The London School of Economics and Political Science

# Fractured Brotherhoods: Ethnic Identity in Multi-Ethnic Violent Political Organisations

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# Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).



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## Abstract

In the literature on political violence in sub-Saharan Africa, ethnic ties have been highlighted as significant and central to insurgent organizations. However, a fixation with ethnicity or 'tribalism' historically led to conflicts being labelled as ethnic in nature, or ethnicity being seen as the driving catalyst of wars in the region. This approach resulted in a false dichotomy in classifying conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa as either "ethnic" or "non-ethnic," limiting our understanding of the role, nuance, and effects of ethnicity in conflicts that are coded as non-ethnic.

To address this issue, this project focuses on a "hard" case - the case of Boko Haram - to explore the role of ethnicity in conflicts not typically classified as ethnic. The dissertation examines when, why, and how ethnicity emerges as a mechanism of organization and control within armed groups, surpassing the overarching supra-identity, despite attempts and claims of cross-ethnic reach and appeal.

The study finds that, despite professing an ideology that transcends ethnic identity, ethnicity can play a crucial role in a number of key areas, including supplementing religious identity, ideology, or doctrine. Moreover, while Boko Haram was able to create a new shared identity centred around their supra-ethnic Salafi jihadism, for some, the significance of ethnic identity and ties did not disappear, despite the group's transethnic ethos and ideology. In some circumstances, ethnicity became so salient that it influenced group dynamics despite the professed religious basis of the group.

The study argues that when group leaders are appointed to leadership positions for reasons that are not contingent on their complete socialization into the group, they are more likely to foster an environment where ethnic factions, identities, and privileges thrive. Given the power they possess, leaders can permit and even propagate potential divisions, siding with co-ethnics when disputes occur instead of maintaining more neutral positions.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

In 2021, in Maiduguri, Nigeria, I was in the middle of my second fieldwork trip after my research was halted because of the Covid19 pandemic. About 1 and a half months into my trip, I had a conversation with Usman*, a Kanuri ex-combatant from Boko Haram, who I met through one of my contacts in the North. Usman and I talked about what happened when Boko Haram raided a village, and what happened to the people and the goods that were captured. He told me:

> *We will take whatever we got from the communities to our camp in Sambisa. Those who went for the operation will be given some money…there is no prejudice; everyone will be treated well*[1]

However, during another conversation I had with a Mafa ex-combatant called Iya* he explained that after Boko Haram captured a town:

> *….. there was a time we went to one village to attack …. Then I saw a motorcycle and I tried to take it and come with it to the camp. After we finished the battle they collected it from me, which I am pretty sure if I am Kanuri, or if I speak Kanuri they will not collect it from my hand. And other people they have collected. They pick motorcycle and they didn't collect it from them. That's the thing that I will never forget. And the commander that seized my own motorcycle is Kanuri. If he is Marge, that is my tribe, I know he is not going to collect it. But because he's Kanuri, he has collected.*[2]

Despite a governing ideology that transcends ethnicity, the experiences divulged to me by Usman and Iya demonstrate that, under certain circumstances, one's ethnic identity can influence the treatment people receive at the hands of some Boko Haram fighters. These divergent experiences did not only manifest among Mafa and Kanuri respondents. Indeed, members hailing from all ethnicities offered fairly different testimonies in this regard, with some emphasising the centrality of ethnic identity, and others dismissing it entirely. These different accounts provoked a series of questions that I set out to interrogate over the course of my dissertation research. I was struck by the divergent ways that Iya and Usman described the salience of ethnic identity. I thus set out to better understand why ethnicity manifests as an important marker of identity in Iya's account and not in Usman's. Put differently, why does ethnicity emerge as a dominant organising narrative for some combatants and not others? Why does ethnicity appear so salient under certain circumstances, yet insignificant in others? And what explains the considerable variation in the relationship between the group's governing ideology and the ethnicity of its members? I suspected that the answers to these questions could shed light on some of the crucial underlying factors shaping Boko Haram's governance, political organisation, mobilisation, and capacity for adaptation, as well as informing our understanding of the functioning of other insurgent organisations in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Between 2019-2022 I spent a total of nine months in Nigeria between Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, and Abuja, where I would decompress after each stint in the north. My aim while there was to try to understand the role ethnicity played in the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram, an Islamic insurgent group that has ravaged the area since 2009. The objective of the research was to advance

