

POVERTY AND TERRORISM IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS AND NOTES ON THE MANIPULATION OF THE *ALMAJIRAI* SYSTEM AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Scholars have posed a relation between Poverty, Ignorance and Terrorism. This is based on the increasing and heightening level of terrorist activities in most parts of the world, which has been linked to the ability of some powerful forces and actors manipulating the minds and hands of those affected by poverty (both material and intellectual) in society to engage in terrorist acts. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out a study with an analytical and narrative historical method. Findings indicate that in the case of Nigeria, with specific reference to the northern part of Nigeria, these actors (often wealthy, influential and disgruntled political and religious persons) deliberately manipulated the *almajirai* system to perpetuate terrorism. It also discovers that this act has in one way or another hampered the socio-economic development of the area in particular and the nation at large. The main reason is that human and intellectual resources, which would have been channelled towards building the nation, have been diverted to destructive tendencies without those involved knowing this under the guise of either liberation movement or fighting for freedom. It can therefore be concluded that unless more drastic measures are taken, the country may face even more severe dangers.

Keywords: *Poverty, terrorism, ignorance, development*

Introduction

Emerging studies have established a link between poverty, ignorance, violent crisis and terrorism, especially in most parts of the Third World

(Oscar 1966; JDPC 2008; Biu 2008; Liman 2013). This is based on the increasing and heightening level of terrorist activities in most parts of the world, which has been linked to the ability of some powerful forces and actors manipulating the minds and hands of those affected by poverty in society to engage in terrorist acts. In the case of Nigeria (with specific reference to the northern part as well as evidence from the Niger Delta area), this is fastly becoming the case as the struggle for survival by those considered the strong hands of the society and their inability to make ends meet as a result of deliberate deprivation (through acts of manipulation and embezzlement) have led to a rise in violent crimes including terrorism.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

Geographically, the northern part of Nigeria today comprises what is politically referred to as the 19 northern states, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). However, despite the heterogeneous ethnic composition of the area, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group still predominates, with over 70 per cent of its people belonging to the Hausa-Fulani ethnic stock. By extension, the historical evolution of the Hausa group is closely linked to that of other ethnic groups in the region (while the term Kasar Hausa or Hausaland does not refer to a fixed place name, but merely means “the country where the Hausa language prevails” (Kwanashie et al. 1987).

According to scholars, poverty means more than lacking financial means as it has to do with one’s state of mind and perception of issues of life. Caritas Nigeria (2008) described poverty as the inability of an individual, group or nation to provide shelter, nutrition and other material goods that enable people to live a good life. The concept of poverty includes material deprivation (e.g., food, shelter) and access to services (e.g., health, education). It constitutes a multiple breach of the fundamental rights of human beings and above all a violation of the right to lead a decent life. This right basically amounts to being able to live out one’s life as a human being with dignity (JDP/Caritas Nigeria 2008).

The concept terrorism is derived from the Latin word “terrere,” meaning to frighten, terrify, deter, or scare away. Thus, terrorism is a particular kind of political violence involving a threat of violence

against non-combatants or property in order to gain a political, ideological, or religious goal through fear and intimidation. Usually symbolic in nature, the act is crafted to have an impact on an audience that differs from the immediate target of the violence. Hence terrorism is a strategy employed by actors (state and non-state actors) with widely differing goals they intend to achieve and constituencies they intend to reach (Post 2007: 3; Enders and Sandler 2012: 4).

Manipulation means, essentially, controlling the actions of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all (Usman 1979). In line with this definition of the term manipulation, scholars have argued that manipulation of religion has become a tool in the hands of those in a position to subject their followers into perpetual ignorance and darkness. In this way, it has been argued that this happens, when there is the need to obscure from the people a fundamental aspect of their reality.

The *Almajirai* System: As it was in the Beginning

Historically, the Hausa word *almajiri* (plural *almajirai*), derived from the Arabic *al-Muhajir* (plural *al-Muhajirun*), best describes an emigrant with specific reference to early scholars as well as others in quest for knowledge, who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. It is hinged on the Islamic concept of migration, which is widely practiced especially when the acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient (Abdulqadir 2003). In a more specific term, Sheik Abba Aji, a renowned Maiduguri-based Islamic scholar (quoted in Abdulrafii 2009), opined thus:

The word *almajiri* is a word borrowed from Arabic language and derived from the word “*al-Muhajir*” meaning a seeker of Islamic knowledge. The *almajirai* system of education practised in northern Nigeria has its origin in the migration of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina. Those who migrated with the prophet to Medina were called “*al-Muhajirun*,” meaning emigrants, while those they met there were referred to as “*Ansar*,” meaning helpers. To Aji, “these emigrants (*al-Muhajirun*) because of the circumstances of

their migration had no means of livelihood for getting to Medina, but based on the fraternity established by the prophet between the two groups, they did not engage in begging but rather were co-opted by the *Ansar* in their various trades and vocations as apprentices who were paid for their services.” Islam frowns at begging in any form because it reduces a Muslim’s self-esteem and dignity.

