



MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Northern Nigeria’s Protracted Social Deprivation and Violent Extremism:

Investigating the Connections of the *Almajiri* Phenomenon to the Recruitment/ Membership of Dissident Groups in the Post-Colonial States of Kano, Maiduguri and Yola in Northern Nigeria”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

With approximately 13.2 million children out of school in Nigeria, the country has had growing concerns especially in the past two decades over the exponential growth in the number of '*Almajirai*' (a Hausa/Arabic term for students in Qur'anic schools). *Almajiranci* (the practice/process) as a religious practice has allegedly instigated warfare, radicalism, political instability, unemployment, rebellion, banditry and other related sociopolitical/economic concerns. This research however focuses on deconstructing and investigating the *Almajiri* phenomenon; its dynamics, historicity, permutations, current status and most importantly, the connections of *Almajiranci* to the formation of dissident groups in post-colonial Hausa states of Northern Nigeria where it is predominantly practiced. The study starts by examining how this 'religious obligation' has deviated from its original objective as contained in the dictates of Islam. It further contextualizes the social, political and economic identifiers of *Almajiranci* and how this phenomenon has inherently entangled itself with Nigeria's security apparatus; from the *Almajirai*'s alleged contacts and social networking with Boko Haram to the '*Yan daba*' subcultures. These ensuing factors necessitated this study whilst encapsulating the interstate, regional and international relevance of violent groups prevalent in Northern Nigeria. Using Boko Haram as the largest '*radical Islamic-sect-turned terrorist group*' that ever emerged from Nigeria, as well as other local dissident groups in Northern Nigeria ('*Yan Daba*', '*Yan Tsane*', '*Yan Banga*'); the study analyzes how *Almajiranci* has constituted the major pool from which the aforementioned violent groups draw their membership. The underlying reason behind this study stems from the fact that Nigeria has had an approximately 13.2 million out of school children whilst accounting for 45% of out-of-school children in West Africa; more than 90% of which are *Almajirai*. Over the years, the phenomenon of *Almajiranci* has been known to have metamorphosed from being just a religious obligation to creating a breeding ground for alternative insurgent groups' formation, whilst adulterating its originally institutionalized Islamic objective in the process.

Key words- *Almajirai*; Violent extremism; Islamic fundamentalism; Terrorism; Radicalization; Boko Haram; Post-colonial; Social deprivation

Zusammenfassung

Nigeria ist vor allem in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten geprägt von wachsenden Sorgen über die exponentielle Zunahme der Zahl der sogenannten "Almajirai" (ein hausa/arabischer Begriff für Schüler in Koranschulen), die den Großteil der etwa 13,2 Millionen Kindern ausmachen, die in Nigeria nicht zur Schule gehen. Almajiranci (die Praxis/das Verfahren) als religiöse Praxis hat angeblich zu Kriegen, Radikalismus, politischer Instabilität, Arbeitslosigkeit, Rebellion, Banditentum und anderen damit verbundenen soziopolitischen und wirtschaftlichen Problemen geführt. Es ist bekannt, dass sich die Almajiranci im Laufe der Jahre von einer bloßen religiösen Verpflichtung zu einem Nährboden für die Bildung alternativer aufständischer Gruppen entwickelt haben und dabei ihr ursprünglich institutionalisiertes islamisches Ziel verfälscht haben. Die vorliegende Arbeit konzentriert sich jedoch auf die Untersuchung des Almajiri-Phänomens unter Berücksichtigung seiner allgemeinen Formen und Dynamiken, seiner Geschichtlichkeit und seiner gegenwärtigen Ausprägung. Ein besonderer Fokus liegt dabei auf der Bedeutung von Almajiranci für die Bildung von Dissidentengruppen in den postkolonialen Hausa-Staaten Nordnigerias, wo diese religiöse Praxis überwiegend ausgeübt wird. Die Arbeit untersucht zunächst, wie sich diese "religiöse Pflicht" von ihrem ursprünglichen Ziel, wie es in den Geboten des Islam enthalten ist, entfernt hat. Darüber hinaus werden die sozialen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Merkmale der Almajiranci untersucht, und es wird aufgezeigt, wie sich dieses Phänomen mit dem nigerianischen Sicherheitsapparat verstrickt hat, resultierend aus den angeblichen Kontakten und sozialen Netzwerken der Almajirai mit Boko Haram und den Subkulturen der Yandaba. Die Arbeit beleuchtet außerdem die gleichzeitig die zwischenstaatliche, regionale und internationale Relevanz gewalttätiger Gruppen in Nordnigeria. Anhand von Boko Haram, der größten radikal-islamischen Sekte, die jemals in Nigeria entstanden ist, sowie anderer lokaler Dissidentengruppen in Nordnigeria ('Yan Daba, 'Yan Tsane, 'Yan Banga) analysiert die Arbeit, wie die Almajiranci den Hauptpool bilden, aus dem diese gewalttätigen Gruppen ihre Mitglieder rekrutieren.

Schlüsselwörter - Almajirai; gewalttätiger Extremismus; islamischer Fundamentalismus; Terrorismus; Radikalisierung; Boko Haram; postkolonial; soziale Benachteiligung

To my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Celestine Abba Jima who have always believed in me; my siblings; Sena, Pennensi, Nese, Lahdi, David and Benjamin; and my constant motivation; Tongret Mwansat.

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Brief definitions of Key Terms:

**Almajiri* (*Almajirai*, plural) – A child who is assigned to an itinerant instructor to learn not just the Islamic faith/religion, but also how to support himself, his teacher, and his family.

**Almajiranci* - The process or practice of learning, traveling, and all things that come with travel.

**Makarantar Allo*, *Madrassa* or *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri* School) - Where child students learn the teachings of the Qur'an and acquire knowledge as instructed by the prophet.

**Allaramma/ Mallam* - The (traditionally male) teacher who acts in loco parentis; a religious instructor.

INTRODUCTION

The *Almajiri* practice in Northern Nigeria's Hausaland is exclusive to boys as young as five and as old as seventeen who are primarily from impoverished rural families whose parents "apprentice" them to a Mallam (Muslim religious cleric) normally in a larger town/city where they undergo a "traditional" Islamic education which consists, generally, of committing the Holy Qur'an to rote memory.¹ There are however, ambiguities associated with the age grade of the *Almajirai* as some of them could be as old as 24 (or more) depending on their mastery of the Qur'anic teachings and their grasp on its recitation.²

One would have wondered how such a beautiful, yet epistemological religious practice would transform into a sociopolitical nightmare, creating countless problems leading to loss of lives and property in the country. While many would attribute the distortion of the *Almajiri* phenomenon to religious radicalism, others would prefer to cast the said practice on "the influence of colonialism, and its entrenchment of Western education, together with the watering down of traditional indigenous practices."³ Needless to say, colonial obstruction arguably constitutes the foundation of a malfunctioned *Almajiri* system in Northern Nigeria. In post-colonial Nigeria, especially within the last two decades, the *Almajiri* population has had an exponential growth⁴⁵ and the Nigerian state has been criticized for 'using' the said group as political tools to disrupt the running of socio-political activities in the state, while negating the drive towards development in Nigeria's Northern states. Find below Nigeria's modern day political map representing the 36 states of the federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

¹ Hansen, 2016: 83-84

² Iro/Surulola, 2013: 100-101

³ Magashi, 2015: 71

⁴ Releif Web, 2020: n. p

⁵ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 104

Figure 1. Nigeria's Modern Day Political Map



Source- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Nigeria [Accessed 22 February, 2021]

The deliberate choice of the word ‘using’ can be dissected to mean a number of factors; that the *Almajiri* group(s) is (are) exposed to political thuggery and are prone to manipulations by politicians, as militia; to disrupt political campaigns and rallies — a fundamental concept that features prominently in Northern Nigeria even without compelling facts. Below is an excerpt that offers a holistic explanation of the situation in question -

“Exploited and used by the politicians as thugs and hoodlums to foment trouble, cause a riot, disrupt peace and achieve selfish political interest. In fact, it has been alleged that most of the terrorist attacks involving suicide bombings, setting places of worship ablaze, killing innocent souls and destroying property were masterminded by jobless pupils of the *Almajiri* schools [...]”⁶

The dynamics of the *Almajiri* practice in Sub-Saharan Africa is not only peculiar to this region. Its prevalence in most West African countries is relatively significant according to the distribution of the Muslim population in these regions and beyond. For example, the *Almajiri* groups can also be found in Central Asia and Pakistan, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and sparsely distributed across other parts of the African continent.⁷⁸ However, one thing remains certain; Nigeria is not only the most populated nation in Africa, but still remains the country with the highest birth rate, risking what theorists would describe as a Youth Bulge.⁹ The *Almajirai* in Nigeria like others in other parts of the world, suffer neglect from both parents and society. Child destitution is evidently stronger in Nigeria, as the practice of begging in the streets by these children has become a common sight.¹⁰

The most central economic claim surrounding the *Almajiri* phenomenon and one of the primary reasons behind its exponential growth over the past two decades is the widely spread intensity of poverty. Because of economic hardships and struggle for survival, some parents are left with no choice than to continue sending their children into the streets disguised as *Almajirai*.¹¹ At this point, they hide behind the idea of *Almajiranci* as a means of fulfilling their religious obligation, when in reality these parents are financially incapacitated and as a result unable to cater for the basic necessities of their children. The foundational block of what was supposed to be a sacred religious practice is consequently reduced to ‘eye-service.’ Disturbing testimonies reveal that

⁶ Oladosu, 2012: 1821-1824

⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2010: 7

⁸ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 99

⁹ Ibid. 108.

¹⁰ Aluaigba, 2009: 19-24

¹¹ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 114

although some Qur’anic schools still adhere to the dictates of the prophet by catering for the welfare of the *Almajiri*.

“Many teachers force the children to beg on the streets for long hours—a practice that meets the international definition of a worst form of child labor. The marabouts are also grossly negligent in fulfilling the children’s basic needs, including food, shelter, and healthcare.”¹²

Given its current overexploitation, the *Almajiri* phenomenon with all its questionable stratagems, including the instigation of violence involving political thuggery, terrorism, robberies and other related social vices that threaten the peace and security of Nigeria; the group has also spread its tentacles to other neighboring countries that have suffered the devastating ripple effect of violent activities resulting from cross-border terrorism believed to draw a sizeable number of its membership from the *Almajirai*. The escalation of Boko Haram activities and the group’s proliferation are allegedly cast on the availability of ‘cheap’ foot soldiers that are recruited from the *Almajiri* lot.¹³

This study begins by critically exploring the historical background of the *Almajiri* phenomenon; its original purpose of institutionalization and its permutations in post-colonial Nigeria. Thereafter, the investigation between the connections of the *Almajiri* phenomenon to the formation of Dissident Groups in post-colonial Hausa States of Northern Nigeria is analyzed. Among others, four of these major groups (*‘Yan Daba*, *‘Yan Banga*, *‘Yan Tsane* and Boko Haram) are discussed extensively and the findings analyzed in order to examine possible connections between (the recruitment pattern of) the aforementioned groups and the *Almajiri* phenomenon.

The subsequent chapter is an extension of the former where a more critical approach is adopted to evaluate the operational scope, current relevance, goals, strategies and tactics of the dissident groups whilst deconstructing the intensity of violence and the role of authorities in the country’s counter-insurgency dilemma. In-depth interviews conducted with journalists, law enforcement officers, as well as the use of secondary literature, including personal accounts, reported

¹² Human Rights Watch, 2010: 24

¹³ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 98-99

speeches, expert analysis, manuscripts, etc. Therein, the fundamental role of authorities involving specifically the Civilian Joint Task Force (C-JTF) as well as the role played by the State Security Apparatus (The Nigerian Army and Police Force) will be discussed. The findings, conclusion, bibliography and appendixes wrap up the research.

For a little more than two years, I have worked with, and currently deliver spontaneous correspondence for Viewer Television. This Communication Company/Media outlet focuses its reports on Human Angle stories, covering its viewership, events and documentaries around current happenings in 6 major federal states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jalingo, Jos, and Maiduguri) of Northern Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Some of the information contained in this research was obtained from news reports (Newsroom) by Viewer Communications Limited, located in the FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

As a result of the difficulty of the subject matter; its sensitive contents, confidentiality and security implications, the use of secondary literature was imperative. However, original sources which included interviews, personal accounts and reported speeches, were prominently featured in order to substantiate the laid out claims in the thesis. Given the complexities surrounding the erratic nature of conflicts in these crises zones, the research majorly relied on online media sources. The information presented in this research is to the best of my knowledge up to date, and these contain meticulously reported insights from a Nigerian perspective as well as a global view of the situations. This study has collected data from non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, private and public media outlets, think-tanks, manuscripts and expert analysis to further conceptualize the topic in question. The presence of varied sources/literature including journal articles, related books, peer reviews and essays in the research offers substantive empirical and analytical claims to the arguments brought forward.

1. HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF THE *ALMAJIRI* SYSTEM IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

This section of the study retraces the dynamics of Northern Nigeria's religious, economic and political involvements with the *Almajiri* phenomenon. The chapter focuses on the historical underpinnings leading to the birth of *Almajiranci* in Nigeria and the crucial religious objectives behind its institutionalization. These and other trends and permutations of the *Almajiri* system of education are deconstructed, including its current status in the Nigerian state. Subsequently, a highlight would be drawn on the trajectories of the *Almajiri* educational process which is inextricably woven around Islamic teachings, but gravely bastardized by external factors of forced begging and abuses engineered by individuals, personal interests, governments and socio-political setbacks.

