



SHEKAU AND FUTURE JIHADISTS: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Theophilus Abbah, *PhD*

Department of English & Literary Studies, University of Abuja

Corresponding author: *Theophilus Abbah
Phone: +234 8033895294 Email: theoabbah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

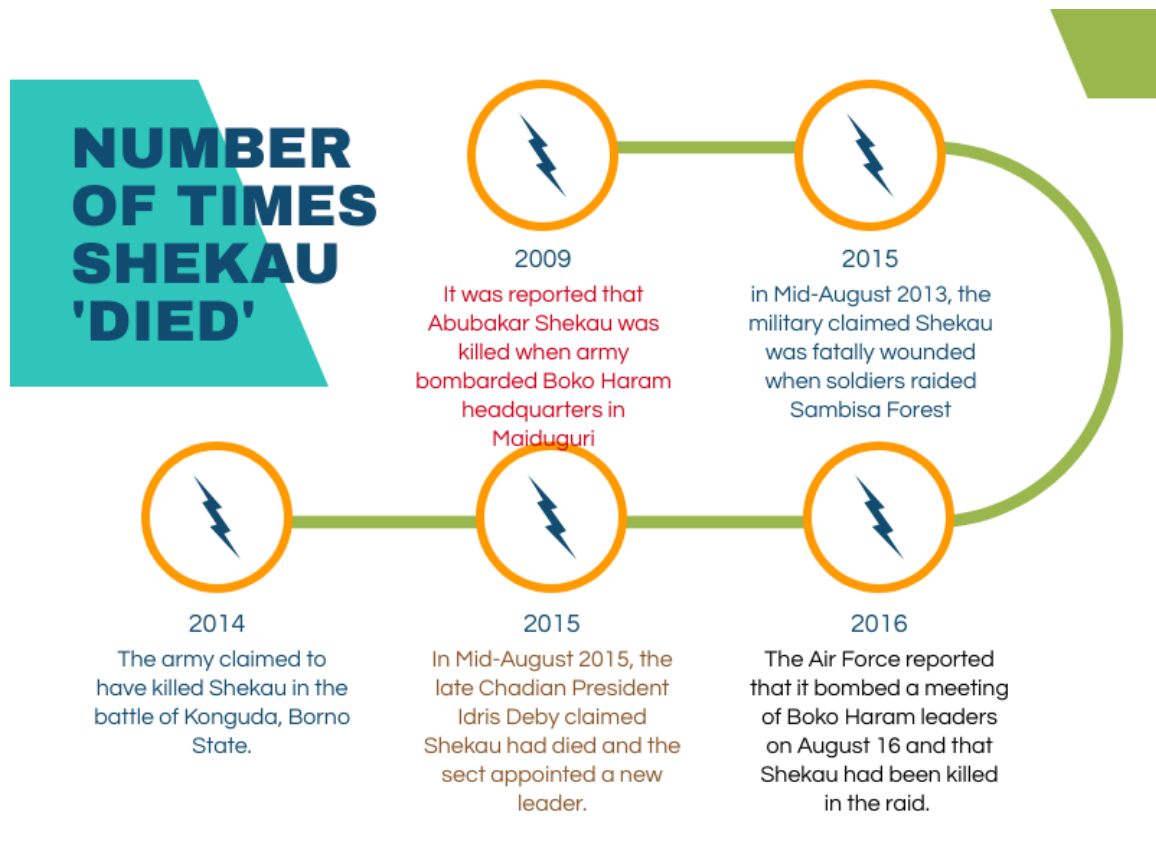
Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was killed in a battle of supremacy between the sect and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in May 2021. His death should supposedly signal the end of terrorism in Nigeria because, over the years, he had been the sustaining figure of terrorism in Nigeria. This paper argues that unless steps to educate the youths against radicalization, there would arise more terrorist Shekaus in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS

future Jihadists, A historical review, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, Nigeria, Jihadism.

