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Boko Haram: Religion and Violence in the 21st Century

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Abstract: Boko Haram in Nigeria provides an important example of the combination of religion and violence in the conditions of the twenty-first century. It is both a movement in the pattern of religiously-justified violence and a significant representative of the emergence of new types of modern terrorism in recent years. This article examines both of these aspects of Boko Haram as an example of religious violence. In the general development of religiously justified violence, Boko Haram is the heir to a long jihad tradition in West Africa. Its emergence follows well-established patterns of older militant Muslim groups, but it also departs significantly from those patterns as it shapes itself as a movement in the patterns of contemporary, twenty-first century modes of religious violence. Boko Haram is also identified, in twenty-first century terms, as a religious terrorist organization. As a religious terrorist group, it fits the pattern of what David Rapoport calls the fourth wave—the religious wave—of modern terrorism. However, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Boko Haram exhibits characteristics of a new style of religious terrorism that is more like the so-called Islamic State than the older type of terrorist organization of al-Qa'idah.

Keywords: terrorism; just war; jihad; caliphate; Nigeria; Islamic State

1. Introduction

"Boko Haram is an Islamic Revolution." [1]. This statement by Mallam Sanni Umaru, the acting leader of Boko Haram in 2009 affirmed the religious identity and mission of the organization after the killing of its founder, Muhammad Yusuf. Beginning as a small group of young Islamist activists in northeast Nigeria around 2002, Boko Haram, within a decade, became internationally identified with

groups like the so-called Islamic State (IS) as "the poster boys of extremism and radicalisation" ([2], p. 5). Its importance was recognized by both its allies and its enemies. IS accepted Boko Haram as its province in West Africa in 2014 and the United States Department of State designated it as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. This rapid development and global visibility make Boko Haram an important example of the combination of religion and violence in the 21st century.

Violence by religiously-identified groups is an increasingly important element of global affairs and local social hostilities around the world. In the words of a major study of global religious conflict in the twenty-first century, "religiously motivated violence has become a pervasive element of modern conflicts."([3], p. 1). Religious violence has a long history in most of the world's major religious traditions, but in recent modern history its nature changed significantly. "Religion," as defined by many social scientists, was not seen as a major element in modern-style socio-political violence during much of the twentieth century. Scholars note that in 1968, for example, none of the groups identifiable as international terrorist organizations in a major databank "could be classified as 'religious'" ([4], p. 42). However, by 1995, 25 out of the 58 international terrorist organizations identified in the database could be classified as "religious" ([4], p. 42). Increasingly, "religious" terrorism dominates discussions of terrorism although terrorism takes many different forms. Similarly, the broader phenomena of religious violence involve more than terrorism, and what a Pew study identifies as "social hostilities involving religion" also increased dramatically in the first decade of the twenty-first century ([5], p. 7). This development was unexpected in the world of secular scholarship. As Mark Juergensmeyer notes, "No one in the secular world could have predicted that the first confrontations of the twenty-first century would involve, of all things, religion." ([6], p. 130).

With its self-identification as a religious revolution, Boko Haram is an important example of how religious violence is justified by extremist militants and how traditions of legitimized religious violence evolve in the contexts of globalization and new technologies in the twenty-first century. In addition, since Boko Haram is described as a terrorist organization by many people, it also provides an important example of the changing nature of terrorist organizations. Its experience and history suggest that an important new wave of terrorism is visible in the contemporary world. So Boko Haram needs to be viewed both within the traditions of religiously justified violence, especially in West Africa, and as a representative of a new kind of terrorist phenomenon.

Many descriptions of Boko Haram have been written in recent years [7–10]. Briefly, Boko Haram arose out of a complex cluster of Islamic reformist teachers and groups in northern Nigeria in the 1990s. By 2002, one of the groups, under the leadership of a religious scholar and student leader, Muhammad Yusuf, gained visibility as an activist Salafi organization, that is, an organization characterized "by being literalist and puritanical in its interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadiths*." ([7], p. 47). After some clashes with police and armed attacks on some villages by the group, the organization entered a teaching and organizing period in which it became the Society of the People of the Sunnah for Propagation and Jihad (*Jamāʿah ahl al-sunnah lil-daʿwah wa al-jihad*). As Mallam Sanni Umaru, the interim leader of Boko Haram in 2009 explained, "Boko Haram" is a description of its position that "Western Civilization" (Boko) is forbidden (haram) [1], rather than the formal name of the group. The organization changed course in 2009 when Muhammad Yusuf was killed by the police, and moved steadily in the direction of militantly violent campaigns to gain control of the region. Although there was some splintering of the group, Muhammad Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau,

led the group into more international networking in an effort to establish an extremist Salafi-style state in Nigeria with ties to a global jihad and caliphate.

The goal of this essay is not to present another account of the history of the group but, rather, to examine the movement as an example of two intertwined types of religious violence: the general religiously-legitimized violence that in the Islamic tradition is associated with jihad, and the more specific modern and contemporary manifestation of religious violence as religious terrorism.

Religious Violence and Terrorism

In examining the relationships between religion and violence in the contemporary world, it is important to distinguish between the more general evolution of forms of religious violence and the specific development of modern and contemporary religious terrorism. In recent years, some people have argued that religion itself, especially monotheism, legitimizes violence [11] or, in the words of the polemical critic of religion, Christopher Hitchens, "religion poisons everything" ([12], p. 13). However, although most people do not advocate violence in general terms, there is broad acceptance of the idea that some violence is legitimate, as in self-defense or in the historical concepts of just war.

Major religious traditions have concepts of religiously justified violence and world history presents narratives of "holy wars" from ancient times to the present. In the modern era, the legitimizing of state violence was often expressed in more secular terms, but the major twentieth century conflicts like the two World Wars and the Cold War were viewed within the framework of a secular morality that justified violence. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these forms of what Mark Juergensmeyer calls "cosmic war" became more explicitly justified within the framework of the major historic religions. In his broad comparative study of violent religious movements, Juergensmeyer concludes, "It is not so much that religion has become politicized, but that politics have become religionized. Worldly struggles have been lifted into the high proscenium of sacred battle." ([6], p. 131).

