

The Perpetuation of Jihad

Boko Haram, Charismatic Constructions of Jihadist Ideology
and the Rise of Abubakar Shekau

Abstract

The Nigerian jihadist-terrorist movement Boko Haram reached international notoriety especially after the bombing of an UN-headquarters in Abuja in 2011 and after the kidnappings of 276 schoolgirls in 2014. But these events are minor parts of rapid evolutionary ideological developments and expansion. In 2009 Boko Haram's leader, Mohammad Yusuf, was killed by Nigerian forces and the movement was considered defeated. But it resurfaced under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau and rapid transnational expansion followed, along significant medial presence through Shekau's published sermons, exhortations and threats against western and domestic leaders. These internet-published messages reach world-wide audiences and constitute platforms for dissemination and constructions of jihadist-ideology. This thesis studies the construction and intermediation of jihadist-ideology by Shekau, through his video-messages. Shekau is investigated through TCP-theory, regarding him as a charismatic leader who in that capacity constructs jihadist-ideology, and develops it in relation to specific contextual crisis-points. The thesis shows that Shekau constructs jihadist-ideological themes of apostate Muslim and Christian oppression and persecution in collaboration with the West. Two main lines of thought constructed are that the ideology of secular democracy is furthered by these actors in order to dominate and persecute Muslims world-wide, and that jihadists are *victims* instead of terrorists.

Key words: Jihadism, Boko Haram, Charismatic Leadership, Ideology, Terrorism

Words: 10 337

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1 Introduction and purpose

“And between us and you is enmity, hatred forever...”

Abubakar Shekau (Kassim 2015:192)

These words by Abubakar Shekau, leader of the jihadist Nigerian movement Boko Haram have an ominous character, expressing an ideological position in a conflict that has taken, so far, over 17 000 lives according to recent Amnesty reports. In the course of the insurgency villages and towns have been attacked, burned down, women and children kidnapped and government officials, teachers, politicians and traditional leaders have been executed as “disbelievers”. In areas under Boko Haram control strict Sharia-laws are enforced and religious education, customs and prayers are mandatory. Disobedience or deviation is punished publically by flogging and execution (Amnesty 2015b:1-6). Boko Haram-governance in controlled territories has the character of an extreme Islamic theocracy. Under Shekau’s leadership the movement has metamorphosed from an introvert, world renouncing sect to a transnational threat with over 280 000 members (Onuoha 2010:58).¹ Not only has Boko Haram expanded rapidly under Shekau, but close ties have been established with other jihadist movements such as AQIM² and ISIS³, and Shekau is believed to be the driving force behind it. He has personally sworn allegiance to Al-Qaeda and ISIS, indicating that not only Nigeria and the African continent, but also western countries are targets (Gray & Adeakin 2015:192-197, Simons 2015:7). Adding to that, medial presence of Boko Haram has increased significantly, Shekau taking center stage, providing messages and statements to African and western leaders. It is thus clear even from a cursory examination that Shekau is an essential actor in the context of Boko Haram, and in wider perspectives, the global jihadist movement. The purpose of this thesis is to examine Shekau as leader, studying his role in the construction and intermediation of jihadist-ideology through Boko Haram-media strategy. The approach includes theories of charismatic leadership and framing, and a functional-ideological holistic analysis of video-material, portraying Shekau. The thesis will examine his particular role in mediating/constructing jihadist ideological themes.

¹ Membership consisting mostly of poor and disaffected youths, unemployed, radical students, but also highly educated people such as politicians, university teachers, theologians, businessmen, and government officials supports Boko Haram, providing financial donations and training grounds (Adesoji 2010, Onuoha 2010:56-58, Simons 2015:42-53).

² Concerning acronyms I refer readers to the appendix.

³ Thus effectively making Nigeria a province of the global jihadist caliphate, “rebranding itself as “Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)”. (Comolli 2015b:109).

1.1 Stating the questions

This thesis will try to answer two questions in regard to Shekau as leader of Boko Haram and his appearances in several videos:

- What kind of jihadist-ideological themes does Shekau construct in his video messages?
- In what sense do symbols and contexts in the video material construct an ideological framework in addition to Shekau's teachings?

1.2 Boko Haram in earlier research

Onuoha (2010:55) stated that the origins of Boko Haram are "mired in controversy". This statement could be equally valid for the whole subject of Boko Haram since many aspects concerning the movement still are shrouded in mystery. Much focus has been placed on understanding how and why people are being radicalized and joining them. The main hypothesis is that of *socio-economic marginalization*, where high rates of unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, crime and lack of education are radicalizing factors. Related to this view are also theories concerning ethnic and religious divides due to socio-economic marginalization and inequitable distribution of resources, mainly through Northern-Southern-Nigeria dichotomies. Such views are represented by Onuoha, Sodipo (2013), Loimeier (2012), Eveslage (2013) and to some extent Comolli (2015a) who views the subject within the field of security-studies. Earlier research of these variants has focused on aspects pertaining to local, regional or national factors. An interesting contribution within the field is that of Simons (2015), who presents the hypothesis that Boko Haram has a deliberate agenda of keeping Nigeria a failed-state through terrorism, establishing a culture of fear, thus weakening the state. Other scholars like Hill (2013) and Agai (2014) have sought to understand Boko Haram within the field of history, seeking patterns of earlier expressions of religious extremism in Nigeria. None, however, has focused on the perspective of charismatic leadership or construction of ideology as essential factors in Boko Haram-research. The only study, to my knowledge, on Boko Haram's ideology is a recent one by Kassim (2015), which seeks to show that Boko Haram uses Nigerian historical expressions of jihad in connection with global Salafist doctrine. There ideological constructions are given some space, but focus is rather on *doctrinal development* between historical expressions of jihad than on constructions of ideology in present time. Also, my study focuses solely on Shekau, whereas Kassim examines mostly earlier characters. This thesis can be seen as related to that of Kassim's, but with other approaches, among others that of charismatic leadership and the use of a holistic method.

1.3 Relevance of this study for political science

The research into religio-political terrorism is intimately connected to political science. The rapid expansion of Boko Haram on the African continent and its ongoing “internationalization” (Solomon 2015:87) points to the importance of ideological studies of particular expressions of jihadism, especially if we take into consideration the ongoing religio-political conflicts world-wide also fueled by jihadism.

Kassim (2015:173-175) laments that analysis of Boko Haram’s ideology within academic disciplines is a virtual “*terra incognita*” and needs to be addressed. Thus, Kassim’s call for deeper studies is here answered.

2 Defining central concepts

2.1 Terrorism

The term *terrorism* is much debated regarding both contents and meaning and there is no academic consensus how to define it (Solomon 2015:2-7, Stepanova 2008:5). This thesis will follow Stepanova's concept of *superterrorism*. This terrorism is "by definition global or at least seeks global outreach and, as such, does not have to be tied to local or national contexts or armed conflicts." It;

"pursues existential, non-negotiable, global (...) unlimited goals – such as that of challenging and changing the entire world order, as in the case of al-Qaeda and the broader, post-al-Qaeda transnational violent Islamic movement." (Stepanova 2008:10)

This thesis regards Boko Haram as part of the GJM with goals transcending those of strictly local, regional or national ones.