[1] B30: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

*All names and other identifying information are anonymized to protect interviewee confidentiality. This study was approved under LSE's Research Ethics Committee: REC ref. 000940b. Where I directly refer to individuals in the body of the dissertation, I use pseudonyms reflective of common Northern Nigerian names. Otherwise, I indicate the gender and ethnicity of the respondent, alongside the location, and year of the interview, in a footnote.

[2] M5: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022

our understanding of how such groups function and survive, and to unpack how identity facilitates and constrains a group's evolution. In particular, I wanted to better understand if and how ethnicity was mobilised within such conflicts. Previous works on Boko Haram frequently noted that the group was majority Kanuri but ideologically does not use Kanuri nationalist rhetoric (Thurston, 2016). Given the movement is explicitly ethnically heterogenous, I was curious to understand the experiences of Boko Haram from the perspectives of its non-Kanuri members.

To try to uncover how ethnic identity shaped the group's trajectory, over the course of three trips, I interviewed personnel from intergovernmental organisations, internally displaced persons, and ex-combatants, including some commanders that had fought for the group and subsequently either surrendered themselves or were caught by the military over the course of the conflict. During my conversations with individuals from different ethnic groups that had spent time within Boko Haram, I explored their experiences with the group to uncover the effects of ethnic heterogeneity, as well as to see if there was any variation in experiences.[3]

Initially very exploratory, I soon noticed that despite the fact that the group's governing ideology rejected ethnicity as an organisational tool, ethnicity still played a role in how the group mobilised and, as a result, had a subsequent effect on some unit dynamics. Despite the perception and belief held by Usman and several others during our interviews that ethnicity did not matter to the group and did not affect how individuals were treated, why was Iya's experience not reflective of this?

Within the literature on political violence in sub-Saharan Africa, scholars have long called attention to the significance and centrality of ethnic ties for insurgent organisations. However, historically, a fixation with ethnicity or 'tribalism' often meant that a conflict was regarded as ethnic by nature, or that ethnicity was the driving catalyst of wars in the region. This, in turn, led to a false dichotomy in classifications of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, with most wars in the region categorised as either "ethnic" (such as the civil wars in Burundi, Ethiopia, and Chad), or "non-ethnic" (such as those in Somalia, Nigeria and Mali). However, such an approach limits our understanding of the role, nuance, and effects ethnicity might have, especially within conflicts that are coded as non-ethnic. As we observe in the case of Boko Haram, even among groups that do not mobilise along ethnic lines, shared ethnic identity can play an influential role in facilitating communication, broadening networks and creating a shared sense of community and purpose (Lewis, 2017). This can be seen clearly through the apparent favouritism of co-ethnics during raids carried out by Boko Haram during their expansion.

Such a phenomenon has led Deng to argue that: "virtually every African conflict has some ethno-regional dimension to it" (Deng, 1999). Deng goes on to observe that even those conflicts that may appear to be free of ethnic concerns often involve factions and alliances built around ethnic loyalties. Indeed, despite the fact that many of today's conflicts are not organised around ethnicity, per se, individuals have multiple overlapping social and political identities whose salience can be activated differently under different circumstances (McCauley, 2017).

In documenting the emergence of rebel groups in sub-Saharan Africa, Lewis (2017) finds that groups formed in more ethnically homogeneous areas are more likely to succeed in becoming viable than groups forming in more heterogeneous areas, demonstrating that ethnic ties play a crucial role in facilitating a group's ability to mobilise and gain traction beyond their immediate geographic community. However, while Lewis draws much needed attention to the *importance* of ethnic ties in facilitating mobilisation and sustaining groups once they form, to date, our understanding of *how* ethnicity activates particular forms of mobilisation – as well as its effects on group cohesion following recruitment – remains limited. While many armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa do not purport to be primarily concerned with ethnic identity, ethnicity remains a potentially salient cleavage to be instrumentalised in their operations and organisation.

