

Terrorism and Violent Extremism in North-Eastern Nigeria: Toward a Model of Radicalization of the Almajiri Cohort

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Abstract : *Despite the existence of a voluminous studies on Radicalization and violent Extremism the concept is still new within the Nigerian context, as there is absence of empirical model explaining the why and how of the African version of Radicalization, in spite of the increasing surge of insurgency and terrorist related activities in the continent. This therefore creates the need to study the factors that shape the development of homegrown extremist within the African context. More so, as all the existing models of Radicalization are context-specific and are not in a complete harmony with one another hence the simple question of how do some individual subscribes to violent extremism remains to a larger extent unanswered, due to lack of valuable framework upon which assumption shall be made on the basis of theoretical paradigm. This paper intends to contribute to the heated debate on the linkage of the Almajiri system and insurgency in the North-eastern Nigeria. It's therefore explored the societal practices and individual factors responsible for revamping the support for terrorism among the Almajiri cohorts in north-eastern Nigeria, specifically the roles of socio-cultural factors in encouraging conviction and involvement, as well as the contribution of myriads of push and pull factors such as unfavorable socio-political condition, economic strain and grievances. The work adopts an ethnographic design in which data were collected through in-depth-interview, focus group discussion and personal observation. The data were thus analyzed in light of theoretical paradigm and previous models in which factors such as bad governance, collective strain, target attribution, cultural resistance; social identity and social learning were identified and discussed.*

Keywords: *Radicalization, violence, extremism, Almajiri cohorts, Youth, Nigeria*

Introduction

A substantial body of research literature exists on radicalization and violent extremism (Borum, 2004, 2011; Sageman, 2014; Precht, 2007; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Moghaddam, 2009; Hegghammer, 2010) but little is known about the concept and its applicability in explaining the why and how of the African version of radicalization despite the increasing surge in insurgency and terrorist related activities in the continent. It is imperative to note that in spite of the existence of huge body of works related to terrorism in Africa quite number of important questions remained unanswered, because quite numbers of important areas are yet to be explored. For instance, why does the insurgence continue to attract new recruit and enjoy the support of some youth despite strong military offensiveness? How do the youth become exposed to extremism? When and how the youth do undergoes transformation from harmless innocent citizens to an embodiment of violence? and what prevent other youth who are exposed to same socio-economic and political conditions from subscribing to violence? These are other relevant questions remain to a large extent unanswered.

This therefore creates the need to study the factors that shape the development of homegrown extremist within the African context because of two important reasons. First, while there are a considerable number of research literatures on radicalization, they are all context specific as great majority of these studies are euro-centric with few focusing on Asia hence the need for an Afro-centric study. Secondly, an in-depth reviewed of the existing models of radicalization revealed a problem of consistency as they do not seem to be in a complete harmony with one another though all the models appear to have some real world impact regardless of their empirical validity (Borum, 2011). However, any study which try to explore the conditions under which individual learn certain behavioral patterns consider problematic to human

society need to be theoretically and empirically grounded so as to establish a sound footing upon which decisions and policy directives should be made (Sageman, 2014). Here lies in the problem of generalization, because the question still remains the same, which of the several models and approaches do we concur with? Shall we presume that all these different models have equal empirical validity and sensibility for explaining radicalization process in every context?

Consequently, the simple question of how do few individual subscribes to violent extremism remains to a larger extent unanswered, due to lack of valuable framework upon which assumption shall be made on the basis of theoretical paradigm (Borum, 2011). It is thus imperative to explore more vital areas in order to bring to limelight factors contributing to individual radicalization into violent extremism. As argue by Borum (2011), a future study on Radicalization shall focus on exploring the societal practices and individual factors responsible for revamping the support for terrorism, specifically the roles of social structures and bonds in encouraging conviction and involvement, as well as the contribution of myriads of push and pull factors such as unfavorable socio-political condition, grievances, social status and financial gain.

The Almajiri system as an instrument of radicalization: A review of existing narratives

A substantial body of research literature exist on the linkage between the Almajiri system and political violence in Northern Nigeria, thereby generating a heated debate on the phenomenon (Taiwo, 2013; Hoechner, 2013, 2015; Aghedo & Eke, 2013; Aghedo & Osumah, 2014; Onuoha, 2014; Ayegba, 2015; Omeni; 2015). However, before delving into such debate there is a need to briefly explain what the Almajiri system entails and how it does operate.

The concept of Almajiri was coined from an Arabic word "Almuhajir" which connotes a migrant, the word is therefore use to describe the students of an informal Arabic schools called the Almajiri system which dates back to the eleventh century. In the pre-colonial period, Almajirai lived with their guardians and were attending school in a demarcated place called a tsangaya. However, the political and social changes accompanying the Usman Dan-Fodio jihad (1804–1808), resulted in structural transformation of the system which saw the creation of an inspectorate of Qur'anic and Arabic studies, which invariably served as a regulative mechanism thereby representing an important milestone in the annals of Qur'anic education in Nigeria (Aliyu, 2015).

The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorate in 1914 marked the establishment of the Nigerian state, a development that was accompanied by the modernization of vast urban areas thereby placing significant numbers of the Almajiri schools in these urban areas. This therefore created a situation in which peoples from the rural areas send their kids to these urban communities, such as, Maiduguri and Kano which were eminent as center for Qur'anic education (Baba 2010). With increasing presence of the Almajiri school students in these urban areas, the pattern of the relationship between these students and their teachers therefore turned out to increasingly draw the interest of researchers and security experts (Muhammad, 2013).