In the case of the Nigerian territory, this system took root as far back as between the 9th and 11th centuries with the establishment of Islam in the northeastern corner of present-day Nigeria (Kanem-Borno). In this way, the *almajirai* education system, originally called the *Tsangaya*, is recorded as one of the oldest educational system established in the area under a system extending from the frontiers of northern Nigeria across the Chadian region up to the borders of Libya. According to sources, it was established as an organised and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. It was a replica of Islamic learning centres in many Muslim countries, such as the *madrrasah* in Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt and Indonesia etc. (Abdulqadir 2003).

Due to the relevance attached to this system, and the fact that it was the major source of training both in cultural and Islamic education (even for the ruling houses), it was funded directly by the state treasury and the state *zakat* funds, and under the control of the emirs of the traditional government system that existed during the period. It was thus not difficult to ensure the welfare of both the students and their teachers, as the community readily supported these *almajirai* most of whom came from faraway places to enroll in the *Tsangaya* schools. In return, the *almajirai* offered services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving and sewing among others as charity to the community that contributed to their well-being. Writing on the organization of the system, Abdulqadir (2003) stated the following:

The *almajirai* system, though funded, was not over-dependent on the state. The students were at liberty to acquire a vocational and occupational skill in between their Islamic lessons and so were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, tailoring, small businesses, etc. Many of them were the farmers of the northern Nigerian cotton and groundnut pyramids. They formed the majority of the traders in the commercial

city of Kano. They were the leather tanners and leather shoe and bag makers in the old Sokoto Empire. The cap weavers and tailors in Zaria city were said to be *Almajiris*. Thus, they formed the largest percentage of the community workforce and made significant contributions to the economy of the society before the introduction of white collar jobs. After colonialization, they were recruited by the British as columbite and tin miners in Jos city, which was then under Bauchi before the creation of plateau state.

On the achievements of the system up to the eve of conquest, the sources continued thus:

The system also produced the judges, clerks, teachers etc. and laid an elaborate system of administration in Northern Nigeria. They provided the colonial administration with the needed staff. The first set of colonial staff in Northern Nigeria was provided by the *Almajiri* schools and this went on for years. In fact, the *Almajirai* system was a civilizing agent second to none. Before they were gradually replaced, phased out & indeed abandoned. *Almajiri* teachers and their pupils also freely provided their community with Islamic Education, in addition to the development of *Ajami* i.e. reading and writing in Arabic alphabets; ... there were 6000 *Almajiri* schools in Northern Nigeria through which writing came to the North first before any other region. Based on this system, which is founded upon the teachings of Qur'an and Hadith, the then Northern Nigeria was largely educated with a complete way of life, governance, customs, traditional craft, trade and even the mode of dressing. The chronicles of the travellers said that the northern part of the territory was well organised, people were in walled cities, were literate and devout.

The British Conquest and the Beginning of the Collapse of the *Almajirai* System

The colonial invasion of Nigeria with particularly reference to the northern region led to the collapse of the *almajirai* system and the inability of the government to maintain those involved. In this invasion most of the Emirs were either killed or disposed, while those who were subjugated lost control of their territories and accepted their new roles

as mere traditional rulers used only for the system of indirect rule. In most of these areas the British did not give much recognition to the *almajirai* education system as emphasis was on western education. Under the new arrangement, the *almajirai* system did not get the type of attention earlier devoted to it under the Sarauta/Emirate system, especially as related to state funding. This view of the colonial government was based on the fact that the *almajiri* schools were mere religious schools and not directly useful to the agenda of colonialism. This rendered the teachers (mallams) not only unemployed but left them unqualified to be employed despite being able to read and write. Thus, with the British withdrawal of state funding for the *almajiri* schools, the emirs lost fundamental control of the *almajirai* system and it collapsed. In this way, the disregard for the *almajirai* system in favour of western education ignited animosity and antagonism among the *mallams*, their pupils, and northern Nigerian society at large. There was much fear that western education, which is of Christian-European origin, would lead graduates to lose their Islamic identity and embrace anti-social behaviour that negated the values and principles of Islam (Dambuzu 2012). In the opinion of Khalid (1997, 2002), this marked the genesis of the manipulation of the system, which today has become a menace in Nigerian society. In his analysis, the scholar argued:

Forsaken by both the colonial and post-colonial state, the *mallam* receives no salary but lives off the support given by the local community, the contributions of his students and supplementary income-generating activities. Accordingly, for most part of the day, the students are preoccupied with learning to reading, writing and memorization the Qur'an. In between lessons, they engage in a plethora of different activities to secure their livelihoods, notable among which is street begging. These multitude of children as young as five, in tattered clothes, bowl-in-hand, solliciting for food and money on the streets of urban centres has made *almajiranci* system to be synonymous with child destitution, a development that has been accompanied by a decline in respect for the system. The Maitatsine sectarian riots in Kano in the 1980s mark a turning point in writing about them. There has develop the apprehension that this sorely neglected section of the young population could be dragged into major political crises, if urgent steps are not taken to integrate them into the mainstream of the socio-economic life. Already there has been wide, yet to be substantiated, allegations of

the involvement of *almajirai* in the spate of sectarian crises which bedeviled the Northern states in the last decades. Since September 11, there has been renewed pressure on the governments in Nigeria to take a hard look at the system. The pressure has become even more intense since the debut of Taliban-like boko haram armed insurgency in the region.