The term *Almajiri* is an ambiguous Hausa word that could mean different things depending on the contextual interpretation. However, the etymology of the word is derived from the Arabic term *Almuhajir*, which simply translates to 'a migrant.'¹⁴ In Nigeria, the commonest contextual interpretation that comes to mind when the term '*Almajiri*' is mentioned is –"[...] a small child sent to an itinerant teacher to learn not just the Islamic religion, but also how to pursue a means of livelihood for himself, his teacher, and his family; or even, to many uninformed Nigerians, a beggar."¹⁵ Whilst this is the case, there are however other Qur'anic relations to this practice which involves having (a) student(s) commit to learning how to recite the Qur'an as obliged by the prophet.¹⁶

¹⁴ Aluaigba, 2009: 19-24

¹⁵ Magashi, 2015: 66-67

¹⁶ Ibid.

1.1. The Religious Context of *Almajiranci*

From a religious perspective, *Almajiranci* in Nigeria dates as far back as the 11th century when Islamic education was most prevalent. At the time, religious reformers and Islamic clerics were charged with the responsibility of passing on their knowledge of the Qur'an, supervising other Muslim faithful, as well as enlightening their followers on the teachings of the Qur'an.¹⁷ The *Almajiri* practice was originally designed as a process for 'inculcating knowledge.' It was never a means for begging to survive as this is the case in post-colonial and contemporary Nigeria.¹⁸ At this point, especially for the children involved, *Almajiranci* is as far as they can tell a means to their livelihood, as was described by young Shehu when asked in an interview conducted in 2016.¹⁹

Historically, It was a norm for these young male children to be dispersed in distant locations (usually outside their own state of origins) by their parents, and handed over to an Islamic cleric or a learned Muslim who is called a Mallam (from the Arabic word 'Mu'allim, meaning 'teacher,' 'tutor' or instructor, as could be used interchangeably). There, the *Almajirai* are taught by the Mallam how to read, write and apply the teachings of the Qur'an to their everyday lives. In this case, the Mallam acts in loco parentis. It was also expected that wherever these children relocated to, they'd be catered for by the inhabitants of those communities; where there basic human needs, from food and clothing to shelter would be provided for as in the basic sense of African communal living.²⁰ The common names used to refer to *Almajiri* schools in Nigeria are *Makarantar Allo* or *Tsangaya*.

It is not farfetched for a country like Nigeria to embrace the *Almajiri* system in its entirety and accept without reservations, all its features, holistically. The reason for this high level of commitment to the *Almajiri* system conceivably stems from the fact that Nigeria is known as one of the most religious countries on the Africa continent. Africa itself has been considered a highly religious continent with overly influential religious leaders that are essentially, often unquestionably allowed to meddle with the political and governmental decision making process

¹⁷ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 103

¹⁸ Magashi, 2015: 68-69

¹⁹ Shehu was a 6 year old *Almajiri* who became a close acquaintance.

²⁰ Ibid.

of citizens.²¹ Nigeria as a country has been criticized for incorporating religious dogmas hook line and sinker into their political and economic affairs, without factoring in trends, modernity, technology and socio-cultural basis for the country. As at 2010, reports by The Pew evidenced that 6 in 10 Nigerians are of the opinion that religious extremism is a major contributing factor that is hindering the development of the nation.²² In sub Saharan Africa, 87% of Nigerians have admitted that the Holy Bible is the literal word of God while 90% admitted to accepting the Holy Qur'an as the literal word of God; placing the country as number 1 and number 2 in ranking respectively.²³ The same survey research places Nigeria as number one on the list in the following categories:

- Most attend religious services regularly (Nigeria, top on the list with 88%)²⁴
- Most people pray in a day (Nigeria, first on the list with 92%)
- Fasting during Lent and Ramadan (Nigerian Christians top on the list with 89% and Muslims with 96%)

The inclusion of the paragraph above furnishes a factual proof on how practical religious extremism in Nigeria is portrayed, especially when the dictates of the Holy books are quoted verbatim and are executed to the latter. The Prophet Muhammad categorically admonished his followers saying "seek knowledge as far as possible." In some translations, the prophet went as far as saying, "seek knowledge as far as China;" probably the farthest place known to him. From the Hadith, the justification of the *Almajiri* practice gained cognizance when the prophet was reported to have said -

"If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, God will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge. The inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and (even) the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is

²¹ BBC, 2011: n. p

²²Lugo et al, 2010: 2-4

²³ Lugo et al. 2010: 24-32.

²⁴ Ibid.

full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave (no monetary inheritance), they leave only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion. (Abu-Dawood: Hadith 1631)”²⁵

In order to maintain and sustain this tradition, many Islamic countries in the world have retained the *Almajiri* practice but in a more distinguished fashion. For example, the same religious phenomenon is called *Khalwa* in the Sudan. In Egypt, it is the *Kuttab*, but also called *Maktab* in some cases. South East Asia on the other hand embraced a method of Islamic teaching which was offered in the form of *Madrassas* where children would avail themselves at the Islamic schools after they got back from school (formal educational institutions; elementary and high schools).²⁶ In this case, their parents take full responsibility for their livelihood. The *Madrassa* served as a learning platform for Qur’anic recitations as well as a breeding place for the boys to be admonished according to the teachings of Islam. This goes on for a few hours under the tutelage of the Mallam after which the children head home to their families.

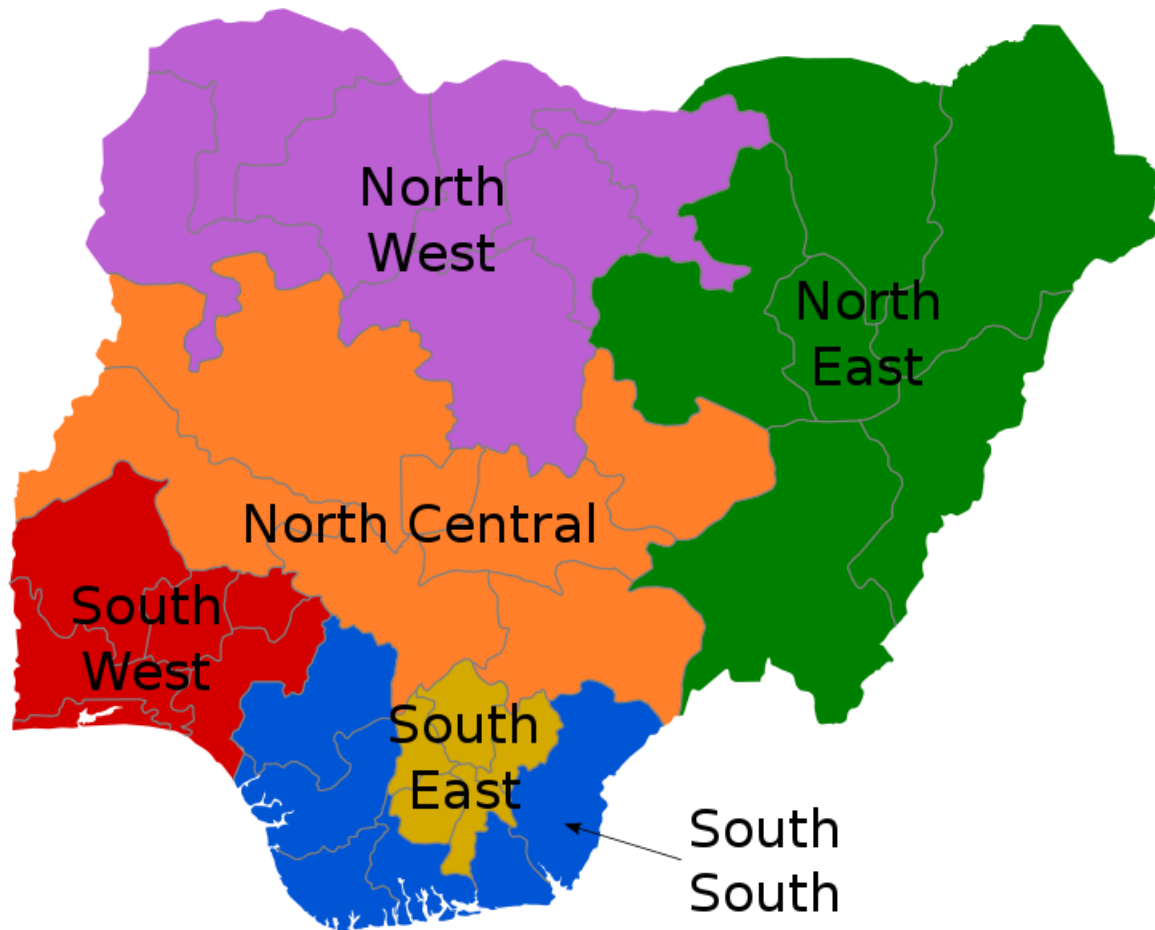
1.2. The Political Context of *Almajiranci*

The historical dissimilitude involving the huge (political and religious) schism between the Christian-dominated South and the Muslim-dominated Northern regions of Nigeria must be clarified. At this point, it is pertinent to narrow down on the subject matter in terms of *regionalism* and also offer some background knowledge on the general description of Nigeria today, focusing on the more “Western” and Christian South of the country and the more Muslim North. More so, a brief description of the Nation’s Federal character would suffice and subsequently, the economic influence of the *Almajiri* system explained. For the purpose of clarity, find below a political map of Nigeria highlighting the 6 geo-political zones namely: North-East, North-Central, North-West, South-East, South-South and South-West.

²⁵ Magashi, 2015: 67

²⁶ Ibid. 68

Figure 2. Nigeria's six Geopolitical Zones



Source- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Geopolitical_Zones_of_Nigeria.svg [Accessed 2 March, 2021]

Just as Nigeria counts nearly 250 ethnic groups with three dominant ones (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) encompassing about 60%, the country is also known for its diversity in religion. The ratio of Christian and Muslim populations in Nigeria is almost equally distributed and even more concerted is the regional predominance of these individual religions.²⁷ Be that as it may, the coexistence of these two major religions in Nigeria is not entirely *regionally* homogenous.

²⁷Demarest et al. 2020: 315

Consider this:

“While Islam is widely practiced in the North, a considerable number of Christians are living there as well, in particular in the North-Central region. Similarly, while Christianity is prevalent in the South, there is also a considerable number of Muslims in the South, in particular in the South-West.”²⁸

Nigeria gained her independence from the United Kingdom on October 1st, 1960; the federal state consisted of the North, South-West and the South-East which were the three autonomous regions at the time. The structure of this regionalization alone is considered unequal, with the North currently having 19 states out of the 36 states of the federation. The other two regions (South-West and South-East) have the 17 remaining states distributed between them. This unequal categorization has generated unhealthy oppression of smaller (*minority ethnic*) groups by the dominant ones.²⁹ The surrounding circumstances have resulted in religious rivalries, political disintegrations and uneven economic developments among these regions. Regarded as one of the most contentious constitutional reforms in Nigeria, the Federal Character principle which was originally intended to manage horizontal inequalities among the numerous ethnic groups in the country is arguably blamed for doing the exact opposite; promoting what the principle is supposedly fighting against. For example, the North is commonly been criticized for dominating the Army and the Nigeria Police. On the other hand, a study by the *Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity* shows that in 1986-1990, about 70% of registered companies in Nigeria was located in the southwest, with 16% in the three northern zones and 14% in the two other southern zones.³⁰ The primary objective of ‘fair representation’ has not been fully achieved as Federal Character promoted *indigeneity* as opposed to competence and skill set especially when it came to employment opportunities and political appointments.³¹ Aghatise describes the dilemma of the Federal Character as “a catalogue of under-qualified civil servants flaunting public offices without qualifications.”³²

²⁸ Demarest et al. 2020: 315

²⁹ Aghatise, 2017: n. p

³⁰ Mustapha, 2007: 43

³¹ Demarest et al. 2020: 320

³² Aghatise, 2017: n. p

Due to the predominantly higher Muslim population in the North, *Almajiranci* became prevalent in nearly all the northern states spanning across Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, Zamfara, and even in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This categorization does not propose that there are no child-beggars in the remaining parts of the country as some of these children emerge from poor families who beg as a means of livelihood.

The *Almajirai* have been used as political tools by politicians for missions of vendetta, causing disruptions during political rallies or used as soldiers for political party rivalries. This group has on countless occasions been arraigned for petty theft, burglary cases etc.³³ *Born on a Tuesday*, a novel written by Elnathan John gives an excellent portrayal of Nigeria's Northern region as well as the *Almajiri* phenomenon. The writer captures explicitly the complexities associated with the use of illicit drugs, among which is the popular *wee wee*, (Cannabis, 'marijuana'), and the consequent role of thuggery by the teeming Muslim youth population. His novel; the plot set in Sokoto state, in North-West Nigeria, gives a rather mind-boggling representation of gang related violence of 'street boys' as well as the rise of fundamentalist groups (both Violent and non-violent) in the northern region. The main character in the novel (Dantala) is himself an *Almajiri* and he takes the reader through the harsh realities of a politically thirstful and Islamically extremist North. As a youth, Dantala, just like the rest of the *Almajirai* is far from home (in search of knowledge), to study the Qur'an, learn the Arabic language and in his own case, Math inclusive. The writer meticulously makes the increasing religious and political radicalization of the North the subject of his book.³⁴

Antithetically, there is also the presence of 'street boys' in other parts of Nigeria who are being used by politicians as tools for violence; perpetrating wanton vandalism resulting in loss of property and countless deaths. The effect of hooliganism is equally profoundly felt in the Southern part of Nigeria, especially in a state like Lagos. The metropolitan area fully justifies its appellation 'street madness' where '*Area boys*,' a generic term denoting hooligans operate in their numbers.³⁵ They are also called *Agberos* as is typical in both Eastern and Southern Nigeria. This is where 'phone snatching' in broad day light happens; women's purses, men's wallets,

³³ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 104

³⁴ John, 2016: 13-17

³⁵ Ibid. 99

wristwatches and other valuables are carted away and car theft, at its peak. I have had personal horrible experiences in this part of the country. For the purpose of clarity, the activities of the so called ‘Area-boys’ in the streets of most Southern states in Nigeria, are unrelated to *Almajiranci*.