Debates among religious leaders and policy makers about the religious and moral justifications for violence and war are important parts of political life in the twenty-first century. Long established criteria for just war "suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions are met" are being questioned as the technologies of warfare change ([13], p. 337). These issues of moral justification for violence are not just related to the actions of extremist non-state organizations and terrorists, but they also involve state policies as well. The use of drones by states in fighting terrorist groups, for example, "potentially alters the parameters of *ad bellum* ['how one determines the justice of *going* to war'] and *in bello* ['how one determines what one can do *in* war'] just war principles" ([13], p. 338). Similarly, discussions about emergence of new military power related to waging "cyberwar" sometimes involve traditional issues of defining the nature of just war [14].

It is, however, the violent actions of non-state organizations claiming religious justification for that violence that represent the most visible assertions of religious violence in the contemporary world. In what Juergensmeyer calls the "global rebellion" involving "religious challenges to the secular state," most major historic religious traditions—Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist—have been used to give legitimacy to religious violence [15]. Some analysts argue that many of these groups are not "fundamentally religious" and that issues of "national, cultural, and linguistic identity" are also significant elements in their violent extremism ([16], pp. 18–19). Few groups can be easily identified

as purely religious, and religion is an element in ethnic and national identities, as well as often being a part of secular radical ideologies. However, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, for an increasing proportion of violent revolutionary movements, it is religious tradition that provides the legitimizing identity of the movements.

Although these groups utilize the vocabulary and symbolic repertoire of the historic religions, they are creating "new forms of religiosity" ([6], p. 137) that reflect the realities of the globalized world of the twenty-first century. Jeurgensmeyer concludes that these militant opposition groups "have done far more than resuscitate archaic ideas of religious rule. They have created something new: a synthesis of religion and modern politics" ([15], p. 263). Michael Walzer, in his study of the emergence of "religious counterrevolutions" in India, Israel, and Algeria, comes to a similar conclusion. In the religious counterrevolutions responding to the secular movements of liberation, religion is not old-style, conservative traditionalism; it appears "in militant, ideological, and politicized forms—modern even in its anti-modernism" ([17], p. 28).

Boko Haram provides an important example of this development with its claims to be engaging in a true jihad to establish a new caliphate. In the framework of West African history, Boko Haram can be seen as part of a centuries-old tradition of jihad—of militant opposition to rulers viewed as non-Islamic and rejection of social practices judged not to be in accord with Islam. However, Boko Haram's militant Islamism is not just a continuation of older religious militancy, it also is a product of contemporary Muslim radical beliefs identified as Salafism. In this way, in teaching and practice, Boko Haram shows significant departures from the historic Muslim understandings of both jihad and caliphate. Its relationship to contemporary Salafism and historic jihadism is part of the ideological and political conflicts in contemporary Nigeria [18]. Its distinctiveness, reflecting the new global modes of religious violence, is that "it is the first Islamic group in Nigeria to carry out an ideological hybridization and synthesis of the theologico-juridico resources of the global *jihadi-Salafism* coupled with the cultural framing of the historical tradition of *tajdid* [religious renewal] in northern Nigeria, specifically the *jihadi* legacy of Uthman Dan Fodio" [19].

In West Africa, a long tradition of militant Muslim revivalism involving jihads exists, and Boko Haram provides an important case study in how a longstanding historic framework of religious violence is reshaped and rearticulated in the conditions of the twenty-first century. While Boko Haram exhibits continuities with past movements of Muslim activism, it also is an example of the new-style movements of religious violence that have emerged in recent years. To support this conclusion, this essay compares Boko Haram with pre-modern jihad movements like that of Uthman dan Fodio, twentieth century movements like Maitatsine in Nigeria, and contemporary movements like the Islamic State and al-Qa'idah. This analysis concludes that Boko Haram is a major example of the new styles of religious social movement organizations emerging in the age of what Sidney Tarrow calls "the new transnational activism" [20].

Boko Haram is also seen as a terrorist organization, and represents an important example of new types of terrorism that have emerged in the twenty-first century. Not all violent religious organizations are terrorist. Religious militias may be violent in their methods but they are not necessarily terrorist, although analysts tend to use a variety of definitions of terrorism. There was a general consensus that al-Qa'idah, as led by Osama bin Laden, was a terrorist organization. However, especially in the years following his death, new violent religiously-identified groups have emerged and represent new

organizations of religiously-identified violence. The most prominent of these is the so-called Islamic State or ISIS, and reflecting the changing nature of these militant organizations, Audrey Kurth Cronin argues that although ISIS "uses terrorism as a tactic, it is not really a terrorist organization at all" ([21], p. 88). In contrast to al-Qa'idah, ISIS has a large military force and controls and administers territory. In Cronin's words, ISIS is "a pseudo-state led by a conventional army" ([21], p. 88). Boko Haram is similar to ISIS in these terms.

ISIS and Boko Haram provide important examples of how religious terrorism is evolving. In an influential conceptualization, David Rapoport describes the evolution of modern terrorism in terms of four waves, with beginnings in the late nineteenth century. The fourth wave, beginning late in the twentieth century, is the wave of religious terrorism, and in Rapoport's analysis, "Islam is at the heart of the wave." ([22], p. 61). The Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1978–1979 and the jihad opposing the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s are seen as important in the launching of this fourth wave. ([22], p. 61). As an organization engaged in religious terrorism, Boko Haram can be viewed as a part of this fourth wave. However, the changing nature of religious violence and the emergence of new types of militant organizations suggest that Boko Haram might also be part of a new, "fifth wave" of terrorism.

2. Boko Haram and Religiously-Legitimated Violence

Religious violence in the form of militant Muslim movements of reform is an important part of West African history. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, a series of activist teachers criticized the pluralist mixture of Islamic and indigenous cultures that characterized states and societies in the region. They sought to create institutions and practices in accord with Islam as understood in the more exclusivist terms of conservative scholars. Some of the resulting groups clashed with the political rulers in a series of jihads, creating a jihad tradition of militant Muslim revivalism extending from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century (and beyond). While the jihad movements were distinctive in their local manifestations, they were historically connected and shared many characteristics [23,24]. This jihad tradition provides an historic foundation for popular acceptance of religious violence in the cause of religious renewal. Boko Haram, in the twenty-first century, is heir to this jihad legacy and the similarities and differences between the contemporary movement and the earlier tradition help to show both the continuities and changes in the nature of religious violence in the twenty-first century.