Destruction/Manipulation of the *Almajirai* System and the Rise of Violent Crime in Northern Nigeria

The conquest of northern Nigeria and the eventual collapse of the *almajirai* system did not go well with those who have benefitted directly or indirectly from the system, since it rendered the teachers unemployed, while the pupils had no direct relevancy in the colonial system. Thus immediately after the colonial authority had overthrown the system and established colonial administration in the area, those benefitting from the *almajirai* system thought of ways of remaining relevant in the new system that had no place for them economically. As a result, the people were made to believe that the colonialists were agents of perpetuating Christian faith and ideology with the target of converting everyone to the new religion. On the other hand, the educators, who were mostly Christian missionaries, were accused of preaching the equality of all men and their system of education was thought to be capable of causing “unrest and fanaticism” by bringing up a “separate educated class in rivalry with the accepted rulers of the people” (Lugard 1922).

Secondly, they were also made to believe that the western education introduced by the infidels was the same thing as Christianisation, which had to be avoided at all cost. It was therefore not surprising that even as late as 1936 enrollment in newly established schools in the northern part of the country was still very low (Akubor and Akinwale 2014). It must, however, be made clear that this sentiment was not shared by all northern aristocrats as some of them wholeheartedly accepted the establishment of schools and even provided land for the building of classrooms and staff quarters. For instance, the Emir of Bida did not only give a boy to Bishop Samuel Crowther to be educated, but also wrote to neighbouring Emirs appealing to them to allow the

Bishop to begin missionary work in their territories (Ayandele 1979). In the case of Zaria and Katsina, Graham (1966) wrote:

...Miller's school in Zaria was at first viewed with suspicion. But gradually, the mallam class in the city appeared to have picked up interest. One mallam was taught Hausa in Roman script and in three months he was able to read. Eight other mallams subsequently joined him. Apparently in response to the growing influence of this mission in the city the Emir was quoted as saying that everybody was free to follow the religion of his choice, that those who had left Islam would not be forced to return, neither will those who were Muslims be forced to embrace another religion. Dr. Miller had a plan to start schools in other emirates, the Emirs of Zaria and Katsina having promised to send two boys each to him.

In the area where they made the people believe that western education was actually the enemy of the religion of most of the people in the area, there were occasional attacks on structures meant for schools. Under this situation little success was recorded in the area of education because of a lack of interest in western education as well as the inability to recruit high quality teachers. The Argungu Mission Diary (1943) reported:

One of the major factors that militated against a successful school programme was the quality of teachers available and the difficulty of finding teachers who could teach through Hausa. It was a frustrating exercise, opening a school in one village and closing one in another mission compound at Argungu so that they would attend the school there but this didn't work out very well. The children didn't want to be in school and the majority of the parents had little interest in educating their offspring. Sometimes it seemed as if the pupils spent more time in running away from school than in the classroom. In the circumstances we must train boys at Argungu who will in future be available as catechists for the surrounding area.

Similarly Sehlinger (1976) wrote:

Those stationed in Argungu over the years, gave their best to the mission but with little results. Perhaps the most devastating experience they had was in 1934 when Frs. Minihane and Dennehy

returned from the annual retreat in Kaduna to find that the house had been burnt down in their absence. There was no question of abandoning the mission; they just had to look for alternative accommodation.

This may be described as the beginning of the period of sowing the seed of manipulation of the *almajirai* system and the subsequent hatred for western education. It led to a situation in which even decades after the overthrow of the system by the British and the subsequent establishment of modern education system a large part of the people continued to resent western education.

The *Almajirai* System and Nigeria Today: The Role of Poverty and Ignorance

With the above situation in view and the impression given of the new system of education as a rival to the religious belief of the majority of the people of northern Nigeria, there is a tendency to view the mindset of the people as being made up by western education, which also increased the level of their hatred to it. Secondly, it set the pace for those who benefitted directly from the system to see Christianity and western education as the same, which therefore should be avoided or eliminated for the survival of Islam. The result was that western education in the area continued to receive low prestige, thereby creating a larger vacuum in term of job opportunities for the youths. This idea later metamorphosed into the Boko Haram Brotherhood. Salihu (2012) described the above position thus:

... More so, political instability and economic hardship since 1980s coupled with other problems including the appalling incapacity of government have resulted in frustration. Unlike the initial stage, when book was suspect because of its evangelization credentials it is now despised for its failure to meet the expectations of many in term of the prospects for better education and employment, and, more fundamentally, the wanton corruption and culpability of its products are related directly to the problems of the country. This is seen as a general background that is relevant to the emergence of the Boko Haram, besides its identity as an Islamist group