2.2 The Global jihadist movement (GJM)

With GJM is meant a heterogeneous, multi-level, complex phenomenon which cannot be regarded as uniform, concerning structures or functions. Nor is it bound to specific geographical areas or cultures, even though it operates on local and national levels in all cultures. Rather, it is a "borderless social movement that survives and evolves via the internet" (Hayne 2010:62). GJM-actors are actors in multiple forms and varieties, often loosely associated (Schultz 2008:141). Since communications today are global, transcending local, regional and national borders via internet and modern ICT-technology, members from different parts of the world communicates with each other in real time. Also GJM is independent of conventional armies, military hierarchical structures and state-led organizations. Instead loyalties, boundaries and organizational structures are of fluid characters and operations takes place in clandestine and unpredictable environments. Narrowly defined, GJM has a *network-character* which often defies transparency and direct observations (Springer, Regens & Edger 2009:96-103). Even though GJM is not a centralized phenomenon, ideologues, sheiks, imams and leaders are unifying factors and important features of the movement (Brachman 2009:189). I define GJM as a global network-based social movement, identified not primarily by factors as nationality, ethnicity or cultures, but religio-ideological markers. This ideology is *jihadism*.

2.3 Global jihadism: a religio-political ideology

In defining “ideology” I agree with Moghadam (2008:1-3) and Schultz (2008:136, cf. Bergström & Boréus 2012:140-141) that ideology is an “emotion-laden system of ideas, beliefs, myths, and values”. When discussing the ideological phenomenon of GJM, I use the term *jihadism*. The term, a modern neologism, is not connected to Islamic history or to the theological concept of jihad⁴, making it useful to capture the phenomenon of extremist Islam (Brachman 2009:4-5). The GJM and its religio-political ideology is Sunni-dominated and *global* in nature (Hill 2013:240, Turner 2014:11). The ideology “central” to the movement (Martinage 2008:12) is not only political, but also religious, since it uses religious codes and language taken from Islam. It presupposes the existence of God, has religious world-views, describing its perceived enemies in religious terms and justifies violence from selective interpretations of the Quran and Hadiths. It is “totalitarian” since it seeks to “mould Islamic religious tradition to serve narrow political ends of domination” (Solomon 2015:22). Ideology can also be described as having 4 functions; an *explanatory* explaining the world-view, a *diagnostic* pointing out perceived enemies, an *identity-function* providing self-conceptual images and identity to the adherents as belonging to a supranational community, and an *action-based-function* explaining in programmatic fashion how the adherents are to deal with perceived threats (Moghadam 2008:1-3). Scholars have identified common denominators, around which the ideology revolves.

2.4 Doctrinal teachings of global jihadism

1. True Islam is under attack by two types of enemies; apostate Muslim-governments and the atheist/infidel non-Islamic Western world, portrayed foremost as the U.S and Europe.
2. An apocalyptic struggle between forces of good and evil, those believing in God’s teachings and those opposing them. The jihadist world-view is strongly *dualistic*.
3. The world-order must be changed through *jihad* to usher in the world-wide Islamic state often termed as “the Caliphate”, a projection of the first Islamic state/empire established by the Prophet Mohammad.
4. The West is morally corrupt and decadent with its culture of atheism, separation of religion and state, sexual immorality and false religions.

⁴ The concept of jihad has two meanings; an inner spiritual struggle towards one’s own sins and temptations, emphasizing personal purification, and a second emphasizing physical warfare for the defense of Islam or defense of Islamic territories (dar al-Islam). That second meaning developed over time and came to embrace an offensive interpretation, used by jihadists, where adherents has the right to impose Islam, by force if necessary, onto heathens or infidels (Hashmi 2004:377-379).

5. *Dar al-Islam* is occupied/colonized by western military forces with approval from corrupt Muslim-governments (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan), traitors to their religion, due to their cooperation with the West.
6. “Zionists” (Jews and Israelis), are trying to eradicate Islam from its Holy land collaborating with “Crusaders” (Christians), an image derived from medieval crusades, depicting colonialism, invasion and war.
7. Sharia-law is the only legitimate, god-ordained way of constituting societies/states. Western democracies are man-made inventions, regardless of type (e.g. direct, representative, elite) opposed to God’s sovereignty. The same goes for Muslim-governments structured not in accordance with jihadist ideological interpretations; they have apostatized from true Islam (Brachman 2009:1-20, Schultz 2008:162-163, Martinage 2008:31-36, Qutb 2006), Springer, Regens & Edger 2009:4-8, 52-56, Turner 2014:52, 142).

2.5 Radicalization

I agree with Onuoha (2014b:2-3) that radicalization is defined as “a process of rejection the status quo and often democratic ideals; adopting an extreme political, social, or religious ideology; and condoning violence as a means to achieving ideological goals.” This can take place in both individuals and in group-contexts. An individual or group goes in such processes from passivity to action, fueled by perceived grievances or crises, in local, national or international contexts. Gradually individuals/groups are being mobilized into adopting extremist views and become integrated into communities of like-minded people. In this digital age the internet has become a tool for radicalization and has a “radicalizing efficacy”. When discussing “the audience” of jihadist video-material we must confess with Awan (2007:399) that; “their efficacy in actual radicalization is extremely difficult to ascertain”. This Awan connects with audiences, we cannot know who they in reality are, or how radicalized every individual or group actually becomes. This is not the task of this thesis either, but rather radicalization is implicit in the understanding and explanatory aims of Shekau’s intermediate role.

3 Theoretical approach: Charismatic leadership

The term was originally coined by sociologist Max Weber who developed it in relation to his concept of “legitimate domination”, which he defined as “the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a group of persons”. Three principles of charismatic leadership can be summed up;

1. That the charismatic person “attracts followers to himself/herself as a leader due to personal attributes which he or she may contain.”
2. “The followers recognize that the charismatic personality has attributes which they perceive as being genuine and therefore follow the charismatic leader with a sense of awe, hope and faith” Thus for Weber charisma is a *relationship between leaders and followers* (Eatwell 2006:143).
3. The context “must be favorable, usually a society under great stress, for the acceptance of the charismatic personality as leader.” (Ingram 2006:3).

Charismatic authority in a leader includes “skills, behaviors, performances, and talent displayed by an actor (...) pertinent to the arena in which he or she operates.” Such skills could be “rhetorical and speech ability, a flair for dramatic performances, star qualities, and appeal” (Balmas & Sheaffer 2014:994). Another characteristic of charismatic leaders is that they must prove themselves to be “exceptional, and exceptional in a way that justifies their claims on the obedience and commitment of their followers” Charismatics often view their mission or tasks as “given by God” or being otherwise “sacred or part of fate”. As Turner states: “The key to charisma is precisely the ability to present oneself as the way, as the instrument, and to rise above (...) and command on the basis of one’s personal authority” (Turner 2011:82-85). Indeed, for Weber charisma *is* “a form of authority” (Barnes 1978:1).

3.1 Transformative charisma phenomenon: TCP-theory

This thesis will apply the TCP-theory, developed by Australian jihadism-scholar Haroro Ingram, on the empirical data. Ingram developed Weber’s theories on charismatic leadership within the framework of Islamic socio-cultural realms,

sculpturing out four categories of outlooks that can be applied to both individuals and groups within given contexts. Ingram defines them as *secularist*, *modernist*, *radical* and *militant*. Thus Ingram acknowledges the wide spectrum of Islamic orientations that are prevalent within Islam's religious/cultural world. Secularists believe Islam belongs strictly to the private sphere, denying it access to public arenas, political systems and institutions. Modernists believe that Islam is compatible with modern society, and should be part of politics and culture. They view Islam as compatible with democracy and capitalism. Radicals think Islam should dominate society, influencing and guiding politics, law, culture and societal life. They view secularism as non-compatible with Islam, but don't condone violence as means of separating the two. Militants, on the other hand, believe that Islam must replace all other forms of government or political systems and violence is an integral part of establishing pure Islamic societies. In the process of individuals/groups moving towards militant views the charismatic leader plays a "pivotal role" (Ingram 2006:5-6). Concerning this Ingram speaks about the *perceptions of crises* within given contexts, where potential secularists, modernists or radicals can turn militant as the perceived crisis needs a political solution, even though the underlying dilemma is of religious nature. Thus, politics and religion, as in Islamic orientations, are intrinsically integrated. Religious terrorism is a process which is constructed over time, but the process needs catalysts fueling it. Charismatic religious leaders, "plays a catalytic role in the radicalization process by highlighting, accentuating or even creating *the perception of crisis* within an individual or group" (Ingram 2006:6). Ingram refers to the *chain of charisma*, focusing on the Islamic clerical tradition, which is not centralized or uniform. This openness in times of perceived crisis facilitates the arrival of charismatic imams, preachers and religious leaders who in turn build upon earlier leader's "charisma, ideology and leadership qualities" Thus ideology and charisma are pivotal factors and perpetuates each other in complex ways relating to both history and current socio-cultural contexts, each charismatic building upon earlier constructing their own images (Ingram 2006:7-8).⁵ Not only images of themselves are constructed, but also the jihadist ideology evolves further with each new charismatic in his context.