A statement Abubakar Shekau issued in 2012 parted the curtains and opened the window into his mood as a vampire; his yearn for blood. In January of that year, Boko Haram, like devils from hell, swooped on Kano, shooting, bombing, hacking and trampling everyone at sight to death. Dead bodies littered the streets of Kano, from Bompai Police headquarters to the hallowed Kano City. Then, from the spring of malevolence in his heart, Shekau declared: "I enjoy killing anyone that God commands me to kill - the way I enjoy killing chickens and rams."





With this mindset, the atrocities, meanness, and cruelty in short-lived Boko Haram caliphate under Shekau could be imagined. No wonder, the open letter by breakaway Islamic States of West African Province (ISWAP) to Shekau in August 2016 was blood-spattered, the blood of other Jihadists murdered by Shekau.

ISWAP to Shekau: Is this the religion of Islam?

In the open letter signed by the late Mamman Nur which signaled the kick-off of the gory five-year confrontation and fracas between ISWAP and Boko Haram, the accusative phrase 'you killed' stood out multiple times in every paragraph, as the sect demonstrated Shekau's penchant for snuffing life out of his lieutenants and co-travellers in Sambisa Forest, Lake Chad Basin and other hideouts.

A section of the letter reads thus: "You were the person who killed Mujahid, Abu Maryam and Abdullahi Hudu. What was the crime of this slave of Allah [Abdullahi Hudu]? He had a dream, so after narrating the dream he was killed. He had a dream where Mallam Muhammad Yusuf said Shekau should abandon capturing slaves, and focus on fighting; otherwise he will not be victorious. That was the dream and after he narrated it, he was killed. Is this the religion of Islam? You are telling people that Hajjaj b. Yusuf also killed people - both the Companions and those who followed them. Therefore, even if a leader is killing people, it is obligatory to obey him..."

The excerpt above thrust sword into the heart of Shekau's priorities. Shekau's lust for slaves, mainly Christians who rejected threats to convert to Islam, served two purposes for him. Male 'slaves' worked on the Jihadist's farms in Sambisa Forest or around Lake Chad Basin as unpaid labourers... Other 'slaves' were Christian women who would not convert to Islam even in the face of certain death

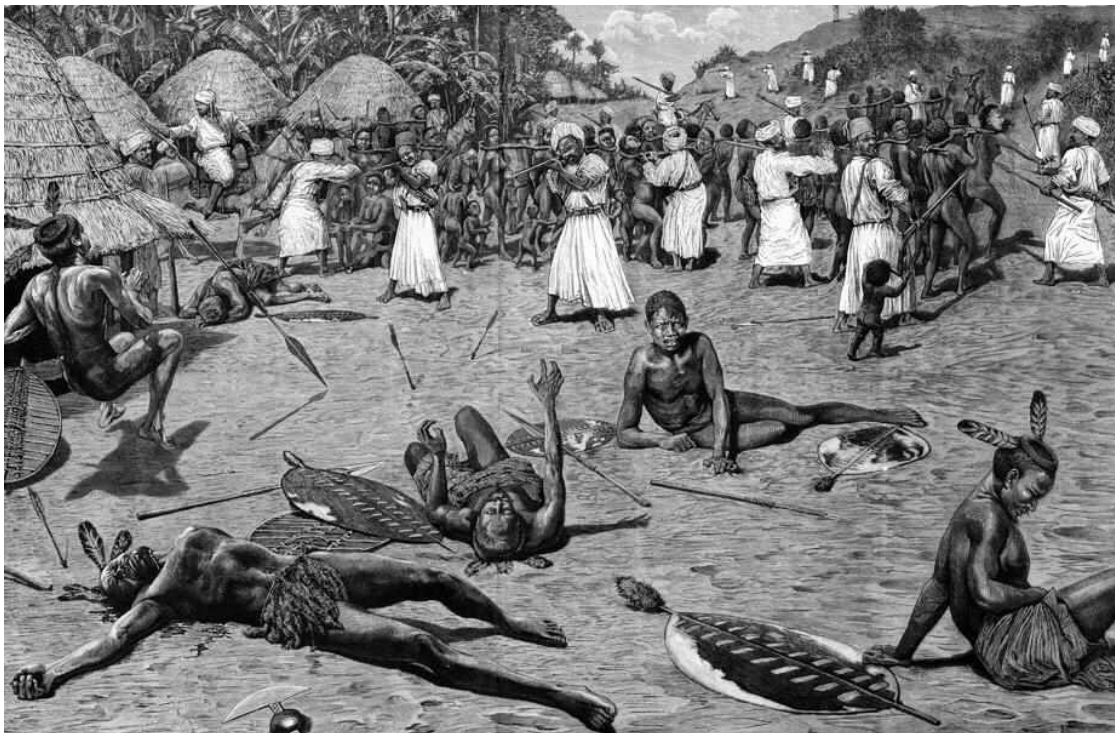
- like Leah Sharibu. They were forced to become sex-slaves or domestic servants to Boko Haram fighters and wives respectively. Perhaps, Shekau's obsession with amassing slaves - and amassing wealth from slaves' labour - overtook the drive to prosecute Jihad that it stared Boko Haram fighters in the face like an evil tree.

