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“Join the Caravan”: The Ideology of Political Authority in Islam from Ibn Taymiyya to Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria

by Atta Barkindo

Abstract

More than countering merely the violence and the mayhem, the current challenge posed by the Boko Haram conflict is how to clearly define the factors and the actors. Debates continue to rage in the literature regarding what motivates non-state armed groups. Interestingly, the prominent ideological factor that seems to motivate Boko Haram revolves round the concept of political authority in Islam. This ideology, it is claimed, is not only propelled by the teachings of the medieval Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, but has also encouraged political violence and extremism in the name of Islam. However, it would appear that none of the debates has examined in any detail the extent to which this ideology has influenced the Boko Haram conflict – something which the present article seeks to do.

Introduction

Several contending theories have emerged to explain the Boko Haram uprising, broadly revolving round socio-economic, political and religious issues and the politics of transitional justice and impunity.[1] The latter refers to the implementation of a specific transitional justice mechanism and how the failure to bring perpetrators of crimes to account motivates resistant movements to transform themselves into violent armed groups. This includes the failure of Obasanjo’s Human Rights Violations and Investigations Commissions (HRVIC) [3]. One discourse that has remained less well examined is the theoretical claim that Boko Haram has been deeply influenced by the religious and ideological teachings of the radical medieval Islamist, Ibn Taymiyya [2]. Using historical, interpretive and analytical methods, this article, in addition to addressing socio-economic and political factors, focuses on the influence of Ibn Taymiyya in detail. The reason for this is that, first, some scholars suggest there is probably no other Islamic theologian, medieval or otherwise, who has had as much influence on radical political ideology of Islam as Ibn Taymiyya [4]. Furthermore, the ideology itself is constructed on the concept that a legitimate political authority must be based on the Quran and the Sunna (acts) of the Prophet. Consequently, it becomes a duty for all Muslims to ensure that Islamic law is implemented in society. As such, it is argued that most Islamic theologians, including reformers, revivalists and Islamists (extremists) either from the Sufi or Sunni tradition, from the Wahhabis to Sayyid Qutb and to Osama Bin Laden have in one way or the other attacked the validity of secular political authority. They have also questioned the authority of Muslim but secular political leaders who have failed both in their personal and political lives to uphold correct Islamic ideals.

How do we relate the concept and practice of Ibn Taymiyya's political ideology to the Boko Haram call for an Islamic state in Nigeria? The intention of this article is not to redefine the historical impression that has come into existence as to who Ibn Taymiyya was. Rather, an attempt will be made to examine the development of the concept of legitimate political authority in Islam. This is followed by an analysis of its radical and violent implications, how it was transited down to Boko Haram and why such ideology is a potent tool for Boko Haram's mobilisation efforts. Finally, the possible lessons Boko Haram might have learned from the experience of Ibn Taymiyya is outlined.

Ibn Taymiyya and the Ideology of Legitimate Political Authority in Islam

Regarded as a 14th century Islamist, Ibn Taymiyya was born in Harran, an old city within the Arabian Peninsula between Sham and Iraq (Al-Shams is an old name that represents the areas of Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon) in the year 1263 [5]. Ibn Taymiyya became a professor of Islamic law, worked in Bagdad and was forced to flee to Damascus in Syria because of the Mongol invasion in 1258 [6]. His political ideology was very unpopular with political leaders at the time and he was imprisoned in both Syria and Egypt. Ideology as understood and applied in this context is defined as a set of ideas by which men explain and justify the ends and means of organized social action, with the aim of preserving or reconstructing a given reality [7]. In totalitarian systems, for example, ideologies are powerful tools for the mobilization of the masses as well as sources of legitimacy - sources of the sense of mission of a leader or a ruling group [8]. In this sense the ideology of political authority in Islam is more than merely a religion in the narrow sense of theological belief, private prayer and ritual worship. It also serves as a total way of life offering guidance for political, economic and social behaviour [9]. It is safe to suggest that Ibn Taymiyya picked up some religious elements in Islam and turned them into an ideological precept [10]. The development of Ibn Taymiyya's ideology of legitimate political authority in Islam makes an interesting reading.