It is therefore not surprising that as late as 2006, there were 1.2 million *almajirai* in Kano State alone. In 2009 that number in Kano State (according to the education ministry), rose to 1.6 million *almajirai* in 26,000 Tsangaya schools across the 44 local government districts of the state. Sokoto State had 1.1 million *almajirai* in 19,167 schools; Kaduna State had 824,233, while Borno State, reputed as a centre of Islamic learning, has 389,048 *almajirai* pupils. (The breakdown for Borno State is as follows: Borno indigenes 266,160, followed by those from other states totaling 118,280, non-Nigerians number 4,608 with 4,464 Sangaya *mallams*.) Thus by 2014, it was estimated that over 10 million Nigerian children of school age are outside the school system in the area. According to the estimates carried out by the Ministerial Committee on Madarasah (Islamic school) Education, “the enrolment for the North-East is 2,711,767 Almajiri, North-West has 4,903,000 and North-Central 1,133,288, with a total enrolment of 8,748,055 Almajiri for the three Northern geopolitical zones” (Bobboyi and Yakubu 2005; Abdulrafiu 2009; Idoko 2014). The result is that in a country that officially earned approximately \$50 billion in revenue from its oil reserves in 2012–13, 70 per cent of the northern population lives below the poverty line, and the mostly Muslim north has higher unemployment than the national average (Sodipo 2013).

In line with the above and over the years in Nigeria (especially from the 1980s) the word *almajiri* (derived from the Arabic word “*al-Muhajir*”), which original meant a seeker of Islamic knowledge, has come to represent any child or adult who begs for assistance in the streets or from door to door. The majority of *almajirai* in Nigeria are children between 3 and 18 years of age. It has been established that these children are totally neglected by their parents and teachers, and are being used as economic tools. According to Biu (2008), the situation has resulted in the fact that *almajirai* are now children destitute, who are deprived of the basic necessities of living and seemingly disadvantaged in all facets of socio-economic life in society. This is against the basic tenet of Islamic teachings and contrary to the teachings of the Qur’an and Hadith, which strongly prohibit begging except in very special circumstances (Abdulrafiu 2009). Such situations could include a man’s loss of property in case of a disaster, or when a man has loaned much of his money for the common good, such as bringing peace between two warring parties. Records show that in Kano state alone there are 13,335 *almajiri* schools housing an

estimated 1,272,844 *almajirai* with 45,454 *mallams*, or teachers (Idoko 2014). All these teachers depend largely on the earnings of the children from begging and on the good will of members of the community. Also the situations under which these *almajirai* are trained have exposed them to hard life as they are most often not housed and left to fend for themselves. It has also been found that most of those who claim to be teaching the *almajirai*, do not possess the basic qualifications needed to positively impact the youths (Akubor 2007).

Apart from the above, societal neglect and corruption as exhibited in the government circle, especially since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, apparently exposed the underbelly of the age-old neglect of the development of northern Nigeria by different segments of its power elites – the political, military, educated and business elites – who, after attaining high status in society, opt to neglect the well-being of their communities and the region in general. Liman (2013) has argued that over the years the northern politicians in particular have manifested an incredible poverty of ideas, vision and mission in the discharge of their responsibility as leaders in their own states and local governments. In a more graphical form the scholars argued thus:

Between 1999 and 2012, the North had collectively realized a colossal sum of money from the federation accounts as revenue, but there was nothing to show for it by way of investment in human capital development, infrastructure, industry, agriculture and education; areas in which the North has comparative advantage and can rely upon for social regeneration. A recent report has it that the “sum of N8.3 trillion accrued to the North from the Federation Account in 11 years” was all embezzled. The fact that agriculture is the mainstay of northern Nigerian economy, authorities should have facilitated taking it to respectable and sustainable levels. Total reliance on oil revenue within the current context of political jostling over resource control also killed the spirit of self-reliance, industry, accountability and transparency leading to the culture of embezzlement and corruption at all levels of governance.

On the menace of the *almajirai* activities as a tide to total neglect and poverty, the argument continued:

The children that have been forced into begging are proving to be a serious menace to society. They are sometimes believed to be the cannon fodder in the ethno-religious and communal clashes that have become a recurring decimal in the region. All efforts to address the menace of Almajiri, including the federal government intervention to domesticate them and integrate them into society, are more or less not proving effective... However, the increasing rates of poverty in northern Nigeria and the overwhelming indifference of the elites to this social hazard are evidently increasing the number of Almajiri and crime in the streets.