2.1. Pre-Modern Religiously-Legitimized Violence in West Africa

The jihad tradition was part of the long historic process of Islamization in West African societies. Islam was brought to the region by merchants and itinerant religious teachers in the period after the original Muslim conquests in the Middle East. These early migrant Muslims became part of the local societies and the result was a blending of Islamic and indigenous local elements in social and political institutions. However, this development also meant that the people became aware of and respected Muslim concepts and teachings, so general opposition to oppressive rulers eventually could be expressed in Islamic terms. Muslim scholars who were critical of the synthesis of Islamic and indigenous elements became both reformers of religious life and leaders of political opposition with

the goal of establishing Islamic states. In this framework, violence against the political authorities was legitimated in Islamic terms as jihad in the path of God. Religion defined an identity that opposed pluralist syncretism in favor of a clearly defined, exclusivist community.

Already in medieval times, Muslim scholars in West Africa discussed when religious violence in the form of jihad was appropriate and their works, especially the writings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Maghili (d. c. 1505), remained influential in the following centuries. Al-Maghili wrote a major study in the late fifteenth century in response to questions posed by the ruler of the Songhay Empire, the most powerful state in West Africa at the time. Al-Maghili explicitly approved jihad against those who professed Islam but continued indigenous local religious practices. These were people who "have idols…[and] venerate certain trees and make sacrifices to them," among other practices ([25], pp. 76–77). He stated that they are "polytheists without doubt" and said that there "is no doubt that *jihad* against them is more fitting and worthy than *jihad* against [born] unbelievers who do not say: 'There is no god save God'" ([25], p. 78). In this framework, jihad against corrupt self-identified Muslims took priority over jihad against non-believers. Jihad was a movement of purification more than a movement of conversion.

Al-Maghili also viewed jihad as the means for opposing unjust rulers, even if the violence resulted in killing Muslims. In his instructions, for example, in dealing with a "land having an *amīr* from among those chiefs whom you described as levying [unlawful] taxes and being oppressive and evildoing and failing to set matters right," he says, "If you can bring to an end his oppression of the Muslims without harm to them so that you set up among them a just *amīr*, then do so, even if that leads to killing and the killing of many of the oppressors and their supporters and the killing of many of your supporters, for whoever is killed from among them is the worst of slain men and whoever is killed from among your people is the best of martyrs." ([25], p. 81).

These themes of opposition to mixing indigenous and Islamic practices and to oppressive rulers who did not follow Muslim teachings are central to the West African jihad tradition. Beginning in the later seventeenth century with a movement led by Imam Nasir al-Din (d. 1674) in what is modern-day Southern Mauritania, a chain of interconnected purificationist movements developed. Jihads in Futo Toro and Foto Jalon in the Senegambia established this chain. "At the fundamental levels of Islamization—spreading literacy and building a consciousness of a dar al-Islam—it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the two Futas and of their influence over the vast region stretching from southern Mauritania to Sierra Leone. By their 'success' in at least establishing regimes that could lay claim to an Islamic identity, they 'solved' the great problem of legitimation." ([23], p. 137).

Throughout the savannah region of West Africa in the following centuries, a number of reformist teachers led movements and jihads which resulted in the creation of Islamically-legitimated states. They were often directly connected by networks of students and teachers who were inspired by previous jihads. At the beginning of the nineteenth century in what is modern Northern Nigeria, Uthman dan Fodio, a scholar and member of the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood, preached a message of reform that led to conflict with local rulers and the declaration of a jihad in 1805. His victory resulted in the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, which became a center in the networks of scholars leading later jihads. Al-Hajj Umar al-Tall (d. 1864), for example, who led a major nineteenth century jihad in West Africa, spent a number of years in Sokoto and married a granddaughter of Uthman dan Fodio. The

jihad led by Uthman dan Fodio and the state that he established are the quintessential examples of the West African jihad tradition.

2.2. Pattern of the Development of Pre-Modern Jihad Movements

In the histories of the pre-modern militant groups, four stages are usual. The first is the gathering of a group of dedicated students around a particular teacher, who is distinguished from the other teachers at the time by an emphasis on the need for reform. Such teacher-student circles were (and are) common throughout Muslim West Africa and most do not become movements or organized groups. However, some of these circles attract larger numbers of followers, and the second stage is one in which the followers of the teacher become a more consciously organized group, while the teacher continues to develop a distinctive message. If the emerging organization experiences resistance from the local population or the ruler, the group tends to withdraw from direct involvement in society. Sometimes the leader and his followers may move to a more isolated area, often citing the example of the Prophet Muhammad who undertook the migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to what became Medina in Arabia. In this stage, the movement becomes a more formally organized association with an emerging ideological identification of Muslim renewal and reform. Again, such self-contained groups are part of Muslim life in West Africa and many do not move to the next stage, open conflict with religious and political establishments.

It is in the third stage—of open conflict—that the mission of the group becomes a jihad and the movement becomes one of legitimized religious violence. Large organizations of opposition become a threat to rulers and attempts at suppressing the groups can lead to warfare. The leader declares a jihad and the movement becomes an army as well as a movement of religious reform and purification. As an organization of opposition to the ruler, the group becomes an alternative state. The fourth stage of development depends upon the results of the jihad. When the group wins the jihad, a new state is established; when they lose, the organization disappears but usually the memory and teaching survive to inspire later movements.