First of all, research has shown that pre-Islamic Arab society had a community structure based on tribal customs and traditions [11]. The first signs that political authority in Islam was emerging was when the Prophet and his companions faced severe persecution in Mecca and migrated to Medina. While in Medina, the Prophet drew up a pact known as *miṭāq al-Madina* (the Medinan Treaty). This particular treaty was very significant because, it guaranteed full autonomy to all tribes and religious groups like the Jews, the Muslims and other pagan tribes. In addition, it went beyond tribal structures and laid down the principle that if an outside force attacks Medina all will defend it together. Critically, al-Raziq argues that the Prophet's intention might not have been to give primacy to a political community. Rather, he wanted to build a community based on religious faith. If Muslims evolved into a community that uses its religious faith to respond to political issues, it was accidental rather than essential [12]. Arguably, the distinction is not about the incompatibility or complete separation of the religious and political

communities. Al-Raziq's analysis reiterates the primacy, not incompatibility, of religion over politics in the *Medinan Treaty*. The fundamental intention of the Prophet was to establish a religious community tolerant of diversity and responsive to political problems, but not a sovereign political authority.

Elsewhere, Al-Raziq argues that the intention of the Prophet was crystal clear: the Islamic community was to be a community of believers whose common religious bond replaced individual tribal allegiance, which had been based on blood kinship. Allah is the sovereign leader of the state, Mohammad, his messenger on earth. Therefore the successors of Mohammad were to ensure that the faithful were following the divine will as expressed in the sacred revealed law of Islam. The law then provided the blueprint for an Islamic society which served as a guide for every aspect of life - outlining duties to God and duties to one's fellow Muslims [13]. However, as Islam expanded and came into contact with other civilizations, questions began to emerge whether or not this was to be the only acceptable vision. Was there any principal code in this vision that called for the exclusion and the non-recognition of other forms of governance?

Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya developed his political ideology in response to such burning questions. He argued that any exercise of authority, be it political or religious, "must be based on the law of Allah" [14]. Thus this can only be legitimate in Islam when it acknowledges this mission and vision of the Prophet, implementing them in every society as the source of law and governance. The process of implementation becomes a religious duty for all Muslims. The development of this ideology by Ibn Taymiyya must be understood against the socio-political context of Ibn Taymiyya's life during a period of profound spiritual and political upheaval. In 1258, the Abbasid Empire (present day Iraq) was defeated by the Mongol armies and Bagdad was captured. For most Muslims, the defeat of the ruling dynasty was an unmitigated disaster. Bagdad, a renowned city of Islamic learning, suffered the fate of being looted and pillaged [15]. This experience forced Ibn Taymiyya into active politics. His first incursion into political life took place in 1293 [16]. He was so depressed by the atrocities committed by the Mongol invaders against the ideals of Islam that he became one of the reformers of Islam [17]. While in jail in Cairo, he wrote his treatise on juridical policy or legitimate political authority in Islam, the date of which may be put around 1315 [18]. In this book, he expressed clearly the basic elements of his radical political ideology.

First, he argued that the legitimacy of political authority must be based on God's revelation in the Quran. In addition, the understanding of God must be based on the teachings of the Quran and the prophet. To describe God as he described himself in his book and as the Prophet described him in the Sunna, repudiating at the same time the attributes humans ascribe to Allah, the comparison humans make of Allah with his creatures and the use of symbolic or allegorical exegesis. All creatures for him must leave to Allah the ultimate mystery of things and must submit voluntarily and unconditional to his word and to his prophet [19]. Second, the belief in

the unity and sovereignty of Allah was to be the foundation of the political, social and moral systems propounded by the Prophets. The basic principle of this theory is that human beings must, individually and collectively, surrender all rights of lordship, legislation and exercising authority over others. No one should be allowed to pass orders or make commands in his own right and no one ought to accept the obligation to carry out such commands and obey such orders. He was a ferocious opponent of *bid'a* (innovation) because the more the innovator tries to be original, the more he distances himself from Allah. Due to the Mongol invasion, he insisted on the defensive jihad and the need to protect Muslim lands from Mongol invasion. For him the command to participate in jihad and its merit are crystal clear in the Quran, deserving no further discussion. With this in mind, he advocated a society where only the law of Allah was to be applied. The reformation of Muslim rulers and their followers would, in his view, only be achieved when the ruler and the ruled collaborate to ensure the law of Allah reigns supreme, as it is clearly stated “collaborate in virtue and righteousness and do not collaborate in sin and transgression” [20]. The application of the law of Allah therefore was the only prerequisite for legitimate political authority and the valid means of defending and reforming all societies.