The above coupled with the lack of quality education has indeed increased the number of school dropouts roaming the streets of northern Nigerian towns and cities, thus increasing the tendencies of these youths to engage in evil vices. This is because the unfortunate children and youth who are unable to make it to tertiary institutions or get some training in skills are in their large number exposed to so many anti-social behaviours like theft, armed robbery, rape, kidnapping for ransom, drug addiction and violence in the streets. The worst dimension of it all is in the frequency with which desperate politicians are drafting the youth for criminal activities against their opponents. They use vagrant youths to cause mayhem, to intimidate, to assassinate and to engage in arson. In line with this, Lawan (2012) argued that any country with a high level of unemployment and poverty is sitting on a time-bomb, because such unemployment and poverty stricken youths could easily be mobilised to indulge in senseless killings and destructions (Sani 2015). This is because the teeming unemployed and idle hands of the youths have on several occasions been manipulated by the political, military or economic elites to achieve their selfish, egoistic and destructive ambitions (Sani 2007). It has also been established that the manipulated *almajirai* system provides the training ground of those, who later graduate into full scale criminality. This is because of the hardship they are exposed to and the uncensored lives they live as *almajirai* in the streets. The groups they graduate into go by various names in different parts of northern Nigeria. For instance in Borno they are referred to as *Ecomog*, *Area Boys* in Sokoto, *Kawaye* in Kaduna and Katsina, *Yan Daba* in Kano, *Yan Sara Suka* in Bauchi, *Shinco* in Adamawa and *Yan Kalare* in Gombe and these are armed, most commonly with machetes, clubs and similar weaponry (Kushee 2008; Pongri 2008; Akubor 2012). Due to their

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condition and high patronage from the political class, these have proven easy prey for politicians, who offer them small amounts of money, drugs, alcohol and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assault or simply to accompany their campaigns in a demonstration of muscle. For example, between December 2003 and April 2007, at least 115 people were killed and scores more injured as a result of *Kalare* violence in Gombe state (Kushee 2008; Akubor 2012).

Illustrating this as demonstrated in Kano in 2002, Sani (2007) observed:

When the Kano riots by youths broke out into violent conflicts protesting the United States Military campaign against Afghanistan in 2002, a highly placed government official, in the person of the then Kano state Deputy Governor, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, had observed that hundreds of unemployed youths took advantage of the anti-United States protest to unleash havoc and destruction on innocent citizens. He said further that the state was populated with thousands of jobless youths who only wait for any slight opportunity to ignite violent conflicts where they kill and maim innocent lives and loot property.

Thus, without a solid educational foundation, good jobs and viable means of livelihood, these youths must create for themselves means of survival in an already chaotic socio-economic situation as found in Nigeria. Table 1 below provides some explanation to this.

***Table 1: General Assessment of Facilities available to the People of Nigeria**

Region	Youth Literacy (% Age 5-16)	Primary School Attendance (%)	Secondary School Attendance (%)	Access to improved Drinking Water (%)	Access to improved Sanitation (%)	Small and Medium Businesses per 100,000	Watches Television once a week (%)	Read a newspaper once a week (%)
North East	18	43	24	39	28	9	19	9
North West	24	37	21	47	37	13	21	10
North Central	43	67	41	51	27	18	49	19
South West	78	79	64	73	26	20	73	21
South South	70	80	59	63	32	14	75	30
South East	66	79	58	71	41	15	52	27

Sources: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria National Population Commission, and the US Agency for International Development (2010-2012)

A critical analysis of the table above shows that not much has been achieved in eliminating ignorance and poverty from the northern part of the country years after independence. This conclusion gives credence to the position adopted by Lamido Sanusi, former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, when he observed that years after the colonialists have left the gap between the North and the South is widening. In his analysis he particularly noted that only five northern states scored above the national literacy level of 75.3 per cent, which has led to a situation in which the failure to prioritise mass education has saddled Sokoto State with a literacy level of 33.1 per cent and Bauchi 39.5 per cent. Records from the Central Bank of Nigeria also state that female literacy in Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Jigawa, Katsina, Bauchi and Niger is below 20 per cent, compared to 81 per cent

and higher in Ekiti, Imo, Anambra, Ogun and Lagos in the South. Accordingly, unemployment as of 2012 was higher in the Northern states than the national average of 23.9 per cent, with Zamfara having 42.6 per cent, Bauchi 41.4 per cent, and Niger 39.4 per cent (Punch Editorial Board 2012).

Poverty, Ignorance and Northern Nigeria: The Road to Terrorism

Research by academics, Non-Governmental Organisations, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme clearly establish a correlation between poverty, insecurity/terrorism, especially as it relates to the northern part of Nigeria. The situation these young men and women find themselves in as a result of poor governance and obnoxious economic policies has been linked to the root cause of youth crisis since the mid 1980s (O'Brien 1996). In a more specific manner, both Gore and Pratten (2003) and Diouf (2003) argue that because many hopeless youths in this area now operate from a marginal geography and culture that is largely antagonistic to the dominant culture, their engagement with the state has become ambivalent, characterized by complicity, insurgency and disengagement. This alienation, in turn, pushes the youth to embrace alternative survival strategies outside the mainstream and socially approved means of livelihood, which exposes the entire society to instability. This is clearly stated in Oscar (1966), in which he presented this argument thus:

Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself. By the time slam children are six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic values of their subculture. Thereafter they are psychologically unready to take full advantage of changing conditions or improving opportunities that may develop their life time... The individual who grows up in this culture has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority.

Domesticating the above argument to fit into the situation concerning the northern part of the country in particular, and Nigeria in general, Sani (2008) wrote:

Poverty has become so endemic that the great majority of the citizens have lost hope and faith and have started considering their conditions as a given, unchangeable act of providence since the more they individually struggle to redeem themselves from it, the more they plunge deeper into its abyss.