[3] Or either of its splitter groups, JAS and the Islamic State in Western Sahara

Focusing on conflicts that are *not* typically classed as ethnic in nature, this project explores the role of ethnicity in a "hard" case – the case of Boko Haram. The dissertation scrutinises when, why and how ethnicity emerges as a mechanism of organisation and control within armed groups, surpassing the overarching supra-identity, in spite of attempts and claims of cross-ethnic reach and appeal. However, despite this line of inquiry, the aim of this study is not to demonstrate that the Boko Haram conflict, for example, has ethnic origins. Far from it. Nevertheless, ethnicity still plays a profound role in how political organisation unfolds. As was aptly phrased to me by one respondent:

> *…there is no tribalism in Allah's business, but they are practicing it, and that was how the problem started*.[4]

To answer the question of when and why ethnicity becomes salient, the case of Boko Haram – as a violent religious organisation in sub-Saharan Africa – offers a fertile arena for studying these dynamics. This is because violent religious conflicts typically present a primary and alternative *non*-ethnic unifying identity and cause (i.e., religion). Although religious conflicts are rarely outwardly articulated around ethnic politics, narratives of ethnic grievance and shared identity have, nevertheless, featured prominently within many religious groups' operational arsenals (Haysom, 2018; Thurston, 2017).

Building on Lewis's pioneering work in this area, I analyse the experiences of combatants from different ethnic backgrounds in Boko Haram and its subsequent splinter groups (JAS and the Islamic State in Western Sahara (ISWAP) in Northern Nigeria. I selected them given their cross-ethnic appeal and strong ideological rejection of ethnic superiority. Despite this apparent rejection, I explore the work ethnicity, in addition to religion, does, both at the individual and the community level in building group solidarity, cohesion and, ultimately, ensuring the viability of the group and its units.

Specifically, this project pursued two interrelated objectives. First, I explored how ethnicity, and, in particular, ethnic boundaries and ethnic pride, manifest within both recruitment, and internal group dynamics. Second, I scrutinise the conditions under which ethnicity supplants or skews religion as a central organising frame, or vice versa, for particular communities within each group. By group, I refer to a smaller subunit within the organisation, and I use the terms group and unit interchangeably.

While mobilisation and group indoctrination in Boko Haram draws heavily on religion, I find that certain privileges, as well as claims to lineage, land and ownership, are extended to – or exclude – certain ethnicities, but only under certain conditions. My goal was to better understand which settings created the foundations for these forms of exclusion. My research revealed that indeed ethnic identity does not function the same way across the Boko Haram crisis. In fact, it is evident that there are certain conditions under which Kanuri identity, for example, is leveraged instrumentally to confer privileged status, and some circumstances where ethnic identity fades – if not into insignificance, then at least to lower salience. In particular, I show that the extent to which ethnic identity influences group dynamics is largely dependent on unit leaders. I show that pathways to leadership, and specifically, the unit leader's socialization into Boko Haram, is the primary determinant of ethnic factionalization within the group.

In revealing these strikingly localised socio-political foundations, the dissertation thus contributes to the literature on armed group viability, organisation, and mobilisation, across sub-Saharan Africa. And while the effect and role of ethnicity should not be overemphasised, ignoring its existence can also limit our understanding of how violent armed actors operate, organise and survive.

## Boko Haram: Ethnicity and Identity

[4] M1: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022

Ethnic identity in Nigeria, like in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, is the most visible and politically salient form of identity. As Reed and Mberu (2015) note: "In competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity" (Reed & Mberu, 2015, p. 419). Additionally, religious identity is also very important to individuals and often these two identity tropes are tightly intertwined. For example, almost all Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani people are Muslim; as a result, Islamic identity is very much embedded within each group.

Regardless of any diversity based on ethnicity, within Islam, the notion of *Ummah* means that all followers are part of a unifying ideological community. However, even though membership of the *ummah* ostensibly replaced the tribal loyalty for Nigerian Muslims, it did not abolish it. Rather, it only sought to change the hierarchy of an individual's identities in the society (Ataman, 2003).