Implications of Ibn Taymiyya's Political Ideology

The particular implication of Ibn Taymiyya's political ideology is that it runs contrary to the demands of the fundamental principles of democracy. He insisted that the source of law that governs society must be derived from the Quran and Sunna of the Prophet. Both the ruler and the ruled are subject to the law of Allah [21], that no person, class or group, not even the entire population of the state as a whole, can lay claim to sovereignty. Allah alone is the real sovereign; all others are merely his subjects. Allah is the real law-giver and absolute legislation rests in him. In modern political terms, this is considered as a religious dictatorship because it does not give space for the existence of other religions traditions and the importance of other forms of political governance. A further comparison shows that the doctrine of Ibn Taymiyya completely repudiates the idea of popular sovereignty, a system of governance where the selection of leaders and public officers and the making of laws is entirely left in the hands of the people. He laid claim only to the sovereignty of God and the viceroy of God on earth. It is what Mawdudi (and others) described as “theocracy” [22] where the Muslim population represented by the viceroy runs the state in accordance with the book of God and the practice of his Prophet.

In addition, the government of the day then becomes only a political agency set up to enforce the law of God. As such it is expected to rule on all affairs of men including the choice of leaders to all public offices, where human reason and guidance does not play much of a role. Thus, this choice must be made not based on human laws and civil constitutions but on principles guided by the Quran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. Ibn Taymiyya made God the centre and kernel of all forms of political authority in Islam and in the society. He forbade the separation of state and religion. The state is, in his view, created only at the service of religion. The complementarity of

state and religion becomes important only when the state is subjected to the whims and caprices of religion and religious leaders. Finally, Ibn Taymiyya seemed to indicate that both the ruler and the ruled are not only subjects to God's law but are transformed by it. What is considered as a civil right in democratic society, Ibn Taymiyya saw as a religious duty. When one refuses to exercise his civil right, it is not an offence or a crime. However, when one fails in one's religious duty, it becomes a serious crime and can be punished by divine decree. This is manifested in the way most Islamists see it as a religious duty to enforce not just the implementation of Islamic law but also to force others to accept it by whatever means, including the use of violence.

In general terms, if the concept of legitimate political authority as proposed by Ibn Taymiyya has to be literally implemented, there are far-reaching consequences not just for Islamic countries, but more importantly for emerging democracies across the developing nations where Muslim populations are growing. The reason is that the foundation of democracy in modern times lies in the sovereignty of the people. In it, the absolute power of legislation rests in the hands of the people. If a particular piece of legislation is desired by the masses, however ill-conceived it may be from the religious and moral point of view, steps have to be taken to place it on the statute book. If, on the other hand, the people dislike any law and demand its abrogation, however just and rightful it might be, it has to be expunged forthwith [23]. As a result, constituent assemblies, representative elections, parliamentary and multi-party systems have all emerged to give people the right to choose and depose their leaders, make or abrogate laws through their representatives so as to ensure equal rights in all civil and political institutions [24]. Halim Rane suggests that it is a system of governance based on the universal principles of social justice, as envisaged by the masses, rather than "crude appeals to the punitive aspects of sharia law or creating an Islamic state in the conventional modern sense" [25]. However, the extreme ideology of Boko Haram does not seem to give space for the plurality of cultures, religions and institutions.