In the case of dan Fodio, he was a popular religious scholar and teacher who gained a large following in Gobir. When he was opposed by the local religious establishment and attacked by the armed forces of the Sultan of Gobir, he and his followers withdrew to a safer place, from which they declared jihad against Gobir. "This was a new beginning, a new 'Muslim space.' Now the past of Hausaland was classified as Jahiliyya [pre-Islamic paganism]; the true Muslim community had performed *hijra*, sworn allegiance to Uthman, formed the Islamic community, and declared the '*jihad* of the sword'." ([26], p. 144). The result was the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, which ruled a significant territory in northern Nigeria and surrounding areas. This political institution has continued in existence in various forms into the twenty-first century. Although it is no longer an independent state, in the twenty-first century, the descendant of Uthman dan Fodio who is the twentieth Sultan of Sokoto is considered to be the leader of the Muslims of Nigeria.

2.3. Boko Haram and the Historic Jihad Movement Pattern

The development of Boko Haram in the twenty-first century follows this pattern of growth to a remarkable degree. Even though its violence is extreme and most Nigerians view its claims as radical

and outside of acceptable Islamic traditions, it is recognizably within the long traditions of militant jihad in West and Central Africa.

Many reform-minded Muslim teachers and students were active in the second half of the twentieth century. John Paden described the great diversity of these groups and organizations in Nigeria that were active at the time of the beginning of Boko Haram and many are still active today. Few actually became militant in their actions ([27], pp. 27–38). Teacher-student networks resulted in a number of groupings around locally prominent teachers. One such teacher was the founder of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf. Muhammad Yusuf was associated with important teachers, and was a leader in reformist student groups in Maiduguri, where he became a preacher in a major mosque. When local religious leaders opposed his teachings, he established his own school and then built a mosque which became a center for radicals holding Salafi views with literalist interpretations of the Qur'an and advocates of activist purification of state and society. He named the mosque after Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, a thirteenth century Muslim thinker whose strict interpretations influenced later activist reformers from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to twentieth century and twenty-first century jihadists.

During this second phase of Boko Haram development, Muhammad Yusuf developed a religious ideology of opposition to Western cultural dominance, building on the intellectual traditions of historic and contemporary militant Salafism. His followers clashed with police from time to time, but they tended to withdraw from society, sometimes moving into relatively remote areas. However, as security forces increased pressure on the movement, it "morphed into more of an urban phenomenon" taking actions against "consumption of alcohol and other non-Islamic practices" with a methodology "very much according to the example of Dan Fodio" ([28], p. 4). In 2009 the Nigerian police undertook a major suppression operation in the course of which Muhammad Yusuf was killed. Under the leadership of his successor, Abubakar Shekau, the group declared a jihad in 2010 and carried out its first coordinated attacks in that year ([29], p. 18).

2.4. Boko Haram and Historic Movements Compared

As a movement of activist (and sometimes belligerent) religious reform, the early history of Boko Haram fits well into the pattern of the early stages of the historic West African jihad movements. In examining the nature of religious violence in the twenty-first century, comparing the nature of Boko Haram as a jihad movement with the jihad (third) stage of the historic jihad movements may be useful. Two themes of reform, already defined by al-Maghili in the fifteenth century, provide important areas for comparison: opposition to popular religious syncretism and opposition to unjust rulers who may profess Islam but do not rule in accord with the Qur'an and Traditions of the Prophet.

Opposition to blending together Islamic and indigenous local practices and symbols was an important part of the historic jihad movements. The respect given to particular natural elements, as in regarding trees or springs as sacred, is an example of the continuation of non-Islamic practices that came to be regarded as part of popular Muslim life. Reformers like al-Maghili advocated destroying such symbols and fighting their guardians if necessary (leading to jihads). This opposition to popular religious customs, regarded as idolatrous superstitions, is a significant element in the teachings of Muslim renewalists throughout the Muslim world. It was an important part of the message of reform of

Ibn Taymiyya and was a core part of the Wahhabi tradition begun by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in eighteenth century Arabia [30,31].

The goal of the reformers was to bring local practice into accord with the historically-evolving cosmopolitan standard Islam. Just as a standardized version of "classical" Arabic became a *lingua franca* for travelers and scholars throughout the Muslim world, a standardized form of Sunni Islam provided guidelines for reformers who could then advocate the socio-moral reconstruction of their own societies. Although local religious and political establishments could dispute details of interpretation, they could not reject the general model, based as it was on a strict and quite literal understanding of the Qur'an and Traditions of the Prophet. In this way, the understanding of Islam presented by the militant reformer was reinforced by the definitions of "pure" Islam as understood by many scholars in the broader global Muslim community (the "ummah").

Boko Haram and other movements of militant Salafism in the twenty-first century are also strongly opposed to what they view as the pollution of "pure" Islam by mixing Muslim ideas and practices with non-Islamic and anti-Islamic elements. The informal name of the group—Boko Haram—emphasizes this aspect of the group's message: "Western Civilization is forbidden." The statement by the acting leader in 2009 emphasizes the cultural dimension of this position: "We are talking of Western Ways of life which include: constitutional provisions as it relates to, for instance the rights and privileges of Women, the idea of homosexualism, lesbianism, sanctions in cases of terrible crimes…blue films, prostitution, drinking beer and alcohol and many others that are opposed to Islamic civilization." [1]; ([10], p. 14). Muhammad Yusuf argued that "present Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam." ([7], p. 48). While Muhammad Yusuf accepted the "purely technological things" of modernity, he rejected "Westernization." ([7], pp. 56–57). The syncretism opposed by Boko Haram was the mixture of local Islamic and modern Western culture visible at all levels of Nigeria society.

The cultural synthesis opposed by Boko Haram is different from that opposed by the earlier jihads and its religious violence played and plays a different role. The early jihads rejected longstanding local religious practices in the name of a more cosmopolitan and transcultural worldview. They were part of the long historical processes of the Islamization of society. Religious violence was justified as contributing to the transformation of society and strengthened important aspects of that historic evolution of society. The jihads were moving with the broader historical trends of the time.

Boko Haram, in contrast, opposes the long term societal transformations of the modern era. The processes of cosmopolitan globalization are reshaping human life around the world. Boko Haram itself is, in many ways, a product of and participant in those processes. However, its goal is to bring an end to the culture(s) created by those developments. In an era of increasingly pluralist societies, Boko Haram seeks to reverse historic trends and establish a culturally exclusivist version of contemporary society based on a narrow, literalist interpretation of Islam. Although both Boko Haram and the early jihad movements were exclusivist, the early jihadists were working within the framework of historical developments in the region, while Boko Haram are working to change the mainstreams of history.

