






**Insecurity and Anxiety in Northeast Nigeria and Boko Haram Agenda Conspiracy Theories:  
Lake Chad Basin's Oil and Water Polemics**

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# **Insecurity and Anxiety in Northeast Nigeria and Boko Haram Agenda Conspiracy Theories: Lake Chad Basin's Oil and Water Polemics**

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## **Abstract**

In Nigeria and other nations with their territory being part of the Lake Chad Basin, anxiety is high and growing because Boko Haram's "strident messages exacerbate intra-Muslim tensions and worsen Muslim-Christian relations in the region" (Thurston 2016: 5). In addition, because the agenda of Boko Haram appear jumbled and its sponsors indistinct, curiosity has led to the conceptualization of theories aimed at providing illumination. The study interpretively discusses how insecurity and anxieties in northeast Nigeria resulting from Boko Haram's insurgency propel the articulation of several conspiracy theories explaining Boko Haram's emergence, evolution and agenda, and the areas where lack of consensus subsists. The study classifies the theories into three categories, namely, the Freedom Fighter and Soldiers of Faith, Proxy Political Tool, and Islamic Caliphate Quest theories, and examines their suppositions and arguments to highlight the degree of plausibility. Substantially, the study expands the 'Islamic Caliphate Quest' theory to include the place of 'oil' and 'water' as likely variables that illuminate other trajectories.

**Keywords:** anxiety, Boko Haram, conspiracy theories, Lake Chad basin, oil, water

## **Introduction**

In his treatise on the economics of human action, Ludwig von Mises speaking in the context of conscious action observes that "human action is purposeful behaviour" (1998: 11). He maintains that "action is will put into operation and transformed into an agency" usually "aiming at ends and goals" (Mises 1998: 11). The indication is that man is privy to what propels his action. This is the reason he is naturally curious about the actions of others. He desires and seeks to understand the variables that impel the actions of others. Curiosity, defined as a motivated desire for information or the desire to know by George Loewenstein (1994), drives investigation and conspiracy theories. Celeste Kidd and Benjamin Y. Hayden (2015), classify motivational desire, which stems from a fervour or a taste for information, knowledge, and enlightenment into two categories, namely, perceptual curiosity (the innate exploratory behaviour that is present in all animals) and epistemic curiosity (the desire for knowledge that is specifically attributed to humans). Daniel Berlyne (1960) observes that three major variables that contribute to inducing

curiosity are collative, ecological, and psychophysical variables. He states that psychophysical variables revolve around physical intensity; ecological variables correspond to the motivational significance and task relevance, while collative variables stem from the following stimuli, novelty, complexity, and conflict (Berlyne 1960).

In this study, we believe that curiosity, which stems from complexity, appears to be the primary factor that drives scholars to investigate Boko Haram (an Islamist terror group based in northeast Nigeria) as a product of human actions. From the inception of Boko Haram, scholars have continued to articulate theories and interpretations to deepen understanding of its agenda beyond just its proclamations and palpable actions. Undoubtedly, different suppositions espousing Boko Haram's emergence and agenda have elevated it to an extremely complex phenomenon (Egbeleke 2013: ix). This is the reason there seems to be no consensus regarding the factor(s) behind Boko Haram's emergence and agenda. Rather what subsists are theoretical formulations variously revolving around economic, political, or religious factors (Onopajo & Uzodike 2012; Pham 2012; Bintube 2013; Onuoha 2013; Muzan 2014; Shuaibu & Salleh 2015; Oluwadare 2016; Unumen and Oghi 2016; Abada et al 2020). Reading these theories, we observe that critics have gone ahead to label theories on Boko Haram's agenda that are antipodal to their inclinations as conspiracy theories. In addition, we observe that while these studies differently have vigorously analyzed Boko Haram's agenda through religious, political, and economic angles, none has elaborated substantially on how these three trajectories are simultaneously evident in Boko Haram's agenda. Therefore, this study discusses the nuances of proxy politics, religion, and economic variables as propelling factors in Boko Haram's emergence, actions, metamorphosis, and agenda.

To place our discussion in a clear perspective, we shall provide succinct insights on the terms, Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin and Conspiracy theory because they are key and central to our discussion. Using interpretive analysis, this study discusses some major conspiracy theories on Boko Haram's agenda to highlight their inclinations and the neglect or omission of Lake Chad Basin 'water' and 'oil' as plausible variables in appreciating and understanding Boko Haram's quest to establish an Islamic caliphate as its agenda. Hopefully, the envisaged persuasion grounded on stringent logicity in the contextual perspective may help disaffiliate it from the status of conspiracy theory.