1.3. The Economic Context of *Almajiranci*

Economically, the *Almajiri* practice is said to have contributed little or nothing to the socio-economic growth and development of Nigeria, particularly in the North. In pre-colonial times, *Almajiranci* was considered a noble religious practice and was therefore devoid of crude means of survival as opposed the *Almajiri*’s hand-to-mouth struggle in contemporary Nigeria. In that era, begging was not the exclusive available means of survival for the *Almajiri*, especially if compared to the current practice where the *Almajiri*’s livelihood is solely dependent on begging and taking up menial jobs to buy his next meal.³⁶ *Almajirai* are mostly temporarily employed to wash dishes in restaurants where their services are paid for in kind (usually a plate of food) or the equivalence in cash. Their awful state of hygiene, tattered clothes, unkempt hair, walking barefoot (usually the whole day, everyday), with a dish in their hands automatically announces their presence. *Almajirai* would be seen hanging around petrol stations, people’s homes, markets, shops and other public places. At night, they sleep in the streets and under bridges, on cardboard sheets and bare floors; come rain, come shine. This visual depiction is drawn from my daily encounter with *Almajirai* for the past two and half decades of my life. They also hold onto menial jobs such as *mairuwa* (or *garuwa*), a term used for a person paid to supply cans of water to people’s homes, usually in a two-wheeled cart called *Amalanke* or *push-push*. The *Almajirai* are known for their traditional singing and begging technique. Most times, the generosity/donations the *Almajiri* child gets from passersby depend on his level of politeness or as in some cases, his impoverished state and level of destitution, or even his ability to be persistent—to sound convincing.

The high level of poverty and economic hardships faced by Nigerians evidenced in the constant struggle for survival by low income families has always been the bone of contention when expounding on the polarity of the *Almajiri* phenomenon. Communities in Northeast Nigeria have

³⁶ Aluaigba, 2009: 20

blamed Muslim parents for subjecting their children to begging in the streets as a means of livelihood especially because it is assumed that such parents do not possess the financial wherewithal to cater for their wards. This sort of financial incapacitation, prevalent among Muslims living in rural areas of the country who consequently send their children to urban/metropolitan cities to beg for food in the name of *Almajiranci*, goes without economic implications.³⁷ The idea of polygamy in the North has also been contested. The Muslim man is allowed according to religion to marry up to four wives. Eventually, multiple wives lead to multiple child births from these wives. A household can have up to 15 to 20 children depending on how many the man is willing to sire. Unsurprisingly, these fathers do not have the economic prowess to shoulder the responsibilities associated with providing food, clothing and shelter for this number of children and their mothers. One would argue that the circumstances surrounding the religious option of marrying two, three or four wives as was originally intended by the Holy Qur'an is adulterated. This factor has further been summarized by the prophet where it was written that:

“[...] the husband is financially responsible for the welfare and maintenance of his wife or wives and any children they produce, to include at a minimum, providing a home, food and clothing.”³⁸

In their defense, parents of *Almajirai* would argue that the same Holy Book instructs that a true Muslim must leave their comfort zone to go in search of knowledge even in the farthest of places (as explained on page 10 above). In this situation, the *Almajiri* practice is inherently used as a shield to justify this claim. But at what point does one religious requirement overlap, override or supersede another?

As explained in the introductory section of this research, the local population is supposedly responsible for providing (in form of donations) accommodation for both the *Mallam* and the *Almajirai*,³⁹ and their daily food and clothing in any given locality. With time, this practice changed as a result of first; the plummeting economic crises in Nigeria in the past two-three decades and secondly; the fact that society gradually became more individualistic, losing the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Qur'an 4:34

³⁹ Hansen, 2016: 83-84

sense of traditional communal living as was typical in African societies at the time.⁴⁰ Some writers would argue that the latter change was as a result of colonial domination.⁴¹ Food however, became limited in supply and the Mallams had to recalculate their option of a means of livelihood which consequently resulted to subjecting the *Almajirai* to the harsh realities of begging in order to feed themselves and bring back some food to the Tsangaya for the Mallam. At this point, there seemed to be an evolving contextual shift from the original intentions of *Almajiranci*; a contending reason that the hardships of the *Almajirai*, characterized by begging and abject destitution were all in a bid to teach them life lessons and the realities of a harsh world.⁴² In fact, some the practice what attributed to the belief that the creator (Allah) will provide for the *Almajirai* what their impoverished parents cannot.⁴³

While some writers like Magashi would argue that the availability of cheap labor provided by the *Almajirai* has accrued some economic advantages,⁴⁴ others would contend that this is a clear case of economic deprivation, adding that *Almajiranci* has become a system of oppression that unfortunately denies the *Almajirai* legitimate social and economic privileges that they would have otherwise enjoyed just as other children their age. They have been reduced to firewood hewers and commercial errand boys.⁴⁵ I have, on countless occasions talked with some of the boys, and unsurprisingly many of them have professed their admiration for formal education and their undying craving for family and parental attention, especially as they have to painstakingly watch privileged children. Since this group has socially been relegated to the level of nuisance, decent people would always chase them away.⁴⁶ In a bid to survive, some resort to petty theft and trading in hard drugs. *Almajiranci* has repudiated what could be described as a ‘socially required educational training,’ making the labor market unconventional and unsuitable for the *Almajirai*. For this apparent reason, there is some exclusivity in job choices, a boundary, or what I would argue, an insurmountable economic chasm that has been created between the job description of an *Almajiri* and that of a privileged kid. One can clearly distinguish the level of

⁴⁰ Magashi, 2015: 69

⁴¹ Magashi, 2015: 69-70

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hansen, 2016: 83-84

⁴⁴ Magashi, 2015: 68-69

⁴⁵ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 104-105; Hansen, 2016: 83

⁴⁶ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 104

education between a home trained child and an *Almajiri* who is left with nothing but the dish in his hands to survive.

2. ACTIVE DISSIDENT GROUPS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA/ HAUSALAND

As at September, 2020, Nigeria had a population of approximately 206 million inhabitants with a regular increase of a little above 2% every year.⁴⁷ With that in mind, one can imagine the inconveniences associated with this exponential population growth amidst Nigeria's declining resource wealth and ineffective political institutions. The Youth bulge theoretical approach has been utilized for analyzing and examining the growing surge in Nigeria's unemployment rate; one which has been arguably faulted for the consequent escalation of violence in many Nigerian states. The proverbial idea of 'an idle mind being the devil's workshop' has been applied severally in Nigeria's situation, especially with regards to the growing youth population. Consider this definition: "the theoretical foundation of the youth bulge is based on the premise that countries with weak political institutions that are undergoing demographic transitions are vulnerable to social unrest, rebellion, and violent conflicts because of the likelihood that the unemployed male youth will seek socioeconomic advancement through extralegal means. Societies that fit the youth bulge profile are mostly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific Islands and usually have a large youth cohort (over 30 percent) relative to the adult populations."⁴⁸ From the excerpt above, one can tell the obvious exclusion of religious radicalism as one of the fundamental factors for the escalation of social unrest in a given country. Recall for emphasis that 'ineffective Political Institutions' was highlighted as a direct consequence for the Youth Bulge theory, a fact I would argue is rather a contributing factor, and not necessarily the sole bane of the problem; especially in a country like Nigeria where violent extremism is not solely a resultant effect of failed institutions but also of fanatic religious ideologies.

Just as there are multiple root causes of violent conflicts around the world, Nigeria is no exception to this multifaceted reality. Ranked the most populous country on the Africa continent,

⁴⁷ Varrella, 2020: n. p.

⁴⁸ Schomaker, 2013: 119

with a total over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria suffers several ethnic clashes; with the most prominent of them all, the Farmer-Herder conflicts. But the reality of this colossal youth unemployment rate (ranging between 25% - 50%) is not exclusive of other likened misfortunes.⁴⁹ “In a country ‘saturated by religiosity,’ to use John Campbell’s phrase, Nigeria’s youth population, a significant portion of the vast underclass in Northern Nigeria, are susceptible to simplistic, esoteric, religious solutions should be all too clear [...]”⁵⁰ In this chapter, I expound on the possible (dis)connections associated with the formations and permutations of the various dissident groups operating in the North, to the *Almajiri* phenomenon.

2.1 The ‘*Yan Daba*

The word “‘*yan*” in Hausa denotes ‘a few group of things.’ The ambiguity of the term ‘*Yan Daba*’ transcends from just being casually referred to as ‘a mob’ in the English context to what I would argue has all the characteristics of a gang; or what Matusitz would describe as an ‘Islamic Urban Gang.’⁵¹ The misguided interpretations of the term are mostly drawn from the fact that the English word ‘mob’ does not capture the contextual meaning of ‘*Yan Daba*’ in its entirety. This group has been associated with multiple violent clashes in the North, particularly in Kano state where their members predominantly reside.⁵² Kano state has been known for its conscious attempt to institutionalize some form of Islamic urbanism over the years. These attempts are said to be orchestrated by Islamic conservationists whose idea of Islam gratified ‘fundamental practices’⁵³ that the former would claim have been bastardized by modernity, civilization and I even dare to say technology. It is to this regard that certain laws in the state which are directly extracted from the teachings of Islam are exerted on the people, with punishable consequences if anyone was found violating them.

The activities of the ‘*Yan Daba*’ originally started off in two capacities: as *Mafarauta*, a Hausa word for local hunters who were mostly found in rural areas in the Kano axis; they used to move in their numbers to hunt for bush animals. Over the years, their activities turned sour for the

⁴⁹ Hansen, 2020: 2

⁵⁰ Ibid.

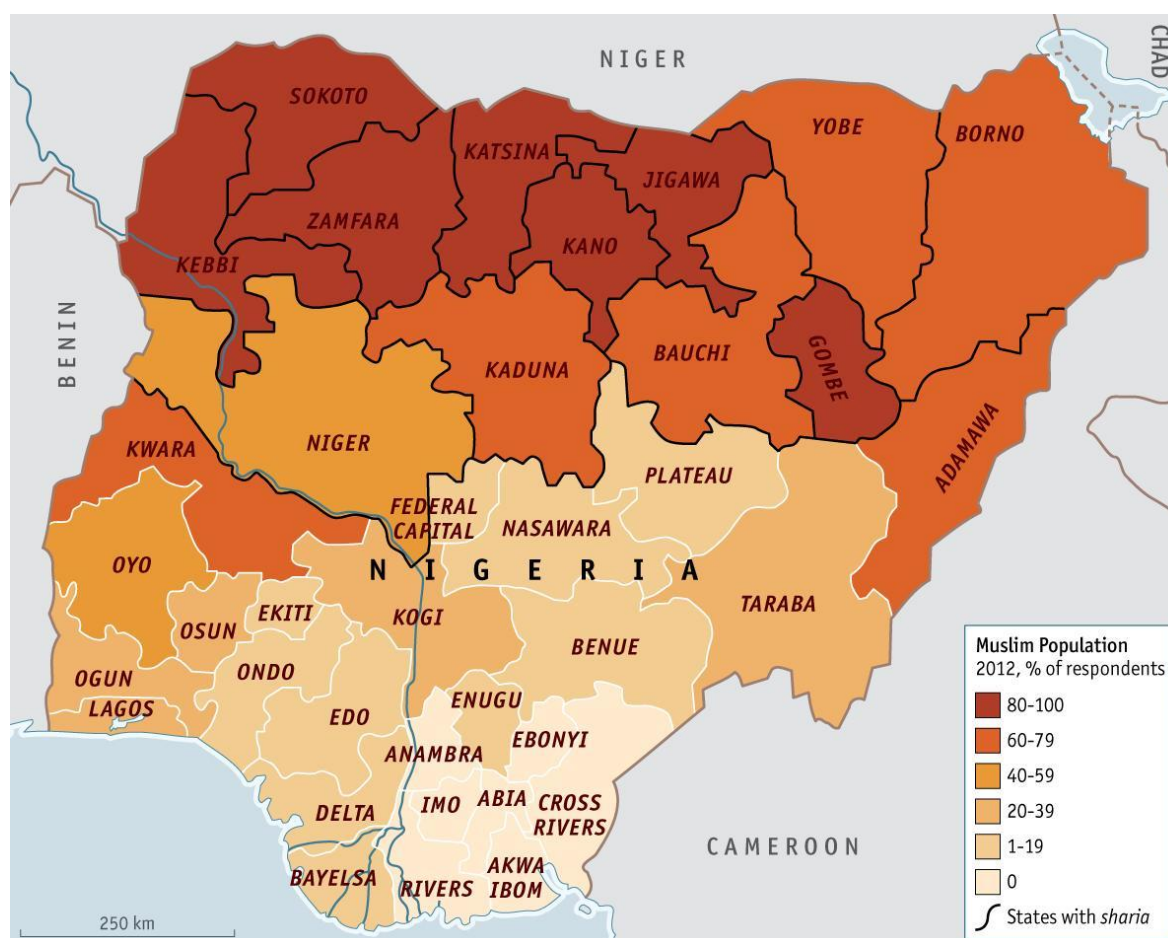
⁵¹ Matusitz/Repass 2009: 496

⁵² Larkin, 2008: 154

⁵³ Ibid.

surrounding neighbourhoods where they would steal, kidnap, beat up and even kill villagers who resisted their violent advances.⁵⁴ The second premise is their capacity as Shari'a law devotees and Islamic law enthusiasts. This is evidenced by the apparent partitioning of the state into two major regions- the so-called Christian dominated part of Kano state and the Muslim dominated side. These boundaries are said to have been created either consciously or unconsciously by Islamic fundamentalists who believe that the Christian-Muslim interactions/relations in the state have had declining religious effects on the teachings of Islam.⁵⁵

Figure 3. Below is a Nigerian Muslim Population Map (including states that have fully or partially adopted Shari'a legal codes: Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe, Borno).