It is therefore not surprising that the *almajirai* in Northern Nigeria for decades have been part of a complex matrix in which they have been used to extend wars of attrition at different times in the name of God. This conclusion is based on the fact that investigations have revealed that the terrorist group Boko Haram recruited and used *almajirai* as child soldiers over the years. According to USBLA (2013), boys as young as 11 were reportedly paid to fight, plant bombs, spy and act as suicide bomb. Girls have been abducted by Boko Haram for slave labour or sexual exploitation; some of these girls were abducted while working on farms in remote villages or hawking wares on the street. It has also been established that Boko Haram are heavily sponsored by powerful agents within and outside the country with destructive intentions. This opinion is reinforced by Bello-Barkindo (2002):

Their sponsors belong hypothetically to the same group that has for decades, denied them the right to learn how to distinguish right from wrong. If the Almajiri had well-paved streets like the ones in the G.R.A's he would not want them littered with corpses of Christians. If he had a job, he would not expose himself to the danger that rioting comes with. If he had a home he would not be there to be incited. If he had hope, he would not find refuge in extremism.

In this condition, the worst hit people are the *almajirai*, who are totally dependent on alms for survival. Owing to widespread poverty, some parents are left with no choice than to continue sending their children into the street disguised as *almajirai*. According to the 2010 National Bureau of Statistics' poverty profile, though poverty permeates the entire country, it is more profound in the North. The report shows that among the six geopolitical zones of the country, the Northwest and Northeast recorded the highest poverty rates of 70 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively. The projection of the Bureau for 2011 was also gloomy with predictions of 71.5 per cent, 61.9 per cent, and 62.8 per cent poverty rates for North-Central, Northeast and

Northwest, respectively (Punch Editorial Board, 8 May 2012). The U.N. 2008–2009 human development report rated the North as the poorest region of the country, using such indicators as child mortality, maternal mortality, and the presence or absence of diseases like polio and measles, which have been nearly eradicated in southern Nigeria (Agbaegbu 2012). Punch (2012) noted:

The reality of grim poverty in the North is stark. Of the 100 million Nigerians living in “absolute poverty” those who can afford only bare essentials of food, shelter and clothing — the majority reside in the Northern states. The North-West has the highest poverty rate with 70 per cent of its people living below \$1 per day. The North-East follows with 69 per cent and the North-Central with 59.5 per cent. The three Southern zones have no cause to rejoice either as poverty level there ranges between 49.8 per cent and 58.7 per cent. The lesson from these latest figures from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics is that wrong choices, wrong policies and poor leadership have led to the rise in poverty from a national average of 54.7 per cent in 2004 to 60.9 per cent in 2010.

Thus, the overall socio-economic situation has been growing from worse to worst over the years. This is aptly represented in the table below. Although this situation cuts across all regions in the country, the socio-economic condition of the northern region seems more pathetic.

Table 2: Poverty by Geo-Political Zone

Geopolitical Zone	Percentage					
	1980	1985–86	1992	1997	2004	2010
Northeast	35.6	53.2	54.0	68.0	72.2	76.3
Northwest	37.7	48.2	36.5	62.0	71.2	77.7
N/ Central	32.2	48.4	46.0	53.0	67.0	67.5
South East	12.9	30.9	41.0	79.5	26.7	67.0
South West	13.4	42.0	43.1	74.1	43.0	59.1
S/ South	13.2	38.0	40.8	78.6	35.1	63.7
Nationwide	28.1	43.0	42.7	69.2	54.4	69.0

Source: www.otiveigbuzor.com

Scholars have argued that the statistics as presented in table 2 could be indicative of the frustration a large part of the young in the northern

part of the country is experiencing. This frustration has made many northerners (especially the *almajirai*) predisposed to conflict, crime, violence, human trafficking, prostitution and several other social vices. This is better understood when considered in line with various sources, local and international, that over 70 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line. This means that they (the 70 per cent) survive on one U.S. dollar (\$1) (N150) a day for all their needs – food, clothing, education, health care, housing, transportation, water, etc. It has also been established that over 70 million Nigerians have no access to potable water. This represents six per cent of the world's 1.1 billion persons who do not have access to safe drinking water. This calculation is based on the fact that Nigeria's population is about 1.1 per cent of the world's population (Osarenren 2011). Thus the standardised *almajirai* system has provided a sort of economic relieve as some of these children originally sent to other towns and cities to “acquire education” are sent by their teachers and sponsors on the streets to engage in petty trade in items like kola nut, groundnut, maize, and assorted condiments to augment the lean income of their families. Such girl children are exposed to countless social hazards like sexual abuse, rape, kidnapping, etc.