Ingram exemplifies with the emergence of the modern Islamic political movement which had its origins in Egypt during the 19th-century. The emergence of charismatic leaders as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935), modernists in the sense that they thought it possible to combine western ideologies with Islam, started the phenomenon of political Islam. As they died new charismatic leaders emerged who took the ideology of their predecessors and evolved it into more radical patterns, namely that western life-styles were incompatible with Islam and dichotomies were constructed.

⁵ This reasoning highlights the importance not only of history within Jihadism, but also of how different jihadist leaders are standing in relation to each other, even though they belong to different parts of the GJM.

One such critically important charismatic was Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood-movement. An important aspect is that Al-Banna came to embody the organization in his person and image and the organization evolved into a model for many Islamic terrorist-movements, as he became the spiritual father of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the very “father” of jihadist doctrine (Ingram 2006:8-11, cf. Brachman 2009:22-26, Martinage 2008:13). Thus, men like Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, strongly influenced by Qutb, militarized the ideology, and modern jihadism was born. It’s noteworthy that bin Laden in many instances pushed Islamic revivalism into the digital age, disseminating propaganda and educational material by “setting up a global distribution system”. After 1994 internet and e-mail became standard electronic means of reaching audiences everywhere (Bodansky 2001:101). Thus, radicalization of ideology has taken place in an evolutionary perspective.

Taken together, these charismatic leaders within a spectrum of Islamic thought and doctrine develops jihadist-ideology in relation to new contexts, but always with historical developments integrated into the whole. What is essential is also that this theory contains aspects of *framing*, purposeful transmission and intermediation of ideology via charismatic leaders in new contexts, making the theory integrative and innovative.⁶ This theory can be fruitful in understanding constructions of jihadist ideology and the role of leaders within those contexts and their interaction in constructing jihadism.

⁶ One must understand the *missionary aspects* of Islam, which are incorporated into the language and behavioral codes of Jihadist-ideology, seen as imperative that people are converted to the “true faith” in the ongoing apocalyptic struggle between good and evil (Martinage 2008:31). I define this as *proselytism*.

4 Method: Social-constructivist holistic approach

This thesis adopts a social-constructivist-approach where ideas and actors such as individuals, groups and movements are connected to each other. In social-constructivist academic tradition languages, actions, symbols, ideas⁷ and ideologies interact with actors forming the reality and the world. Thus, reality is not something that is “out there waiting to be discovered”, but rather something that is given meaning and purpose by and through actors. Reality is *social* by nature, constructed by actors and given meaning (Barnett 2014:156-161). Identities⁸ are therefore fundamentally important within this ontological tradition. Within functional-ideological methods ideas and ideologies are systematically studied, here in relation to texts. The meaning of “text” in academic study is broad and inclusive. Texts are often written documents but digital material such as movies, photographs and images also constitutes texts. Since much material today is internet-based the definition of “texts” needs to be expanded (Björkvall 2012:307, Macnamara 2005:1). Languages, symbols and contexts are parts of an integrated whole, and they can be analyzed in accordance with their own premises, and be understood as complimentary parts of that complex whole (Macnamara 2005:15-17). Thus, I refer to a *holistic* analysis, not only of texts in the traditional understanding, but also of video-material featuring Shekau. Studying ideologies requires;

“in-depth analysis of selected contents (...) required to fully understand the potential meanings (manifest and latent) for audiences and likely effects of texts” (Macnamara 2005:14)

A *visual* textual analysis probes deeper into the world of ideology, where also actors are mediators of it, not only transmitting it further but also upholds its meanings. We note a circular relationship between ideology, context and actors. Since functional ideological-analytical method have at the same time descriptive and explanatory ambitions it is useful from social-constructivist approaches, as is the large amount of academic freedom attached to the method in defining it (Bergström & Boréus 2012:146-147).

⁷ Defined as constructions of thoughts defined by a certain stability and continuity, as notions of reality, valuations of events and conceptions of how one is to act (cf. Bergström & Boréus 2012:140).

⁸ With “identity” is meant the individual/collective self-perception, which in turn is derived from group-membership and the emotional belonging attached to it. The individual or group views itself from membership, thereby creating their identity, which is social, since it is produced through interactions. (Barnett 2014:159-166).

By emphasizing the visual aspects both manifest and latent ideology can be properly analyzed (Björkvall 2012:342-343, Macnamara 2005:2). Thus, both contextual events and language will be analyzed to capture the whole dimension of ideological transmission and construction. The analysis will be implemented through the methodical use of dimensions/categories, in order to systematize contents and analysis more coherently. The dimensions/categories have been structured after my investigation of the empirical data. Also here, as in the world of jihadist-ideology *symbols* are immensely important.

4.1 Jihadi symbols and imagery: visual aspects of ideology

The roles of symbols and imagery are equally fundamental parts of the jihadist universe. This comes from the fact that Jihadism is a religious ideology, deriving its language, imagery, actions and codes from Islam (Moghadam 2008). Concepts as *jihad* are religiously derived from the Quran and the Hadiths, reinterpreted by jihadists according to ideological belief-structures. Cook (2009) states that jihadist use of symbols and imagery in video material has increased, and that it is; “a prime vehicle for communications and the essential tool for the diffusion of jihadist ideals”. Several other scholars on jihadism, including Jarret Brachman, states that not only can symbols be seen as texts, but also that ideology is mediated *through* them. Symbols are;

“(...) an essential tool utilized by radical ideologues, terrorist organizations, and sympathetic propagandists, which plays to the particular religious and cultural experiences of their audience.”

(Brachman, Boudali & Ostovar 2006:5)

Regarding internet in relation to the study of jihadism one must also bear in mind that it is the “principal platform for the dissemination and mediation of the culture and ideology of jihadism” (Awan 2007:390). Thus symbols and imagery within digital texts such as video material are important factors to consider in a holistic perspective concerning construction and mediation of jihadist ideology.

4.2 Empirical data: critical discussion

Several videos featuring Shekau will be used here for analysis. The use of video-material is defensible with the lack of written sources from Boko Haram and especially Shekau himself in mind. The fact that he has been featured in several videos becomes vital for this investigation into the subject of ideological

constructions and intermediation. The purpose of a holistic analysis of language, symbols and imagery also allows this material to be used in such contexts as this. The data is collected mainly from a compiled set of translated video material by Benjamin Eveslage, a scholar in African and Oriental Studies. Eveslage's study has a *quantitative* approach towards understanding Boko Haram's expansionism by examining specifically coded words in Shekau's and other spokesperson's video-messages. From the quantitative investigations Eveslage concludes that Boko Haram's threats are emphasizing the domestic contexts, although he doesn't rule out Boko Haram's capacity in making real their threats against the international community. Eveslage's focus is thus on threat-assessment, and not ideological constructions or formations. In fact, ideology is only mentioned in passing here. I therefore conclude that Eveslage's examination has no bearing on my thesis and my approaches, although it is valuable for an overall picture of Boko Haram's threats against specific actors.