This difference points to an important dimension of religious violence in the twenty-first century. Religious violence takes many forms and Boko Haram is an example of a distinctive mode of religious violence. Although it is opposed to important historic changes that are taking place, it is not presenting a conservative defense of existing society. In its critique of contemporary society it was initially

reformist in nature. While there were occasional violent clashes between the followers of Muhammad Yusuf and the police or conflicts with other groups, the effort was aimed at changing existing society. In Islamic terms, it was a *tajdid* ("renewal") movement. However, as Boko Haram became involved in its major jihad, the goal became more explicitly to replace the old socio-political order with a new one. In the early teachings there was little mention of creating a true caliphate. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, Boko Haram joined a number of militant groups in the Muslim world in proclaiming a caliphate as the goal. With the proclamations of caliphates, the most visible religious violence in the Muslim world has tended to shift from militant tajdid movements to militant millenarianism, the type of "religious movements that expect imminent total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation" ([32], p. 159). Boko Haram's history reflects this development.

In opposition to unjust rulers, Boko Haram's jihad also is both similar to, and different from, the earlier jihad tradition. The major differences are in the nature of the involvements in the broader global ummah (community of believers). Both appeal to what is frequently identified as the Salafi tradition in Islamic history and both seek to legitimize their violence by showing how it is mandated or at least allowed by Islamic teachings.

Both Boko Haram and the earlier movements involve networks of teachers, students, and militants that were and are transnational. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, jihads and militant movements of tajdid occurred from West Africa to Southeast Asia. To a remarkable degree, student-teacher networks including people who would be involved in these jihads brought people from these diverse areas together, especially as they went on Hajj (pilgrimage) [33,34]. These networks involved significant exchanges of ideas and facilitated developments in scholarship like the development of new approaches to the study of Traditions of the Prophet. The leaders of jihads were part of the broader cosmopolitan intellectual community of Muslim scholarship of the time. Major teachers from Mecca and Medina and in the major educational centers of the Muslim world recognized the legitimacy of the militant tajdid movements.

Although concepts of tajdid and jihad were important parts of the content of the studies in these networks, there were no direct efforts to train people how to fight jihads. The core followers in the movements were students studying the religious sciences and had little training or experience in combat. Training for jihad generally involved study of the rules regulating what was permissible and what was forbidden in fighting jihads. Uthman dan Fodio, for example, wrote a major study on the rules defining what could and could not be done in a jihad [35]. It was accepted by the participants that there were limits to the violence of jihad.

Boko Haram presents a very different picture. It is part of trans-regional networks of activists but these networks differ significantly from the earlier ones. Teachers and students interact but the theological and conceptual contents of the discourses are extremist and marginal in relationship to the broader cosmopolitan intellectual community of contemporary Islam. As a result, the majority of Muslims around the world do not view Boko Haram, and other similar movements, as legitimately engaged in jihad. This negative assessment is strengthened by the view that the contemporary militants do not act in accord with the traditionally understood rules for engaging in jihad. Longstanding rules and precedents about the treatment of women and children, for example, are ignored in the violent campaigns of Boko Haram. This difference emphasizes the dramatically uncompromising positions of Boko Haram and the resulting difficulty of negotiating with the group. Instead, it creates a significant

characteristic of the new style of religious violence: violence without limitation or rules like those that shaped the concepts of just war and jihad.

Networks in which Boko Haram participates are also dramatically different in that a significant portion of network activity involves training to engage in violent conflict and terrorism. Such training efforts were absent in the earlier networks involving jihadists. The contemporary networks often become more vehicles for recruiting and training fighters than ways of presenting and advocating Islamic teachings. There is no indication that in the early jihads, recruits received training in the eighteenth century equivalents of "improvised explosive devices" (IEDs).

One significant difference between the networks of the two eras of jihad is in the technology of communication. Many analysts have noted the importance of the new electronic media in the activities of religious (and other) activist organizations [36]. Already in the 1990s, conflicts utilizing electronic resources were recognized as a new form of warfare—netwars [37]. The networks supporting religious violence in the Muslim world make very effective use of this new technology. However, networks of believing scholars and activists perform basically the same functions as they have in the past as vehicles for the exchange of ideas, with contemporary electronic exchanges of ideas being virtually instantaneous, while such exchanges in the eighteenth century often took months or years.

One of the major differences created by the new media for exchanging information is the sudden visibility that they can provide for small isolated groups. Oppositional groups in out-of-the-way places in the past frequently gained little attention outside of their own area. However, contemporary electronic media provide global audiences for even small rural movements. One of the early examples of this change is in the success of the Zapatista movement in Mexico. A local rural insurgency, opposing a repressive government, gained the attention of a network of global non-governmental humanitarian organizations. "Within days, a traditional guerrilla insurgency changed into an information-age social netwar." ([38], p. 187). The various networks of religious militants, drug and arms traders, and pop culture provide similar visibility for many different local groups.

In terms of movements engaged in religious violence in the Muslim world, the old networks of scholars and teachers provided a supportive interregional framework, but were usually not directly involved in the local organizations. During the twentieth century (in the pre-electronic media era), there were many movements of religious violence in the Muslim world, but they received minimal attention. In the 1920s, for example, a Sufi leader in Turkey, Shaykh Saʿid, led a major revolt against the Westernizing reform program of Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), which received little world attention, especially when compared with the attention given to the anti-Western jihad of Boko Haram. A similar contrast is between an earlier militant group in Maiduguri in the 1970s and 1980s, Maitatsine. This group had a profile very similar to the early stages of Boko Haram, with a central reformist teacher and a large number of followers who crystalized into an activist community. It represented "a classic example of millenarianism occasioned by the destruction of traditional socio-economic networks on which the wandering *mallams* [teachers] and their students…depended for their survival."([39], p. 525). However, in the days before Internet, Maitatsine received little attention outside of Nigeria. Much of the Nigerian public information about the group was the product of popular rumors [40], the geographically limited equivalent of Facebook and Twitter. When the founder of Maitatsine was killed, the movement ceased to be a significant element in religious violence. In contrast, the successor to Muhammad Yusuf in Boko Haram was able to transform the

local group, which many thought would cease to exist after the killing of Muhammad Yusuf, into a globally visible jihad group. An important element in this was the increasingly effective use of the global social media by Boko Haram in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