Shekau must have read the wrong history books

If Abubakar Shekau were knowledgeable and conversant with the history of revolutionary Islam in Nigeria and beyond, he should have predicted the doom that hit him to death in May 2021. History would have foretold him that he would not survive the bloodshed in his ill-fated caliphate; that he would not savour the power, glory and peace of reigning over an emirate from a luxurious palace. Rather, for 11 years, from 2010 when he declared war against the Nigerian people and state, until his death in 2021, Shekau lived the life of a wandering fugitive, fleeing from the Nigerian military, went underground for fear of interpol, isolated from fellow jihadists, holed up from his family and fearing his shadows. But that is the fate reserved for all who battle nature to turn the hand of time back to some misty, opaque, clouded, unknown and incomprehensible past in an anxious and deplorable attempt to please paradise. This fate awaits all ISWAP leaders and commanders in not so distant future.

A lesson from the Mahdi of Sudan

Perhaps a study of the exploits and frustration of Muhammad Ahmed, a self-declared Mahdi in Sudan in the 19th Century should have taught Shekau that he took a doomed track when he arrived at the crossroads and chose the brand of Islam that hot-headed preachers espoused. ^{iv}The Mahdi's military exploit against the British and Egyptians was legendary, as on January 25, 1885, his fighters overwhelmed skillful foreign soldiers, with wanton massacre, while women enslaved after the battle were distributed among Mahdists.

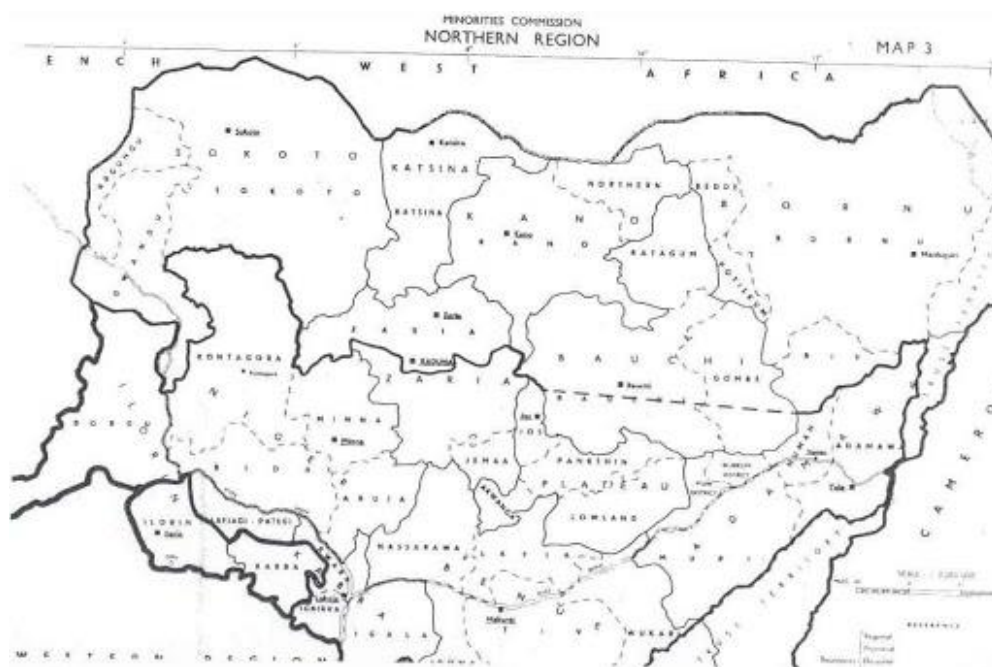


Sudan Mahdi revolt illustrated photo: **Source:** www.histclo.com.