Within the subcontinent of sub-Saharan Africa, despite the significance and breadth of Islam, ethnic identity is still an almost unshakable phenomenon. This is because an individual's ethnic identity often carries a significant amount of sentimentality and manifests as an identity that connects them to their wider community, like an extended family.

Within Boko Haram, despite the significance and importance of religion, it was immediately apparent that ethnicity still held notable significance for recruits. In particular, when asked about the feeling they held for their identity, regardless of which ethnic group they came from, respondents frequently noted its significance. Many responded to my earliest questions about ethnicity with statements about how their ethnicity brings them happiness, or informed me that "*no one denies their identity*".[5] As proclaimed by one Shua respondent:

> *I am Shua by tribe. I am feeling like the most important person on earth and there is no other language on earth that is better than me*.[6]

Therefore, it was not surprising that following recruitment, insurgents from the same ethnic background often preferred to spend time together, rather than with those from other ethnic backgrounds. This loyalty prevailed for many Boko Haram members in spite of their group's fairly diverse ethnic composition. Alex, a combatant from Gwoza Local Government, reinforced this point, noting that:

> *Sometimes those insurgents that are from the same ethnic group prefer to hang out together*.[7]

As a result, building on the work by Janet Lewis, it was evident from the experiences shared with me in Northern Nigeria that, despite professing an ideology that transcends ethnic identity, ethnicity can play a crucial role in a number of key areas, including sometimes supplementing religious identity, ideology, or doctrine. As a result, violent religious groups like Boko Haram also utilise and benefit from ethnic ties through their relationships with community networks.

For background and context, it is necessary to understand the important role that ethnic hierarchies – and Kanuri identity in particular – play in the Boko Haram conflict. Many Kanuri felt that they were the vanguards of movement, and therefore central to the organisation. For example, as was explained by one Kanuri respondent when asked how he felt about being part of the group with his fellow 'tribesmen':

[5] B24: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[6] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[7] Alex: Male, Waha. Borno 2019

> *"I felt nice because then I thought the insurgency was about advancing the course of Islam and knowing that the Kanuri are the custodian of Islam in this part of the world, I felt honoured to be part of the group."*[8]

Moreover, throughout several interviews, I asked why the Kanuri were the largest majority. Many respondents told me that in addition to the Kanuri being the most populace identity in Borno, despite the ethnic diversity within the state, they also held most positions of leadership. Others made sure I understood that the Kanuri were also "*the founders of the group.*"[9]

Nonetheless, the group's leaders still actively sought to recruit beyond the Kanuri base. Once recruited, the aim was to create a new shared identity centred around their supra-ethnic Salafi jihadism.

However, ethnicity still played a role even for individuals with privileged status within the group. And most non-Kanuri combatants interviewed noted that a co-ethnic recruited them, highlighting the utility of ethnic bonds in recruitment, mobilisation, and group expansion and survival. Others told me how individuals were actively encouraged to return to their communities to recruit more people, and were often promoted when they did so.

For many, therefore, the significance of ethnic identity and ethnic ties did *not* disappear, despite the group's transethnic ethos and ideology. In some circumstances, ethnicity became so salient that it influenced group dynamics despite the professed religious basis of the group. For example, previously held perceptions amongst recruits about other ethnic groups, in particular regarding hierarchy and superiority in religious belief, persisted long after recruitment. In this vein, many Kanuri members regarded the Ngarmagu people as "*religiously illiterate atheists and thieves*," and as a result, the Ngarmagu often experienced marginalisation and debasement.[10]

However, this was not always the case. In fact, several respondents from all ethnic groups interviewed stated that their ethnicity never affected the treatment that they received, and that the group treated everyone fairly, as long as they adopted the ideology and followed all of the rules.

Given this variation even within particular ethnic groups, it is evident, therefore, that contextual, environmental, and organisational factors play a role in explaining why ethnicity comes to the fore in some instances and not in others. In this dissertation, I demonstrate the importance of unit leaders in shaping experiences of ethnic integration.