The Almajiri system represent a system in which a large youth cohort between the ages of three and twelve, are sent by their parents to a system of Islamic boarding school, in order to study the Qur'an under an individual Islamic scholar popularly refer to as Malam. Once enlisted, the desire is that the young men will study the Qur'an, and contribute to the welfare of their teacher, as well as the discharge of other domestic obligations. The Learning process, by and large would continue until the student's reach graduation normally in their mid-twenties (Muhammad, 2013).

To this end, the Almajiri system as it is constituted today represent a subject of so much debate and controversies, in which the main stream literature portrays it as an institution for the production of a socio-economically vulnerable youth cohort who are susceptible to radicalization (Ajakaye, 2014). For instance, some scholars argued that the pupils from the Almajiri School are rendered socially and economically destitute hence become parts of the local criminal gangs that unleash violence on the society (Danjibo, 2009; Falola, 2009; Umar, 2013). While others opined that the Almajiri school system in itself serves as an instrument of radicalization as the schools are now run by radical Islamic preachers (Purefoy, 2010). On his part Agbiboa (2013), try to forge a linkage between socioeconomic deprivation and the pervasive incidence of insurgency in northern Nigeria, revolving around the relative deprivation theory he further argued that the low score on human development index in factors such as literacy and unemployment is responsible for violence and radicalization in northern Nigeria. on the other end Ngbea and Hillary (2014) asserted that the Almajiri system has "outlived its purpose and has become a breeding ground for child begging and potential terrorist's camps in Nigeria." as it institutionalized "child abuse, social exclusion and chronic poverty"

in that Almajiri pupils substitute begging for learning.

However, the above narratives were challenge on three counts, first for over simplifying the phenomenon as most of these narratives the authors fail to perfectly comprehend the nature and practice of the Almajiri system hence unable to clearly differentiate the Almajirai cohort from among the total population of homeless and destitute youth in Northern Nigeria (Omeni, 2015). This is because the concept *Almajiri* as utilized by these studies erroneously covered all the categories of violent youth in Northern Nigeria such as “yan daba” “yan Sara suka” “yan bangan siyasa”. The above conceptualization is not only flawed but dangerous as it creates a situation in which the Almajiri school system has being inherently stigmatized. Additionally, such narratives also portray the Almajirai cohorts in a clearly different connotation in which the pupils are regarded as problems instead of the victims of a socioeconomically challenged youth system (Hill, 2010). Consequently, significant number of people within the broader Nigerian society does not seem to understand who the Almajirai are and what the Almajiri system really entails (Hoechner 2013). This lack of understanding is manifested glaringly in both the contemporary and historical literature in which, all the categories of delinquent youths in northern Nigeria regardless of whether they are affiliated to the Almajiri system or not are classified and labeled Almajirai (Umar, 2013, Isichei 1987;). This is worrisome because instead of providing a solution such narratives further compound the problems of youth violence and radicalization in northern Nigeria.

Secondly, as argued by Hoechner (2015), the mainstream literature on the role of *Almajirai* in violence and radicalization are often taken to the extreme because as she observed “Almajirai may well be, and probably are, amongst the followers of Boko Haram, [but] there is no systematic evidence to support such assertions” (2). She therefore further argued that, though some *Almajirai* may willingly or through coercion join the insurgents, however, “there are undeniably problems and dangers related to the circumstances under which many Almajirai grow up. Yet, many narratives construe negative outcomes as an automatic and inevitable result of Almajiri system.”

Thirdly, the mainstream literature forges a conceptual linkage between the socioeconomic destitution of the Almajirai and the increase in youth restiveness in northern Nigerian. The inference to be drawn from the established narrative is that the socioeconomic destitution of the Almajirai cohorts makes them vulnerable to

radicalization and violent insurgency (Isichei 1987; Danjibo 2009; Falola 2009; Umar 2013, Aghedo & Eke, 2013; Aghedo & Osumah, 2014; Ayegba, 2015). However, as pointed by Hoechner (2013: 17) “the conditions under which Almajirai may come to learn values and behaviors, considered to be problematic, remain unexplored,” Same opinion was echoed by Omeni (2015).

Against the above background, this study intends to fill this research fissure by exploring the conditions under which the Almajiri cohort become exposed to values and behavioral patterns which lead to their radicalization. It is however, the contention of this paper that the youth cohort (such as “Yan kalare” “yan sara suka” and ECOMOG) who are often exploited and used by the politicians as thugs and hoodlums to cause riot, foment trouble and disrupt electoral process are not from the Almajiri cohorts but rather they are from other categories of youth cohorts such as “yan daba” “yan tauri” “yan sara suka” and “yan bangan siyasa” who are unaffiliated with the Almajiri school system. However, the foot soldiers used by the insurgence of maitatsine were largely from “Gardawa” (Graduate of Almajiri school system) and the founder of Boko Haram Mohammed Yusuf was also a Gardi (singular for Gardawa) whose biological father was killed among the disciples of Mohammed Marwa the founder of the Matatsine insurgency of the 1980’s in the town of Jakusko of Yobe state. This study is therefore, concern with the latter category of political violence (domestic terrorism and insurgency).

This work therefore argues that though Almajiri system in itself does not radicalized the Almajirai cohorts but it has directly contributed in producing a large youth cohorts with a strong sense of identity, in which as suggested by evidence out of the 10.5 million out of school children in Nigeria 9.5 are Almajirai cohort where the hub of the Boko Haram insurgency (i.e. Borno state) alone has 1.8 million Almajirai couple with seventy per cent (70%) out of school children the highest in the entire country (Owen & Usman, 2015).

Contemporary literature forges a linkage though contestable between the existence of large youth cohort and political violence (Urdal, 2008; Idrees, Shabbir, Roman, & Atif, 2015; Blum, 2015; Grimm, 2015). This position revolves on the presumption that youth are volatile and revolutionary therefore easy to be coopted into radical movement especially under unfavorable political and economic conditions. However, this position was challenge for inability to provide empirical evidence on how the generational consciousness of common identity and collectivism

are developed by the youth. It also fails to explain why other youth cohort in similar political and economic conditions does not subscribe to violence (Sommers, 2011).