The Transition from Ibn Taymiyya's Political Ideology to Boko Haram's Agenda

According to Bonney and Lewis, Ibn Taymiyya's views on legitimate political authority in Islam greatly influenced the prototype of Takfiri ideology (i.e. the practice of pronouncing others as being infidels) and influenced anti-colonial uprisings that called for the establishment of Islamic governance; such as the Jihad of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab 1744-1773; the Jihad of Abd al-Qadir in Algeria from 1808-1883 and the Jihad of Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda affiliates. Ibn Taymiyya's ideology recognised a defensive form of jihad based on the strict observance of a Quranic injunction. Thus his influence within Sunni Islamists (extremists) like Osama Bin Laden could be seen as a link between global *takfiri* ideology and local contemporary grievances. It is necessary to concede that this form of defensive jihad espoused by Ibn Taymiyya's ideology is different from other forms of jihad based on mainstream Sufi traditions like the Jihad of the Mahdi in the Sudan from 1844 -1885, the Jihad of Imam Shamil in Russia

from 1834 -1859 [26] and that of Othman Dan Fodio in Northern Nigeria in more recent times. These were protagonists of the Sufi tradition whose forms of jihads were also defensive. However, unlike the Taymiyyan jihad, they were built upon consensus and analogy. However, whether these jihads were offensive or defensive and whether they belonged to Sufi or Sunni traditions is disputable. What is clear is that the sense of Ibn Taymiyya's ideology of legitimate political authority is evident in most of them, albeit in different nature and texture.

In light of these distinctions, evidence suggests that his ideology regained prominence with the activities of Osama bin Laden. Twice Osama cited Ibn Taymiyya in his sermons and communiqués in 2003. On one occasion he said:

The most important religious duty – after belief itself - is to ward off and fight the enemy aggressor. Šayḥ al-Islam (Ibn Taymiyya), may Allāh have mercy upon him, said: “to drive off the enemy aggressor who destroys both religion and the world – there is no religious duty more important than this, apart from belief itself. This is an unconditional rule.” [27].

It is therefore not surprising that north-eastern Nigeria was not left out in the whirlwind of Ibn Taymiyya's far-reaching influence with the emergence of Boko Haram. According to Abū Abd Allah Al-Sa'dī, one of the leading figures of Al-Qaeda:

The state of šayh Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhāb (Saudi Arabia) arose only by *ğihād*. The state of the *Tālibān* in Afghanistan arose only by *ğihād*. It is true that these attempts were not perfect and did not fill the full role required, but incremental progress is a known universal principle. Yesterday, we did not dream of a state; today we established states and they fall. Tomorrow, Allah willing, a state will arise and will not fall [28].

The feelings expressed in the above quote demonstrate the fact that extremists like the followers of Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram are not lying low in their effort to establish Islamic rule and that the ideological influence of the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, even if taken out of context, cannot be overlooked. Before the emergence of Boko Haram, some scholars have tried to link the extremist nature of the Maitatsine sect to Ibn Taymiyya. Maitatsine was a group led by Muhammad Marwa who claimed to be more powerful than the Prophet with a divine mission to save Nigeria [29]. He banned the use of modern technology. By 1980, Maitatsine presented Nigeria with its first case of violent Islamic radicalisation [30]. This call to religious duty in ensuring the rule Allah as advocated by Ibn Taymiyya, though frowned upon by some fraction of Muslims in Nigeria, has likely become the central mission of Boko Haram.

Some commentators have argued that though plausible, it is still difficult to establish the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya's ideology has influenced Boko Haram. First of all, most of what is regarded as information about the group is tainted and does not consist of reliable first-hand evidence [31]. Second, there is no evidence to suggest that the core leaders of Boko Haram read the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and have been deeply influenced by it. However, to be influenced

by a particular ideology does not necessarily suggest that one must have read the original text of the ideology itself. Yet the principal witnesses in this case whose evidence would have been most reliable are the thousands of corpses that littered the landscape including that of the leaders of the movement who, in the eyes of the public were victims of judicial murder by the security agents. However, it is a fact that there are many audio-tapes in circulation purported to be recordings of their leader's sermons where he directly quotes Ibn Taymiyya. Yet how and where these recordings were made and by whom – that has not yet been verified. Some have claimed the influence of Ibn Taymiyya's ideology is linked to the emergence of Boko Haram. Fundamental to this discourse in northern Nigeria is Suleiman who wrote:

We will be betraying the cause of Islam and the integrity of the Muslim umma if we fail to discharge our obligations to Muslims. These obligations entail, among other things, the establishment of Islam as a complete polity and the dismantling of all western influences as they affect us [32].