Source- <https://maps-nigeria.com/nigeria-religion-map> [Accessed 23 March, 2021]

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Carter et al. 2015: 284

⁵⁵ Ibid

In fact, at some point, services offered by buses, tricycles, taxis and other means of public transportation became gender-based. Beer parlors, brothels, some hotels, theatres and even cinemas were closed because these were considered ‘breeding spaces’ for ‘mixed-sexed’ activities.⁵⁶ There was every attempt targeted towards introducing a new religious order in Kano state; one that would synthesize Shari’a (Islamic) law and the state law on both the Muslim and non-Muslim population throughout the state. This major decision was greeted by controversies that instigated violent clashes between the Christian and Muslim populations not only in Kano state but also extended to other states of the Northern region where Shari’a law was either already in practice or vaguely implied by state authorities/constitution.

In one of my term papers, “Religion and the Secular in the Muslim World: Local Developments and Global Encounters,” I expounded on the introduction, implementation and level of acceptance of the Shari’a Law in Northern Nigeria since Nigeria’s independence in 1960. Using Laban Hinton’s phenomenal book “*Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence*” as a basis for my research on the intricacies of Shari’a law in Kano state, I deliberated on how the ‘*Yan Daba* provided a compelling argument on their fundamental desire to integrate social justice (through Shari’a law) into state constituted laws.⁵⁷ As reported in his book, the ‘*Yan Daba* would always emphasize “we are all Muslims, Shari’a will help us to know each other better. In this way, crimes will be reduced, and the rich and poor will be the same under the law.”⁵⁸ This development ignited heated debate, rancor and passionate fervency among particularly the Christian population in Kano state who deemed the Shari’a laws as obnoxious and therefore inconsequential.

Over the years, subgroups emerged as a variation of the ‘*Yan Daba*. Studies have analyzed an active *peculiarity* in the criminality of these smaller groups which represent strands that emanated from the bigger ‘*Yan Daba* group. The ‘*Yan Daukar Amarya*, ‘*Yan Bori*, ‘*Yan Farauta* and the ‘*Yan Tauri* are all microcosmic gang-related groups with their origins and permutations deeply rooted in the ‘*Yan Daba*. Note, after an extensive study on the specific functions of multiple groups existing outside the operational scope of the ‘*Yan Daba*, in the author’s findings, Conerly claims that although the ‘*Yan Bori*, the ‘*Yan Tauri* and the ‘*Yan Farauta* (*mafarauta*) are

⁵⁶ Ibid. 1

⁵⁷ Jima, 2020: n p

⁵⁸ Hinton, 2011: 126

also gang related factions operating in Northern Nigeria, these barely constitute a nuisance or threaten the security of their respective communities.⁵⁹ The '*Yan Farauta* for example consists mainly of groups of hunters in communities whose primary occupation is hunting. The '*Yan Bori* on the other hand pride themselves in conserving Islamic traditional cultures, even though this group is often criticized for its members' syncretism of Islam and Animism.⁶⁰ The last group on the list of less controversial factions is the '*Yan Tauri*'; these identify themselves as warriors; their members are often associated with the use of traditional charms, talisman and ritual powers for protection. The '*Yan Tauri* are often skilled in the use of weaponry whilst using magic to *protect* themselves against knife cuts, machetes and bullets. There are very few reported cases of extortion, robbery, kidnapping or killings associated with or attributed to the activities of these aforementioned groups.⁶¹

However, before I expound on the dis(connections) of *Almajiranci* and their vulnerability to being recruited into the '*Yan Daba*, the specific modus operandi of one remaining violent subunit of the '*Yan Daba* (the '*Yan Daukar Amarya*) would be analyzed. This subunit is said to be actively involved in the abduction of women, theft, raping of minors and other related assault cases. Generally speaking, the activities of these so-called dissident groups overlap. When certain violent acts are perpetrated, there is always an air of uncertainty and difficulties in identifying who the actual perpetrators of those crimes are, and which group(s) usually claim(s) responsibility for the attacks. This is especially common in communities where there are two or more active dissident groups present. After every violent attack or criminal activity, authorities often have to wait for a *statement* from the leaders (or high ranking members) of the group that claims responsibility for the reported attack. Below is a brief exploration into the subunit of the '*Yan Daba* called the '*Yan Daukar Amarya*, a group that particularly specializes in a certain kind of criminality; bride snatching.

⁵⁹ Conerly, 2014: 4

⁶⁰ Ibid. 5

⁶¹ Ibid. 4

2.1.1. *'Yan Daukar Amarya*

Directly translated as 'bride snatchers' or "bride takers" in Hausa;' this subunit of the *'Yan Daba* is notorious for abducting women and girls.⁶² For their countless escapades, the *'Yan Daukar Amarya*'s victims are selected indiscriminately, usually within the vicinity or neighborhood. Their operations are mostly heightened at night times and typically in narrow street corners of unprotected areas. This group is associated with abducting and gang-raping their victims who are almost always women. Women and girls who are seen outside their homes (in these violent-prone areas) during the late hours of the day, usually unaccompanied by a man, are abducted, sexually molested or gang raped, battered and rendered helpless.⁶³ Prior to my research, I had tried to decipher the symbolism behind the incorporation of *'Amarya'* (the Hausa word for a 'bride') in the group's name, as I had initially assumed that the said group would have specialized in simply *'taking brides'* to their intended husbands' homes, as is a typical cultural practice in Hausaland. But after a casual conversation with a member of the *'Yan Daba* in 2016, he claimed that this had been the originally intended "job description" of the *'Yan Daukar Amarya*, before this noble tradition was later abused and vitiated by violent acts. Mallam Yinusa (not his real name), one of the leaders of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the Kano metropolis, further explicated on the vulnerability of the *Almajiri* youth to be actively involved in the above listed atrocities. He assessed these cruel events whilst attributing them to religious extremism and the indifference of the Nigeria government towards implementing policies that would fine-tune the *Almajiri* phenomenon in the country.⁶⁴

To summarize the violent activities of the *'Yan Daba* and its subgroup, the analyses above offers some insight on the claim the *'Yan Daba* assert in order to justify what they often describe as their duty of upholding the dictates of Islam and Hausa virtues. They are known to harass and intimidate women outside their homes, especially when these women are seen in the streets without male company. More of such activities include offering themselves to be hired as paid foot soldiers during religious or ethnic riots; harassing women whom they deemed 'inappropriately dressed,' illegally selling of petrol/gasoline, kerosene and similar products in the black market where they are constantly chased and arrested/detained by the state authorities. On

⁶² Salaam, 2011: 69

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Interview (4), 2016

countless occasions, they are hired to beat up people, sometimes leading to multiple deaths and severe casualties. There have been recorded cases of robbery, rape and rampant kidnappings in Kano city and these atrocities are said to have been perpetrated by the said group.⁶⁵ While the use of Talisman is common among the *'Yan Daba*, they also 'fortify' or 'protect' themselves (as they would choose to describe it) with other charms and medicines; especially when they go out for their operations.

2.1.2. The (Dis)connections of the *'Yan Daba* to *Almajiranci*

A report by Carter et al. highlighted the exponential growth of the *'Yan Daba* population from approximately 14 persons per neighborhood in 1991 to a range of fifty to two hundred in 2015.⁶⁶ This group has often been attributed to committing themselves as thugs for local politicians and religious leaders. The term "Mercenaries" is the common nomenclature used by most Nigerian media outlets to describe the *'Yan Daba*. While others would consent to the use of this term, many would argue that unlike mercenaries, the *'Yan Daba* are known to draw their membership from their own local communities and neighborhoods. Often associated with "politically motivated thuggery," their services are always sought for in times of political, ethnic and religious crises. "*Almajirai* form the main pool of youths from which the *'Yan Daba* recruit."⁶⁷ It is to be noted that the exclusivity of this membership (recruitment) is not confined to the *Almajirai* alone, as the category of 'unemployed youths' is equally vulnerable to recruitment. This is to say that the *'Yan Daba* are not uniquely Hausa Muslims, but that their recruitment also accommodates unemployed youths; Christians and Muslims alike.⁶⁸ However ironic it may seem, "if there is a fight between Muslims and non-Muslims, all the *'Yan Daba* will get involved in the fight, to help their Muslim brothers, in the name of Muslim brotherhood, to fight in the name of Islam."⁶⁹ In Conerly's study on Armed Youths and Mediations of Islam in Northern Nigeria, the author argues that the *'Yan Hisba* are the main Shari'a law enforcers, which the *'Yan*

⁶⁵ Salaam, 2011: 69

⁶⁶ Carter et al. 2015: 284

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 285

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Daba later merged with, an alliance that consequently expanded the operational scope of both groups in the North.⁷⁰

One of the prominent events in Nigeria's history is the agitation of the '*Yan Daba*' in 1999, when during the reign of the then governor of Kano state, Rabiyu Kwankwaso, the group demanded for the implementation of the Shari'a (Islamic) law. In their bid to be heard, they consequently destroyed streetlights, set some public institutions ablaze; vandalized properties in government schools and created road blocks in the major streets of Kano as the group's strategy to persuade the governor into signing the Shari'a law as the official law of the state. There were reports by the media then that this pandemonium was reckoned to being instigated by Islamic fundamentalists who had transpired with the said group in order to promote the Islamic agenda of "Islamizing Nigeria" as a country. The Mallams of the *Madrassa* (*Tsangaya*) schools in Kano state were rumored to have triggered the rancor by propagandizing shari'a policies to the *Almajirai* (they teach) which the '*Yan Daba*' draw their membership from. On one occasion, the group was described as the Future Islamic Army of Nigeria.⁷¹

Male domination has been immensely expressed by the '*Yan Daba*' because of what I would argue may be the conservative patriarchal representation of masculinity by both the doctrines of Christianity and Islam. Femininity has historically been relegated to the 'household,' and any forms of extensions of power remotely solicited by women were condemned thereby confining the woman to a subjugated role. The '*Yan Daba*' exude fear in people through their physical appearance, intimidating both men and women alike in their neighborhoods, while offering themselves for labor, pleasure and war. Some experts in this field, the likes of Magashi and Hilton would attribute the actions of the '*Yan Daba*' to unemployment, hardship, struggle for survival and the instinctive desire to be 'recognized' and respected; the resultant effect typical of children who were devoid of parental care and attention for most (or all) of their lives.⁷² *Almajiranci* espouses nearly all the aforementioned characteristics giving room for easy '*Yan*

⁷⁰ Conerly, 2014: 3-4

⁷¹ Ibid.; Magashi, 2015: 69

⁷² Hinton, 2011: 126

Daba recruitment. In fact, Gomment/Esomchi explicitly hypothesized that “today’s *Almajirai* are tomorrow’s ‘*Yan Daba*.’”⁷³

On one of my interviews (with Imam Dauda Bello in 2015),⁷⁴ he drew my attention to the *Almajiri* being a readily available target to ‘*Yan Daba*’ recruitments pointing out factors such as joblessness, homelessness and poverty as experienced especially by *Almajirai* after graduating from the *Tsangaya*. He specifically noted that with no means of survival, “products of *Almajiri* schools, sometimes not – often collectively become what is known as ‘*Yan Daba*’; street thugs, petty criminals, muscle for hire in classical Marxist terminology, a *lumpenproletariat*.”⁷⁵ For this set of young men, their foundational understanding of what Islam represents is some sort of ‘call to justice’; a reformation agenda that they believe only *they* can ‘fix.’ I would argue that the concept of radicalization, violence and intimidation as adopted by the ‘*Yan Daba*’ in their *earnest* desire to intensify the practices of Islam is detrimental to both the citizens and the economy of Nigeria.

In one of their studies on the *Almajiri* phenomenon and international security in Nigeria, Iro and Surulola further discovered that many a time, the ‘*Yan Daba*’ were seen to ‘take care’ of the *Almajirai* in their local communities. Albeit their paper did not explicitly state if the intentions of the ‘*Yan Daba*’ to ‘take care’ of the *Almajirai* was voluntary, consented or obligatory, there are speculations that there is a ‘mentor versus mentee’ relationship between the two groups. The average *Almajiri* child looks up to the ‘*Yan Daba*’ for mentorship and possible membership after *graduating* from the *Almajiri* School.⁷⁶ In 1999, both the *Almajirai* and the ‘*Yan Daba*’ organized what metamorphosed into a dreadful violent clash between them and the Yoruba residents in Kano. The attack was in retaliation to a similar clash that erupted between Hausa residents and the Yorubas in Sagamu, a predominantly Yoruba area of Ogun state. In 2011, over 800 Nigerians lost their lives to post-election violence. This carnage was reported to have been executed by what the media described as collaboration between ‘teenagers who attend Qur’anic schools’ and a Hausa gang known as the ‘*Yan Daba*.’⁷⁷

⁷³ Gomment/Esomchi 2017: 85

⁷⁴ Interview (1), 2015

⁷⁵ Hansen, 2016: 87

⁷⁶ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 114

⁷⁷ Ibid. 114-115

It is an open secret to hypothesize that the *Almajirai* today are the '*Yan Daba* of tomorrow as described by Gomment/Esomchi. In 2011, a study was conducted on the correlation between *Almajiranci* and the recruitment pattern of gangs in Northern Nigeria. The study had a sample size of 72 gang members selected particularly from the '*Yan Daba*, where the outcome of the quantitative analysis denoted that the gang members were majorly recruited from school dropouts, but most importantly, from the *Almajirai*.⁷⁸ The research analysis recorded that more than 50% of the gang members were at some point of their lives, arrested or convicted, a typical characteristic that portrays the similarities, or what the study would describe as the 'intimacy' between the *Almajirai* and the '*Yan Daba*.