## **Conspiracy Theory**

Despite a wealth of research on the meaning, dynamics, and factors behind the formulation of conspiracy theories, there is no consensus on why some conspiracy theories persist longer than others. This is probably because "there is no one single, accepted definition of conspiracy" (Dagnall et al 2015: 1). According to Neil Dagnall et al, conspiracy theories are not always false even though "they typically lack evidential support" (2015: 1). Conspiracy theories linger or fizzle out at varying duration and people believe, endorse, or discountenance them differently. Conspiracy theories tend to sway people's minds and views variously and differently because they do not inject the same quality and quantity of appeal, persuasion and plausibility in them (Byford and Billig 2001; Sutton and Douglas 2014; Dagnall et al 2015). Furthermore, several factors and variables work together to instigate each individual's propensity and drive to engage either similarly or differently in the conceptualization, dissemination, acceptance or rejection of

conspiracy theories (Goertzel 1994; Stempel et al 2007; Swami et al 2010; Uscinski et al 2011 and Dagnall et al 2015). Some of the factors highlighted by these scholars are history, personal experiences, inclinations, level and quality of education, and worldviews. For instance, no two individuals possess an exact quantity and quality of information and knowledge about any subject, hence, the less an individual knows about a topic or subject, the less his/her ability to provide a fact-based conclusion on the subject, and vice versa. In addition, the acceptance or belief in a conspiracy theory influences the tendencies of individuals in many ways (Butler et al., 1995; Bird and Bogart, 2005; Jolley and Douglas, 2014; Dagnall et al 2015).

Conspiracy theory usually arises when past or unfolding events remain shrouded in mystery and secrecy. This thought aligns with the popular position that when it gets murky, it gets suspicious. A conspiracy theory is an unproven conceptualization/explanation, regardless of how vigorously its protagonists/theorists project it as fact-driven and dependable. Therefore, the quest for meaning-making in respect of past or unfolding events, actions, or occurrences, means that people are attempting to come up with rational and plausible suppositions. The interesting thing is that in response to a past or an unfolding event, action or occurrence such as Boko Haram guerrilla warfare, curiosity propels individuals to engage in all kinds of analyses in a bid to proclaim the purpose and agenda. When several suppositions are interpreting a given subject such as what is Boko Haram's agenda, it becomes a matter of debate to decide which of the suppositions is correct, factual, or not. Therefore, any supposition aimed at demystifying speculations surrounding a question such as what is Boko Haram's agenda is a conspiracy theory until proven otherwise.

### **Boko Haram**

The name Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, which means, the association for the propagation of the prophet's teaching and Jihad, widely known as Boko Haram, (Western education is sacrilege), is a Lake Chad Basin-based extremist Islamic group, designated globally as a terror organisation. Its origin is located in the Sahaba Islamic group formed in 1995 and led by one Abubakar Lawan (Ovaga 2012; Agbiboa 2013a & 2013b; Okoro 2014; Egbegi et al 2018; Odoh et al 2018). Boko Haram came to the limelight in 2002 under Muhammad Yusuf, who assumed leadership and introduced extremist/inflammatory perspectives after Abubakar Lawan travelled to Medina, Saudi Arabia for further studies. Studies indicate that Mohammed Yusuf's leadership pursues virulent fundamentalist rhetoric and inclination, describing Western education as the primary reason behind the increasingly immoral lifestyle led by a growing number of Muslims in Nigeria. This supposition is encapsulated in the expression Boko Haram, which is a combination of the Hausa word 'Boko' (Western education) and the Arabic word 'Haram' (sacrilege). Literally, 'Boko Haram' means Western education is a sacrilege, and in response to the leaders' bold extremist proclamations, the Nigerian government began a ruthless crackdown to end it swiftly (Odoh et al 2018: 94). After the crackdown, Boko Haram evolved with new leaders and began to indulge in violent attacks in parts of Northern Nigeria in 2009, concentrating mainly in the northeast region. Rapidly it evolved in its activities into one of the world's most dangerous terrorist groups, extending its campaign of terror to parts of Cameroon, Chad, and the Niger Republic on the fringes of Lake Chad (Ovaga 2012; Agbiboa 2013a & 2013b; Onuoha 2013; Okoro

2014; Egbegi et al 2018; Abada et al 2022). However, their actions, proclamations, and choice of operational base, which are not supposedly accidental, began to elicit different kinds of propelled permutations speculating their agenda. Boko Haram's operational base, the Lake Chad Basin appears to influence directly and indirectly the theories on Boko Haram's emergence and agenda.