Many analysts suggest that Boko Haram emerged as a non-violent socio-religious movement in 1995 known under the name "The People Committed to hijra and the Prophet's Teachings (*ahl al-sunna wa jama'a al-hijra*). In 2002, the group declared the entire city of Maiduguri intolerably corrupt and irredeemable. Under a new leader, Ali Muhammad, they embarked on hijra; along the lines of the Prophet, from Maiduguri to a village called Kanama in Yobe state. In December 2003, a community dispute regarding fishing rights led to a siege of its mosque by the Nigerian army and the brutal execution of the leader, Mohammad Ali, and seventy others. Under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf, the survivors returned to Maiduguri, recruited and expanded their network across the north-eastern states. However, sustained security pressure culminated in an assault on Boko Haram in 2009. Dozens of people were then rounded up and executed without trial, including Yusuf. Last argues that there is no doubt the suppression operation of 2009, and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian security forces in July of 2009 (sic), was a turning point for Boko Haram. This turning point, according to Cook, is reflected in the ideological, structural and operational changes within the group. This is likely so because, since 2009, the group has tactically transformed itself into a violent sect, driven by a desire for vengeance against the state and western related institutions.

Sources indicate that the acclaimed founder of Boko Haram Muhammad Yusuf received a western-style education. Other sources suggest that he completed a basic education in Quranic studies in Niger and Chad [33]. Yusuf was reportedly a member of the Borno State Shari'a implementation committee under Governor Mallah Kachallah, and was an active participant in Islamic debates on television and radio [34]. Suggestions indicate that when he lost out with the government of Ali Modu Sheriff (later to become Senator Modu Sheriff), he preached a return to the original sources in Islam and called for the rejection of all currents from abroad. He totally rejected the political and social principles on which modern civilization, particularly of the western nations, are built [35]. The original name of Boko Haram itself, *Jama'atul Ahlu Sunna*

Lidda 'Awati wal Jihad, or People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad [36], seemingly reinforces Ibn Taymiyya's call to return to the basics of Islam belief and the duty to implement such beliefs. Yusuf compared Western education and modern statecraft with the Mongol invasion during the time of Ibn Taymiyya. Political leaders in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria, professed to be Muslims but deep down they were committing atrocities that were antithetical to Islamic ideals and values.

In what looks like an impressive furtherance of Ibn Taymiyya's ideology, Yusuf preached, "Our land was an Islamic state before it (sic) was turned it into a land of *kafir* (infidel), the current system is contrary to true Muslim beliefs" [37]. Experts like James Forest suggest that this was a clear-cut message to fight the secular government in Nigeria; a government compared to the Mongol invaders of Ibn Taymiyya's time. In addition, it well known that they preached openly in places like Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Maiduguri and other places. According to Kukah,

they were obviously contemptuous of the state and its agents and agencies and they openly said so in their sermons. They abused other Muslims whom they considered to have abandoned the paths of Islam. They rejected the corrupting influence of the secular world, they railed against the corruption within the so called Islamic community. They abused the political class openly. Like all millenarian groups, they spoke and looked forward to a future of living in an Islamic state. They believed that a truly Islamic state was possible even though they were ignorant of the real world beyond them [38].

Similarly, the news of the heroic exploits of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban would naturally have been a sign that progress was being made in the quest towards an Islamic world. In parts of the Northern states, settlements have been renamed new Mecca, new Afghanistan, Basra, Karbala etc. In his sermons, Yusuf maintained that socialism, capitalism, military dictatorship, western education and modern statecraft have all failed because God was excluded from these systems. The solution therefore was to return to the noble, honourable, moral and perfect principles of the rule of Islamic religion, which is infinitely more accomplished, more pure, more glorious, and more complete than all that have been discovered earlier by political and social theorists. Thompson argues that the dire economic stress, the greed, corruption, unemployment, naked poverty all combined into a living testimony of the failure of the modern statecraft in northern Nigeria. More so, Boko Haram seemingly became an attractive platform for a political opposition experiencing fears of arrest, harassment or intimidation.