In order to contribute to this debate, this article comes up with four arguments; Firstly, the Nigerian state as it is constituted today is characterized by rancor, acrimony and mistrust among its citizens precipitating from the diversity in religion, culture, region and ethnicity which serves as important sources of identity formation and development. Secondly, to achieve political stability in the country the political system must strike a balance between these conflicting identities by entrenching an ideal democratic practice which can guarantee a future for all the citizens irrespective of their religion or social class. Thirdly, Nigerian state is facing a crisis of legitimacy because the interest and identity of some group of youth are neither promoted nor safeguarded by the political system. Fourthly, the socio-economic principles associated with the western liberal democratic model are either weakly internalized or not internalized within the body polity, which therefore create a room for cultural threat, cultural resistance and antinomian behavior by the youth whose interest and identity are not safeguarded by the state.

Method and Data

This work adopted ethnographic study in which data was collected through direct observations, in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion, a total number of 30 informants were interviewed cutting across the students from Almajiri School, Islamic clerics, parents of the Almajirai cohorts, the Mallams (teachers of Almajiri School) and members of the academics. The study was conducted between April to October 2016, the study was conducted in four states in North-eastern Nigeria namely Adamawa (Mubi north Local Government), Gombe (Akko local Government), Taraba (Jalingo local government) and Yobe states (Gulani local Government). The information from the interview was translated, transcribed and analyzed based on the conceptual/analytical model developed by the researchers.

The Model

The analytical model for this study is developed from the combinations of theories such as the General Strain Theory of Terrorism (Agnew, 2010), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979), the Youth Bulge theory, (Urdal, 2006) and the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). In brief Bad governance due to lack of opportunity and space for the youth to participate in governance and politics depict the first and most important factor in

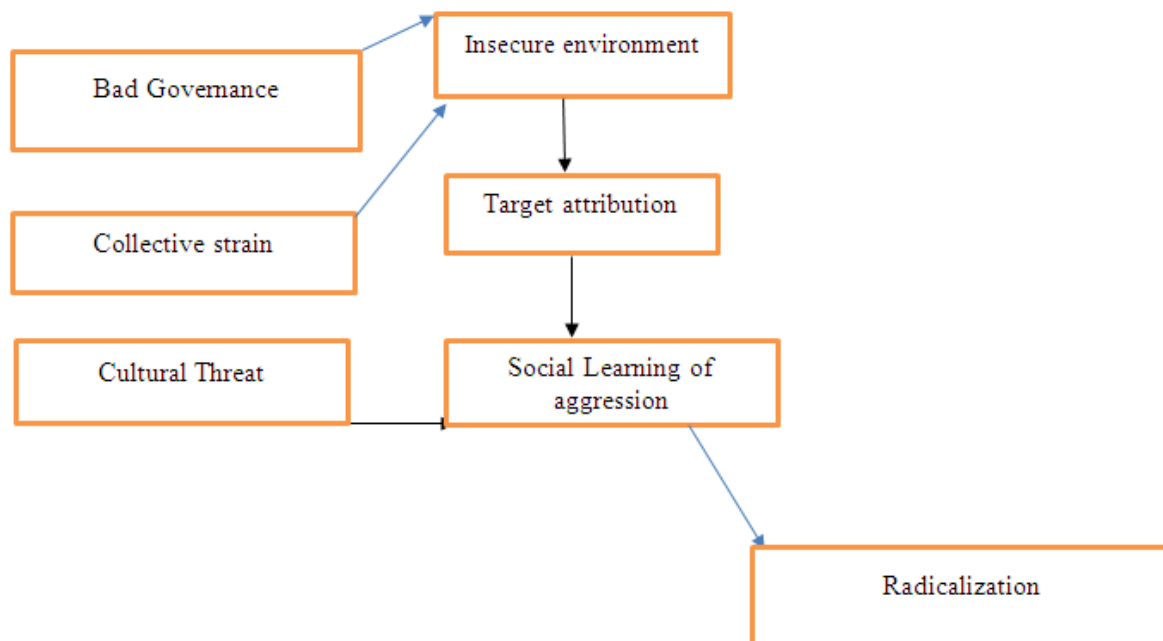
the process of radicalization. This is because the youth constituted the largest portion of the population at the center of social interaction in Nigeria, yet they are the less significant group in terms of political and economic process. Thus the feelings of being excluded from the political process and the collective strain associated with the harsh economic conditions due to unemployment and lack of basic needs combines to create an insecure environment for the youth in general (Almajiri cohort inclusive), in which the government is seen as primary cause of these hardship (target attribution). This situation in which the Almajirai cohorts believes their future and identity are not secured under the current political system and the existence of an established social and cultural resistance to western values and culture in northern Nigeria create a room for social categorization in which all individual associated with the state institution are classified as ‘yan Boko’ a categorization which carries a serious negative connotation as all individuals classified as ‘yan Boko’ are considered deceitful, dubious, impious, and corrupt hence responsible for the national predicaments.