### **Lake Chad and Its Basin**

Lake Chad, the fourth largest African lake by area after lakes Victoria, Tanganyika and Nyassa, "has shrunk by more than 90% over the past 58 years" and in 2021, it covers "less than 10% of the area it occupied in the 1960s" which is approximately around 25,000km<sup>2</sup> (LCBC 2021). In an attempt to establish and maintain a sustainable management protocol for Lake Chad as a natural resource which millions of people, directly and indirectly, depend on, the Lake Chad Basin Commission 'LCBC' was established by the Fort-Lamy (N'Djamena) Convention on 22 May 1964 by the four countries bordering Lake Chad: Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Central African Republic and Libya joined the organization in 1996 and 2008 respectively. Sudan, Egypt, The Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo received observer status (LCBC 2021). According to Binh Pham-Duc et al "Lake Chad Basin is exposed to hazards associated with climate change" and people living within and around it, who are mainly farmers, herders and fisher-folk, are "particularly vulnerable and have very limited adaptive capacities" hence "an urgent need to take action to reduce their vulnerability" (2020: 1). Studies indicate that "since the two terrible droughts of 1972-1973 and 1982-1984, rainfall has fallen from an average of 320 millimetres to 210 millimetres" and "the two large rivers which flow into it have lost their power" considerably (LCBC 2021). In addition, anthropological factors and climatic conditions responsible for the Lake's shrinking include the region's high population growth, large-scale exploitation of groundwater, dams' construction, the establishment of large irrigation projects in the watershed, increased temperature, and variability in precipitation (LCBC 2021). Furthermore, the reduction in the size of Lake Chad translates into destabilizing and perilous consequences such as food insecurity, worsening poverty, social tensions, and forced migration of the 42 million people living within the Lake Chad Basin (LCBC 2021). Thus, while the population of the Lake Chad Basin grows rapidly due to the procreation and migration of herders from drought-stricken and famine-prone Sahel regions of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, the economic assets, which mostly revolve around the lake, are dwindling rapidly. This situation brings about vicious competition for arable land and fishing locations. This brief introduction shows that Lake Chad Basin is undergoing a massive change and the people dwelling and earning their livelihood therein are increasingly impoverished, despondent and restive.

The abundant alternative economic benefit in Lake Chad Basin is widely discussed by scholars as a major factor behind the emergence of Boko Haram, but what they left out is the strategic angle to the massive underground water and crude oil. Subsequently, we shall discuss how these two abundant natural resources are the likely factors driving Boko Haram's attempt to take over the Lake Chad Basin and make it an Islamic Caliphate.

### **Theories of Boko Haram Agenda and Emergence**

Despite a large number of studies containing plausible explanations of the Boko Haram agenda, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos observes that Boko Haram "remains mysterious with little

evidence to substantiate different allegations about its true agenda" (2014: 6). The agenda theories, variously describe Boko Haram as "a radical religious sect, a violent insurgency, a terrorist organization, a network of criminal gangs, a political tool and a cult" (Pérouse de Montclos 2014: 6). In line with the evidence of a constant state of flux in Boko Haram's adaptation to changing circumstances with its warpath and recruitment, we view this metamorphosis as a primary reason behind the evident divergences in interpretative conceptualizations in several studies. In their attempt at foregrounding the contexts of the Boko Haram insurgency, Friday Raphael Egbebi et al, describe Boko Haram "as the most vicious and violent religious group ever witnessed by the country" Nigeria (2018: 13). Based on several scholarly analyses regarding Boko Haram's emergence, metamorphosis and agenda theories, we have categorized the scholarly views into four pathways. They are Adverse Economic Pressure Theory, Freedom Fighter and Soldiers of Faith Theory, Proxy Political Tool Theory, and The Islamic Empire Quest/Socio-economic Interest Theory.

### **Adverse Economic Pressure Theory**

The adverse economic pressure theory proponents build Boko Haram's emergence and agenda theory around the destructive outcome of the adverse economic realities in the Lake Chad Basin territory spanning over five decades. They present the growing loss of livelihood in the Lake Chad basin area and the endemic poverty in parts of northern Nigeria, most severe in the northeast, as the empirical basis of their supposition. According to Thurston, studies demonstrate that over 60% of Nigerians live on less than one dollar per day and that Muslim-majority northern Nigeria with the faster population growth, trails the heavily Christian South in infrastructural development and educational attainment (2016: 14). The argument is that rapid loss of livelihood and diminishing economic opportunities due to natural and anthropogenic factors such as desiccation and the rapid shrinking of Lake Chad are the primary reasons behind Boko Haram's emergence. Their observation is that the increasing rate of crop failures, disappearing quality pastures, and shrinking fishing returns have escalated poverty, hunger, anger, and restiveness. These theorists describe Boko Haram "as a social movement for the poor" particularly in its early days (Pérouse de Montclos 2014: 6). They argue that lack of viable alternative means of livelihood instigates despondency. This makes people in Lake Chad Basin (mostly the youths) susceptible to Boko Haram's message of poverty alleviation. Boko Haram regularly promises to enthrone a liveable society through the enthronement of pristine Islamic communism after dethroning the subsisting ineffectual corrupt government (Ifabiyi 2013; Pérouse de Montclos 2014; Onuoha 2014; Okpara et al. 2015; Magrin & Pérouse de Montclos 2018). In line with the evidence of extreme poverty in and around Lake Chad Basin, Pérouse de Montclos interprets Boko Haram as a response to a dehumanizing status quo. Therefore, in agreement with adverse economic pressure theorists, Boko Haram is a movement that "grew out of socio-economic flux that came with a process of democratic transition, coupled with the consequences of decades of mismanagement resulting from military rule and corruption" (Pérouse de Montclos 2014: 3).

The factors that combined to provide fertile ground for the germination of Boko Haram include poor governance riddled with inefficiency and treasury looting. In addition, retrogressive ideologies and worldviews tacitly supported by the ruling northern elite encourage unsustainable

family size. This brought about an economically unsustainable population. The political elite in northern parts of Nigeria encourages peasants to have large families for purposes of state and local government allotment and voting strength during general elections. However, maladministration and abysmal economic planning have allowed the rapid population growth to translate into a large number of despondent and restive youths who face dwindling economic fortunes from subsistence farming and fishing due to vagaries of climate change such as desiccation and famine (Onopajo & Uzodike 2012; Bintube 2013; Onuoha 2013; Muzan 2014; Oluwadare 2016).