My trip to Kano in 2016 further justifies this claim. In my interviews, an *Almajiri* from one of the focus groups explained how he and his friends would surreptitiously find their way to the nearest '*Yan Daba* hideouts in search of food and accommodation.⁷⁹ This situation is further expounded on the research conducted by Zakari Yau where it was discovered that the vulnerability of *Almajirai* to be recruited by the '*Yan Daba* is more dependent on food and accommodation as it was on unemployment; a move the writer would later describe as a risky venture "seeking solace from criminals."⁸⁰

2.2. '*Yan Tsane*

It is shocking to reveal that there is barely any secondary literature on the '*Yan Tsane* and even more disheartening is the reality of their activities being partially or completely sidelined by media houses and news reports. This group is responsible for what is commonly known as 'pick-pocketing.' While many people would conclude that the violent acts of the '*Yan Tsane* are mostly associated with pilfering; instead, when caught, the young men are often charged with larceny according to state laws.⁸¹ The '*Yan Tsane* are primarily found in Yola, Adamawa State in North-East Nigeria. The deliberate exclusion of the '*Yan Tsane* group as a subgroup of the '*Yan Daba* is primarily because the '*Yan Tsane* group claims not to have connections with the '*Yan*

⁷⁸ Gomment/Esomchi 2017: 85-86

⁷⁹ Interview (5), 2016

⁸⁰ Ibid. 86; Iro/Surulola, 2013: 114

⁸¹ Interview (6), 2021

Daba as its members are said to operate independently, drawing their recruits from the pool of *Almajiri* boys in the neighborhood. Their operational scope is usually in the state capital, the Yola metropolis. For logistical and proximity reasons on my part, and the fear of getting prosecuted on the part of the ‘*Yan Tsane*, this study did not avail me the opportunity to make direct contacts with members of the said group. But with some assistance from a Yola local, I had the liberty of engaging in a telephone conversation with a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), heading one of the Police Divisions located within the Yola metropolis. He reports that in a week, his Division receives at least three cases of people’s personal belongings snatched from them forcefully or unknowingly.⁸²

The Officer in charge further expatiates on how these crimes are meticulously orchestrated and executed by the perpetrators. He also explained the different tactical approaches that have been adopted by the said group over the years, especially with regards to stealing people’s phones, snatching women’s handbags/purses, (a swift move the group referred to as *kwatar karfi*, in Hausa); snatching wallets, wrist watches and any other items reachable within the limited timeframe of their operation. The ‘*Yan Tsane*’s victims are both men and women, even though women constitute the commonest target. The group typically operates in public spaces such as markets, sports centers, open cinemas, local stadiums, crowded restaurants, eateries and canteens; as well as quiet places and neighborhoods, especially in narrow streets and dark alleys. In a paradigmatic ‘*Yan Tsane* operation (in quiet streets for example), a tricycle or motorcycle is often a necessity. When a victim is targeted at a distance, the ‘*Yan Tsane* drive/ride slowly towards them (the victim), when they get really close to the victim, one of them swiftly jumps off the tricycle/motorcycle, snatches the victim’s bag, phone, purse, wallet etc. from their hands and quickly zooms off to get into the already accelerated vehicle, leaving their victims petrified. Women especially do not chase after the hoodlums after an attack; however men have attempted a counter chase in some cases, but they rarely succeed in catching up with the ‘*Yan Tsane*. To retrieve their stolen property, victims succumb to reporting to and relying on the police for investigation and/or stricter police presence in those ‘*Yan Tsane* prone areas. In public and

⁸² Interview (6), 2021

crowded places, the young boys skillfully but stealthily deep their hands in people's pockets, purses and hand bags, to pilfer any item of value their fingers can carry.⁸³

When asked of the identity of the perpetrators (*'Yan Tsane*) of these crimes, the DSP precisely ascribed these atrocities to the *Almajirai* and 'unemployed youths.'⁸⁴ However, the fundamental concern of the authorities is that, like other similar groups, there is barely any information on the demographics of the *'Yan Tsane* operating in the Yola metropolis. This is owing to the fact that the presence of the *Almajirai* is influenced by germane factors such as the level of acceptability of its beliefs and practices, which varies from community to community; and the hospitality the *Almajiri* child gets in terms of his basic needs.

2.3 *'Yan Banga*

There are some similarities between the modus operandi of the *'Yan Daba* and the *'Yan Banga*; but in a bid to debunk the ideology of their supposedly 'shared' characteristics with the *'Yan Daba*, the *'Yan Banga* would prefer to describe their operational scope as a politically motivated one; or one that is arguably inspired by vanguardism.⁸⁵ Either ways, one feature is certain; both groups perpetrate gang-related violence in their various communities. Just like the vast literature and readily available research/studies conducted on the *'Yan Daba*, literature on the *'Yan Banga* is also generally available. However, I would buttress that of all the violent groups prevalent in Northern Nigeria, the *'Yan Daba* is undoubtedly the group with the highest number of membership/recruits, particularly because the city of Kano (North-West zone, home-state of the said group) is the second largest city in Nigeria, with a population of approximately 4.2 million inhabitants.⁸⁶ A distinguishing factor between the two groups suggests a considerably larger presence of the *'Yan Banga* in North Eastern Nigeria around the lake Chad basin.

The origins of the *'Yan Banga* is contained in two major historical accounts: the first and most widely known is that which can be traced back to the 1950s when the politicians of what used to be the *Northern Protectorate* of Nigeria had thugs who 'protected' them from their political

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Conerly, 2014: 3

⁸⁶ City Population, 2020: n. p

opponents.⁸⁷ They allegedly started off as political party supporters, but later extended their *services* to intimidating and terrorizing supporters of rival parties. Their activities have always had traces of thuggery typically accounting for loss of lives and property over the years. Their Hausa name ‘*Yan Banga*’ is said to be adopted from the translated version of the English term Vanguard.

The second account of the permutations of the ‘*Yan Banga*’ can be historically traced back to the 1990s; the years from 1991 leading to 1994 birthed a sudden reinvention of the ‘*Yan Banga*’ in Niger, particularly in the Northern axis that is predominantly occupied by Nigerien Hausa-phones who had settled around the Nigerian borders.⁸⁸ One would have wondered how Niger got integrated into grooming what would have been originally tagged a Nigerian invention. But as contained in Göpfert’s research, the answer to this *entangled* cross-border relations is not farfetched. Maradi and Zinder, two of the seven regions in Niger were experiencing series of deteriorating security concerns shortly after the National Conference of 1991, a disturbing turn that consequently led to a violent upheaval between business men and lorry/taxi owners. In a bid to curb the rise in petty crimes in these regions, the Nigerien authorities sought assistance from the leadership of the ‘*Yan Banga*’ in Northern Nigeria to *collaborate* and assist in establishing what they considered a *local police force* that would oversee the security tensions in those two troubled regions (Maradi and Zinder). This move albeit sincere, did not pass through legal procedures and subsequent approvals. It was later deduced that there was no written authorization from the commissioner of Police (and the departmental préfet), mandating the ‘*Yan Banga*’ to execute policing duties, even though reports claimed that these young men were incentivized with handcuffs and torch lights by the police commissioner.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Göpfert, 2012: 56-57

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

2.3.1. *Yan Banga*: Operational Scope, Strategies and Criminality

From the two aforementioned historical accounts of the formation of the *‘Yan Banga*, news analysts reported a drastic reduction of crime rate during the first years of policing duties by the *‘Yan Banga*.⁹⁰ Göpfert categorically described the duties of the *‘Yan Banga* to involve chasing and apprehending criminals/thieves and consequently beating them up, leaving them either dead or comatose. The *‘Yan Banga* groups have taken security matters in their hands, but not without the consent of the Police Force working in those localities. It is important to note that the *‘Yan Banga* also comprised of unemployed youths that did not require any formal training or security related expertise in the execution of their duties. The recruitment process was undemanding and therefore devoid of any form of rigorous training. The selection team, with the help of the local police force, would vet and select a handful of *capable* young men, (usually) with clean criminal records; they are then split into units where they would be required to patrol and watch out for any form of security threats including questioning unknown faces.⁹¹ The *‘Yan Banga* were therefore neither legally employed nor paid by government authorities. The communities they served as well as private individuals, offered them food, clothing, sugar, rice, money, kola, water, etc for their immediate basic needs;⁹² while they (the *‘Yan Banga*) in return, look out for any security threats targeted on the inhabitants of those communities. The *‘Yan Banga* groups were basically the local vigilante in the neighborhoods they policed. They were often seen patrolling in public spaces such as markets, village squares and in public and ceremonial gatherings where they occasionally functioned as ‘the law,’ accosting people and situations that would have been otherwise ignored by actual *commissioned* Police Officers.⁹³

In the beginning, the *‘Yan Banga* group was admired and commended for efficiency by the local population and even the government of the regions they patrolled, but situations later turned sour when the said group allegedly perpetrated those exact crimes they were fighting against. “Residents realized that the *‘Yan Banga* did not effectively prevent thieves from entering the neighbourhood; quite the contrary, they were seen as cooperating with thieves (e.g. taking money from them for not arresting them) or turning into thieves themselves [...]”⁹⁴ At this point, there was a lot of resistance by the local populations against contributing to the well-being of the *‘Yan*

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. 62

⁹³ Ibid. 57

⁹⁴ Ibid. 61

Banga. Extortion and theft became rampant again leaving residents in constant fear; community members from different cities and municipalities dreaded the ‘*Yan Banga* as they would any criminal in the streets.

2.3.2. *Almajiranci* as a Pool for ‘*Yan Banga* Recruitments

For Northern Nigeria, clashes between party supporters are unavoidably heightened during electoral periods. It is important to note that the acceptability of the ‘*Yan Banga* in both Niamey (Niger’s capital) and Northern Nigeria, is dependent on whether or not a particular community/municipality requests their services. This factor is evidenced by the current presence of the ‘*Yan Banga* in numerous communities and neighbourhoods in Northern Nigeria. The impending question is who gets recruited into the ‘*Yan Banga* groups and how are the *Almajirai* directly or indirectly connected to this recruitment pattern?

While expounding on the operational scope, strategies and criminality of the ‘*Yan Banga* above, unemployed youths constituted the major pool of membership for ‘*Yan Banga* recruitments. Apart from unemployment as an enabling factor for recruitment, there is also the absence of formal education/training as a precondition for recruitment. After talking with one member of the ‘*Yan Banga*, he explained in categorical terms that his major reason for joining the said group as an *Almajiri* is because he derives some sense of *mutunci* (dignity) and ‘*yan uwantaka* (fraternity). In addition to these privileges, his position as *Dan Banga* (singular) accords him power, control and a sense of belonging.⁹⁵ These opportunities along with food items, clothing and sometimes shelter provided for by their respective communities incentivize their membership. For the politically motivated ‘*Yan Banga* in Northern Nigeria, (or those who would prefer to hide behind the façade of political vanguardism and politicians’ bodyguards); these have almost always taken to violence as a means of coercion. Hinton has tried to justify those raging actions by attributing them to ‘national and state codification of new rights and privileges.’⁹⁶

In the case of the ‘*Yan Banga*, the implementation of Shari’a law in Northern Hausaland is not the fundamental reason for their violence and political disruptions; they instead claim to be

⁹⁵ Interview (7), 2021

⁹⁶ Hinton, 2011: 122

fighting against high level corruption whilst reinforcing their earnest support for their political aspirants/candidates. The general concern however, is the level of political thuggery exhibited by the said group in particularly, Kano, Adamawa and a few other states in Northern Nigeria, where the *Almajirai* (and young unemployed men) are hired as militia to burn down electoral wards, cart away ballot boxes, set fire to political party secretariats, beat up political aspirants, murder their political contenders (from opposition parties), and sometimes take up arms.⁹⁷

These and many other similar cataclysmic events characterized by contentious elections and crises have been recorded in Nigeria's political history for decades. There is a routine associated with this particular kind of news reportage on media platforms in Nigeria. After every four years, what is expected to be an ordinary peaceful transition of power from one leadership to the next is often befouled by chaos, with people losing their lives and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. There was a routine in the violent clashes and fights between '*Yan Banga*' that represented different political parties.⁹⁸ In the late months of 1966, the Nigeria government passed a decree to out-rightly ban all forms of partisan politics, an action that disrupted and subsequently eliminated the violent activities of the '*Yan Banga*'; but this law did not stand the test of time as it was reinforced about a dozen years later (in the early months of 1978), thereby permitting the re-grouping and reformation of the *Yan Banga* group. As expected, conflicts resurfaced.⁹⁹

Almajiranci as a practice has exposed the Nigerian children and youths of the *Madrassa* schools to being recruited into the '*Yan Banga*' group. Whilst there are other impending national issues such as unemployment, high level of poverty, indigeneity, corruption, ethnic violence, farmers-herders conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts, high rate of infant and maternal mortality, amongst others, I would argue that the root cause of these politically motivated clashes prevalent in Northern Nigeria are a result of failed political, economic and financial institutions. One of these failed agenda is the sheer administrative and political negligence of the *Almajiri* phenomenon which has mutated over the years, thereby affecting the fabrics of Nigeria's socio-political spectrum. The modern *Almajiri* practice has rendered the male child useless; their life of unpredictability negatively influences their dreams for a better future; they live a life of

