

Abdul Raufu Mustapha (ed.) (2014), *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, Martlesham: James Currey, ISBN 9781847011077, 256 pp.

For approximately five years now, Nigeria's North, particularly the Northeast, has experienced a wave of sectarian clashes caused by an Islamist insurgency. It began after the killing of the so-called "Boko Haram" leadership by security forces in 2009 and, since then, some 15,000 people (a modest estimate) have lost their lives. Boko Haram, widely and misleadingly translated as "Western education is forbidden," in fact refers to the original meaning of the Hausa word *boko*, meaning "deceit or fraud," and is rooted in the idea of the deceit or fraud associated with the Western lifestyle, which is forbidden; the relation to "education" came much later. Furthermore, the group actually calls itself *Jama'at abl al-sunna li-l-da'wa wa-l-jihad 'ala minhaj al-salaf* ("Community of the people of the Sunna who fight for the cause of Islam according to the method of Salaf"). Against this backdrop and the expanding Islamist insurgencies in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Horn of Africa, the insurgency in Nigeria, the world's biggest Christian/Islamic state and Africa's largest economy, became an international focal point of interest in terms of security and Islamist terror.

This volume will surely come to be regarded as a reference book for dealing with those Sufi, Islamist, Salafist, and terrorist movements developing in multi-ethnic and multireligious societies in Africa and elsewhere. Mustapha's multidimensional and multifaceted approach offers a credible and intelligible analysis of the relevant historical, political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural issues which led to the current situation in Northern Nigeria, explaining it within a framework which brings together themes such as the dialectics of reform, fragmentation, loss of control, and violence. In his comprehensive introduction, the editor highlights the issue of Sufis, Salafists, Shi'ites, and Islamists in Northern Nigeria, pointing out that there is a mistaken tendency to see the Sufi sects as "peaceful" and the Wahhabis or Salafists as open to violence in terms of their orientation to the nation-state.

Murray Last's chapter about the genesis and development of reformist Islamic groups in Northern Nigeria serves in a sense as a core. It offers brilliant insights into the pervasiveness of dissent, showing that there has always been religious dissidence in the Muslim *umma* in that part of Nigeria. Even in the early days of Usman Dan Fodio's jihad, dissent and dissidence developed and led first to divisions within the *jama'a*, the community of the Muslim faithful, and then within the cali-

phate that emerged from the successful jihad. He argues that today's dissidents, such as Boko Haram, are part of that tradition of dissidence. And instead of extinguishing the flame of dissent by military force, the flame of dissent should be left with some air to burn, preferably away from city centres.

The chapter on contemporary Islamic sects and groups in Northern Nigeria emphasises an understanding of the world through the lens of the different sects. Mustapha and Mukhtar Bunza identify all major sects, up to and including Boko Haram, outlining their respective histories, with a particular emphasis on the fierce competition between them regarding doctrinal beliefs. They also analyse the support of the main Sufi brotherhoods, Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, for political actors and how they were subsequently confronted with Salafist groups such as Yan Izala. In addition, they clearly identify the main actors in the religious politics of the Muslim communities today in a historical context. In their analysis of the dynamics of sectarian fragmentation within the current Muslim communities, they suggest that while Boko Haram has taken doctrinal disagreement to new heights (to legitimise their cruel actions), it is a question of degree rather than of direction.

Ever since the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in 1980 and even more since the Boko Haram insurgency, it has been widely believed that the Almajirai, boys and young men enrolled in Qur'anic schools, have served as storm troopers of religious violence. Even Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka shared this opinion. However, Hannah Hoehner, who carried out fieldwork in Kano State, dispels in her chapter several myths about the Almajirai. Notwithstanding their alleged role, they live in abysmal conditions which are not unrelated to the long-lasting underdevelopment of the North – specifically, the poor public school system. Quite frequently, Almajirai are even harassed by Salafists and are often victims of sectarianism themselves. At least the Qur'anic schools transmit some kind of education, and, according to Hoehner's findings, most Almajirai travel widely and adjust to the spartan life of the schools and to affluent employers' homes in both rural and urban environments.

The ancient city of Kano, once the hub of the North, and the federal state of the same name, are still important reference points of political development and decay. Yahaya Hashim and Judith-Ann Walker address the issue of ethnic divisions in Kano, highlighting the tendency of the Hausa Muslim majority to look down on Muslims from other ethnicities. Thus, the *umma* is fragmented not just along sectarian lines, but also along lines of ethnic cleavage. Their findings suggest that the failure to accept diversity is closely associated with the doctrinal intoler-

ance that drives repeated cycles of crisis in Kano. In addition, the failure of the state to provide security in places like Kano is forcing residents to resort to self-help paramilitary outfits, which simply adds fuel to the fire.

The last two chapters, written by the editor, are dedicated specifically to Boko Haram and the theme of violence and social disorder caused by sectarian extremism. The heading “Understanding Boko Haram” indicates the direction taken by the author, who argues that to understand the discourse it is imperative to look beyond economic, doctrinal, and governance issues. He maintains that geographical and international contexts must be taken into account along with the personal agency of the individuals who choose to join this or any other insurgency. Some might join because of doctrinal conviction, others for thrills and status, some for love, and still others for connection and comradeship. In short, there are as many motivations for joining an insurgency as there are individuals.

In his concluding chapter, Mustapha summarises the four overlapping patterns of violent conflict in Northern Nigeria since the 1940s, specifically those conflicts caused by the religious and political dynamics of sectarianism. While the first was driven by doctrinal differences within Islam, the second had an ethnic and regional logic at its core with a strong religious undercurrent. The third, however, was characterised by the millenarian uprising against the state and society. The latest pattern has been the emergence of Islamist insurgency against the backdrop of an incompetent state that offered fertile ground for nurturing a sect such as Boko Haram. The author argues that without a counter-radical narrative, the insurgency and its possible ramifications cannot be erased. Credibility and legitimacy, however, are core ingredients of such a narrative, and it is vital that learned and knowledgeable actors, especially in the Muslim community, make themselves heard.

- Heinrich Bergstresser