Now victorious, Mahdi set up a caliphate in Khartoum where strict Sharia was implemented while whippings, mutilations and beheading became common. Everything alien to Arab culture was outlawed - European education, industry and medicine (all doctors were executed). When Mahdi Ahmed died of typhus, his deputy Khalifah Abdullahi took over as Mahdi, visiting upon Sudan untold mayhem with the slaughter of Kababish Arabs, Batahin tribe of Arabs, invasion of Christian empire of Ethiopia, laying it waste, and halting Holy pilgrimage to Mecca, and instead insisted on pilgrimage to the tomb of his predecessor in Omdurman. The caliphate endured for a decade and a half, but not the population. As at 1885 when Mahdi converted Sudan to a caliphate, the population was put at eight million, but when the country was recaptured in 1898, the population had reduced to 2.5 million. More than five million persons had been killed in the guise of implementing the strict Shariah and holding unto power. In the British battle against the Mahdist to reconquer Sudan thousands of Mahdists fell, bringing an end to the blood-soaked caliphate.

Jihadism is not new in Nigeria, but...

In Nigeria, there were forerunners to Muhammad Yusuf and Abubakar Shekua - the Mahdist militant Islamic movement (Mahdiyya) who violently resisted established Sultanate and British colonialism. Unlike Boko Haram, Mahdists enjoyed popular support from peasants, radical clerics, and slaves. From Sokoto to Gombe, this apocalyptic and messianic marched to overthrow all established authorities, including the Sokoto Caliphate, the colonial regime with local officials who collaborated with the colonialists. It was similar Boko Haram's opposition to Western education, Christianity, America, Jews and the West in general. In the long battle, the West African Frontier Force and French troops, overwhelmed the Satiru8 Mahdists, killed them in their numbers and destroyed all the villages loyal to the revolutionary Islamists.



Jihadist had always wanted to rule northern Nigeria. **Photo:** *Urhobo Historical Society*

Also, in the 1980s, Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine, who was said to have hailed from Cameroon emerged in Kano to preach revolutionary Islam that defied the authorities and forbade his followers from yielding western education and innovations. ^vLiving in secluded quarters to avoid being contaminated by material things, followers of Maitatsine denounced wealth, owning of houses, wrist watches and other conveniences. They hated security agencies, and preached against other Muslims who owned motor vehicles, worked in the civil service and even enter into mosques with money in their pockets.

Instead of keeping their self-righteousness to themselves, Maitatsine followers dreamed of compelling others to join them in their ambition to set up a society noted for purity, or in their self-imposed mission of purifying the Islamic faith. A long-drawn battle ensued; it consumed Alhaji Maitatsine and thousands of his followers who thought magical powers would render them invincible against police and military onslaught.

The ^{vi}Nigerian Taliban, which called itself Al-Sunna Wal Jamma, meaning “Followers of Prophet Muhammad,” emerged in 2001 in Yobe State. Founded by one Mohammed Ali who was believed to have returned from Afghanistan where The Taliban fought Russian troops to a standstill and became victorious, Yobe or Nigerian Taliban members cut across graduates, undergraduates, retired military personnel, and fiery clerics, who separated themselves from ‘corrupt society’ and system by establishing a camp in Zaji-Birin, and later at Kanama forest which had border with Niger Republic.

The core of their rhetoric denounced the Nigerian government and Western systems. But they overstretched their luck by causing mayhem in Kanama on December 24, 2003. The Yobe Taliban attacked and burnt down structures of government-owned institutions in the community. They confronted the police with superior fire power, but the sect was crushed within days, leaving many of them dead.