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2007: n. p

⁹⁸ Viewer Television Newsroom; Conerly, 2014: 4

⁹⁹ Ibid.

hopelessness, with no actual jobs or a potential for securing one; their helplessness compels them to embrace the most cheapening jobs even when those job requirements are tainted by criminality, loss of lives and destruction of public and private property; as in the cases of some ‘*Yan Banga* and the ‘*Yan Daba* above.¹⁰⁰

It is important to note that the current status of the ‘*Yan Banga* in some Northern states in Nigeria (especially in Adamawa state), has changed for the better. A phone interview with one of the officials of the ‘*Yan Banga* operating in Gombi Local Government Area of Adamawa State further expatiates this point. The interviewee confirms that there has been a total or at least partial reform in many ‘*Yan Banga* stations operating especially in the Northeast regions of the country.¹⁰¹ This claim however has not been fully authenticated as there are still reports of abuses and human rights violations by the said group, as well as clashes between the different factions of the so- called vigilante groups in Adamawa state. There are often violent clashes between and among the said groups typically resulting in fierce gun fights between two or more factions purported to be “rivals.”¹⁰²

2.4. Boko Haram

Of all the dissident groups examined above, Boko Haram also known as Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Ladda’¹⁰³ is by far the largest, most internationally recognized, and as Thurston describes, “[...] one of the world’s deadliest Jihadist groups.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, in 2012, after rating the Afghanistan’s Taliban as number one in the world, Boko Haram was declared the second deadliest terror group in existence.¹⁰⁵ On November 14th, 2013, Boko Haram was officially designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S Department of State.¹⁰⁶ The group’s name is used interchangeably, but ‘Boko Haram’ is the widely used appellation when referring to the sect. Over the years, this group has been responsible for tens of thousands of deaths within Nigeria and the surrounding countries of Cameroun, Chad and Niger. With periodical changes in their tactics and strategies ingrained in their violent attacks, typically characterized by butchery,

¹⁰⁰ Magashi, 2015: 78-79

¹⁰¹ Interview (7), 2021

¹⁰² Fulani, 2021: n. p

¹⁰³ Gomment/Esomchi, 2017: 86

¹⁰⁴ Thurston, 2017: 2

¹⁰⁵ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 98

¹⁰⁶ US Dept. of State, 2013: n. p

multiple abductions and often unprecedented destruction of public and private property, Boko Haram justifies their actions first on the prevailing social inequalities and massive poverty levels evidenced in the general standard of living of Nigerians;¹⁰⁷ and secondly to promote Jihadist ideologies by ‘eliminating’ anyone or anything that stands against Islamic doctrines as revealed by the Holy Book (Qur’an).¹⁰⁸

I dare to propose that Boko Haram is currently one of the most controversial radical Islamic organizations on the globe. The reliability and authenticity of sources/information pertaining to Boko Haram are not only questionable but disconcerting as these are problematically multifaceted; beginning from the ambiguity associated with the etymology of the group’s name; to the complexities surrounding the group’s historicity and place of birth, and to the often disputed and inexact information on the death toll and casualties disseminated by both press reports on the Nigerian media space (and the insurgents themselves).¹⁰⁹ It is rather unfortunate that information about Boko Haram is regrettably untrustworthy and mostly fragmentary. Press reports on the intensity of Boko Haram attacks; (for example) the number of deaths or casualties, the exact location of attacks (if single or multiple attacks), number of insurgents killed or arrested, number of kidnapped victims, number of women raped, number of children missing, etc; these information are almost always contradicting the reports and figures collated from security forces or the victims/survivors of Boko Haram attacks themselves. Thurston and Gomment/ Esomchi attribute these complexities to the sensitivity of the subject matter as well as adherences to security guidelines.¹¹⁰

For a holistic view of the Boko Haram insurgency, this section of the study encapsulates some of the biggest circumstances surrounding the group’s radical transformation and its consequent influence on Nigeria’s political, economic and religious construct. The culmination of their name Boko Haram is directly translated to mean “Western Education is forbidden.”¹¹¹ Even though this is the generally perceived rendition of the group’s name in the English language, most

¹⁰⁷ Hansen, 2016: 2; Conerly, 2014: 3

¹⁰⁸ Thurston, 2017: 6

¹⁰⁹ This dynamic is often reflected when the insurgents release videos of themselves, typically to make a ‘statement’ or claim responsibility for an attack.

¹¹⁰ Gomment/Esomchi, 2017: 86-87

¹¹¹ Thurston, 2017: 14-15

Yusufiyya (as some of the Boko Haram followers are labeled)¹¹² would argue that this translation of their group name has intrinsically ‘watered down’ the true ideological and religious representations of Boko Haram. In fact, some of the sect members would contend that the name was an invention given by outsiders. The etymology of the word ‘Boko’ is linguistically proven to be an indigenous Hausa word for ‘school’ or ‘education’ depending on the context. The historical disputation surrounding the use of the word “Boko” has colonial undertones attributed to its features. The word “Boko” originally meant ‘fraud.’¹¹³ When the British ruled Nigeria during colonial times, the northern protectorate (consisting of present day Hausa states in Nigeria) had a preconceived notion that ‘Western style education’ alongside the establishment of formal schools, created avenues aimed at ‘adulterating’ the minds of the Muslim (umma) faithful into accepting what Boko Haram describes as ‘false knowledge.’¹¹⁴ “Haram” is the Arabic and Hausa word for ‘forbidden’ hence the amalgamation of both words “Boko” and “Haram.”

Boko Haram scholars have identified Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state, in Northeastern Nigeria as the home-base of Boko Haram whilst highlighting the chronological but fragmented phases of the insurgency through Nigeria’s history. In his book “Boko Haram,” Alexander Thurston categorizes the spiraling upsurge of Boko Haram from the group’s pre-historic status to its current position. The writer blatantly, but factually repudiates the connections of Boko Haram to the *Maitatsine* group that took centre stage from 1980-1985, consequently wrecking Nigeria’s Northeastern states.¹¹⁵ In his argument, the author disputes that the *Maitatsine* movement was somewhat devoid of the eclectic trends posed by Islamic thoughts— rendering Jihadism and Salafism as his major examples. Even though Thurston acknowledges the ‘structural and demographic similarities’ of both groups,¹¹⁶ he however opines that the *Maitatsine* movement did not possess as much influence as is often accorded to it by Boko Haram scholars. From 2001 to the early months of 2009, Boko Haram devoted their time to what analysts would refer to as ‘open preaching.’ This phase was characterized by its members’ fundamental need to devote themselves to the propagation of Qur’anic teachings as well as establish a well-grounded

¹¹² Named after the founder of Boko Haram; Mohammed *Yusuf*

¹¹³ Thurston, 2017: 14-15

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 25

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 63

followership in not just the Northeast but also the surrounding regions. During this time, only one major attack was reported, with Boko Haram claiming responsibility.¹¹⁷

The year 2009 was the year Boko Haram took a decisive violent turn; that year was ‘explosive’ both literally and figuratively. I was 18, conscious enough to notice the tension emanating from every Nigerian citizen, young and old. The lives of these poor patriots dangled around a bitter past, a dreadful present and an uncertain future. The Northeast was not the only region under attack as far the meaning of a ‘nation-state’ goes. Everyone was sceptical about the security of their lives and property as there was a massive uprising initiated by the group across the different northern states in the country. But to the citizens’ disbelief, the unanticipated uprising was contained by the Nigerian security forces, crushing the rebellion and even going extra miles to capture and kill Muhammed Yusuf, the founder and then leader of Boko Haram.¹¹⁸ Just when the country was about to draw a sigh of relief, unknown to the citizenry, a subsequent regrouping by the insurgents was ongoing and soon enough, Boko Haram confirmed a new leader of the group named Abubakar Shekau. After assuming power, Abubakar Shekau (who was said to be a companion of the former Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf) began his tenure with a bang, bombing major targets in the Northeast and even extending the group’s violent activities to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, where the insurgents raided the police headquarters.¹¹⁹

These attacks, killings and raids became persistent and increasingly regularized. The three years (2013-2015) that followed were devoted to capturing, controlling and claiming territories within the Northeastern states; one of which is Mubi, a Local Government Area in Adamawa state, which was captured in 2014 and renamed *Madinatul-Islam* by Boko Haram. It took the Nigerian security forces 3-4 months until the country was able to reclaim the town of Mubi. The only option inhabitants were given in these captured areas was “embrace Boko Haram’s brand of Islam, or face violence.”¹²⁰ The pinnacle of this phase of the insurgency was when Boko Haram abducted 276 school girls, in a town called Chibok, close to Maiduguri, in April of 2014.¹²¹ For the record, the group in March 2015 pledged and confirmed its allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 2

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Thurston, 2017: 2

¹²¹ Ibid.

2.4.1. Boko Haram: Current Status in Nigeria

As at the time this study was being conducted, on February 26th, 2021, a major abduction was carried out where an all girls' boarding school in the Jangebe rural community of Zamfara state in Northeast Nigeria was raided. 300 schoolgirls were kidnapped and taken to an "unknown place." As at the time of this report, no group claimed responsibility for the abduction but conjecturally, all fingers are pointing towards Boko Haram.¹²² This major abduction closely followed another which took place about a week earlier where 42 boys were in similar fashion kidnapped by 'gunmen' in Kagara, another small community in the Rafi Local Government Area of Niger state.¹²³ In the evening of 11th December, 2020, about 300 school boys were abducted in another boarding school in Kankara, Katsina state. In February of 2018, 110 school girls were abducted by Boko Haram in a boarding school located within a town called Dapchi in Yunusari Local government area of Yobe state. The popular Chibok girls' abduction in 2014 remains the first of the series of these mass kidnappings in North-east and North-west Nigeria.¹²⁴

When these massive operations are carried out and the *gunmen* claim responsibility through their usual *statement*, some form of *negotiation* ensues between the Federal Government and the abductors. When the lives of the kidnapped victims are spared, they are released (sometimes in batches, as was typical in the cases of the Kankara Boys and the Dapchi Girls), while others will still be held in captivity and nothing would be heard of them from then on. The kidnapped girls are either married off to the Boko Haram members, raped or/and killed or enslaved as is often reported by the escapees.

Of the list of dissident groups prevalent in Northern Nigeria as examined in this study, Boko Haram is by far the largest, deadliest and most internationally recognized organization. The group purveys a paradigmatic spiraling process of communal, interstate, regional and international escalation of violence. Most Boko Haram scholars contend that the religious underpinnings often tied to the insurgency is not as compelling a reason as the failure of the political class in Nigeria that inherently received tutelage from colonial masters in pre-colonial

¹²² BBC, 2021: n. p

¹²³ Hazzad/Muhammad, 2021: n. p

¹²⁴ Thurston, 2017: 2

Nigeria. To further buttress this point, here is an excerpt from William Hansen's article "Poverty and "Economic Deprivation Theory": Street Children, Qur'anic Schools/*Almajirai* and the Dispossessed as a Source of Recruitment for Boko Haram and other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria"¹²⁵ where he argues that

"Boko Haram is the entirely logical consequence of more than five decades of the post-colonial Nigerian state ruled by a parasitic-predator class that is itself a by-product of the colonial state. Asking the same predatory state class that created the problem in the first place, to correct it, as most Western governments and security studies proponents do, seems a Sisyphean task at best."¹²⁶

2.4.2. Boko Haram and the *Almajiri* Phenomenon

This section of the study gathers empirical data from the field research I conducted in March of 2016 while writing my undergraduate Honor's Thesis on the *Almajirai* as a possible catchment area for Boko Haram recruiting.¹²⁷ These primary sources as well as secondary data drawn from other works (studies and research) in the relevant field will be analyzed to investigate the connections of *Almajiranci* to the recruitment pattern of Boko Haram. The field research was conducted in two major Northeastern cities of Nigeria, namely Kano and Maiduguri. The survey interviewed a sample size of 49 *Almajirai* where 7 focus groups, each having 7 *Almajirai*, constituted the population of the study. The first three focus groups (made up of 21 *Almajirai* in total) were randomly selected from the pool of *Almajirai* in one of the Madrassa schools located within the Maiduguri metropolis. The last four focus groups (sampling 28 *Almajirai* in total) were drawn from one of the major *Almajiri* hubs in Kano city. These alongside 6 Mallams (three from each of the cities) were interviewed on general questions related to the *Almajiri* phenomenon such as its origins, objectives, its widely perceived exploitative tendencies, patriarchal significance, etc. But for the sake of this research, I only extracted a single part of the study that specifically answers the question: "do you know any of your fellow *Almajir(a)i* that

¹²⁵ I served as the leading Research Assistant of this publication.

¹²⁶ Hansen, 2016: 85

¹²⁷ Jima, 2016: n. p

got recruited by Boko Haram either persuasively, willingly or forcefully, during or after your *Almajiri* School? How many do you know?”

The tabular representation below displays the results of the study conducted in both Maiduguri and Kano states, Nigeria.