The reality is that children from unsustainable large families produced by peasants end up as unskilled manual labourers and petty traders because they could not attend formal education due to poverty and anti-formal ideology. This very large number of individuals who dwell in despondency, anger, bitterness, hunger, and hopelessness are restive and easily pliable to Boko Haram recruitment antics and messages. Furthermore, the proponents of adverse economic pressure theory suggest that the flagrant display of opulence by the Nigerian political elite, while the peasants and poor masses remain trapped in abject poverty, makes it easy for Boko Haram to win sympathy and converts rapidly. Boko Haram in their messages refers to the elite as corrupt and responsible for the masses' penury. In other words, the perennial poor handling of Nigeria's socio-economic affairs seems to be the major reason behind the massive discontent. Emeka Aniago et al observe that "poor leadership has unarguably been recognized as a major national question around which many socio-economic and political problems revolve in Nigeria" (2021: 55). Poor leadership "has led to decadence and a squandermania mentality which breeds all sort of vices, mass poverty, absent and decaying infrastructure, kidnapping, agitations, banditry, and all kinds of insurgencies" (Aniago et al 2021: 55). Clearly, mishandling and looting of the economy are evident and verifiable empirical reasons responsible for retrogressive economic fortunes of Nigeria characterized by massive unemployment, rapidly decaying and insufficient infrastructure, and poor remuneration of government workers.

Looking at this theory, there is a lacuna. First, while the variables presented by its proponents are capable of provoking restiveness leading to a rebellion against an inept government in a bid to dislodge it, there is no explanation of how Boko Haram intends to govern and make Nigeria economically viable without Western education. Boko Haram's insistence and promise to end Western education when it topples the government because it corrupts the people is problematic and incongruous with many subsisting realities. Boko Haram's failure to elaborate on how ending Western education will propel socio-economic prosperity has left many questions unanswered. It is plausible to say that 'adverse economic pressure' contributed to the emergence of Boko Haram, however, it does not appear to explain their agenda. We suggest that Boko Haram understands that educated individuals will not be as malleable as illiterate *almajirí*. This makes its purpose and agenda go beyond the postulations of the Economic Pressure Theory.

### **'Freedom Fighter' and 'Soldiers of Faith' Theory**

Beginning from its emergence, Boko Haram "has always been anti-state and has always purported to pursue an Islamist agenda" (Pérouse de Montclos 2014: 6), "yet the sect's theology and politics encompass more than hatred for Western influence" (Thurston 2016: 5). In his elaboration, Thurston observes that Boko Haram's "worldview fuses two broader ideas" which are "a religious

exclusivism that opposes all other value systems, including rival interpretations of Islam" (2016: 5). Their demands include abandonment of supposedly anti-Islamic practices" such as "democracy, constitutionalism, alliances with non-Muslims, and Western-style education" (Thurston 2016: 5). The second projection is "a politics of victimhood" whereby "Boko Haram claims that its violence responds to what it sees as a decades-long history of persecution against Muslims in Nigeria" and they identified the State-sponsored military crackdowns on the sect as the latest manifestation of such persecution (Thurston 2016: 5).

According to Adem Anyebe "others see the Boko Haram as freedom fighters from the perspective of their frequent prison breaks and freeing of inmates" and "this view supported the work of some writers who observed that injustice, inequality and dehumanisation bred the crisis of Yusufiya Boko Haram insurgency which Nigeria is facing today" (2016: 56). Egbebi et al suggest that Boko Haram's attempt at fronting themselves as 'soldiers of faith' and proclamation of their intent to introduce strict 'Sharia' law across Nigeria and abolish Western education is an ideologically driven attempt at a psychological warfare and a form of political conditioning. In addition, some scholars studying Boko Haram's emergence from the 'soldiers of faith' trajectory, suggest that Boko Haram is likely the resurgence of 'Mai-Tatsine'. Proponents of this perspective present demography and apparent similarity between the Mai-Tatsine sect and Boko Haram's proclamations in their contextualization. The founder of the Mai Tatsine sect is Muhammad Marwa known as 'Mai-Tatsine' (meaning the one who curses), a Cameroon-born preacher who died in 1980. Muhammad Marwa who called himself a new prophet rejected Western technology, and promoted a 'Quran-only' doctrine (Last 2014; Higazi 2015). Proponents of this supposition also suggest that Boko Haram's strategic withdrawal from mainstream society and systemic recruitment of young Islamic schools' students, present significant resemblance with the methodology of the Mai-Tatsine sect. However, scholars who are not inclined to this perspective, suggest that the comparisons rest on assumptions rather than evidence (Adesoji 2011; Hoechner 2014; Cohen 2015). While the Mai-Tatsine sect largely recruited followers from Islamic schools, there is evidence that Boko Haram welcomes secondary and tertiary school dropouts into their fold. In addition, reports indicate that Boko Haram engage in the mass abduction of youths, whom they indoctrinate and turn to their idea of Islam and followership.