His list consists of Boko Haram-statements from 2012, some by Shekau and others by spokespersons. This compiled set is of great value to this thesis, since it provides English translations of Shekau's statements, which often are delivered in Hausa and Arabic. The data also shows that established scholars are using translations of such material, even though it is understandable to criticize all use of translations in general, since such use runs the risk of losing some aspects of the original language, and perhaps also underlying meanings of that language. But that risk is affordable in situations where access to Hausa and Arabic are limited, and also with the level of the thesis and its time-constraints in view. If established scholars are using translations then it's certainly legitimate for an undergraduate-thesis in the same context to use translations.

Another fair criticism that can be put forward against these sources is the fact that we in some sense "fall into the hands of Shekau himself", when investigating its contents. Certainly, one runs the risk of investigating here, perhaps, what Shekau wants us to investigate. But then again, it's also my intention to actually sculpture out Shekau's explicit views and statements in order to understand his position in ideological construction and formation. If Shekau, as my object of investigation, has a "hidden agenda", I could not know of it, as could no one else either. As researchers we can never enter into the hearts and minds, so to speak, of our objects of study. Therefore both this thesis and other kinds of research are subjected to that kind of danger. Thus, a critical position and a critical awareness must be implemented along the process of research, to minimize such dangers, as scholars within textual critical methodology also states (cf. Bergström & Boréus 2012:33-38).

The individual videos used will be accounted for in the "Sources"-section at the end of the thesis, where links to the videos also will be accounted for. For those interested in more thorough study of the sources I refer them to Eveslage (2013) for easier access. Now, I will address the rise of Boko Haram and the ideological heritage its leaders have addressed and advocated.

5 Rise of Boko Haram: Ideology from Yusuf to Shekau

*Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda áwati Wal Jihad*⁹ or Boko Haram¹⁰ has its roots in Islamic revivalist-and insurgency movements dating back to the 18th century.¹¹ In 2002 the group was founded by Muhammad Yusuf (1970-2009), the foundation being the result of theological controversy over how to relate to western influences in Nigeria. Yusuf rejected moderate imams, schools and the Nigerian secular democratic system as contrary to orthodox Islam.¹² Yusuf also rejected Darwinism taught in schools as anti-Islamic and was considered “a charismatic speaker” with “oratory prowess” that preached an austere life and seclusion from the corrupt society. Yusuf was influenced by the Taliban-movement in Afghanistan and saw Boko Haram as the Nigerian version of the Taliban. But Yusuf’s admiration for the Taliban was double-edged; he was inspired by their fight for a Sharia-state, but regarded their ideology too extreme (Adesoji 2010, Onuoha 2010). This indicates distance between Yusuf and Shekau concerning ideological formation and levels of radicalization. Shekau leans towards al-Qaeda-affiliates and ISIS, and Yusuf adhered to more localized expressions of ideology, influenced by national and tribal factors such as the Taliban (Frear 2012).

As membership increased the group took up arms against the authorities in 2003 attacking police stations and governmental institutions. The goal was to turn Nigeria into a Sharia-governed Islamic state. When Boko Haram provoked major uprisings in several federal states in 2009, full-scale assaults on the sect ensued by government forces ordered by President Goodluck Jonathan, leading to the extra-judicial killing of Yusuf. Over 1000 people were killed, mainly sect-members, and hundreds were arrested. The sect was believed to have been defeated but it resurfaced under the leadership of Shekau, Yusuf’s second-in-command. The insurgency escalated with frequent attacks on government institutions, police stations, military installations, prisons, schools, markets, churches and mosques. The movement gained international notoriety attacking the UN-headquarters in Abuja in 2011 and with the kidnappings of 276 school-girls from Chibok in 2014.

⁹ “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad”

¹⁰ Often translated “Western Education is forbidden/sinful”. The movement denounces this name, since it views western cultures sinful, not only education (Cook 2011:13-14).

¹¹ Presentation based on Comolli 2015, Cook 2011, Loimeier 2012, Onuoha 2010, Onuoha 2012, Onuoha 2014, Simons 2015 and Pérouse de Montclos 2015.

¹² “The constitution is a lie, it is *kufir*, Democracy is a lie; it is *kufir*” (Yusuf quoted in Kassim 2015:189).

5.1 Shekau: paradoxical, mythical and radical leader

Shekau himself seems to be a man of contradictions, paradoxes and mystery, reinforced by the fact that not much is known about him. He was born in Nigeria and after having been schooled by a traditional cleric he went to university-studies in theology and became an educated imam, considered even a specialist in Islamic doctrine. Witnesses portrayed Shekau as “dedicated” and intelligent, but also highly radical and extreme in his theological position, something confirmed by his sermons working as imam in a Maiduguri mosque. He knew Yusuf as a student and joined him early on since they shared radical Salafist views. But compared to Yusuf, Shekau is a “hard-liner” and harsh decision-maker in matters concerning the collective movement. Shekau even accused Yusuf, when alive, for being too “liberal” (Comolli 2015a:60-61). He is described by Nigerian experts as that of a “fearless loner, a complex, paradoxical man – part-theologian, part-gangster” A Nigerian journalist with deep insights into Boko Haram claims Shekau has “an intense ideological commitment and ruthlessness” Also he is said to have a “photographic memory” and is “well-versed in theology” (BBC 2014). Shekau has been pronounced dead several times by Nigerian authorities, but has always resurfaced. These events have shaped the image of Shekau as a mythical leader, being almost immortal. However, Shekau’s leadership has not been uncontested; *Ansaru*, a splinter-group, has left Boko Haram, questioning Shekau’s views of killing Muslims, regarding him as too severe and extreme (Onuoha 2013). Under Shekau’s leadership Boko Haram has transformed from a revivalist-sect with regional implications to a transnational threat, operating in Chad, Niger, Cameroon, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and probably CAR. Organizational ties have been established to Al-Qaeda-affiliates, Al-Shabaab and ISIS. He has even married Yusuf’s widow and adopted his children (Comolli 2015).

5.2 Boko Haram media strategy

According to Awan (2007:392) many internet-forums such as social media, blogs and webpages have the goal of “promulgation of jihadism” and is a fundamental part of GJM to disseminate its teachings and doctrines online, thus providing opportunities for proselytism (Bockstette 2008:13-19, Hayne 2010:62). Since Boko Haram joined ISIS it has become “a key member of a wider pan-jihadist network” (Gray & Adeakin 2015:196), thereby becoming part of ISIS aggressive media-strategy to proselytize and invoke fear into enemies. Simons (2015:53-57) states that Boko Haram sees internet and YouTube as invaluable means in a “propaganda effort” to publicize their acts and intentions, thus providing evidence that they have implemented a media-strategy in order to achieve their goals. We will have this in mind in the analysis.