	1 st <i>Almajiri</i>	2 nd <i>Almajiri</i>	3 rd <i>Almajiri</i>	4 th <i>Almajiri</i>	5 th <i>Almajiri</i>	6 th <i>Almajiri</i>	7 th <i>Almajiri</i>
Kano							
1 st Focus Group	10	1	1	3	5	2	2
2 nd Focus Group	8	6	5	5	10	20+	20
3 rd Focus Group	30+	10+	11+	5	12	8	Left while interview was in progress
Maiduguri							
4 th Focus Group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5 th Focus Group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6 th Focus Group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7 th Focus Group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1. Results deduced from focus groups 1-3 stem from Maiduguri, those from focus groups 4-7 were from Kano.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Jima, 2016: 37

Based on these focus group discussions as detailed in the table above, as to the vulnerability of these young boys to the blandishments of Boko Haram in both Maiduguri and Kano, evidence indicates that most of the Maiduguri youngsters who participated in this study identified other *Almajirai* who got recruited into Boko Haram. One particular boy among them knew more than thirty and even bragged about listing their names. Two others knew more than twenty and multiples knew more than ten. Similar discussions conducted in Kano revealed the exact opposite; i.e., none of the participants had any such personal knowledge. This, of course, can be easily explained by the fact that (as is noted in the historicity of Boko Haram above) the group has little to no grass roots presence in Kano.¹²⁹

Despite the incontrovertible connection between *Almajiranci* and Boko Haram, many do not realize the extent to which the *Almajiri* phenomenon exposes the boy child to being recruited into the Boko Haram Militia. Researchers like Gomment/Esomchi dared to attribute the recruitment drive of Boko Haram to the likes of primary school pupils who are meant to ‘graduate’ into secondary school, euphemistically using their (the young boys’) joining the pool of Boko Haram Militia as ‘the reward’ for graduating from the *Almajiri* school.¹³⁰ This way, the *Almajiri* School is reduced to a breeding space for grooming future insurgents. Thurston, in his second chapter *Conflicts with Mainstream Salafis*, specifically elucidates the role of *Almajiranci* as an Islamic practice that provides easy membership mobilization for Boko Haram recruitment.¹³¹ Odoemelam et al. further buttressed this point in their work, where the authors discussed variables such as absence of parental care, poverty, religious fundamentalism etc as fundamental factors that expose the *Almajiri* child to Boko Haram recruitment.¹³² It is logical to assume that the skills, education, religious teachings, mannerisms and much of the eccentric behaviors as often exhibited by the *Almajirai* are incorporated in them through their (sometimes) inconsistent but compulsory interactivities and encounters with their Mallams who are “legally” in loco parentis. One of the direct countervailing factors promoted by the *Almajirai* (through the

¹²⁹ Hansen, 2016: 86; Jima, 2016: 37

¹³⁰ Gomment/Esomchi, 2017: 86-87

¹³¹ Thurston, 2017: 101

¹³² Odoemelam et al., 2014: 77-84

Mallams), and their beliefs against ‘Boko’ as a system of ‘western (formal) education’ is the popular street song taught them by their Mallams:

Ku ‘yan Makarantan Boko
Ba Karatu, ba Sallah
Sai yawan zagin mallam¹³³

The song simply translates as,

All you pupils (students) of Western schools
You neither read the Qur’an, nor pray
You only rain insults on your teachers

As a child, I had this song memorized. We (children in the neighborhood), including those who were enrolled into ‘formal’ schools, would irreproachably sing the song without necessarily decrypting the symbolism detailed in its lyrics. The above listed circumstances are resultant consequences akin to ‘indoctrination and radicalization’ as buttressed by Iro and Surulola.¹³⁴ One would have noticed the correlation between the content of this song which undoubtedly validates Boko Haram’s *raison d’être*, and denotes how these sorts of ‘manipulation’ alter the *Almajiri*’s beliefs and world views from a tender age. Whether it is an outright rejection of ‘Western education’ or ‘Western civilization’ as is often argued by Boko Haram’s leader Abubakar Shekau, the group’s repudiation of Western principles is fundamentally expressed through the severity of their violent acts. It is important to note that currently, Boko Haram’s recruitment pattern is not limited to the male child, as the group has extended its growing body through its members’ series of abductions of girls and women, as analyzed in the group’s operational scope above. Paradoxically, women have been actively involved in promoting the politico-religious beliefs of Boko Haram coupled with their sheer commitment in propelling whatever strategic violent attacks are concocted by the sect. As analyzed by Biesmans, Boko Haram’s recruiting, abducting and instrumentalization of women is evidenced in their countless abduction of school

¹³³ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 106

¹³⁴ Ibid.

girls: case in point, the Chibok girls' abduction. The author explained how women and girls are forced, and others lured (through initial promises of security and a 'better' life), consequently subjecting these victims to sexual abuses, slavery and forced marriages.¹³⁵ Others are specifically set aside for reproductive purposes/child bearing: an attempt aimed at the expansion and proliferation of Boko Haram.¹³⁶

3. *ALMAJIRANCI* AND VIOLENCE - THE ROLE OF AUTHORITIES:

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and the Nigerian Army/ Police force

This section of the study deconstructs the role of security agencies in their struggle to curb systemic violence associated with insurgencies in Northern Nigeria. The Civilian Joint Task force for example was commissioned by local authorities as a rapid response to the incessant attacks meted on local populations in the Borno/Maiduguri and Yobe axis. From the field research I conducted in February of 2016, the study gathered first-hand information from one of the founding members (who was equally a one-time Sector Commander) of the CJTF residing within the Maiduguri metropolis. Goni Usman (real name)¹³⁷ elucidated some of the challenges faced by the CJTF in repelling attacks posed by Boko Haram, and most importantly the role played by members of the CJTF in their fight against violent clashes between the insurgents and local communities which were at the time ravaged/captured by the insurgency. With this collection of primary materials as well as other relevant secondary data selected from experts' research on the subject matter, this study critically analyzes the origins, formation and challenges encountered by the CJTF in their fight against Boko Haram.

While the CJTF was distinctly inaugurated for counter-insurgency operations, with the group primarily committed to channeling its resources towards curbing violent attacks posed particularly by Boko Haram, the Nigerian Army and Police Force on the other hand played an all-embracing role in handling the different ugly faces of security challenges in the North-including banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, ethno-religious crises, thuggery, Boko Haram

¹³⁵ Biesmans, 2017: 61

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Interview (3), 2016. The interviewee did not care for anonymity. His real name is revealed with his consent.

insurgency etc. For the purpose of this study, emphasis will be placed on the CJTF, as the group holistically represents the key elements contained in this research. The intricacies associated with the ‘*Yan Daba*, ‘*Yan Banga*, ‘*Yan Tsane*, ‘*Yan Daukar Amarya*, Boko Haram and even the Civilian Joint Task Force, have one familiar attribute; these groups have all originated and evolved from (the streets in) their local communities. It is important to note that *Almajiranci* has been a major supplier of memberships to the above listed groups, including the CJTF.

Ironically, the field research in Maiduguri exposed us to an interesting discovery where *Almajirai* employed by the Federal Government¹³⁸ as members of the CJTF, are tasked with *identifying* Boko Haram hideouts as well as apprehending suspected Boko Haram insurgents, essentially calling out other *Almajirai* who had joined the Boko Haram Militia. In other words, groups of *Almajirai* (who are now CJTF) were helping out the Federal Government to fish out other *Almajirai* who are on the side of terrorism.

3.1.1 The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

The account of the origins of the CJTF as given by one of the group’s one-time sector commanders traces its roots back to 2011, when the country was in dire need of counter-terrorism strategies and measures to help oust Boko Haram insurgents in the cities of Maiduguri and Damaturu (Yobe State).¹³⁹ Other accounts delineate the inception of the CJTF to May 2013, when a fearless man named Lawan Jafar counterattacked a gunman using only a stick.¹⁴⁰ Members of this group were drawn from the pool of capable and willing civilians whose primary obligation was to serve as informants to the army whilst assisting in uncovering Boko Haram hideouts as well as identifying its members. Basic weapons were given to members of the CJTF to protect themselves while executing their duties. Their familiarity of the nooks and crannies of their own communities gave them an edge over patrolling Army/police officers fighting for the same course. Some were paid a monthly stipend of 20,000 Naira (an equivalence of 50 dollars,

¹³⁸ Through the State Security Apparatus of Borno State

¹³⁹ Interview (3), 2016

¹⁴⁰ Bamidele, 2017: 92

then) through the Borno state government; while other youth voluntarily committed to joining the group as unpaid members, in the spirit of civic-mindedness. The CJTF had often been associated with vigilantism, but its members would often dispute this general perception, maintaining that their duties are directly (officially) employed by, and their members deployed by the Nigerian government.

In the beginning, Ba Lawan¹⁴¹ emerged as chairperson of the Civilian Joint Task Force. Prior to the official commissioning of the CJTF, the Borno State Youth Empowerment Scheme (popularly referred to as BOYES) was reportedly committed to undertaking the same tasks similar to what the Civilian JTF is doing at the moment, only unofficially. Goni Usman also pointed out that the prefatory Joint Task Force that received national and even international recognition was one which comprised of Soldiers, the police and Air Force combined.¹⁴² This, therefore, meant that the Civilian Joint Task Force was strictly for civilians who were after maintaining peace, law and order in their communities. At the time this study was conducted, there were about 10 different formally independent sectors of the CJTF and the eleventh one had just been inaugurated. The CJTF started out with just 11 committed individuals which exponentially grew to about 26,000 members dispersed across the 19 Northern states in Nigeria.¹⁴³

In my interview with Goni Usman, the one-time CJTF commander also redressed the symbiotic relationship between the CJTF and the military/police force stating in his words “[...] about receiving orders from the military, it is reciprocal; they own the guns, we fish out the culprits.” In addition, “traditional charms/talisman were used on rare occasions” he affirmed, while debunking claims of the suspicious use of charms and ritual powers for protection against attacks meted by Boko Haram insurgents on the members of the Civilian JTF. “A couple of us use these charms for protection,” he admitted.¹⁴⁴ Some of their members have taken the CJTF as a full time job while others have other side jobs. Goni Usman for example, was both a welder and a CJTF officer at the time of the interview. He emphasized that the group’s knowledge of the physical and social terrain of their communities granted them the home advantage they needed

¹⁴¹ As Lawal Jafar was popularly called then.

¹⁴² Interview (3), 2016

¹⁴³ The Economist, 2016: n. p

¹⁴⁴ Interview (3), 2016

for planning and execution of counterattacks by violent groups. The CJTF played the intelligence role in identifying individuals and hideouts of insurgents who were mostly camped in hidden locations, typically at the outskirts of towns and villages.¹⁴⁵

For secondary sources: In his publication, *the Civilian Joint Task Force and the Struggle against Insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria*, Seun Bamidele argued that like the CJTF whose members have fundamental knowledge of the people and places in their local communities, the same strategy would have been adopted in Nigeria's fight against the formation and consequent violence perpetrated by other dissident groups in crises-prone regions of the country. Through this local initiative employed as a mechanism for counter-insurgency, communities have a high tendency of pulverizing violent groups from their embryonic stage, a critical stride that would have otherwise shrunk their influence, distorted their formation and crippled their possible upsurge.¹⁴⁶ I would also propound that the involvement of local members within the community or in some cases, those recruited from neighboring communities provides a distinctive sense of participatory and coordinated response to crisis management. Resources become more available, local leaders are actively involved and technical skills are deployed in the most essential ways.

3.2. Harmful Protection- The Case of the CJTF in Maiduguri

Although the CJTF massively assisted in repelling violent invasions by Boko Haram with recorded successes in liberating and sometimes recapturing communities that were initially claimed by the insurgency,¹⁴⁷ there have also been numerous accusations leveled against members of the CJTF alleging that the group also commits abuses against civilians. Some of the violations of Human rights as perpetrated by the CJTF were documented by the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), a US based organization founded in 2003, serving as a leading voice for conflict-ridden areas in the world.¹⁴⁸ In their research, there were reports associated with the unlawful assaulting and sometimes murdering of innocent civilians who are mistaken for Boko Haram insurgents; they have also been accused of promising security and protection to

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Bamidele, 2017: 87

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Nagarajan, 2018: n. p

woman (and men) in exchange for sexual favors; they harassed and exploited victims of terrorism who were mostly encamped at the outskirts of Maiduguri.¹⁴⁹ These atrocities alongside drug dealerships became prevalent among the CJTF, so much so that even after reports of their criminalities were tabled to the military/police officers in command, the group was neither reprimanded nor court-martialed because in the authors' words "[...] those entities work closely with the CJTF."¹⁵⁰

3.3. The *Almajirai* as CJTF Recruits

In similar fashion, Nigeria and the rest of the world became thoroughly concerned about the massive recruitment of the boy child into the CJTF. Even more disturbing was the fact that the militia typically conscripted children who were majorly drawn from the pool of *Almajirai* in the Maiduguri metropolis and its surrounding communities.¹⁵¹ The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund UNICEF noticed a pattern in the recruitment drive by the CJTF. The agency thereafter reacted expeditiously through implementing an Action Plan that was committed to preventing child recruitments/involvements of any kind.¹⁵² Measures were subsequently put in place to protect the boy child from any kind of engagements within the CJTF, whilst its members (CJTF) were strongly instructed to steer clear of any sort of child-related dealings—except it warranted their rescuing/saving the children on their rescue operations.