Attempts by various bodies to stop the manipulation of the *almajirai* system and related actions to safeguard children from danger in Nigeria have met with resistance from religious leaders in states where the *almajirai* system flourishes. In areas where conscious efforts are taken to make this work, the states have enacted provisions to bolster protection for working children within their territory. For example, in the 2006 Abia State Child's Rights Law prohibits all children under 18 from engaging in domestic service outside the home or family environment, just as Delta State prohibits children from street trading during school days (Abia State Child's Rights Law 2006). Similarly, governments of Anambra, Bayelsa and Lagos have prohibited children from all forms of street trading (LLC 2010). In the northern part of the country, there is a National Framework for the Development and Integration of *Almajiri* Education in the Universal Basic Education Scheme, while Kano state initiated a prohibition against *almajirai* children begging on the street while Kaduna and Borno states talk of providing free feeding and transportation to school children (U.S. Embassy-Abuja reporting 2014). Nevertheless, not much has been achieved thus far. This is because these efforts have been interpreted

by some quarters as an attempt to destroy the teachings of Islamic religion.

Implications for National Development

From the available evidence it has been established that Northern Nigeria has been the locus of an upsurge in youth radicalization and virulent militant Islamist groups in Nigeria since 2009. Nigeria's ranking on the Global Terrorism Index rose from 16th out of 158 countries in 2008 to 6th (tied with Somalia) by the end of 2011. There were 168 officially recorded terrorist attacks in 2011 alone. Bombings across the northeast prompted President Goodluck Jonathan in May 2013 to declare a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States. Many Nigerians have come to question whether the country is on the brink of a civil war (Sodipo 2013).

One area in which this has affected national development is in the field of recurring violent crises and economic losses. It has been found that before the country attained independence and the incursion of the military into the political scene, most of the conflicts in the country were in the form of political thuggery, that is, gangsters of the different political parties attempting to prevent, if necessary, by forcefully opposing political parties from conducting election campaigns in the territories they regarded as the area of their jurisprudence (Usman 2002). However, from the late 1970s up to the 1980s, (with the rise in the number of jobless young men and women, poverty and the failure of the *almajirai* system) the situation changed to outright violence leading to massive killings and the destruction of properties, starting with the Maitatsine Uprising in Kano, in the northern part of the country, in which *almajirai* provided a ready tool for execution. Although most of these crises are often gabbed with religious colouration, it has been established over time that it is more a result of poverty and economic depression. The Maitatsines has therefore been described as an opener of the gateway for crises, as after the Maitatsine Uprising several other violent outbursts and/or religious riots followed sequentially. These included the Bullum-Kutu (Maitatsine) in October 1982, Rigasa (Kaduna) in 1982, Jimeta-Yola; Gombe (Bauchi state) in 1984. Similarly, Hussaini Abdul (n.d.) wrote:

Since the 1980s, Ethnic and Religious crises have become a re-occurring decimal in Northern Nigeria. There is virtually no state out of the 19 states that constitute the Northern Nigeria that crisis of this nature has not raised its ugly head. Since the middle 1980s the spate of violence has continued to increase. Among these includes: Maitatsine crisis in Kano 1980, Bullum-Kutu 1982, Maiduguri 1982, Yola 1984, Ilorin 1984, Bauchi 1984, Ilorin 1987, Kano 1984, Kafanchan 1987, Zuru 1980, Birnin Kebbi 1990, Katsina 1991, Tafawa Balewa 1991, Kano 1991, Jalingo 1992, Kaduna Polytechnic 1992, Kasuwar Magani (Kaduna) 1994, Gure Kahugu 1987, Kafanchan 1987, 1999, Kaduna 2000 Jos 2001, Kano 2001, Tafawa Balewa (since 2000), Nasarawa 2001. Others include Chamba-Kuteb crisis in Taraba state since 1975 Tiv-Jukun crisis, Bassa-Igbira crisis in Toto and a host of others. While these crises continue to exhibit ethnic and religious colorations, and portray clear manifestation of criminality and frustration resulting from sociological and economic alienation coming from wide spread poverty and unemployment, there are other forces whose identity and character are difficult to define. Many people lost their lives as a result of these crises, some sustained injuries of various degrees, some had their properties worth millions of Naira either destroyed or looted; yet others get permanently dislocated and psychologically depressed. These crises have created a general threat to the security of the citizens, it has resulted in the violation of the rights of citizens. Many people “either through miscarriage of justice or through the failure of the state to prosecute perpetrators and instigators of these clashes” have been unjustly treated.

Focusing on the period 1999–2007, Bui (2008) wrote:

Between 1999 and 2007 Northern Nigeria has witnessed violent ethno-religious crises in Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Adamawa, Jigawa, Benue and Nassarawa states. The common factor in these crises has been an army of young destitute children usually called Almajiri. Over various different periods these young children and youths between ages 6–20 have been manipulated by some unseen forces through a mere “mess of pottage”, to inflict injury, kill, maim, rape and destroy properties belonging to supposed enemies.

Closely related to the above is the consistent rise in number of Internally Displaced Persons in over 26 camps across the country. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) as of April 2015 there were over 1,491,706 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe (IOM/NEMA 2015). Although various reasons have been advanced for this upsurge, the insurgency in the northeast was reported as the predominant cause of displacement, with fewer than 6 per cent of those displaced fleeing inter-communal clashes and disasters. While most were displaced in 2014, up to a third fled violence in the first four months of 2015 alone. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) recorded an additional 47,276 IDPs in Plateau, Nasarawa, Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Kano and Kaduna in February (IOM/NEMA, February 2015). This would bring the total number of registered IDPs to 1,538,982 in these northern states and parts of the Middle Belt. This is indeed a great economic loss considering the quantum of impact this would have made on the socio-economic life of the nation under calm condition.