6 Analysis

6.1 Shekau, leadership and embodiment of ideology

In a video released in September, 2013 Shekau appeared after having been reported dead by Nigerian authorities, and Comolli (2015a:62-62) aptly stated that she was “very skeptical” when such messages were delivered to the press. Nigerian military sources have declared Shekau dead multiple times and yet he has always resurfaced, establishing images of them as powerless, incompetent liars. Such events cannot be underestimated because they are essential in providing Shekau with authority¹³, and a position of power in jihadist circles. As scholarship shows, leaders are actors essential for cohesion, loyalty and obedience within jihadist movements and in the radicalization process (Ingram 2006:6). Terrorism is a *multi-causal* phenomenon not driven by one single factor, but by many interacting ones. Within jihadist terrorism, leaders are dominating actors even though planning and execution of terrorist-acts gets delegated to subordinates. For religious terrorism the causal effect of justifying one’s acts is inherent into the phenomenon itself, the religio-ideological system justifies terrorist-acts, implementing a transcendent/theological dimension, by asserting that God justifies and makes terrorist-acts “sacred” (Underhill 2014:9-10). Thus, decisions and orders from leaders in such environments are crucial, constructing the leader’s position. Therefore it is important for Shekau to use his public appearances to strengthen his position and legitimization. They constitute platforms for dissemination of ideology. In a video from 2012 we meet not only a propaganda-video, but statements from Shekau directed to all the worlds’ jihadist-fighters and a display of Boko Haram’s power as a fighting force. Most of the compiled video-footage is of Shekau commanding his troops in military drills and shooting exercises. Jihadists are in a desert landscape with assault-rifles and machineguns firing them on targets not visible, accompanied by Shekau’s commanding voice, giving directives, echoing the jihadist war-cry “*Allahu akbar*”, something deeply ideological. Shekau is seen shooting and still-footage of him are interspersed throughout. All this is framed to show that Shekau is a *fighting leader*, not a bystander. Such footage constructs the image of Shekau as one who fights *with* his men, not as one only commanding others to execute jihad. The image is one of an active fearless leader; who shares the hardships of jihad with his soldiers, not one who hides.

¹³ Understood in the terms of Weber’s “legitimate domination”.

The context is reinforced by Arabic religious music playing in the background and the picture of the Quran in the upper-corner which gives religious legitimacy to the group and the events. The Quran symbolizes the “correct belief-system” and also admonishes Muslims to keep their religious duties, here, *jihad* (Brachman, Boudali & Ostovar 2006:92). Shekau invokes traditional chants glorifying God, and then invokes blessings onto the audience. We have here an important aspect of Shekau’s leadership, as imam, having *religious authority* preaching God’s words and will, making him not an ordinary military/worldly leader; but can be perceived in jihadi contexts as a spokesman for God. Within Sunni-Islam imams are leaders connected to authority, being personifying examples for others to follow (Zaman 2004:349-350). This enhances Shekau’s charismatic abilities as an agitator, giving him authority and at the same time providing impressions of humility as he joins his men in jihad, pointing out that he is only a poor servant of God. Such rhetoric strengthens his leadership. Jihad is the pervading theme and Shekau says;

“The religion is victorious until the Day of Judgment, and its support is an obligatory duty (...) O mujahideen brothers this is a proof that our jihad is a jihad in the Cause of Allah because it is impossible that we kill everyday and not get killed” (Shekau 2012-11-29)

Shekau frames jihad as obligatory, because it has its grounds in God himself and will be victorious for all earthly time until God judges the world. “Mujahideen” is an honorary title as righteous soldiers of God and Shekau bestows this title on the watching jihadists. This frames the whole legitimizing context of jihad as divine and mandatory, but also gives the audience the impression of being chosen by God for a cause greater than themselves, namely jihad. This righteous cause is confirmed by the fact that they can kill their enemies and survive themselves, divine approval according to Shekau, thereby giving further legitimization of jihad. God is constantly used as frame of reference and legitimization, as are quotations of selected Quran-texts to fit into a modern conception of a crisis situation. According to TCP-theory perceptions of crises are important in constructing ideology with the charismatic leader as an important component in that process. Shekau (2012-11-29) frames the nature of the crisis;

“The world should witness, and America, Britain, Nigeria and other Crusaders (...) and the Jews of Israel who are killing the Muslims in Palestine should witness, and the idolaters should witness, and the apostates and the hypocrites (...) that we are with our mujahideen brothers in the cause of Allah everywhere, those who did their best to raise high the words of Allah and helped the weak Muslims who are humiliated by the Jews and the Crusader Christians...”

Interestingly, Shekau exemplifies with Palestine as a crisis point, where Muslims are killed and abused not only by Jews and Christians, but by apostate Muslims who are hypocrites, a common name for perceived traitorous Muslims, helping “idolaters”, another derogatory name for non-Muslims. America, Britain and Nigeria are equaled to “Crusaders” thereby providing global dimensions to the crisis-point. But Palestine is not the center of attention overall for Shekau; the

crisis is *global*, which Shekau reiterates throughout his speech, pointing to an international context. Muslims suffers everywhere at the hands of Jews and Christians. But he brings “glad tidings” to the oppressed in a global perspective;

“We are with our mujahideen brothers in the cause of Allah everywhere, in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Pakistan, Kashmir, Iraq, the peninsula of Muhammad (...) Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, and other places I didn’t mention” (Shekau 2012-11-29).

Shekau frames *dar al-Islam* as *globally* invaded territory, thereby hinting at the jihadist-ideological notion of it as occupied by oppressors. But he consoles the suffering brothers in jihad, telling them that their struggle is divinely willed and that the Nigerian jihadists are supporting them with constant prayers day and night (Shekau 2012-11-29). Thus, Shekau frames a *global brotherhood*, a bond *transcending* national borders, which is another jihadist-ideological theme, that participants are brothers. A jihadist-identity is being framed by Shekau, with global extent. One very important aspect of Shekau’s leadership is that he is heavily influenced by especially bin Laden, and Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), a “highly revered” preacher, considered as the founder of jihadism in Nigeria, who waged jihad in 1804 and established a caliphate. He’s considered an “ideological inspiration” for many jihadists and radicals in Nigeria today (Comolli 2015a:13-16, Kassim 2015). Dan Fodio’s jihad was based on several factors; *religious* (spreading Islam as the only genuine religion), *political* (over-throwing rulers viewed as illegitimate) and *socio-economical* (calling for fair distribution of resources to the poor and reformed laws) (Agai 2014:67-70). Dan Fodio was regarded as charismatic, drawing large crowds to his teachings and jihad, but the context was the immediate local one, not global jihad. His jihad had a more tribal-oriented character, something Shekau seems to disregard. According to TCP-theory charismatics build upon predecessors, taking some of their aspects and teachings, developing and radicalizing them. Shekau refers to him in another video (2015-02-18) addressing African Muslim leaders;

“(…) even some of your Religious scholars did not remember or think how the kingdom of Shaikh Usman ibn Fodio was, and how he ruled his land by following the Quran”

Dan Fodio is presented as an example of godliness, leading his caliphate on the basis of the Quran, thus framing current Muslim leaders as his opposites. Shekau connects history to his own leadership, but takes it further ideologically. Shekau’s admiration of bin Laden and al-Qaeda has earned him the nickname “The Osama bin Laden of Northern Nigeria” (Simons 2015:99) and the tying of bonds with AQIM and AQAP are important aspects of Shekau’s views of jihadist-ideology. Regarding Shekau’s leadership we see that he continually address himself as “sheikh” and “imam” constructing his own position and exerting authority over jihadists, even claiming that *God speaks to him personally* (Shekau 2012-01-11). In effect, Shekau is constructing *himself* as jihadist-ideology by *embodying* piousness (prayers, Quran-citings), action, fearlessness, former leaders in new contexts (crisis-points) thus embodying jihad itself.