This therefore create a fertile ground for mobilization of the Almajirai cohorts into violent extremism by propagating religious narratives which emphasize the dichotomy between ‘pure’ and ‘adulterated’ religious practices therefore sanctioning taking of arms against the state and its agencies who are portrayed as heretical, corrupt, dubious, perverted and adulterated. Religion thus depicts an important mechanism for collective identity construction and mobilization, this is because it set the pace for both social and political participation in Nigeria. Therefore, when linked with the issues of socio-economic inequality, injustice and marginalization religion serves as a tool for social and political mobilization this is because the workability of religion in shaping social movement depends on other non-religious factors such as socio-economic development and political context. Social learning also plays an important role in radicalizing the Almajirai cohorts in two ways: firstly, a collective memory on how violence was used by the British colonial masters to truncate the autonomous and independent traditional indigenous political and administrative systems in Nigeria was quite instrumental in radicalizing the Muslim youth in northern Nigeria, secondly, the state response in an effort to suppress the Boko Haram insurgency through extra-judicial killings of all perceived sects members further intensified the mobilization and radicalization of the remaining supporters of the Boko Haram ideology. The promoters of the insurgence ideology also resort to verbal persuasion and vicarious

means to indoctrinate the Almajiri cohort by revering martyrdom and idolizing other extremist such as Ben Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, Abu

Mus'ab al Zarqawi who are tagged as heroes, which therefore, boost their sense of self-efficacy in adopting the extremist way of political struggle.

Figure 1 Analytical Model



Analysis and Discussion

The details of the research findings as it relates to the above analytical model in figure 1 are discussed in this section.

Bad Governance

There is a logical interlocking nexus between democracy, poverty and insurgency in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. As indicated by Hilary Clinton, the former United States of America (USA) Secretary of state and the presidential candidate for the democrats in the recently concluded election, the most conspicuous source of discrepancy between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is the paucity of governance at all levels in the country. She contended that the absence of accountability and transparency has in actual sense robbed the Nigerian government of its legitimacy which invariably created an atmosphere for the emergence and development of several groups that adopt violence and reject the authority of the state (Ajayi 2014, p.13).

As argued by Unumen & Oghi (2007), the situation in the country's Fourth Republic has made it

extremely difficult to instill confidence in Nigerians that democracy is the most suitable system of government in the country. The average Nigerian now relates democracy with institutional decay, corruption, crisis of legitimacy, recession, underdevelopment, instability, insecurity and violence. As indicated by Muzan (2014:232), inequality and discontent result in animosity thereby sowing the ember of rancor and acrimony among the diverse elements that constitute the country. From the Niger Delta to the indigene/settler crisis in Jos and the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east geo-political zone, inequality, mistrust and disdain are their underlying causes.

It is therefore, apparent from the above that there is an interlocking relationship between the failure of democracy to empower the people and the emergence of radicals and terrorist groups in some parts of the nation. Democracy is about individuals. It is about popular articulation of rights by the general public. Democracy and Good governance ought to incorporate empowerment and improvement in the living conditions of the common masses, however, such is not the case in

Nigeria in the sense that the significant portion of the citizens continues to experience hardship hence insurgency and terrorism become inevitable.

In Nigeria, one of the major factors responsible for radicalization and violent extremism is the inability of the political class to adequately adhere to the essential precepts of democracy and constitutionalism (Ogbeidi, 2012). As Mustapha (2010:2) appropriately observed, this circumstance “has given rise to abuse of power, brazen corruption, disregard for due process and the rule of law, intolerance of political opposition, abuse of the electoral process and the weakening of institutions.” This negates the tenant of good governance, which presupposes “the procedure of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a polity” (Adejumobi, 2004). Good governance could be achieved when the operation of government is in accordance with the predominant legal and ethical standards of the political entity.

When all the elements of good governance are fully entrenched in the polity, system effect will be high, and the masses would collectively display keen interest in the operation of the state, knowing fully well that adherence to the tenets of good governance would lead to greatest happiness for the greatest number of the populace. Deprivation of benefits and inequality would be discouraged, as people's rights would be ensured within the ambit of the law. Political leaders would hold dear the watchwords: accountability and transparency in governance.

However, in Nigeria these important tenets of governance especially transparency and accountability are not observed by those in power except in its application to frustrate the opposition (Achua, 2011). The more profound motives of introducing the anti-corruption measures were never nationalistic; they were basically motivated by the strong desire to remain in power by displacing and wading off all opposition. As summed up by Sklar et al “The growing distance between this political elite and the general public, however has undermined accountability...poverty and frustration over the slow pace of change fan public anger...” (2006).

The aftermath of the hypocritical stances towards corrupt practices has been a constant cycle of political and legitimacy crisis in Nigeria. The citizens constantly display their anger and disappointment against bad governance, and eventually lost their confidence in the entire system. This situation gained wider currency among the improvised and malnourished Almajirai cohorts who completely lost their faith in the western political system as it does not seem to have

any impact on their lives. This is evident from the result of the interview below:

The informants from among the Islamic clerics expressed serious concern about how poor Governance contributed in promoting radicalization among the Almajirai cohorts: *Today, the Almajiri system promises neither access to political power nor high social status, its former economic viability has largely been undermined and its religious merit has come under attack. Students are vilified as presumed perpetrators of violence. Yet demand for the system persists. Yet the enrollment rate in such schools is higher than those of the formal western school system that is the reason we have a large concentration of youth cohorts that are socially excluded and politically marginalized.*

A community leader also expressed same view point: *As community leaders we do try our best to enlighten those youths about the importance of being law abiding but the Government on their part need to do more to change the perception of those youth about the state.* Informant from among the members of the academics also echoed similar concern: *The government is not responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Almajirai Cohorts for instance there is no social security and welfare packages for the disadvantage groups such as the Almajirai cohort, they are not employable in both the private and public sector and those with some entrepreneurial skills among them do not have access to any financial assistance from the government this makes them to respond emotionally in support of the Boko Haram ideology.* In another response by an academic he asserted that: *The nexus between the Almajirai cohorts and the Boko haram elites are purely cultural and ideological but governance and political factors make this bond even stronger in the sense that the hypocritical attributes of our governing elites towards governance grossly isolate them from the rest of the society which therefore deprived them of all sense of legitimacy.*

This becomes clear when we consider the views of the Almajirai cohorts in this study where the significant numbers of them expressed concern about how bad governance confers on them some serious predicaments such as social exclusion and lack of political relevance, which invariably makes them, developed an apathy and antinomianism towards the state. The below exemplified the comments made: *In Nigeria today we the Almajirai are the worse set of citizens we are made politically and economically irrelevant by the white men in collaboration with our politician.... we must return to the Islamic sharia if at all we need peace and justice because not all of us can fold our arms and*

keep watching as we are gradually being made slaves in our own country, something need to be done.