2.5. The Evolution of Religious Violence in Contemporary History

In many areas of life, the twenty-first century is a time of major transformations. Religious violence is part of these changes, and Boko Haram is an example of the developing modes of religious violence in the contemporary world. As has been discussed, networks are important in both the old jihad traditions in West Africa and in contemporary Muslim militancy. However, the instantaneous nature of electronic media, with its immediate global visibility, changes the role of the networks. Rather than simply being the means for communication of ideas among jihadists, the networks have become part of the militant operations themselves, transforming at least part of the jihad efforts into new style "netwar jihads." Boko Haram joins IS, al-Qa'ida, and other similar groups in this new mode of religious violence.

In broader historical terms, Boko Haram can also be viewed as a renewal of an old style of opposition to unjust rule. In the West African jihads of the eighteenth century, once the initial tajdid (reform) efforts were frustrated, the jihadists strove for the creation of a new political system, not just the replacement of an unjust ruler. This transition from renewalist-reform to a millenarian vision is also part of the development of Boko Haram. However, in the twenty-first century, it represents a new form of militant opposition to the existing state system.

In the modern politics of opposition to imperialism and then to the rulers in post-colonial states, the primary vision was "revolution," either in nationalist or Marxist forms, within the system of polities conceived as "nation-states." The system of interacting sovereign states, identified with the arrangements created by the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, became the core of European international politics and then spread to the rest of the world during the era of European imperialism. Even religious movements of opposition tended to operate within the framework of the established nation-states—the major Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, for example, was primarily an effort to take control of the existing modern state structure in Iran. In this way, even religious oppositional violence was less oriented toward the millenarian ideal of total replacement of the political system, and more seeking to control the existing political system and Islamizing it.

By the twenty-first century, post-Westphalian polities like the European Union became important parts of the global structures for political life. In the broader context of the history of modernity, scholars like S. N. Eisenstadt and Robert Hefner note the emergence of "multiple modernities" in which modernity takes many different social, cultural, and political—and religious—forms [41,42]. These new developments not only created new establishments of political and social power, they also involved the rise of new forms of opposition.

Even before the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001, scholars noted that global developments changed the role of religious movements. In 2000, Eisenstadt wrote, "The pivotal new development amounts to the transposition of the religious dimension, which was delegated or confined to private or secondary spheres in the classical model of the nation-state, into the central political and cultural arenas, and its significance in the constitution of novel collective identities. But…, the resurgence of religion did not entail a simple return to some traditional forms of religion, but rather a

far-reaching reconstitution of this religious component." ([41], p. 600). Hefner noted three types of responses to this new global situation: pluralist acceptance of religious diversity in a competitive religious marketplace, separatist sectarianism (in Islamic terms, the hijra option), and a militant absolutist response (the jihad option). The militant alternative, an "organic and aggressive response," is "to strap on the body armor, ready one's weapons, and launch a holy war for society as a whole." ([42], p. 98). Militant religious millenarianism became a significant mode of religious opposition in twenty-first century societies, and Boko Haram is an important manifestation of this new religious violence.

Boko Haram's millenarian alternative to existing Nigerian state and society is proclaimed as a caliphate. This identification was affirmed early in 2015 when Abubakar Shekau took an oath of loyalty (*bay'a*) to the leader of IS and received recognition as the province of IS in West Africa. This development represents a "re-branding" of Boko Haram, and a shift from networking with the old-style militant terrorist organization of al-Qa'ida: "Boko Haram's merger with the Islamic State was consistent with a broader transnational trend whereby militants formerly loyal to al-Qaʿida have switched sides in favor of the more youthful, social media-savvy, and territorial-focused Islamic State." ([29], pp. 17, 21).

The alliance with IS emphasizes the new forms of religious violence in the early twenty-first century and the contrasts with the extremist groups established in the late twentieth century. These new forms involve increasingly effective use of contemporary social media to recruit and train followers and then to provide the framework for violent operations in new-style netwar jihads. While many of the older groups proclaimed their long term goal as being the establishment of an Islamic polity, often labeled a "caliphate," they usually made little effort to maintain control over significant amounts of territory. IS and Boko Haram consciously view themselves as establishing and maintaining a new territorial entity which is different from the old post-colonial nation-states. They reflect the religious violence of the twenty-first century in its millenarian form.

3. Boko Haram and Twenty-First Century Religious Terrorism

Religious terrorism is a significant aspect of religious violence in the twenty-first century and is an important dimension in the evolution of terrorism in general. The development of Boko Haram reflects key elements in the emerging nature of contemporary religious terrorism, just as it experiences some of the changes in the more general phenomena of religious violence. Specifically, Boko Haram can be viewed as a changing participant in what some scholars identify as the fourth wave of modern terrorism, possibly highlighting the emergence of a fifth wave. In these aspects of its experience, it reflects the growing importance of territoriality in religious terrorism and the emerging neo-medieval style of warfare in religious militancy.

Many analysts identify modern terrorism as a distinctive form, while recognizing that terrorism has a long history and has taken many forms. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of modern terrorism are products of modernity itself. Martha Crenshaw notes that "modernization produces an interrelated set of factors that is a significant permissive cause of terrorism, as increased complexity on all levels of society and economy create opportunities and vulnerabilities. Sophisticated networks of transportation and communication offer mobility and the means of publicity for terrorists." ([43], p. 36).

Modern terrorism utilizes the resources of modern globalizing society and has evolved as modern global society itself has evolved.