6.2 Shekau and the war against apostate Muslim states and leaders

Before the Nigerian elections in March, 2015 violence escalated between Boko Haram and JMTF. By now, Boko Haram had become a transnational threat reaching into Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Before the presidential election Shekau appeared in a video attacking and threatening Muslim national leaders. He addresses several issues concerning Muslims and the picture of war emerges. Let's approach the visual context first. Shekau presents himself dressed in traditional clerical attire, highlighting his status as imam and Boko Haram's spiritual leader. In his lap he has an AK47 and beside him a machinegun, weapons representing jihad as means of conquering enemies and religious war. Shekau sits on a green flag, representing the Prophet Muhammad and the advancement of Islam, with connotations to history and genealogy (Brachman, Boudali & Ostovar 2006:58, 97). In that sense Shekau points to his succession as legitimate imam in the line of the Prophet, thereby promoting jihad as ideology and providing historical legitimacy before the audience. In the upper-right corner we interchangeably see *al-rya*, the black flag of ISIS containing the *shahada*¹⁴ and *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda áwati Wal Jihad* in golden Arabic letters. This frames the connection and loyalty to ISIS, delivering powerful ideological statements to the audience. It presents Boko Haram as part of ISIS and therefore part of *global jihad*, not restricted to local or regional jihad-campaigns as those under Dan Fodio or Yusuf. Clearly, Shekau has radicalized the teachings of his predecessors. In this video his charismatic personality appears; Shekau's manner of speaking reminds of Adolf Hitler, by scholars regarded as strongly charismatic; the pitch of Shekau's voice goes up and down, pausing after having lashed out on perceived enemies. His eyes are intensely staring into the camera, as he speaks sometimes calmly smiling, yet authoritatively, suddenly raising his voice loudly in anger. At times he suddenly laughs scornfully, yet keeping his intense personality focused on the camera and the message. He radiates nonchalant confidence and rhetorical boldness, charismatic traits Hitler also possessed, which establishes bonds between listeners/observers and the leader (Eatwell 2006:141-142). Shekau's strong personality in combination with his position as imam having religious authority, he constructs a crisis-point in a jihadist context;

“All of you had created a constitution that is organized with numbers and pages, and you established it as a rule of your government. And you made the people to follow it, you made them follow it by force, you made them fear your aircrafts, and you jailed whoever that opposes you.

(...) And now you are following and listening to Francois Hollande and you are imposing the rule of French people, and after all of that who allowed you to make some people disbelievers?”

(Shekau 2015-02-18)

¹⁴ The Islamic confession of faith, itself an essential ideological symbol within jihadism.

Shekau here constructs distinct features of jihadist ideology; the Muslim leaders addressed are framed as traitors collaborating with western oppressors, here embodied by France and Hollande. Shekau probably has the French intervention against jihadists in Mali or CAR (cf. Comolli 2015:94-95) in mind, which he regards as infidel colonialist assaults on jihadist brothers, eagerly aided by apostate Muslim leaders in Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Niger and Chad. But there is more; Shekau talks about constitutions in these African countries, which are founded on *secularist principles*, the “numbers and pages” clearly referencing all that which is against the only legitimate state-constitution; the Quran.¹⁵ Secular laws, especially in Muslim lands are considered “major unbelief” by jihadists and amounts to *polytheism*¹⁶ (Kassim 2015:178, 185)) and Shekau confirms this ideological doctrine. Naming France is not a coincidence either; the French principle of *laïcité*, strict separation between religion, public space and governance is essential here. Media have reported that many French Muslims believe themselves to be discriminated against, because of *laïcité*, where religious public expressions and symbols are forbidden (Cornish 2015). In jihadist interpretation these are attempts by godless states at eradicating Islam and persecuting believers. Shekau says that African states are effectively in the hands of France, and the French hatred of true religion abides also within these African nations.¹⁷ The mentioning of “aircraft” is symbolic of western modern weaponry used to combat jihadists. “Jail” represents wrongful incarceration of believers protesting apostate governments and western presence as well as Boko Haram-members arrested. The jihadist images of *persecution* and *colonization* appears in Shekau’s constructions; Muslim African leaders and France are collaborating in persecuting believers. They are therefore God’s enemies. Shekau explains why secular democracy is prohibited;

“Everyone knows that democracy and the constitution is paganism and everyone knows there are some things that God has forbidden in the Quran that cannot be counted even western education!” (Shekau 2012:01-11)

Democracy as governance, and constitutions based on that principle, amounts to *paganism*, rule and law separated from God’s sovereignty, making it man-made governance which in jihadist interpretations represent corruption, decadence and willful *rebellion* against God (Kassim 2015:188). The international system and modern nation states are aberrations for jihadists, who seek to build a supranational community under God’s sovereignty (Turner 2014:38). Shekau states that Muslim apostates are subjugating believers with “French rule”, secularism, turning people into “disbelievers”. Shekau most probably refers to Muslims *accepting secular governance* in African states, effectively turning them into believing in a false man-made system, and not in God’s constitutions.

¹⁵ Yusuf also rejected the Nigerian constitution explicitly (Onuoha 2010:56).

¹⁶ Since obeying such rulers and constitutions is equaled with worship of them as authorities, i.e. “gods”.

¹⁷ Implying continued French *colonization* of Africa.

Implicitly the masses themselves are not primary villains although culpable, but the apostate governments *transforming them* into disbelievers, secularizing them. Shekau issues severe threats raising his voice aggressively pointing his finger at the camera, turning scornfully superior;

“Do you think in this way you will be safe in the Grave? O Rulers of Africa! And you claim that you are Muslim! O you Mahamadou Issoufou President of Niger. O you Idriss Déby President of Chad. Don’t you see Jonathan, how he has failed in the fight against us. Do you think that you came to fight Jamaát Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-jihad? Take off the masks from your faces, and you must know that you fighting Allah (...) And it will be hard for you, because we fight with the guidance of Allah, we are not proud of our forces and our numbers. (Shekau 2015-02-18)

Shekau portrays an ideological war and clash; between jihadism under God and secularism under apostate leaders, personified by Jonathan, Issoufou and Déby, leaders that jointly set up JMTF to combat Boko Haram’s transnational agenda. Intelligence exchange is also a vital component between Niger, Chad and Cameroon since it became known that Boko Haram runs “an international network of recruiting, training and indoctrination camps” in the respective countries. The cross-borders attacks are also having destabilizing effects which the leaders hope that JMTF will reverse (Onuoha 2014:6-7). But the African leaders are depending on large armies and numbers, secular things, but to no avail Shekau taunts, because they are in reality fighting against God. Shekau infer that Boko Haram has divine protection in the struggle against apostates. Shekau’s rhetoric is strong, provocative and fearful. Not even in their graves will the apostates be safe, a statement referring to Boko Haram’s (or God’s) anger against their countries, or perhaps referring to an eschatological punishment after death for apostasy. Indeed, Shekau views Boko Haram’s mission not as “evil”, but good, stating to Jonathan;

We have stopped everything apart from saying we should stay on the path of truth and peace and live right in the sight of God. There, we will have peace and that is what we have been preaching and because of that they said we should be killed and our mosques destroyed. We decided to defend ourselves (...) That is why Jonathan (...) this is beyond your power. It is not our doing but that of God. (Shekau 2012-01-11).

Shekau constructs an ideological picture of Boko Haram as *victims* of secular oppression, symbolized by Jonathan and Nigerian military forces. Boko Haram members are not evil, but try to preach the truth to people; they have abstained of everything except God’s truth, indicating compromises. But instead Nigerian forces kill and destroy their holy places of worship. Therefore, Shekau says, Boko Haram could only resort to self-defense. In that sense jihadism is also presented by Shekau as an ideology, promoting only truth and peace. But in the end God’s decisions will prevail, and Jonathan is powerless. Shekau have constructed deep crisis-points to the audience; Muslims are persecuted, oppressed and killed, their sanctuaries destroyed by apostates calling themselves Muslims, but are not. They are in the hands of more sinister forces; Christian western powers.