Again, there is a fundamental problem with this theory as a means of understanding the agenda of Boko Haram. In this theory, the proponents report that Boko Haram is fighting to restore pristine Islamic rubrics, however, in practice Boko Haram leaders avail their fighters of mind-altering and sex-enhancing hard drugs, which is anti-Islam (The Nation 2015). It is hard to rationalize and accept the notion that Boko Haram's agenda is to establish an Islamic Caliphate governed by technologically void or redundant individuals bent on dismantling Western education-influenced science, capitalism, democracy, and institutions. This is because they are utilizing products such as guns, boots, clothes, heavy weaponry, RPG, bombs and transmission systems, all products of years of painstaking, diligent research and development within the formal education system (Abada et al 2020: 125).



### **'Proxy Political Tool' Theory**

Proponents of the 'proxy political tool' theory contend that economic deprivation alone cannot explain why radical/violent groups emanate in some places and not in others, or why some of these groups come up with fundamentalist/extremist worldviews. They argue that the analysis of Boko Haram's emergence and agenda, should neither discount demography nor present it as the sole factor because it is only one factor in a more complicated unfolding of violence and dissent. In this regard, Thurston observes that Boko Haram has proclaimed that it is a response to the perceived political marginalization of the North and particularly the Northeast. In line with this Boko Haram's inclination, many southern Nigerians tacitly see Boko Haram as a sponsored group with a major mandate, which is to destabilize the polity. This supposition revolves around the notion that many northern Nigerian political elites got offended because a Southern Christian, President Goodluck Jonathan, won the 2011 presidential election after he ascended to the presidency after the demise of President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua, a northern Muslim despite their opposition. Yar' Adua did not complete his eight years two terms in line with the ruling party's (PDP) internal arrangement, which is to rotate the presidency between the South and North every eight years. Thus, President Jonathan's re-election disrupted this arrangement and the northern political elites voiced their displeasure strongly. Jonathan's re-election led to sponsored riots in several northern cities leading to heavy loss of lives and properties. Although Boko Haram has been in existence before Jonathan's re-election, it steadily evolved from a less violent to a major terrorist organisation. In his contribution, which highlights the context of the 'proxy political tool' theory, Adam Anyebe notes that Boko Haram is:

Labelled an instrument of political re-engineering being used by unscrupulous political elements to stage a proxy war in their quest for political power, thereby threatening government, institutions and targeted civilian populations in their insurgency to achieve their political end. (2016: 56)

The theory argues that some aggrieved northern Nigerian political elites are likely the sponsors of Boko Haram because of President Jonathan's election victory. Their agenda is to use Boko Haram to create insecurity and socio-political destabilization, which will sway opinion against President Jonathan's government to reduce his winning chance in the subsequent general election. Insecurity, violence, and rebellion by Boko Haram orchestrated massive negative public outbursts towards President Jonathan as an inept, visionless, and weak leader, who has allowed terrorists to continue the wanton destruction of lives and properties in Nigeria. According to Onapajo and Usman, there is a widespread belief mostly by the Southern Nigerian Christians that Boko Haram is a political machinery created by prominent northern politicians to discredit President Goodluck Jonathan because they opposed his re-election bid in 2011 (2015).

On Boko Haram as a proxy political tool for de-marketing of President Jonathan's government to deny him re-election, this is our observation. We agree that Boko Haram is a major factor that assisted in turning the tide against President Jonathan's re-election because political elites vociferously vilified President Jonathan for not securing Nigerians against the atrocities of Boko Haram. However, Boko Haram is not a creation for the sole purpose of dethroning President Jonathan because Boko Haram pre-dated his government and it exists long after him. One expected Boko Haram to fissile out if it has accomplished its agenda, but that is not the case

because it has evolved further and has continued its actions. The activities of Boko Haram appear to be more horrendous in the Mohammadu Buhari-led administration. This leads us to look at another argument projecting Boko Haram as a proxy political tool for purposes of natural resources in the Lake Chad Basin.