## Argument and hypotheses

Following recruitment, an integral aim of Boko Haram leaders is to create a new shared religious identity, adopted by all, not based on ancestry, that unites the ethnically heterogenous membership base. This process of inducting new members into the norms and rules of a new community involves the internalisation of a new religious identity that surpasses other identity characteristics and inspires loyalty and commitment. The process is an intensive one, where the intended result is not simple behavioural adaptation, but a deeper change in an actor's sense of self.

New recruits are not blank slates; they bring with them a variety of values, norms, and attitudes formed through prior arenas of socialisation. As a result, unit leaders need to continually work to embed the group identity, which is central to the group's pursuits and existence. Sometimes, this process unfolds effectively, embedding and inscribing new religious identities among diverse members. Other times, ethnic identity is insufficiently deemphasised, and continues to structure the ways in which members relate to one another. There are a number of potential explanations for this. It

[8] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[9] M5: Male, Marge. Borno 2022
[10] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

would be reasonable to expect that group composition plays an important role in shaping the effectiveness of top-down socialisation. Other scholarship suggests that competing claims of group legitimacy (Horowitz, 1985), as well as shared political motivation can also lead to conflict (Conrad, et al 2021).

Alternatively, some scholars have also highlighted the role that contact theory might play, for example, with regards to the claim that contact typically reduces prejudice. Cook (1984), argue that exposure to groups, communities, or individuals from different ethnic backgrounds might temper animosity or prejudice. However, more recently, this field of study has been met with increasing criticism, with other scholars arguing that it is not that simple, and the individuals involved may all contribute to enhancing or inhibiting contact's effects (Pettigrew, 2011).

However, none of these explanations proved capable of explaining the variation I observed at the unit level. For example, given the role and significance of religious identity and the prevalence of ethnicity across groups and units comprised of different ethnic identities, and people with different prior exposure to other ethnicities, none of these explanations could explain why ethnicity was so much more salient in some units than in others. Rather, my research revealed that ethnicity was more likely to come to the fore and negatively influence group cohesion as a function of group leadership.

This is because leaders shape and enforce expected behaviour. Specifically, I show that when group leaders are appointed to leadership positions for reasons that are not contingent on their complete socialisation into the group, they are more likely to foster an environment where ethnic factions, identities and privileges thrive. Specifically, I highlight the importance of a leader's own internalisation of the group's ideology and identity – an identity that is assured by their socialisation into the group, and their specific pathway to leadership. In doing so, this dissertation highlights the centrality of political education, ideological socialization, and leadership dynamics at the unit level in shaping group cohesion, mobilization, and political organization.

More precisely, I demonstrate that when appointed leaders have undergone extensive political education following their recruitment, and that this education has been the basis for their promotion, a unit leader will typically propagate religion as the group's primary organising frame, eschewing ethnic privilege and dismantling ethnic hierarchies and factionalism as it emerges under their command.

On the other hand, when unit commanders are selected for leadership positions for reasons that do not explicitly dislodge sentiments of ethnic biases, for example as a result of patronage politics or their combat successes, they are more likely to retain a strong sense of their own ethnic identity, which inflects the culture of the group and the behaviour and experiences of its members.

As a result, given the power they possess, leaders are able to permit and, can even at times, propagate potential divisions, siding with co-ethnics when disputes occur instead of maintaining more neutral positions. This can lead to the emergence of what Jason Lyall terms a 'hierarchical structure of citizenship and belonging,' where populations considered 'alien' are violently marginalised and relegated to the lowest rung.

This privileged status can then result in preferential treatment for members hailing from the leader's group, regardless of said leaders' ethnic identity, as in such cases, the leader's group will subsequently emerge as the dominant group. This preferential treatment occurred in a variety of ways. For example, respondents in some groups commented on the punishments, privileges and rewards leaders engaged in and their inflexion with ethnic bias. When a recruit, for example, engaged in transgressive behaviour, sometimes they were pardoned by a co-ethnic leader as a result of their privileged status. As was explained by one respondent who shared how his leader gave preferential treatment to his co-ethnic when disputes over resources occurred:

> *A Ngarmagu native went to his farm, and he fought with a Kanuri. The matter was reported to the Amir; after the hearing, the farm was confiscated and given to the Kanuri… because the Kanuri is his kinsman.*[11]

In other examples, the coordination of military operations, and the distribution of resources within the group, would be shaped by ethnic favoritism.