Consequently, like Ibn Taymiyya, Boko Haram believed that the reformation of Islam and the implementation of Islamic law remains the only valuable option for social justice and prosperity. It is not surprising that recently, markets in the towns of Kafanchan and Michika in the north-central and north-eastern regions respectively were segmented divided into Christian and Muslim markets, at least administratively. This has many implications not only for the drive towards dialogue and integration, but also the continuous creation of conflict and prejudice. As important

as these observations are, it is safe to suggest that violence on the side of both the government and Boko Haram will not bring a lasting solution. It becomes imperative that political dialogue be considered. From the ideological point of view, it will be wise for Boko Haram members to rethink some features of the Islamic religion and consider how much Islam has to offer the world in terms of peace, tolerance and mutual coexistence.

The Question of Change and Moderate Voices in History: Lessons for Boko Haram

Immediately after the death of Prophet Muhammad in Madina, Islam flourished rapidly, especially during the Umayyad caliphate and the Abbasid caliphates. Then there emerged the powerful Safavid Empire in Persia, the Mughal Empire in the Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East which lasted till 1923. However, with the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 by Ataturk in Istanbul, Turkey, a process of western colonization which intensified during the First World War, set in. Thus for the first time in history, many parts of these once mighty Islamic empires found themselves subjugated and ruled by foreigners who were unbelievers. Empires were fragmented and divided into nation states, weakening the Islamic community and initiating a long process of imposing western values and in some cases democratization in the Muslim countries. As the 20th century progressed, Muslim political fortunes began to change with the rise of independence movements, the shedding of colonial rule and the beginning of constitutional debates regarding the status of Islam as a state religion, its ideological role in national governance, the place of Islamic law in the state's legal system. Also discussed was the question of separation of state and religion, especially in judicial and educational systems and the change in status of women through the reform of Muslim family law. Was the legitimate political authority as demanded by Ibn Taymiyya capable of accommodating other forms of political authority and ensuring the coexistence of different faiths in a multicultural society?

To respond to these historical challenges, there emerged a radical change in the political, economic, social, and moral mentality of many Muslims societies. For example, there emerged in most of the Islamic countries a new generation of Muslim political parties like Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi; AKP), Malaysia's People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat; PKR) and Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera; PKS). Such parties are Islamic in orientation and identity but base their political programs on universal principles such as democracy, social justice, rule of law, human rights, pluralism. Today there are Islamic political parties in Muslim countries like Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Pakistan [39]. Al-Hakim observes that the Islamic world is passing through a devastating period of transition. A period of economic and scientific change which took Europe five hundred years is, in the Muslim world, being squeezed into a couple of generations. Only thirty five years ago the capital of Saudi Arabia was a cluster of mud

huts, as it has been thousands of years. Today's Riyadh is a hi-tech mega city of glass towers, coke machines and gliding Cadillac cars [40].

Writers like Allawi noted that a journey from Riyadh to Dubai, to Bahrain and the cities in the Gulf shows rampant commercialism, brand worship, gigantism, strict class segregation and a calendar of festivals and events designed by marketers to promote frantic capitalism, relegating to the background the traditions and the Islamic legacies of the people [41]. Many visions developed in these cities are clearly antithetical to Islam. It is what the urban critic Mike Davis has termed, a place where "Speer meets Disney on the shores of Araby" [42]. Allawi noted further that sometimes these developments are conceived on the basis of exclusion, isolation, fear and imitation. The ridiculous names of these developments like the Lagoons, Fortuna Towers and Residences, the Villas at Bay Village, are nearly all drawn from American real estate marketing manuals. It is these models of developments in the Gulf cities that are being exported to other Islamic cities such as Islamabad, Cairo, Karachi, Casablanca, Khartoum and Tunis [43].