6.3 Shekau and the Christian agenda of dominance and destruction

Much focus has centered on Boko Haram's attacks on schools and societal institutions representing western education and culture, something which can only partly explain the complex phenomenon. For Shekau there are greater movements of destructive forces behind, which cannot be reduced to western secular influence on African/Nigerian schools, even though that is part of it. We have treated Shekau's constructions of Muslim apostates; they are part of greater underlying forces. The implementation of democracy, supported by Muslim leaders, is only a *tool* used to achieve domination; the *goal* is the very destruction of Islam. The forces behind are both historical and present-day phenomena; namely Judaism, Christianity and western atheism. By them Muslims are held in *jahiliyya*, a state of decadence and religious ignorance (Qutb 2006:11-12). The GJM-ideology is *universal* and so is the battlefield (Schultz 2008:48-49). This we must bear in mind studying Shekau's constructions of ideology. Shekau names "Jews" and "Crusaders" as forces oppressing and killing Muslims in Palestine, an essential conflict for jihadists since Jerusalem is the third holiest site in Islam (Springer, Regens & Edger 2009:51). Christians have been targeted by Boko Haram on several occasions, often in connection with international events such as the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark or western interference in Middle Eastern affairs, showing that Christianity and the West are viewed as interconnected. Also Igbos, an ethnic group including many Christians, are attacked in connection with such events, perceived as connected ethnically with Israel and stereotyped as "Jews of Africa" (Simons 2015:73-79).

Shekau appeared in a 2012 video addressed specifically to Jonathan and the President of CAN. Shekau appears dressed in white clerical attire, but also in a bullet-proof camouflage vest, signifying war. Beside him are AK47s, and behind him a green wall in leopard-spotted pattern sometimes seen on book-covers of the Quran. The color green is always connected to Islam and even if it appears insignificant it is not. Green coloring is "significant to all sectors of the Islamic world" and is "an overtly political and explicitly Islamic statement" (Brachman, Boudali & Ostovar 2006:107). Shekau appears showing off features of both his roles; the spiritual/clerical, and the military/worldly, indicating that he *in person* embodies jihad, which includes both spiritual and worldly applications. He talks here in a more restraint manner than otherwise, but not without his personal intensity. Especially Christians are attacked by Shekau, including Jonathan, a Christian, and therefore unfit to lead Nigeria. Remarkably, Shekau here constructs an odd image of Christians, portraying them as historical enemies of Islam, active also now in present time;

“We hardly touch anybody except security personnel and Christians and those who have betrayed us. Everyone knows what Christians did to Muslims, not once or twice. (...) Everyone knows what happened to our leader. Everyone knows what wickedness was meted out to our members and fellow Muslims in Nigeria... (Shekau 2012-01-11).

Shekau again portrays Boko Haram as *victims* of oppressing forces, namely Christians represented by Jonathan, military forces and traitorous Muslims cooperating with them. Shekau repeats “everyone knows” thus framing what he says as *facts*, and not private views. Boko Haram doesn’t attack innocent people, but only those oppressing them and their collaborators indicating self-defense. Jonathan and his Christian oppressing government killed Yusuf and metes out “wickedness” against Boko Haram-members and believing Muslims. Boko Haram equals victims, Jonathan and Christians equals oppressors.¹⁸ Shekau frames a religio-political system of persecution behind all events, thereby giving flesh to jihadist-ideological notions of persecution by non-Muslims, aided by Muslim collaborators. This God knew would happen;

“Before God created the earth, he knew what was going to happen and he has promised in the holy book that he will help his religion. It is beyond your power. What you see has been happening, God allowed it because you have refused to follow him and you have betrayed his religion. That is why, Jonathan, this is beyond your power-yes!” (Shekau 2012-01-11).

The perspective provided is all-encompassing, God is sovereign and knows everything beforehand and therefore established his religion to counter men like Jonathan and his cronies. Boko Haram’s insurgency is therefore a result of God’s providence, because Jonathan has betrayed God by not converting to Islam and for persecuting righteous believers. Shekau’s words on what Christians have done to Muslims can be interpreted in two ways; historical or present-day events. It can also refer to both, with historicity implicitly understood, referring to either the Crusades as examples of Christian colonialism, or to Jonathan’s Christian government. The reference to Jonathan’s “power-yes” is odd. I believe it to be references to democracy as governance, which Jonathan represents, implying the power gained from the people’s consent, their “yes” to persecute Boko Haram. We have seen that Shekau denounces democracy as paganism, and we get further clues as Shekau attacks Christianity;

“You Christians should know that Jesus is a servant and prophet of God. He is not the son of God. This religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion of God – it is paganism. God frowns at it. (...) Aside that, you Christians cheated and killed us to the extent of eating our flesh like cannibals! You did all you wanted to us. We are trying to coerce you to embrace Islam, because that is what God instructed us to do. Even at that, without provocation, you slaughtered us and took our wives and humiliated us! Now you CAN president, you come out to say your people should come out and do whatever they want do!” (Shekau 2012-01-11)

¹⁸ Thus, Yusuf was killed by *Christians* rather than by *government forces*, according to Shekau’s argumentation.

The image constructed is of fundamental conflicts between what Shekau presents as righteous beliefs versus false ones. Democracy is denounced as paganism, and so is Christianity. They are *therefore parts of the same oppressing system*. In Islamic theological understanding Jesus is a prophet, and Christians are thereby regarded as pagans, worshipping a man. But Shekau not only presents common misunderstandings of Christianity, he provides bizarre theories concerning Christians as “cannibals” eating Muslim’s flesh. This could be propaganda aimed at stirring Muslim masses against Christians, spreading false rumors.¹⁹ But it could also be genuine beliefs that such things happen. Simons (2015) explains that conspiracy-theories abound in Nigeria, often connected to Boko Haram. If Shekau believes this, it would certainly confirm his view of Christians as pagans, being cannibals. Additionally, Christians supposedly took wives of Boko Haram-members, thereby humiliating them, without “provocation”. Many female Boko Haram-members have been arrested, and Shekau might be referencing such women, although it is not entirely clear.²⁰ The overall ideological construction is clear nonetheless, Christians in power-positions are persecuting Muslims, and Boko Haram-members are victims, because they are trying to convert Christians and instead gets “slaughtered”. CAN is as an enemy, its president alongside Jonathan, are power-players persecuting Muslims.²¹ Thus, the construction of collaborations between Christians in a national association and Christians in the government as persecutors becomes clear.

6.4 Shekau and the global conspiracy of atheistic democracy

Finally, Shekau portrays the overarching enemy of jihadism; atheism as an all-encompassing conspiracy. This conspiracy is global because its advocates and supporters are everywhere and their weapon is *democracy*;

“(…) that came from America, France, Italy, Germany, Russia and the United Atheists, yes I call them atheists…” (Shekau 2015:02-18)

The mentioned nations are atheist powers bent on Islam’s destruction, by furthering world-wide democracy, reinforcing jihadist interpretations of great conspiracies. Shekau’s derogatory name for the UN mirrors his views of it; a man-made coalition of atheistic democracies, allied against Islam.

¹⁹ Boko Haram has spread such views in printed pamphlets in the city of Kano, which could be expressions of such propaganda-tactics (Eveslage 2013:4).

²⁰ Women have taken on more active participation within Boko Haram as suicide-bombers and recruiters, and have been arrested in numbers by the authorities (BBC 2014-06-04).

²¹ An ideological construction held also by Yusuf (Kassim 2015:190), showing that Shekau stands ideologically also on Yusuf’s teachings, something confirmed by TCP-theory.