The Islamic States of Iraq and Leviant (ISIL), founded by a former Al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi in 2014 and strengthened by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, pursued the ambition of erecting an Islamic caliphate through uncommon violence, bloodshed, savagery and inhuman treatment of victims, leaving a large part of Iraq and Syria in ruins. Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda left the world with the signature atrocity of destroying the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001, instantly cutting short over 3,000 innocent lives and opening a 20-year fresh chapter in the world called War on Terror.



The late ISIS leader al-Baghdadi: Source: bbc.com

More Jihadist coming

Shekau has died, but Jihadism is alive and kicking in Nigeria, no thanks to the lack of deliberate system to quench this unnecessary fire being stoked all over the country. There is no legislation at state or national levels to curtail the excesses of fiery preachers whose stock-in-trade is to expound revolutionary Islam, whip up sentiments against Christians, Jews, Americans and the West, and attack government for being in bed with the West. ^{vii}A half-hearted attempt by Governor Nasir el-Rufai of Kaduna State to regulate preaching died prematurely. The poisonous teachings goes on unchallenged in many so-called 'Shariah States' where young kids in Qur'anic schools are fed with poison cooked with revolutionary ingredients. In many university campuses, Jihadist sermons are preached to students who are brought up to hate the Western system, Christians and Jews on account of warped and distorted historical narratives.

On social media, Boko Haram and ISWAP have continued to broadcast hatred against Christians, Jews, Americans and the West, and to preach salacious sermons on apocalyptic self-sacrifice, the imperative of paradise, and winning the hearts of gullible youths.

Worse of all, government and religious bodies have not vigorously put in place measures to counter wrong Jihadist sermons spread by Boko Haram, ISWAP and fiery revolutionary preachers in many parts of the country. In countries like ^{viii}Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, and several countries that have fought terrorism and terrorist effectively, government and the people were united against apocalyptic, inciting and revolutionary sermons. Algeria used traditional media to correct wrong Jihadist teachings and prohibited certain categories of doctrines from being expounded. In Morocco, sermons by clerics are censored, while in Saudi Arabia, preachers are licensed.



Governor Nasir el-Rufai: he attempted to promulgate a law to regulate religious preaching in Kaduna State.

To prevent mayhem by the next Abubakar Shekau, the federal government must assemble religious leaders, elite and traditional rulers to come to a consensus on ‘what not to preach,’ and make a binding legislation around it. As long as children, youths, young adults, and even the elderly continued to feed on contaminated, distorted, revolutionary and hate-filled sermons bordering on martyrdom from self-appointed fiery Jihadist preachers, Nigeria will not escape the curse of Jihadist attacks and destruction.



Leah Sharibu: Jihadists have enslaved this Christian girl who refused to convert to Islam

Work Cited

ⁱⁱ The full text of the open letter is found in *The Boko Haram Rader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, edited by Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa (2018), Hurt & Company, London.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leah Sharibu, a Christian schoolgirl abducted from Dapchi, refused to convert to Islam. She has been held since March 2018: Boko Haram Sect Vows to Keep Leah Sharibu ‘Slave for Life’ - Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA.

^{iv} A summary of the ill-fated caliphate is found in “Mahdi Revolt” (pages 320-324) in *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things*, by Matthew White, and published by W.W. Northon & Company in 2012.

^v *The Killing Fields*, by Shehu Sani, (pages 113-115) contains more about the doctrines, practices and activities of Maitatsine in Kano State.

^{vi} The origin, activities and crushing of the Yobe Taliban Revolution is contained in *The Killing Fields*, by Shehu Sani (pages 179-183).

^{vii} The Bill to regulate preaching may have been well-conceived but it contains unnecessary clauses that made religious leaders to oppose it. Read the highlight here: Facts about Kaduna religious preaching regulation bill | TheCable

^{viii} Saudi Arabia even sacked preachers who failed to condemn Muslim Brotherhood’s Jihadist sermons: www.middleeastmonitor.com

Dr Abbah is an Abuja based journalist and researcher.