How will Muslims live out their Islamic identity as they come into contact with modern democracy and secular ideas associated with the West? Can the individual Muslim jettison his or her worldview, the demand for complete practice of Islamic law as advocated by Ibn Taymiyya and demonstrated by members of the Boko Haram Sect in Northern Nigeria without a traumatic break with the past? How are members of Boko Haram to acquire virtues embodied in democratic civilization without seriously compromising or abandoning their own ideals of Islamic legacy? What aspects of Western democracy and secular ideas are they to acknowledge as foundations of modernity and the need to implement them to achieve Islamic governance, the Judeo-Christian heritage? [44]. Evidently, many Muslim countries, particularly the younger generations are beginning to accept the valuable contributions western democracy can make in improving the standard of living for all human beings irrespective of religion, colour or region, seeing in them the prototype of all that is vital and progressive. Can Boko Haram not begin to see the same thing in Northern Nigeria? Why will Boko Haram not consider transforming itself into a genuine political party?

One of the moderate voices worth considering here is that of Ali Al-Raziq. In the debate that followed the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, Al-Raziq offered a contribution entitled *Islam and the Bases of Power*, which led to his condemnation by a council of Islamic scholars at the famous al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt [45]. Al-Raziq argues that there is no need for an Islamic state in the contemporary Muslim societies as advocated by Ibn Taymiyya and others. To defend his position, he rejected the essential or internal connection between prophecy and kingship. The only connection is not in meaning but in roles. The fact that one is a prophet does not always necessarily mean that he has to physically fight for the deliverance of his people. He further contends that sometimes God raised prophets without actually making them kings. The fact that Prophet Muhammad was a head of Islam as a religious unit cannot be denied and that as

head of that unit, he preached with word and sword, obtained divine revelation and was aided by divine forces is also not denied by his believers. However, all these activities of Prophet Muhammad were not in any way a process of establishing an Islamic state. They were activities meant for the formation of the Islamic religion [46]. He contends that even in the Quran, the prophet had nothing to do with political royalty. He makes references to Quran 80, “He who obeys the prophet obeys God. As for those who turn away we have not sent you to be their guardian” [47] and “Your people have denied it. Though it is the truth, say, I am not in charge of you, for every announcement there is a term and you will come to know” [48]. Even human reason, according to him, forbids us to accept that the prophet was a political king and that he was sent by God to massacre people, attack caravans, exile the Jews and establish a kingdom. The unity which existed at the time of the prophet was in no respect a political unity. It was a unity based on faith and religious dogma, free from the admixture of politics.

Secondly, the utterances of the Prophet made no allusion to an Islamic state or an Arab state. If his mission was also the establishment of a political kingdom, how come he did not pursue the most fundamental elements and the details of organizing and establish such an Islamic state?

The central teaching of Islam is the principle of *unity* - the oneness of Allah. As such there is one universe and one humanity. This lack of distinction, segregation and discrimination in God should be reflected in the universe and in humanity. *Jihad* should stand for self-control and the struggle to excel in what is good. This should be the basic pillar of the community.

Conclusion

The article has tried to illuminate the radical, if not violent, political ideology of Ibn Taymiyya and its influence on the ideological motivations of Boko Haram. It has also examined the implications of his ideas for Boko Haram agenda. The goal of Boko Haram today in northern Nigeria is not only to fight a modern state but to ensure that Islamic law is the basis of political organization and civil life in Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria. However, whatever the grievances of Boko Haram are, the radical and violent views embedded in the ideology of Ibn Taymiyya are not the solution to the problems of Nigeria’s multi-ethnic society. As Al-Ashmawi noted, “each human being is the word of God and is entitled to every human right because humanity is one community” [49]. It is time that Boko Haram joins the caravan for peace in Northern Nigeria.

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at the Pontifical University for Islamic Studies, PISAI, Rome. He also obtained an MSc degree at SOAS. His current PhD thesis research addresses issues of impunity, memory and the politics of terrorism in the transformation of the Boko Haram sect in north-eastern Nigeria.

Notes

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