3.1. The Waves of Modern Terrorism

In analyzing the evolution of modern terrorism, David Rapoport argues that there have been four waves of modern terrorism since the late nineteenth century ([22], pp. 46–73). Rapoport's framework is influential and provides a helpful foundation for examining Boko Haram as a religious terrorist organization. Rapoport's framework starts with late nineteenth century anarchists in Russia: "Modern terror began in Russia in the 1880s." ([22], p. 47). Anarchist terrorism was primarily a Western phenomenon but the second wave became global as a part of anti-colonial movements, beginning in the 1920s. The third wave, called the "New Left Wave" in this schema, was associated with the rise of radical, basically secular, ideological movements advocating revolutionary reform in the new post-colonial societies. This wave began to ebb in the 1980s, as the fourth wave—the "religious wave"—gained momentum.

The waves are not sharply separated; instead there are many continuities with different emphases. "Religious elements have always been important in modern terror because religious and ethnic identities often overlap." ([22], p. 61). However, the nationalist movements of the second and third waves primarily worked to create secular nation-states, while the new religious movements advocate new political models for state and society, within the framework of a religious tradition.

In many discussions of twentieth century religious terrorism, including Rapoport's, al-Qa'ida led by Osama bin Laden is seen as one of the prime examples of the new religious terrorism. Created within the jihad against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, al-Qa'ida "developed over a 20-year period into the world's first truly global terrorist movement." ([44], p. 2). As a global movement, it went beyond the nationalism of the second and third waves. Each wave of terrorism has many dimensions and the identifying name is not the only feature of the wave. Nationalism is a part of all of the waves, but "each wave shaped its national elements differently." ([22], p. 47). In religious terrorism, as shown in the case of al-Qa'ida, national and ethnic identities are subordinated to the transnational message and followers are recruited globally, with the help of new social media.

Although al-Qa'ida began in a religio-national jihad to gain control of the Afghan state, it soon became a transnational network of activists. Its long term goal was the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate, but it was established as a non-state organization to organize and coordinate terrorist attacks. It advocated a strict adherence to a rigid interpretation of Islam but its basic strategic goal was the destruction the United States and its "apostate" allies in the Muslim world. In its structure—and in its mode of operation—it was not an alternative to the state nor was it prepared to manage and control significant territory. In its proclaimed vision, it was millenarian, looking forward to a time of an Islamically-pure human society, but in practice it was pragmatically operational as a terrorist organization which did not attempt to establish its own exemplary society. In contrast to the pre-modern jihad movements in West Africa and to the experience of Boko Haram in its early days, hijra in al-Qa'ida practice was to training camps in order to participate in terrorist jihad, not to establish a settled community of believers.

If al-Qa'ida is the major example of the wave of religious terrorism, then Boko Haram is both a part of that fourth wave and an emerging example of a possible new mode of terrorism. The continuity is that the basic ideology and framework are religious. Both movements are opposed to secular ideologies and are neither old-style nationalists nor heirs to the leftist radical terrorism of the third wave. Both appeal to the faith and identity of a global community of believers and can appeal to the historic legitimation of religious violence as jihad. After Muhammad Yusuf's death, Boko Haram leaders had many contacts with the broader al-Qa'ida network, especially in dealings with AQIM (al-Qa'ida in the Maghrib). The impact of these contacts could be seen in the improved explosive devices used by Boko Haram, in the adoption of the tactic of suicide bombing, and in increasingly effective use of social media ([7], pp. 85–107).

With these connections with al-Qa'ida, Boko Haram is a part of the fourth wave. However, when Boko Haram became more formally a part of global jihad, it did not do so as a franchise of al-Qa'ida. It did so by recognizing the authority of the Caliphate declared by the IS in 2014. For Boko Haram and IS, the Caliphate is the concrete expression in real time of the millenarian vision of the goal of the global jihad. It is the negation of the nation-state as a legitimate political authority and affirms the identity of the movement as an alternative state system. This characteristic shows that Boko Haram is part of a post-al-Qa'ida formation. The contrast is emphasized by the non-state nature of al-Qa'ida, with neither Bin Ladin nor his successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, declaring himself to be Caliph.

Although the early Boko Haram did not make claims to control territory, when the organization under the leadership Abubakar Shekau conquered areas, he organized control of territory as a political entity. When Boko Haram took control of Gwoza in 2014, Shekau proclaimed that the region was now part of the Caliphate. The creation of state-like structures and the control of territory distinguish Boko Haram and IS from most of the fourth wave terrorist movements. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, even some franchises of al-Qa'ida adopted this new style of jihadism. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), for example, following its conquest of Al Mukalla in Yemen in April 2015 established "a civilian council and gave it a budget to pay salaries, import fuel and hire teams to clean up garbage," establishing a political administration [45]. Similarly, in Syria, although Jabhah al-Nasrah broke away from IS and maintained an affiliation with al-Qa'ida, it also created state-like administrations in territories under its control.

Audrey Kurth Cronin argues that ISIS is not simply an outgrowth from or a part of al-Qa'idah. Instead, "ISIS represents the post-al Qaeda jihadist threat." ([21], p. 87). Boko Haram is a part of this emerging "post-al Qaeda jihadist" style organization and along with ISIS possibly represents the emergence of a new—fifth—wave of modern terrorism. This fifth wave is still predominantly a form of religious violence but is a new style of organization and movement.

3.2. Neomedieval Military and New Forms of Religious Violence

A new style of military organization is associated with the statal nature of this Caliphate system. In most of the religious terrorist organizations of the fourth wave, acts of violence were targeted on particular individuals or sites. They were symbolic acts undertaken to create alarm among a target audience and to create instability. They were not undertaken to gain control of territory or to establish a concrete long term presence. Hijackings and hostage takings were developed as terrorist methods

already in the third wave of terrorism, and the suicide bomber became a major tactic by the beginning of the twenty-first century. The suicide mission was used widely by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and became "a hallmark of the organization." ([43], p. 7).