### **Proxy Political Tool Theory: The Oil Politics Dimension**

Proponents of the oil politics-economics dimension to Boko Haram's agenda present the 2010 geological survey report by the US Geological Survey, which places the Lake Chad oil reserves at 2.32 billion barrels and 14.65 trillion cubic feet of natural gas as the undeclared reason behind Boko Haram's terrorism and not the proclaimed yearning for a pristine Islamic doctrine and tenets. A key advocate of this concept Tochukwu Omenma calls for "more critical enquiry on the possible link between Boko Haram activities and natural resources" (2019:1), because "terrorists themselves do not tend to highlight economic factors in their own rhetoric" and agenda proclamation (Krueger 2007: 46). Pointedly, Omenma opines that Boko Haram has metamorphosed to a proxy group, sponsored to disrupt Nigeria from exploiting oil from the Lake Chad basin. Omenma hypothesises that hindering Nigeria's attempts to commence oil exploitation by Boko Haram, while Chad, Niger, and Cameroon's oil exploitation continue unhindered is more than a mere coincidence (2019:1). He views this unfolding as an international conspiracy and a well-articulated proxy war against Nigeria in the quest for oil in the Lake Chad region (Omenma 2019: 2). Furthering, he observes that "when two or more states sit astride a large underground oil basin, there is always the tendency of using non-state armed groups as a tool of state-craft" (Omenma 2019: 4). He notes that "the Nigerian government had often been suspicious of Chad and Niger's close relations with a particular faction of Boko Haram" (Omenma 2019: 4); and has "criticized Cameroon for not doing enough to fight the spread of violent extremism in its territory" (Comolli 2015, 89). Omenma contends that these points lead to two assumptions, which are "the possible pursuit of economic rather than religious interest by Boko Haram insurgent groups, and second, the likely use of Boko Haram against Nigerian economic benefits in the Lake Chad region" (2019: 4). Omenma aligns his position with the perspectives of James Terry (1986), and Daniel Byman (2005), which he summarizes in the following words:

States use terrorism to substitute traditional warfare if the latter is too expensive or risky. Where traditional forms of warfare are considered overtly costly or would result in uncertain outcomes, terrorism may be regarded as an appropriate substitute. This may result in state provision of a range of support mechanisms, including propaganda, financial aid, training, intelligence, weapons, and even direct involvement. (Omenma 2019: 10)

Leaning towards this approach to buttress his argument, Omenma cites the views of René Värk who explains that it has "become a rewarding alternative approach of foreign policy to use this extraordinary, but potentially effective means, as it avoids or minimizes the risk of taking responsibility" (2011: 82). Then, rhetorically he asks:

Is this scenario applicable to the Lake Chad region, where possible state cooperation or acquiescence with Boko Haram gives the state improved access to the oil resources or, the probability of Boko Haram abandoning the religious ideological motivation to a more lucrative economic interest? (Omenma 2019: 10)

We believe the answer to the above rhetorical question is in the contribution from Jacob Zenn's paper published a year before Omenma's study. Zenn in this paper, which highlights the Islamic Caliphate Quest trajectory, provides three heuristics for evaluating al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM's) impact on Boko Haram's founding, the launch of jihad, and the suicide bombing campaign. Regarding the founding of Boko Haram (2002-2003), Zenn contributes seven encompassing observations, which variously indicate that Boko Haram is neither a spontaneous association merely driven by hunger to start a rebellion nor a proxy group leveraged by states occupying the Lake Chad basin but a group with the intent to replicate the patterns of al-Qaida in Lake Chad Basin. Zenn provides the following high points from primary sources.<sup>ii</sup>

- a. A Nigerian al-Qaida operative meets Osama Bin Laden in Sudan in the 1990s –
- b. Receives a promise of up to \$3 million from Bin Laden to start a jihadi group in Nigeria –
- c. Engages in military training in Afghanistan –
- d. Al-Qaida intends to provide this operative with 'immense wealth' to found a jihadi group in Nigeria –
- e. Sends an al-Qaida member from Pakistan to coordinate attacks on Western targets in Nigeria with this founder's new jihadi group –
- f. And this group claims allegiance to the Taliban and communicates with al-Qaida's regional allies in West Africa –
- g. Then al-Qaida is likely to have had a significant impact on the group's founding. (2018: 86)

Regarding the launch of Jihad by Boko Haram (2009-2010), Zenn provides the following information to support the notion that Boko Haram had retained its connection with an external Islamic terror group, particularly AQIM. He notes:

- a. A Nigerian jihadi group engages in clashes with Nigerian security forces and within two weeks its leaders deploy three operatives to meet with AQIM's top commander in Mali; and –
- b. That commander reports to AQIM's leader that he knows those operatives well; and –
- c. AQIM's leader provides 200,000 euros to that group in Nigeria and increases AQIM training for dozens of the group's members; and –
- d. That Nigerian jihadi group's leader writes a letter thanking AQIM for the "training and financial generosity" after its first successful attack in Nigeria – then, AQIM is likely to have had a significant impact on that Nigerian group's launch of jihad. (Zenn 2018: 87).

Regarding the Suicide Bombing Campaign by Boko Haram (2011-2012), Zenn cites the following points, which are from primary sources validating the view that Boko Haram is getting support from an external jihadi group to take over large parts of Lake Chad Basin.

- a. A region of a country has never experienced a suicide attack but after a Nigerian jihadi group announces a jihad there is a rapid increase in suicide attacks; and
- b. the group that announced the jihad claims some of those suicide attacks and there is no evidence that another militant outfit launched those attacks; and
- c. some of the masterminds of those attacks trained with AQIM or al-Shabab and received money from AQIM; and

- d. The targets of those attacks are consistent with AQIM's recommendations to that Nigerian jihadi group; then, Al-Qaida is likely to have had a significant impact on that suicide bombing campaign. (2018: 87)

The contribution of Zenn suggests that Boko Haram is in contact and collaboration with Al-Qaida and AQIM. Though it is plausible to suggest that activities of Boko Haram aided the opponents of President Jonathan to defeat him in his re-election bid, it is not plausible to agree that Boko Haram is under their control as a political proxy tool while it is targeting their interests more viciously under President Buhari's government. Again, it is a possibility for states to utilize terror and non-state actors to wage a proxy war against opponents; however, it is not plausible that Boko Haram will be working with a Christian-governed nation such as Cameroon with funding and technical support from Al-Qaida and AQIM. Furthermore, the increased collaboration between Nigeria and Niger Republic such as the proposed rail line from Katsina (Nigeria) to Maradi (Niger Republic) will not be plausible between enemy states. Thus, we turn to the Islamic Caliphate Quest theory for further interpretation.