The immediate impact of the above is that Northern Nigeria continues to display some of the worst human development indicators in the world. In northeast Nigeria, 71.5 per cent of the population live in absolute poverty and more than half are malnourished, making it the poorest part of the country. Insecurity, desertification and flooding have interrupted farming activities, the main source of income for most northerners. Forty per cent of Nigerian children aged 6–11 do not attend any primary school, and northern Nigeria has the worst school attendance rates, especially for its girls. The literacy rate in Lagos, Nigeria's bustling commercial capital, is 92 per cent while in Kano, the north's commercial capital and Nigeria's second biggest city, it is 49 per cent. In the northeastern state of Borno, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, it is under 15 per cent. In 2010, nine of the 19 northern states had the highest levels of unemployment in Nigeria – some as high as 40 per cent – with young northerners being overwhelmingly more likely to be jobless. The worsening challenges which poverty, youth unemployment, poor infrastructure, illiteracy and insecurity pose are inherently systemic and a consequence of the collective failure of leaders at all tiers of government to properly

deliver public goods and services or to accountably manage public funds (Hoffmann 2014).

Also the above has negatively impacted investment in that part of the country as investors and people flee in droves from sectarian strife and terrorism. This has further heightened the level of poverty, unemployment, under-employment and the lack of basic amenities. Thus once these youths are unemployed or underemployed, their idle hands and minds provide a large pool of recruits for violent groups. The most ruinous has been the cynical deployment of religion in the service of politics by a few. It is a potentially dangerous cocktail.

In the area of food production, the area has continued to lag behind when considered from the potential human and material resources it possesses. For instance, it has been argued that with 53 per cent of the population and 65 per cent of the land mass, advantage in food and cash crops, and a wide range of mineral deposits, Northern Nigeria should not be the least developed part of the country it is today. However, a 2007 survey by Economic Associates found that the North contributed only 23 per cent to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product while the three Southern states "Lagos, Delta and Rivers" contributed 36 per cent.

The above situation is not a good sign for any nation that is aiming to be among the Twenty Developed Nations of the world by 2020. It is even more alarming considering the fact that these items become very expensive and are out of reach of the ordinary citizens when they finally get to the market. In line with this analysis the present paper argues that there is an urgent need to revitalise the role of rural families in agricultural production and food security. However, at present, this seems an illusion, as apart from the problem of inadequate support from the Nigerian government, other situations have impeded the large-scale involvement of the family in agriculture. For example, it has been established that ca. 19,000 farmers in 2013, abandoned their farms in the fertile New Marte District in Northern Borno, along the Lake Chad Basin, while a large number could not cultivate their farms due to the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency, which took over the areas in northern Borno State bordering on Cameroon, Chad and Niger, forced thousands of residents, most of them subsistent farmers, from their homes. This disrupted farming in the area, which

produces the bulk of the staple food – maize, millet, wheat, rice and cowpeas – grown in the region (Caritas 2014). In line with this, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) has declared a food crisis condition in Yobe and Borno and the other states in the region. This is mainly due to the fact that the northern part of Nigeria, precisely Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Yobe, Borno, Jigawa and Kano, has been unstable due to crises since 1999 that have crippled all farming activities (Idoko 2014).

The situation outlined above is even more worrisome when seen in the light of the report of the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), with argued that approximately 492,000 children in northern Nigeria are severally malnourished. It further declared (according to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that global acute malnutrition rates are highest in Sokoto State at 16.2 per cent, while Kano State at 9.2 per cent has the lowest. The international emergency threshold is 15 per cent. Decrying the situation in Nigeria as well as encouraging the government to turn to the family for agricultural production against food insecurity will certainly remain a mirage as long as the area remains unstable (Idoko 2014).

Conclusion

From the discourse so far, it is clear that poverty and ignorance play vital roles in the emergence of groups of people who, having lost hope and faith in the system and its ability to rescue them from hardship, begin to take their destiny in their own hands. This is even more dangerous when within the system there exist groups of individuals who will continue to manipulate such situations in order to create anarchy so that they can remain relevant both politically and economically. One position the present paper has constantly maintained is that there is nothing absolutely wrong with both *makarantar allo* (Qur’anic school) and *makarantar ilmi* (advanced knowledge school), which produce *almajirai*. However, the manipulation of the system as well as the fact that some individuals have subjected these pupils to ignorance and poverty have led to a situation where they are bound to take their destiny in their own hands. The result is a venture into terrorism by some of them while others have become ready available tools for

politics and still others are bent on setting the nation ablaze. The outcome is the emergence of extreme religious groups, which have become a threat to national development. The present paper thus argues that the current socio-economic situation is responsible for the seemingly gloomy future, which the country is presently faced with as reflected in youths, largely unemployed, who are susceptible to financial inducement and wait for any opportunity to ignite violent conflicts where they kill and maim innocent lives and loot property.

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