Boko Haram utilized these methods as they developed their jihad under Shekau. A suicide bombing by Boko Haram of the United Nations compound in Abuja in 2011 "was a boundary-creating attack, designed to expel foreigners and the foreign influence epitomized by the UN in Nigeria. It was also clearly designed to demonstrate to Nigeria and the world that Boko Haram's goals were no longer local in nature." ([10], pp. 19–20). However, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, the major force used by Boko Haram was its well-armed militia, which took control of territories, rather than the old-style individual terrorist attack. In this, it went beyond the usual style of fourth wave religious terrorism into an implementation of the religious terrorism in a new, millenarian wave working to establish post-Westphalian political systems in the framework of religious rather than secular polities.

The creation of a military force capable of conquering, and then maintaining control over, a territory is a feature of the emerging new style of terrorist organizations. Boko Haram emerged as a "grass roots rebellion" ([46], p. 135) by the second decade of the twenty-first century with its own military arm. A rebellion with a militia may utilize terrorism as a tactic but it is not simply a terrorist organization. Anticolonial terrorism was part of the broader movements of national grass roots rebellions against foreign imperialist control. Similarly, the revolutionary movements of the "New Left" wave, like Castro's Cuban Communist movement or radical Palestinian nationalist organizations, utilized terror as a part of their campaigns. The emergence of IS as an extremist millenarian organization different from al-Qa'ida—being an organization with its own military capacity to conquer and control territory—is in this broader pattern of terrorist activism. By 2014, Boko Haram's association with IS confirms it as another movement in this next wave of terrorism and political violence.

This new wave brings together two trends of the late twentieth century. One is the wave of developing religious terrorism in which violence is justified by a particular interpretation of a major world religious tradition. Rapoport's fourth wave includes Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Japanese religious terrorism, as well as Muslim ([22], p. 61). The second trend is the increasing importance of non-state military forces, ranging from private contract mercenary groups to militias and militant bands organized around ethnic, regional, or religious identities. Armed conflicts in the twenty-first century are more frequently fought between a variety of state and non-state forces than as inter-state wars. Sean McFate posits that this development involves the rise of "neomedieval" warfare as a part of the broader "reorganization and redistribution of power" in the global (and post-Westphalian) system of state and non-state actors ([47], p. 74).

Organizations of religious terror like Boko Haram and IS combine these two trends in millenarian religious organizations that have non-state armies. "Terrorism today [the second decade of the twenty-first century] embraces a neomedieval agenda. In the twentieth century when the Westphalian system was at its zenith, revolutionaries such as Mao Zedong in China, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Fidel Castro in Cuba, and Che Guevara in Bolivia fought to take over states. In the post-Cold War era, groups such as al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, and al-Qaida worldwide fight to leave the state system altogether, abandoning the Westphalian order." ([47], p. 82).

Non-state military forces are an important part of the organizations of religious violence in the twenty-first century. They make it possible for activists to believe in the possibility of establishing the desired state and society in the present. The debates about methods and goals are not primarily the debates of the fourth wave terrorists about whether to concentrate the jihad against the "far enemy" or the "near enemy." [48]. Fourth wave terrorists understood the establishment of the Caliphate to be a long struggle. For the advocates of jihad against the near enemy, "[E]ven the establishment of the caliphate…had to await the destruction of 'apostate' local rulers," while for those advocating the battle against the far enemy, the caliphate would only be possible following the defeat of the United States, at least in the Muslim world ([48], pp. 30, 267).

Twenty-first century jihad organizations with effective military forces are willing to declare the Caliphate as existing in territories under their control. IS and Boko Haram view the Caliphate as a part of the jihad, not the jihad's distant goal. As a part of the jihad itself, their Caliphate becomes militarized, and engages in a brutality that is in contrast to the traditional jihads which recognized limitations on violence. Boko Haram's practices in controlling territories, for example, are in sharp contrast to the policies of Uthman dan Fodio in the Sokoto Caliphate. The treatment of women is an important example of the contrasts. "The tradition of educating women, and women themselves writing tracts as practical guides to both rudimentary life skills and pious behavior, was an integral part of the Sokoto Caliphate community." ([49], p. 76). In Boko Haram, women are subjugated and have little role in the organization other than as servants and slaves.

As a terrorist organization, Boko Haram is evolving away from the type of organization characteristic of Rapoport's fourth wave, like al-Qa'ida, which is networks of activists engaged in acts of terror, who justify their violence by their self-identification as warriors engaged in jihad. Fourth wave Muslim terrorists have a global Caliphate as their goal, but believe that the achievement of that goal is in the distant future. Few, if any, of the leaders, claimed to be the caliph. The new religious terrorism might be thought of as operational millenarianism, in which the goal is proclaimed as achieved, and extreme measures of repressive control are utilized in creating and maintaining a religiously-identified, post-Westphalian political order.

4. Conclusions: Boko Haram as Militant Operational Millenarianism

Movements and organizations utilizing religiously justified violence are an important part of world history. In the modern era, militant religious social movements have taken many forms and in the twenty-first century, distinctive new types have developed, reflecting both continuities with past movements of religious violence and new characteristics shaped by contemporary globalizing developments and new technologies.

Boko Haram provides an important example of these trends. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, it became a part of a proclaimed Caliphate with a non-state military force working to establish a new, post-Westphalian polity. Like IS and other new groups, its religious violence is a part of its operational millenarianism which is a jihad that attempts to convert globalization into a process of global Islamization, imposing an extremist interpretation of Islam.

The non-state military dimension of this jihad has been identified as a neomedievalism which is post-Westphalian in its nature. In broader terms, the millenarian impulse of the new religious violence

shows a broader neomedievalism, with a profound continuity of millennial human hopes. In the middle of the twentieth century, Norman Cohn studied historic millenarianisms in Europe and saw in those movements a parallel to the modern secular millenarianisms of fascism and communism. His conclusion has relevance for the vicious millenarian utopianism of twenty-first century violent religious movements like IS and Boko Haram:

> "A boundless, millennial promise made with boundless prophet-like conviction to a number of rootless and desperate men in the midst of a society where traditional norms and relationships are disintegrating—here, it would seem, lay the source of that peculiar subterranean fanaticism which subsisted as a perpetual menace to the structure of medieval society. It may be suggested that here, too, lies the source of the giant fanaticisms which in our day have convulsed the world." ([50], p. 319).

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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