It is therefore clear from the above that the Almajirai cohorts are grossly dissatisfied with their status under the contemporary Nigeria state under which they continue to suffer stigmatization and social exclusion not only from the Government but the society at large. This is because the Almajirai demographic cohorts are excluded youth cohorts, susceptible to stereotyping, criticized for their cultural upbringing, and experiencing a disguised feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, with restricted access to communal systems of mutual assistance. Their purported unhygienic, criminality sexual abuse and intellectual inadequacy are the frequently discussed subjects in the academic literatures. This becomes clear when we consider the following portrays of the Almajirai both in the media and academic literatures.

According to Aluaigba, (2009) Typical Almajirai are identifiable by their awful state of hygiene, unkempt tattered clothes, diseases-afflicted and ulcerated skins, he went further to asserted that, street begging exposes Almajirai “to all sorts of vile and deviant behaviors and immoral acts because they interact freely with people of low virtue like prostitutes, drug addicts and gamblers” (2009: 22).

In the same vein Ofongo, (2016) opined that “desolate, hungry and largely illiterate, the Almajirai become ready instruments of manipulations in the hands of the elite and other mischievous individuals. At this moment, there are over 9.5 million Almajirai in northern Nigeria alone”.

While on their part, Kabir, Iliyasu, Abubakar and Ahmad, (2005) argued that “the Almajiris in one way or other are endangering the health of the community by urinating and passing stools indiscriminately. This is because most of the Almajiri schools do not have toilets and bathrooms”.

Comments and statement such as the ones above pose a great danger to the Nigerian state as it confers on the Almajirai cohorts a kind of social stigma hence perceive by people from other parts of the country as nuisance and social problem rather than victims of circumstance. This in addition to lack of integrative policy by the government renders the Almajirai cohort vulnerable to cooptation into the insurgence group, as they become alienated from the state.

The above are indicative of how lack of democratic principles and good governance generate tension in the body polity in which the political system is facing a crisis of legitimacy from the Almajirai cohorts which invariably simplify the recruitment process for the Boko Haram elites. Governance is therefore very pivotal in addressing the problems of radicalization in Nigeria this is supported by the observation made by Qader, & Abbo, (2015) that the most critical factor in combating insurgency is Governance, because the state policy has the capability to address and neutralize the conditions which provide ground for radicalization ab initio.

Collective strain

Economic strain and Relative deprivation are crucial in understanding the economic dimension of radicalization and violent extremism in Northern Nigeria. From the macro level, significant numbers of practicing Muslim youth in northern Nigeria consider globalization and Western social and economic imperialism as having malevolent impacts on Muslim societies across the globe. According to this perspective, the Muslim societies are not capable to keep pace economically with the West as a result of degenerate and inept governance shored up by an avaricious West that tend to exploit Muslim societies and keep them politically and economically subordinate for its own particular economic advantage and material prosperity. On the micro level, significant portion of the Almajirai cohorts consider their present economic and societal position as out of line with their education, social status and family tradition. Among the Almajirai cohorts, the feeling of deprivation regularly originates from three factors: the loss of historical status as an esteemed group, the annihilation of traditional political and social structures and the ruthless predatorship of the local resources by western educated elites and regimes that frequently leaves its people in destitution. The following responses from some Mallams (teachers in Almajiri School) are indicative of this: *Before the advent of colonialism the Almajiri School is the most revered and respected institution but the colonial masters in collaboration with the so-called nationalist have collectively bastardized the entire system thereby transforming it into mere institution for the production of beggars and menial laborers.* Another one has this to say: *The Almajiri school is not supposed to be treated and regarded as it is today, because its represent one of our religious and cultural heritage but unfortunately modernization and the so-called civilization have all contributed in relegating it to the background.*

The outcome is a class impression of relative social and economic deprivation. At all levels, fear of becoming economically and socially peripheral is

crucial. In this sense, the Boko Haram leaders originate from the same social group. These group have truly been, and keep on being, the ones that live in constant dread of economic marginalization and stand to lose the most in the downward redistribution of wealth that regularly comes about because of economic modernization. The Boko Haram leaders impart to the insecure Almajirai cohorts, a hefty portion of who have needed to defer marriage and family for economic reasons, the idea that they have a crucial role to play and mission to satisfy in a cosmic war between good and evil. In a world in which their milieu and their destiny appear to be increasingly beyond their control, these youth, find for themselves a glorious predetermination and values other than economic accomplishment that separate them from the group and, regularly, from what they see as the inauspicious lives of their pauperized parents.