### **Islamic Caliphate Quest Theory**

A school of Thought interprets Boko Haram as an extension or an affiliate of al-Qaida. The proponents cite Boko Haram's enthusiastic remarks about al-Qaida as admirable soldiers of the Islamic faith at the beginning of their evolution and the evidence of linkage as the premise of their supposition. They point to pieces of information alluding that Boko Haram members receive financial support, and training from al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Somalia's al-Shabab, which influences their actions (Zenn 2018). The argument here is that some of Boko Haram's tactics such as the kidnapping of Westerners and suicide bombing are imitations from the repertoires of AQIM and al-Shabab, even though their action executions do not entirely match the competencies and aims of its alleged sponsors.

Scholars opposed to the above claim, contend that Boko Haram tactics are a mere replication of copied ideas from other jihadists, which it combines with self-generated approaches, such as the destruction of telecommunication masts, wanton looting and killing of villagers, and kidnapping of women en masse. Therefore, Boko Haram's methodology is essentially a syncretism built through adaptation and improvisation in response to the spontaneity of war and unexpected realities. Proponents of this position such as Adam Higazi, et al (2018), suggest that Boko Haram is not an enactment of a script from foreign affiliation, even though its open affirmation of affiliation with the Islamic State complicates their supposition. They observe that Boko Haram at its early stage may have just admired al-Qaida and expected that their open support will draw support. They argue that even if Boko Haram had any link with al-Qaida, there is no evidence to suggest it was robust; rather what may have existed was patchy, and marginal. Thurston observes that it is misleading to treat Boko Haram as a socio-economic protest with an Islamic veneer, an ethnic revolt, a puppet of foreign jihadis, or a resurgence of an earlier religious movement. He argues that structural factors, politics, and ideas in northeastern Nigeria are the major variables that will provide plausible interpretations (2016: 8).

Another trajectory to the 'Islamic Caliphate Quest' theory is based on the premise that Boko Haram emerged from the collapsed Borno Empire, and that Yusufiya Boko Haram is an instrument

for resurrecting a dead empire (Anyebe 2016: 56). In his contribution, Chukwuma Onyia posits that "Lake Chad Basin's historical antecedents, its geopolitical influence, and the emotional fixation of the Islamic world on Caliphate systems, make the Lake Chad region strategically crucial and attractive to the terrorists" (2020: 53). This observation captures Boko Haram's claimed objective, which is "to dismantle the Nigerian state and replace it with a caliphate" (Onyia 2020: 53). The idea here is that Boko Haram aspires to replace the states around Lake Chad with a pure Islamic society. Looking at this supposition, a lot of scepticism revolves around the lack of evidence to support Boko Haram's military capacity to dismantle entire Nigeria and make it a caliphate. In what appears as a modification of the notion of making the Nigeria a caliphate, N. O. Anyadike (2013) and Joseph A. Oluwadare (2016) think that Boko Haram is essentially bent on imposing strict authoritarian version of Islamic codes and tenets in and around the space widely referred to as Lake Chad Basin. In this regard, the enclave includes a considerable swath of Northeast Nigeria, parts of the Niger Republic and Cameroon. According to Oluwadare:

The ideological mission of Boko Haram is not in doubt. It clearly declared that it wants to overthrow the Nigerian state and impose a strict Islamic Sharia legal system in Nigeria. It was the conviction of members of the sect that there were so many social vices in Nigeria that only an Islamic legal system was capable of eradicating them. (2016: 46)

The government of President Jonathan in its tacit support of this theory notes that economic hardship alone will not propel Boko Haram to unleash the kind of carnage so far recorded. Our view is that Boko Haram is interested in a forceful takeover of parts of Nigeria, just like the jihadist groups in the Middle East and northeast Africa.

The Muslim and Christian communities indicatively have their own separate and conflicting answers regarding what is Boko Haram's agenda. The Christians through their apex organization, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) contend that Boko Haram is a tool of annihilation, subjugation and an attempt at the Islamisation of Nigeria (Usman, 2015). An instance where this inclination alluded was after an attack on a Church on the campus of the Bayero University, Kano, in May 2012, which was claimed by Boko Haram. In response, the Southern Nigerian CAN wonders why in a space with mosques and churches nearby, Boko Haram singled out the Church and not a mosque for destruction. This action reinforces their conviction that Boko Haram's agenda is to exterminate the Christians in the North and Islamize the country. In addition, the abduction and conversion of the Chibok girls to Islam is another premise the Christians present to support their Islamic Caliphate Quest theory.