Shekau's view of it might have been the reason for Boko Haram attacking the UN-headquarters in Abuja in 2011, thus being perceived as an attack against globally allied enemies. The mentioned nations are all, regardless of west or east, non-Islamic and ancient Christian territories. Shekau's thought seems consistent with the jihadist-ideological notion that "global atheism" is a force ruling the world (Martinage 2008:41), but he clearly singles out the UN as a central atheistic actor here. Shekau clearly connects these nations as the powers behind the Nigerian elections and he swears that they will; "not happen in peace, even if that cost us our lives". God will not permit democratic elections to take place;

"because you are saying that Authority is from people to people, which means that people should rule each other but Allah says that the Authority is only to him" (Shekau 2015-02-18)

The jihadist interpretation of democracy as pure man-made rule is contrary to God's sovereignty and therefore atheistic, because it does not consider God's authority. Shekau states that those who believe in democracy are disbelievers, deniers of God. The ideology presented is that of man-made systems from mainly the Christian West, versus God's sovereignty. Shekau is clearly hateful discussing it, speaking in a dark sinister voice mediating those feelings to the audience via his religious authority pointing his finger repeatedly and aggressively, marking every word. The presentation of a crisis-point is obvious. Behind such things are nations exerting their influence not only via democracy, but by killing jihadist leaders, hoping to scatter believers. Shekau (2012-11-09) lashes out;

"O Britain, America, Israel and Nigeria: Don't think that jihad stops with the deaths of imams, because imams are individuals. Jihad started now, jihad started now, O enemies of Allah. (...) Did jihad stop?! Did jihad stop?! No, a thousand no's, a thousand no's! (...) O disbelievers, O Apostates, O hypocrites, die from your frustration!"

Abovementioned categories are joined together in this agenda, but will not succeed because leaders, even though important, are but tools of God who rules everything. Shekau once again turns to humility in his raging anger; he is but an instrument that can be killed, but jihad will always continue. The ideological construction is that jihad will continue regardless of how many imams are killed by the mentioned nations, images of democracies against everything Shekau stands for. The main ideological thought is of jihadism against democracies represented by Jews (Israel), Christians (Britain, America, Nigeria) and Muslims (Nigeria). *The perpetuation of jihad* is thus a central thought in Shekau's ideological constructions throughout, explicitly and implicitly. Shekau's charismatic outlook reinforces the message outlined; his extravagant flair for spectacular behavior, ferociousness, intensity and dedication to the cause conveys images of a leader jihadists can depend on. As Barnes (1978:4) aptly stated; charismatic leaders have the ability to provide answers in times of crisis. We will now address the conclusions.

7 Conclusions

Shekau, viewed through TCP-theory, clearly constructs different jihadist-ideological themes that pervade his video-messages. Viewed holistically a coherent ideological system is constructed, containing several *key themes*, constantly interacting.

One such theme is that of Islam and jihadists as *persecuted* by oppressing powers, singled out by Shekau as apostate Muslim leaders, Christian leaders and secular western nations, particularly France and the U.S. The UN is also singled out as an atheistic system of nation-states using secular democracy as a weapon against Islamic nations and believers in order to persecute and dominate them.

Another pervading theme constructed by Shekau is *Christians as enemies*, pointing to Christian political dominance within Nigeria via President Jonathan, and CAN as Christian-organized persecution of Muslims. Historical images of Christian crusades are implicit in Shekau's construction of jihadist-ideology and Christianity is referenced as connected to the West. Shekau gives voice to peculiar conspiracy-theories of Christians, which are interwoven into the ideological constructions of them as ruthless enemies. Muslim leaders are treated specifically, again in relation to the theme of persecution, and they are constructed as collaborating with Christians and western governments. The theme of *colonization* is also prevalent, both explicit and implicit, and connected equally to Christianity and to the West. Shekau, as a charismatic and influential leader with both religious and worldly authority, even constructs himself as part and parcel of jihadist-ideology by embodying jihad in various aspects and claiming to be spokesperson for God. By standing on the authority of *bin Laden* via allegiance to Al-Qaeda and ISIS, *Yusuf*, previous leader of Boko Haram, and *Dan Fodio*, a historical jihadist leader; Shekau radicalizes their teachings, thus escalating the conflicts against perceived enemies. Where Yusuf and Dan Fodio advocated local or regional jihad, Shekau clearly advocates global approaches, framing jihadism in opposition to a global hostile system. The presentation of specific crisis-points mediates radicalization, which perhaps can be an explanatory factor in the enormous increase of Boko Haram-membership since Shekau's takeover 2009. Shekau constructs and presents, via media strategies implemented especially after the allegiance to Al-Qaeda and ISIS, new interpretations of jihadist-ideology further developed in relation to current crisis-points.

An overarching systematic ideological construction is that of Boko Haram and all jihadists as *victims*, something I did not expect to be so emphasized throughout.

The perpetrators are all constructed as specific actors within a complex global system, designed to oppress Muslims. Thus, jihad as struggle has both local and global expressions, as does the system oppressing it. Democracy is clearly constructed as the primary weapon of the enemies, aimed at destroying Islam. In the end the clashes and wars are, according to Shekau, systematic and global, regardless of which forms they take in local contexts. They are consequently constructed in antithetical forms.

The visual symbols and imagery in the form of *al-riya*, weapons, flags, attire and banners each provide elaborate jihadist-ideological contents, enhanced by Shekau's dualistic role as imam and military leader. The contexts of war, weapon exercises and sermons by Shekau provide an *ideological whole* to the audience, where symbols and imagery constitutes latent ideology. Thus, we also note both latent and manifest ideology embodied in a charismatic leader, expressing characteristics such as fearlessness, piety, rhetorical boldness, aggressiveness, relentlessness and a flair for spectacular appearances. Shekau approaches new crisis-points with both old and new interpretations of jihadism. He stands firmly on his predecessors, but also constructs new ideological thoughts and doctrines, and then summarizing them synthetically. It's up to future scholars to further study these jihadist evolutionary teachings and actors.

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9 Appendix: acronyms and short descriptions

AQAP: “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”, an al-Qaeda-affiliate jihadist movement operating mainly in Yemen, Saudi-Arabia and the Gulf states.

AQIM: ”Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb”, an al-Qaeda-affiliate jihadist movement operating primarily in Algeria and Northern Africa. There is much evidence of connections with Boko Haram in the form of weapons exchange, training of jihadists, joint operations and ideological commitment (Onuohoa 2014a).

ISIS: “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”, a jihadist movement which has established an Islamic caliphate within the geographical borders of Iraq and Syria, although its real presence is not limited only to those regions, but extends to most continents of the world via jihadist cells, supporting individuals and networks of support and financing. Boko Haram have pledged allegiance to ISIS, making it an affiliate-movement in the struggle for jihad in Africa (Comolli 2015b).

CAN: “The Christian Association of Nigeria”, an ecumenical national organization working to safeguard Christian political interests, discussing subjects relating to education and other social-economic questions. CAN have often spoken out critically against Boko Haram, but have also tried to work out amnesty via the Nigerian government for jihadists willing to leave Boko Haram. (Simons 2015:137-161).

CAR: “Central African Republic”, a coup d’état took place in an already volatile country in 2013, leading to lawlessness and a Muslim rebellion. There are indications, although presently unclear, that Boko Haram or Ansaru may be trying to establish themselves in CAR, thus adding to the jihadist expansion. (Comolli 2015a:94-95).

JMTF: “Joint Military Task Force”, a joint political-military coalition between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger fighting to stop Boko Haram’s transnational expansion. The coalition, although successful in some measures, have also been accused of high-handedness, incompetence and critique has been delivered against internal bureaucracy and unwillingness to cooperate fully in some matters.