The economic destitution of the Almajirai cohort confers on them a strain of high magnitude affecting significant portion of them, who also sees it as an aftermath of injustice by the government with which they have weak ties thereby rekindling negative emotion against the state. For example, the life of the Almajirai cohorts is epitomized by poverty and chronic unemployment resulting from lack of education and skills needed for better life, this paved the way for attitudinal changes toward the state. Below response are indicative of this: *The government is responsible for our destitution because they do not provide Skills acquisition programs for us so that we can earn a living like those with School certificates.* In another interview an Almajiri argued that: *I blame our parents but the largest share of the blame goes to the Government because they fail to encourage our parents to enroll us in the western school thereby depriving us a better future like other youth.*

The above is indicative of how most Almajirai cohort continues experiencing a collective strain and how they believe that government is responsible for their predicaments. This is in line with Agnew's general strain theory of terrorism, in which he argued that an entire group can be affected by strain when there is strong bond of identity like the Almajirai cohort for instance. He therefore stress that for collective strain to serve as motive for involvement in violence it should be of high magnitude, must be due to injustice and must be inflicted by more powerful others with whom the victims of the strain have weak ties. To this end, lack of political relevance, social exclusion and economic strain constitute what Precht (2007) described as background factors in his model which underscores the Almajiri struggle toward alleviating such factors so as to improve their

living condition (Moghaddam, 2009) however, the inability to achieve that creates what Borum (2011) called the unsatisfying conditions that generate grievance against the government through target attribution.

Cultural Threat

Threat to one's cultural identity is consistent with the integrated threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). Stephan et al. (1998), distinguish four particular sorts of threats such as realistic threat, symbolic or cultural threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotype. Cultural threat is the most pertinent for this study. Stephan et al. characterize cultural threat as the apparent damage brought on by foreigners with different norms, and values. At the point when an individual feels that his or her way of life is threaten by the potential influx of a foreign culture, that individual reacts negatively towards such group. On an interpersonal level, this implies the potential influx of foreign culture with an alternate language and interpersonal style will provoke negative responses (Zarate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2002). Here, cultural threat is characterized as the impression of peculiarity on social or interpersonal traits between groups. Cultural threat models posit that as one sees great contrasts between the in-group and potential foreign culture on imperative interpersonal characteristics, one ought to feel greater threat and show absolute bias and anger towards that group.

To this end, one popular response to western education in northern Nigeria is the belief that it will change the existing cultural structures. It is therefore the conception of this paper that the existence of unsatisfying conditions which prompt grievance and target attribution against the government does not automatically radicalize the Almajirai cohorts; this is because other youth who are not affiliated with the Almajirai system are also experiencing same economic hardship and exclusion. However, what makes the Almajirai cohort particularly more prone to radicalization is the rivalry between the western education and the Almajiri school system due to social and cultural resistance to western values and culture in northern Nigeria which create a room for social categorization in which all individual associated with the western formal school system are classified as 'yan Boko' a categorization which carries a serious negative connotation as all individuals classified as "yan Boko"(western educated elites) are consider deceitful, dubious, impious, and corrupt. This makes it easy for the Boko Haram ideology of 'Al takfir wal jihad' to enjoys the support of the Almajirai cohorts by categorizing and regarding all "yan Boko" as

heretical thereby sanctioning taking arms against them with the view to reform the society and save it from western influence.

The disdain towards and fear of Boko (Western Education) emerged from its generally close relationship with the colonial state and Christian evangelists. This additionally suited colonial educational arrangement in the sense that the British had no goal of universal education at inception. The aim of colonial education, especially in northern Nigeria, was to perpetuate the current status quo by "imparting some literacy to the aristocratic class, to the exclusion of the commoner classes" (Tukur 1979: 866). By the 1930s, colonial education had created a pocket of Western-educated elites, who were conscious of their education and were longing to assume a part in the running the society. Chiefly children of the aristocratic class, the sort of education they received were "not quite the same as the traditional Almajiri education that was prevailing in the society and this alone was sufficient to mark them out as a distinct social group (Kwanashie 2002: 50).

This new education empowered the children of the aristocratic class to climb the social and economic ladder well beyond their peer who had an alternate sort of education, the Almajiri education. This was the inception of the ill will and distrust between the traditionally educated citizens and Western-educated elites in northern Nigeria. In spite of the fact that they are subordinate to the Europeans, these western educated elites were seen as collaborators by their traditionally-educated fellows. Consequently the enmity towards Western education persisted in several northern Nigerian communities particularly these with reasonable Muslim population, which have challenged government efforts toward revamping the formal school enrolment rate to this day. Against the above background the founder of the Boko Haram insurgency the late Mohammed Yusuf essentially restored and developed his radical ideologies from the existing historical narratives which continue to play a significant role in attracting host of new recruit to the group to date. Responses from some parents of the Almajirai cohorts conformed this: *The western education does not create any positive changes in our society it has rather corrupt the minds of our people, you see them siphoning resources and glamourizing evil of all sorts.....so I will not enroll my children in these schools.* Another parent expressed his concerned in the following words: *I cannot enroll my children in the western school system because am not too comfortable with the behavioral patterns exhibited by those who attended these types of school.*

Same view points were also expressed by some of the responding Almajirai: *I know you will disagree with me but believe me there are lots of heretical practices in the western school system which make us reject it.* Another one proclaimed that: *All the societal ills we are experiencing today such as corruption and abuse of power were introduced into our society by the so-called western education that is the reason behind the reluctance of our parents to get us enrolls therein.*

The Boko Haram ideology thus serves as an important bonding mechanism between the Almajirai cohort and the Boko Haram elites through the institutionalization of the linked fate phenomenon which provide a means for social mobilization in which verbal persuasion and vicarious means are utilize by the promoters of the Boko Haram ideology to indoctrinate the Almajiri cohort by revering martyrdom and by idolizing extremist such as Ben Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri and Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi, who are seen as reference group for the Boko Haram members, which therefore, boost their sense of self-efficacy in adopting the extremist way of political struggle thereby having them fully radicalized.