### **Conclusion and an Insight into 'Oil' and 'Water' Polemics in Islamic Caliphate Quest Theory**

The beginning and evolution of Boko Haram have propelled scholarly suppositions aimed at presenting plausible explanations regarding its actions, realities, agenda and metamorphosis. Hence, beyond what Boko Haram's leaders have repeatedly proclaimed as their objective and agenda, scholarly suppositions have continued to yield both convergent and divergent interpretive trajectories. What this shows is that none of the interpretations from the entire situation and scenario has complete facts because they are largely reliant on suppositions and available information. Going through some of the major theories on Boko Haram's agenda, we noticed that there are clear plausible suppositions therein even though there are apparent gaps.

This study looked at the plausibility of these theories by assessing the empirical realities that validate or invalidate them. Boko Haram's agenda conspiracy theories discussed are Adverse Economic Pressure Theory, Freedom Fighter and Soldiers of Faith Theory, Proxy Political Tool Theory, and the Islamic Empire Quest/Socio-economic Interest Theory. A critical appraisal of studies on Boko Haram's emergence indicates a convergence of views, which mostly point to debilitating abject poverty, unemployment, and unsettling economic inequality as catalysts behind the emergence of Boko Haram. These studies point at mass discontent as a major concern facing Nigeria, which Boko Haram leaders consistently project as the reason behind their mission, which is to salvage the suffering masses. Mass discontent leading to drug abuse and addiction, restiveness, armed robbery, banditry and kidnapping is mainly due to massive youth unemployment and underemployment. These studies observe that from the year 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule after years of crippling brutal military totalitarian regimes, her fledgling democracy has continued to face formidable challenges. The result is the growing call for restructuring of the country by some and unbundling of the country into confederate states by others because the political leaders have failed to enhance the well-being and livelihood of the people. We discussed how the polemics of Lake Chad Basin metaphors are literarily multifaceted ideas that when looked at closely are applicable in providing a plausible explanation of the long-term rationale behind the territory-grabbing quest by Boko Haram.

The oil and water economic dimension contextually is polemically an existing gap and trajectory to the Islamic Caliphate Quest theory, which revolves around the utilization of Boko Haram for the actualization of an Islamic Caliphate in the Lake Chad basin because of the presence of huge oil and gas reserve and massive underground water reservoir. It is proven scientifically that "below the arid surface of the great desert are huge natural reservoirs of water" (Ambroggi 1966: 21). Furthering, Ambroggi observes that the Sahara, "possesses in abundance the remedy for aridity" because "below the desert sands is water-bearing rock formations are huge quantities of water to sustain human settlement, pasturage for livestock and, in many places now barren, productive agriculture" (1966: 21). Furthermore "the Saharan oil can supply the energy needed to pump the water" and "good soils are also available, recent investigations have shown that extreme tracts of desert land have arable (and once cultivated) soils overlain by a thin cover of sand" (Ambroggi 1966: 21). Ambroggi's findings are supported by more recent reports such as MacDonald et al 2011, MacDonald et al 2012, Pavelic et al 2013).

Naturally, it is a universal tendency that the quest for big gain is concealed in diversionary tactics, as exemplified in the biblical parable of a man who discovered a hidden treasure in a land and sold everything he possessed and bought the land (Matthew 13: 44 -45). This may be evidential and explains the reason Boko Haram and their international sponsors are tacit on the oil and water dimension to their quest. If amidst all these treasures already scientifically unveiled, and yet Boko Haram and their network of collaborators are blind to the belying favourable potentials, then intuitively fluke is unarguably working for them. However, it is incontestable that such wide-scale ignorance and cluelessness are not reconcilable with the present age of super highway of information and dire materialism. Hence, conclusively, oil and water geological matrices are the variables upon which the conflict revolves.

### Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

### Notes

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<sup>i</sup>The word 'almajiri' is derived from the Arabic word '*Al muhajirun*' (an emigrant), which refers to a person who migrates from his home to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge and this is the basis of the *almajiri* system of Islamic education practised in northern Nigeria. The male gender seeking Islam knowledge is '*almajiri*', the female gender is '*almajira*', and the plural is '*almajiral*'.

<sup>ii</sup> The primary sources used by Jacob Zenn are source one, letters between AQIM and Boko Haram and AQIM treatise, 2009–2011 (released in April 2017). These primary sources are in a roughly 70-page Arabic language document called the "Documents of Advice and Sharia Instruction to the Fighters in Nigeria," which was released by al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in April 2017 and included an introduction by Mauritanian AQIM sharia official Abu al-Numan Qutayba al-Shinqiti. Source two, is the International Crisis Group (ICG) Report on Boko Haram, 2014. Source three is an article about Boko Haram's and Ansaru's history as written by the Ansaru leader, Abu Usama al-Ansari, in the al-Qaida magazine, al-Risalah, in January 2017. Source four is Court Documents from the Case of Ibrahim Harun, 2017, and source five is News Reports and Academic Article about Suicide Bombings, 2010-2011 (Zenn 2018).

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