To further reiterate the significance of this stern move, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba said: “Now that the Action Plan has been signed, I urge the CJTF to fully implement it in order to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children once and for all. The UN stands ready to support the CJTF in this process.”¹⁵³ In the meantime, media reports have recorded a significant reduction in the activities of the CJTF in Northern Nigeria.¹⁵⁴ Speculations are that this declining involvement of the CJTF may be attributed to the complexities of crimes and disorder emanating from the numerous communities ravaged by violence. Some members of the CJTF resigned from their positions,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ UNICEF, 2017: n. p

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Viewer Television Newsroom, 2021: n. p

alleging that the insurgency was and still remains ‘politically motivated.’ They contend that it is therefore fueled by personal interests and politicians’ deliberate attempt at diverting the attention of the citizenry away from their corrupt-ridden practices involving money laundering, misappropriation of resources and ostentatious lifestyle.¹⁵⁵

3.4. The Nigerian Military/Police Force

[...]not surprisingly, at the peak of the violence from 2010 through 2012, the Nigerian military is estimated to have killed three times more civilians than Boko Haram [...]¹⁵⁶

The inclusion of this devastating finding above as reported by the Nigerian National Stability and Reconciliation Program (NSRP), has been the spate of military-civilian predicament in Northeast Nigeria in the past two decades. In their effort to uphold counterinsurgency missions and fight against violent extremism and radicalism in Northern Nigeria, the Nigerian Military on their part have been accused of war crimes as well as crimes against humanity. As at June 2015, more than 8000 Nigerian civilians were reported to have been murdered by the Nigerian military, either through starvation, torture or suffocation.¹⁵⁷ Young boys and men have been at the receiving end of these gruesome murders/executions, tortures and countless disappearances. In women’s cases, those who were lodged in various Internally Displaced camps scattered across Northeast Nigeria, especially the ones within the Maiduguri metropolis, reported on how they and their children were rendered homeless after they dreadfully but painstakingly watched their homes razed to the ground by the Military who arguably operated without any imperative military backing or permission from their so-called commanders. Those who had already been rescued and encamped in shelters provided for by the Federal government, reported sexual violence and molestations by the military, confirming that they were offered food in exchange for sexual favors and on many occasions raped.¹⁵⁸

To tender a more elaborate analysis of the role of the military in their fight against terrorism, violent extremism and the radicalization of dissident groups in Northern Nigeria, it is important

¹⁵⁵ Hansen, 2020: 2

¹⁵⁶ NSRP, 2016: 12

¹⁵⁷ Amnesty International, 2015: n. p

¹⁵⁸ Carsten, 2018: n. p

to highlight the perception of Nigerian citizens on how they regard the police and the military in general. My personal experiences with the Nigerian Army have never been pleasant. This bitter reality can be extended to the countless cases of police and military brutality on Nigerian civilians. The year 2020 witnessed a sudden uprising of a decentralized social movement — the End SARS campaign. There were series of protests held in Nigeria’s biggest commercial hub, the city of Lagos, where angry youths stormed the streets, demanding for the disbandment of the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS), a subunit of the Nigerian Police Force notorious for series of abuses including illegal detention, indiscriminately murdering motorists and carting away with their vehicles, robberies in neighborhoods, raping women, setting up illegal road blocks, and as Yomi (Quartz Africa) describes, “the constant extortion of young Nigerian males who are seen driving exotic vehicles and using laptops and iPhones.”¹⁵⁹ This depiction of the Nigerian Police Force represents a broader picture of the inhumane treatments that have been experienced by civilians in the hands of security officials in Nigeria.

Interestingly, the rather unfortunate dysfunctionalities, brutality and corruption of the federalized police force and military, further authenticated the involvement of the federal government in the affairs of the CJTF. In fact, in our interview with Goni Usman, the one-time sector commander reiterated that the abusive nature of raids and indiscriminate arrests carried out by Special Operations Forces and army officials propelled the CJTF’s organizational skills and the willingness of their members to engage actively in counterinsurgency operations and form alliances with the security agencies.¹⁶⁰ It was evident that the CJTF members were also protecting themselves from the military. In several accounts, local communities reported how their homes were raided by the military; their young boys illegitimately arrested and detained, homes torched, women and children displaced, hundreds murdered and losses unaccounted for.¹⁶¹ Soldiers who were originally meant to protect civilians from the insurgents were seen opening fire on residents in communities whilst backing their actions on the intelligence reports they claimed to have received by local authorities. “The soldiers killed many civilians because they accused local community members of harboring and shielding insurgents from the military eye” Goni Usman reported. “We felt like we needed to *do something* to save ourselves and our

¹⁵⁹ Kazeem, 2020: n. p

¹⁶⁰ Interview (3), 2016

¹⁶¹ Carsten, 2018: n. p

families from the indiscriminate killings of our family members who are often mistaken for insurgents by the security operatives. That was the motivation we got to form an alliance with the military and police officers in road blocks,” he added.¹⁶² With these mass killings, the Federal government was alarmed, giving the CJTF the necessary backing and wherewithal to execute their operations with active support from the Nigerian Military.

On numerous Human Rights platforms, the Nigerian security forces have been criticized for implementing the ‘shoot-first-ask-questions-later’ strategy in their operations. Devastating ordeals as narrated by suspected insurgents and members of dissident groups suggest a pattern in soldiers’ arrests and multiple deaths resulting from mistaken identity. Research conducted by Amnesty International and the International Observatory further authenticates these claims.¹⁶³ In his study of the CJTF, Gana L. M. highlighted the intricacies surrounding the Nigerian military, the local population and violent groups in Northern Nigeria. For example, one of the major contentions observed is that the military unjustifiably refer to the local population as Boko Haram, while Boko Haram insurgents refer to the locals as traitors.¹⁶⁴ This unfortunate quandary has further convoluted the relationship between these three principal identifiers; the military, local populations and the insurgents.

To further buttress this point, when asked about his views on the conflicts existing between the security forces, the CJTF, local populations and insurgents, Goni Usman narrated one of the incidences involving a major raid by the Nigerian military in 2014, where soldiers in their numbers allegedly stormed into one of the communities in the Maiduguri metropolis, arresting over 76 young boys including everyone who was seen within the vicinity. He added “this was enough reason for us to mobilize ourselves against such raids by the military. We needed them to understand that they were arresting, harassing, detaining, victimizing, incarcerating and murdering the wrong people.”¹⁶⁵ Needless to say, at the point, the CJTF was not only protecting itself from the insurgents, but also from the clutches of the military and security forces. Hansen has rather graphically illustrated these inhumane treatments meted on civilians in his article “The

¹⁶² Interview (3), 2016

¹⁶³ Pyne-Jones, 2018: n. p

¹⁶⁴ Gana, 2020: 354

¹⁶⁵ Interview (3), 2016

ugly face of the state: Nigerian security forces, human rights and the search for Boko Haram.”¹⁶⁶ Keeping in mind that in 2016, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was ranked number one on the list of the world’s worse Police Force by the *World Internal Security and Police Index Report* (WISPI),¹⁶⁷ to many Nigerian citizens, this ranking does not come as a surprise.

Expectedly, insurgents have over the years targeted the Nigerian Police. In fact, in one attempt, on June 17, 2011, Boko Haram attempted to bomb the Police Headquarters in Abuja using a suicide car bomber.¹⁶⁸ Results from forensics showed that the explosion which was meant to be a drive through, was reported to have detonated in the parking lot of the Police headquarters, killing the suicide bomber and burning 33 vehicles beyond recognition. Iro and Surulola would argue that the Nigeria Police Force has made concerted efforts in curbing the activities of insurgents and other violent dissident groups in Northern Nigeria, thus exposing the institution to frequently spontaneous and/or orchestrated attacks.¹⁶⁹

This claim however is disputed by Salaam, where he blames the multiplicity of violence perpetrated by insurgents and dissident groups in Northern Nigeria to the increased criminality, corruption and unprofessionalism of the Nigerian military and Police Force. His argument detailed thus: “in light of the vast wave of antisocial activities and crime among gang members treated ruthlessly by the Nigerian police, where suspected gang members can be detained indefinitely, the criminalization of the ‘*Yan Daba*’ phenomenon gives further impetus to the gang members to commit violence against society in an attempt to protect their space and autonomy.”¹⁷⁰

I concur with the realities embedded in Salaam’s argument owing to Nigerian’s current state of insecurity. The country is faced by more violence as was ever recorded in 61 years since post independence. As at the time this study was undertaken, series of abductions resulting from banditry, terrorism, farmer-herder conflicts and ethno-religious crises have been reported by the Nigerian media in nearly all the Northern states of the federation. The proposition for de-radicalizing and reintegrating repentant insurgents and former members of dissident groups into

¹⁶⁶ Hansen, 2020: 10

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 4

¹⁶⁸ BBC, 2011: n. p

¹⁶⁹ Iro/Surulola, 2013: 115

¹⁷⁰ Salaam, 2011: 69

mainstream society as a strategy for counter-terrorism has been the bone of contention recently. News outlets within and outside Nigeria have blatantly condemned the inconceivable decision of the Nigeria's Federal Government to negotiate indefensibly with insurgents after every abduction carried out in the country. In fact, many would argue that the *business* of raiding schools and kidnapping students whilst demanding for ransom from the Federal Government in exchange for students' release is becoming lucrative by the day.¹⁷¹ Through their duplicity yet gratuitous attitude, the leadership of Nigeria has accorded more power to abductors, who are often portrayed as faceless gunmen- unknown gunmen who have within the past weeks made headlines for engaging in a series of inexplicable kidnapping spree.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to deconstruct the relationship between *Almajiranci* and the formation of dissident groups who allegedly draw their memberships from the pool of readily available *Almajirai* in Borno, Kano and Adamawa States of Northern Nigeria. The opening chapter focused on conceptualizing and investigating the *Almajiri* phenomenon; its dynamics, historicity, permutations, current status and the practice's inherent connections to religious fundamentalism and violent extremism in post-colonial Hausa states of Northern Nigeria. In the early chapter, the study started by examining how this 'religious obligation' has deviated from its original objective as contained in the dictates of Islam. By exploring the historical background of the *Almajiri* phenomenon; its original purpose of institutionalization and its permutations in post-colonial Nigeria, this chapter purveyed a foundational guide that delved straight into the next major section, where investigations between the alleged connections of the *Almajiri* phenomenon to the formation of dissident groups in three post-colonial Hausa states of Northern Nigeria was analyzed. Among others, four of these major groups ('*Yan Daba*, '*Yan Banga*, '*Yan Tsane* and Boko Haram) were extensively, yet critically analyzed in order to examine possible connections between (the recruitment pattern of) the aforementioned groups and the *Almajiri* phenomenon. This section of the study chronicled the intensity of violent attacks perpetrated by dissident

¹⁷¹ Viewer Television Newsroom

groups and insurgents and how these unfortunate happenings predicated the highest level of insecurity and instability, consequently plunging the country into a deteriorating economic state.

The third section of the study illustrated the complexities associated with the fundamental role of authorities involving specifically the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) as well as the Federal Government and the State Security Apparatus (The Nigerian Army and Police Force). Here, the dysfunctionalities, brutality and corruption of the Civilian Joint Task Force, the federalized Police Force, and military are elucidated, alongside the irony surrounding the *protection* of civilians and victims of war.

In all the sections, attempts have been made to deconstruct the connections of *Almajiranci* as a practice, to the formation of violent groups as well as their recruitment pattern. The study attributed the recruitment of insurgents (militia) and the escalation of violence to the failure of the Nigerian state to provide the necessary tools for survival in a country that is ostensibly ravaged by political and religious discord. Whilst propounding that Nigeria's protracted social deprivation constitutes the bane of the country's plight, the study recommends a possible reform of the *Almajiri* phenomenon and a call for total overhauling of Nigeria's security apparatus. Think Tanks, the military and a well-developed state apparatus would go a long way in checking the extent to which the *Almajiri* phenomenon contributes to the recruitment and mobilization of violent and dissident groups in Northern Nigeria. This way, particular attention would be accorded to the foundational driving forces and mechanisms that incentivize the *Almajiri* child to being recruited; other than the government's current focus on fighting "faceless gunmen." The primary concern should be channeled towards the conditions that expose the *Almajirai* to being forced into memberships, because I believe that the systemic overexploitation and social deprivation as characterized by the *Almajiri* phenomenon, as well as Nigeria's failed institutions and unreliable security apparatus, have resulted in the formation of dissident groups which draw their membership from the pool of *Almajirai*, who are allegedly responsible for violent attacks and insurgencies in Northern Nigeria.

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November 14th, 2015

- 2- (2016) Interviews (in Hausa) with six Maiduguri and Kano based clerics (Mallams)¹⁷⁴ overseeing 2 different Madrassa schools, who pleaded anonymity.
March 12th - 16th, 2016

- 3- (2016) Interview (in English) with Mr. Goni Usman - One-time Sector Commander of the Civilian Joint Task Force based in Maiduguri, Borno State.
March 28th, 2016

- 4- (2016) Interview (in Hausa) with Mallam Yinusa (also, a one-time CJTF member, based in Kano, Nigeria.
April 2nd, 2016

- 5- (2016) Interviews (in Hausa) with 49 *Almajirai* - 21 of which were based in Maiduguri (the epicenter of Boko Haram Insurgency) while the remaining 28 were from a Madrassa school located in the Kano metropolis.
March 27th - April 6th, 2016

¹⁷² Transcripts of all interviews are available upon request

¹⁷³ Mubi is a commercial town located in the far North of Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria- The city of Mubi was captured by Boko Haram and renamed to 'Madinatul-Islam' until it was recaptured by the military months later.

¹⁷³ Three each, from the cities of Kano and Maiduguri

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- 7- (2021) Phone interview (in Hausa) with two '*Yan Banga* who wish to remain anonymous.
Gombi¹⁷⁵ Local Government Area (LGA), Adamawa State
February 25th, 2021

Expert Email Correspondence

Email exchanges with Professor Bill Hansen
Chair, Department of Politics and International Studies
American University of Nigeria
December 2020 - March, 2021

Viewer Television Newsroom

Gwarimpa, Abuja, Nigeria
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqmhN21ZMz1aGC_kj8zww5Q/videos
<https://viewertv.com.ng/>

¹⁷⁵ Gombi LGA has experienced series of attacks by Boko Haram. The LGA is believed to heavily rely on the '*Yan Banga* for its security. In fact, for the last 6-7 years, a military state of emergency has been declared on the region. The town gained international recognition after a German development worker was kidnapped there in July, 2014. See, Faul, 2014: n. p

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