Social Learning of Violence

According to the social learning theory, exposure behaviors of others with whom one associates has substantial influence on one's behavioral patterns and practices. The effect of this exposure varies depending on the frequency, duration, intensity, and need of the distinctive affiliations people have with others. The social learning process has play a crucial role in promoting Radicalization among the Almajirai cohorts in two parlance; first the Almajirai cohorts are expose to violence through the reprisal attack by the Nigerian troops in an efforts to suppress the Boko Haram insurgency in the sense that whenever there is a hit and run attack on the military convoy. The troop instantly embarks on reprisal attacks where the main targets are the Almajirai cohorts who have been stigmatized as prime suspects. This further alienates them and paved the way for them to join the insurgence with the view to be secure from being brutalized or for revenge mission. Secondly, the existing of collective memory regarding how the British colonial masters' utilized violence to subjugate and truncate the autonomous and independent traditional indigenous political and administrative systems in Nigeria has enormously contributed in institutionalizing violence as a legitimate means of political struggle in the sense that Lugard, adopted a highly violent and ruthless strategy in the process which saw the conquest of what became Northern Nigeria.

Regarding how state repression contribute in radicalizing the Almajirai cohorts, it is imperative to note that radicalization process focused on two processes: the impact of state repression and movement cycles this is because if political opportunities can increase mobilization, then constraint on political activity can hose it (Tilly, 1978). One of such limitation is repression by governments, for example, the utilization of naked force or coercion by the police and the military, which has critical ramifications for collective action. While repression can suppress over all mobilization, in specific cases, it can equally make insurgency more likely. Rasler (1996) contends that the indiscriminate utilization of force in the Iranian Revolution increased mobilization, and della Porta (1995) finds that state repression really suppress moderate alternative, radicalizes remaining supporters by further justifying the martyrs and myths used by the promoters of terrorism to legitimize their activities. Below comments cutting across all the category of the respondents are indicative of this: *The Nigerian military and the police force are unfriendly, undisciplined and arrogant to them every single Almajiri is a Boko haram member; most of those of us who were killed in Borno state were innocents.* Another respondent opined that: *Dealing with insurgency requires tact unfortunately the military are too arrogant to realize that the use of excessive force against all perceive enemies is further creating more enemies for the Nigerian state.*

As regard to how collective memory plays a crucial role in promoting violence in radicalization in northern Nigeria it is equally imperative to note that, every social order is sustained up by underscoring specific memory that established a specific version of history. In these accounts some people are celebrated and conceded legend status. They usually belong to a particular social class and political group, and in addition specific sex, sexuality, ethnicity, race, district, religion, social status and language. These narratives about the past, while praising a few group, devalue others by changing their disparities into justification for discrimination. These renditions are either acknowledged or confronted by the alternative stories delivered by the excluded group. Memory, along these lines, is a field in pressure where chains of importance, disparities and social exclusion are either developed and fortified, or challenged and changed. Religious and Ethnic difference are crucial in determining the potency of collective memory in promoting radicalization and political violence, in the sense that both culture and religion offer diverse resources for interpreting and confronting a particular incidence. Some violence activities can pulverize when they affect the basic

aspect of a culture or put into question basic belief of a certain social group. It is therefore imperative to see how bigot, fanatics and racist ideologies intersect and shape demonstrations of monstrous violence against particular group. This becomes clear when we consider the following response: *I believe the narratives on how violence was used to brought the western civilization to northern Nigeria play key role in both the maitatsine uprising of the 1980's and the present Boko Haram mayhem.* It is therefore, crystal clear from the above that both state repression and collective memory are quite instrumental in promoting radicalization of the Almajirai cohorts into the Boko Haram insurgency.

Discussion

The study attempt to unveil the factors that have contributed in shaping the development of homegrown extremist within the Nigerian context, its focus on exploring the societal practices and individual factors responsible for revamping the support for terrorism, specifically the roles of cultural practice in encouraging conviction and involvement, as well as the contribution of myriads of push and pull factors such as unfavorable socio-political condition, grievances, social status and relative deprivation.

Whatever may be consider as the theoretical contribution of this work such an endeavor can only be regarded as modest, in the sense that, the work itself is a beneficiary of rich, excellent and established scholarly ideas on the subject. It is imperative to note that many scholarly and academic publications have profoundly articulated on radicalization, terrorism, violent extremism and the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. However, only few of these studies are empirical in nature and even the empirical ones have failed to explore the contribution of cultural practices and social identity in promoting radicalization and violent extremism in northern Nigeria because most of these studies tend to dwell on political and economic grievance paying little attention to the potency of the socio-cultural attributes of the northern Nigerian society which in most cases play even greater role than both the economic and political factors.

Therefore the contribution of this study theoretically revolves around the exploration of how cultural resistance, social identity and social learning play a substantial role radicalizing the Almajirai cohorts in which both the political and economic factors just provided the fault line upon which the extremist ideas are nurtured this study thus adopted four combination of theories in its analysis; the General Strain Theory of Terrorism,

the youth Bulge theory, the social identity and the social learning theories.

Paradoxically, so many studies in the past adopted and utilized the youth Bulge Theory in exploring political violence and youth restiveness in Africa and the Middle East where the findings from these studies suggested that a country with a large number of youth cohorts is vulnerable to political violence especially in the presences of relative deprivation and inequality. However, these studies failed to explain the mechanism which tend to provide the feelings of consciousness, social bond and togetherness among the youth for the to be able to form a group that challenge the constituted authorities thereby justifying the use of violence against the state in the sense that so many countries with large concentration of youth cohorts amid deprivation and inequality are yet to experience youth restiveness.

