and transnational dimensions can better be understood in the context of the original materials emanating from the movement as reproduced and contextualized here in a comprehensive fashion. The effects of the BH insurgency have engendered a wider social disequilibrium in form of hate speech, slavery, sexual abuse of women, proliferation of light and heavy arms, kidnapping for ransom, and indiscriminate killings (Matfess 2017; Brigaglia 2017; Africa Report 2018; ICG 2019).

By and large, this work has helped readers, especially non-Arabic and non-Hausa readers, overcome cultural, religious, and linguistic obstacles associated with the BH and indeed Jihadism in general. (Cf. Daniel Holbrook, ed. *Al-Qaeda 2. 0 A Critical Reader*, London: Hurst, 2018). It is an essential reader for anyone interested in exploring the *raison de'tre* and original ideology and active narratology of a millenarian, militant, home grown, maverick, 'religious' movement which was allowed to develop by default into a sub-regional monster with far-reaching global security challenges and social upheavals of unimaginable proportions. This book is a rendition of the spoken and written 'voices' of the ideologues and protagonists of BH. From a little acorn that

was unconsciously planted in north-eastern Nigeria at the twilight of the 20th century grew the mighty oak that would engage the entire world for the most part of the first quarter of the 21st century, and perhaps beyond.

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