Such studies often linked youth cohorts with violence through the instrument of generational consciousness of common identity, sense of belonging and collectivism (Feuer, 1969, Braungart, 1984, Urdal; 2011, Bristow, 2015). However, the studies do not seem to be backup by any empirical evidences in the sense that we are yet to witness any incidence of political violence along age demarcation, hence the generational approach in explaining the youth bulge syndrome in relation to political violence possess an inherent weakness regarding it explanatory power of the nexus between youth bulges and political violence. Though there is no disputing the fact that the development of consciousness through group identity and sense of belonging are instrumental in unleashing a collective violence, it however, amounted to academic flop to attributes such identity and sense of belonging only to generational consciousness as the main factor in explaining the increasing tendency for involvement in violence by large youth cohort.

This is because, the generational approach has fail to provide adequate explanations of the motives behind the youth involvement in rebellious movement, it also fails to offer concrete explanation of the conditionality's that contributed to development of such generational consciousness. It can therefore be argued that if a mere feelings of generational consciousness by clear large youth cohort is enough reason to trigger violence, then incidence of youth revolts would have been a lot more phenomenon. It is imperative to notes that the circumstances providing youth bulges with the motives and opportunities to engage in political violence differ considerably among countries more so as even countries with the existences of large

youth cohort is not all the youth that engage in political violence (Sommers, 2010).

This study therefore attempt to fill this research fissure by adopting the social identity theory and the general strain theory of terrorism, where empirical evidence was found in this study to support Agnew's GST that in the presence strain affecting the generality of youth only those youth that have a weaker ties with the state resort to violence. The study found that the existence of weaker ties between the Almajirai cohorts and the state makes the former more prone to be radicalized into taking arms against the latter taking into cognizance the former's economic destitution.

This is rather strengthen by the application of the social identity theory where the empirical evidence from this study shows that among the Almajirai cohorts those with other identities in addition to that of being an Almajirai are less-prone to violence, for instance those Almajirai that are privilege to be enroll in the western educational system (thereby combining both education) display a more positive perception about the state than those who do not. Social identity therefore plays a major in determining who could easily be lure into terrorism and violent extremism among the Almajirai cohorts.

This study therefore argued that the more complex the identity of an Almajiri is the less prone he is to be radicalized into violent extremism; he becomes less-concern with the predicaments of the Almajirai as a social group by virtue of his membership to other social group (the yan Boko) but for those Almajirai with no other identity than that of an Almajiri display a higher propensity to be violent against the state due to the existence of a weaker-ties, cultural threat and the link-fate phenomenon.

Conclusion

All said and done, it is the contention of this paper that the youth bulge syndrome is very relevant in understanding the process of the Almajirai cohort's radicalization, more so as the cultural practice in which parents especially from the country side send their children at a very tender age to the cities under the Almajiri school system pave way for the concentration of a large youth cohort with strong sense of identity in those cities, in which factors such as unfavorable economic and political atmosphere combines with the prevailing cultural resistance against western education and value system to facilitate the process of radicalizing these youth. However, as revealed by the focus group discussion even among the Almajirai cohorts some have higher tendency for radicalization than others, because those with strong affiliation to the Almajiri

school system have higher tendency of supporting the Boko Haram ideologies than those who have the opportunity of enrolling in the western school system after graduation from the Almajiri school system. This paper therefore argues that the complex the identity of the Almajiri the less prone he is to be radicalize in the sense that the feelings of linked-faith does not seems to work on the psyche of those Almajirai that have the privilege of enrolling in western school, in fact, they do not consider themselves as Almajirai, hence their expectation from the state and their perception of the government tend to be positive and optimistic despite their present predicaments.

To this end, it is therefore, paramount for the Nigeria state to comes up with a policy for compulsory and free primary and secondary school to all the Almajirai and not in separate schools as it is at present being practice but in an inclusive one. It is accordingly basic for state-run schools to include and accommodate all categories of children, and to be involved in providing all kind of knowledge both secular and religious to ensure decency and censorship in access and quality of education. These schools must have the ability to address the particular socio-cultural needs of the distinctive classes of children, and make a learning atmosphere which does not cripple, repel or segregate, but instead recognizes and accommodate divergence with the view to facilitate national integration.

In an order to cultivate conducive ambiance for educational development, it is pertinent for the government to take over the Almajiri educational system in which as opposed to permitting some schools to religious bodies that will facilitate the propagation of a particular narrative, governments should ensure that schools ingrain the of soul of logical humanism, of peace and solidarity, and there must be a superseding rationality which tries to advance greatness and goodness, social worth and value, working for national solidarity and a global discernment. It is only when children from different works of life, work and play together that they appreciate and recognize each other's uniqueness, and built up an air of strength, evolving a common identity and composite society. They begin to develop a spirit of solidarity and national integration. Be that as it may, when the children of different religious entities are kept in their mono-social schools, it is to a great degree hard to accomplish national integration. This is because the task of building a strong and united country out of Nigeria requires as a precondition the mixing of different social orders and statuses, and the weaving together of the particular strings of

various national fabrics which must be accomplish through inclusive education.

It is imperative to note that no nation has ever accomplished political and socio-economic advancement amidst predicaments in political, economic and social spheres. Also, no nation has ever succeeded in the midst of disunity among its citizenry; nor has any prospered in an air of grievance and strain, economic and political alienation of citizens or above all a limping and non-utilitarian educational policy. This connotes the need to establish a solid linkage between social inclusion, education and sustainable peace for any country to achieve its developmental objectives. This paper has thus succeeded in coming up with a model of radicalization based on system evidence which can serve as a blue-print to the policy makers on how to handle the issue of violent extremism in Northern Nigeria, for without proper understanding of the environment under which the act of insurgency geminate and grow it is to a greater extent very difficult to develop a policy framework that can lead to its demise. The paper therefore explored the societal practices and individual factors responsible for revamping the support for terrorism in north-eastern Nigeria, specifically the roles of socio-cultural factors in encouraging conviction and involvement, as well as the contribution of myriads of push and pull factors such as unfavorable socio-political condition, economic strain and grievances.

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