## Dependent Variable: The Varying Salience of Ethnicity in Boko Haram

I observed three distinct arenas in which the varying salience of ethnic identity across groups is most visible. These include resource allocation (for instance, when members of a particular ethnic group are favoured in the distribution of resources), punishment (when members of more marginalised or minoritised ethnic groups are punished more aggressively for their transgressions, whereas members of the dominant group are treated with lenience), and military operations (when members of particular ethnic groups are given preferable assignments).

### Resource allocation

One way the salience of ethnicity is displayed is following successful raids when some unit leaders are seen to favour their co-ethnic when distributing goods and resources among members. In particular, after goods, such as weapons, are seized, they are typically kept under the leader's control. While in most instances, leaders keep or distribute shares of captured resources fairly among members, in some groups, several respondents noted how their leaders favoured their co-ethnics when distributing items with regard to both quality and quantity. Similarly, the distribution of arable land was also a frequent area of contention, which necessitated adjudication to end disputes. These patterns could not be explained by members' prior relationships with other ethnic groups, nor by the composition or proportion of a particular ethnicity within a group.

### Military operations

Certain aspects of military operations are also influenced by ethnicity in some groups but not others. In particular, several respondents noted how certain ethnic groups were more likely to be chosen to carry out attacks than others due to the virtues and stereotypes associated with them. For example, in some groups, tropes such as being illiterate, yet strong and good at killing, were used to describe particular ethnic groups that were then disproportionately selected to take part in battles. Yet this was not evenly distributed. In fact, in many units, the Ngarmagu were disproportionately targeted to assume such roles, due to their reputation as ruthless fighters, as well as often being viewed as religiously illiterate. Yet in other groups, the Ngarmagu identity was not deemed relevant to military operations, and rather, all ethnicities were treated the same.

### Punishment

Though not as common, another way in which the salience of ethnicity is displayed is with regard to due diligence carried out before a punishment is given. In particular, some respondents noted that ethnicity emerged when an individual was accused of breaking a rule. Instead of being judged fairly, some group members observed that proper due diligence was not carried out when the accused did not share the same ethnic identity as the leader.

Once again, and as described above, this phenomenon affected different groups differently, seemingly regardless of ethnic composition or prior contact with other ethnicities.

[11] B21: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022

## Methodology

In order to understand how ethnicity came to the fore in some groups and not others, I draw on a total of 95 semi-structed interviewers in Maiduguri and Bama with local Borno residents, NGO staff, local leaders, internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and ex-combatants over the course of eight and a half months between 2019-2023. Initially very exploratory, I carried out three separate trips to Nigeria, each time developing and refining my research approach in order to uncover and better understand the lived experiences of individuals representing different ethnic groups within and across different units.

While ultimately very constructive, I faced several challenges throughout the data collection for this research project. The first of these was gaining approval to travel to Maiduguri as a sole researcher given the security threats present in the region. Additionally, I had never been to Northern Nigeria before and had no first-hand knowledge of the reality of the conflict on the ground. To counter this, I worked alongside international and local NGOs that had a lot of local knowledge, and from whom I learnt a great deal about the nature of the conflict.

During my first trip to Maiduguri in 2019, I spent three months working with Christian Aid, a British charity that has had an office in Maiduguri since 2016. During my time with them, I assisted with food distributions within IDP camps within Maiduguri, all the while learning about the conflict from local staff. During this trip, I conducted 24 interviews with internally displaced people housed within the camps, most of whom were women and individuals who described themselves as 'slaves' for the group and not fighters. I also conducted seven interviews with local NGO staff and local leaders. These interviews, which were more general and centred around the history of the conflict and Borno State, provided me with a lot of background information. Additionally, these interviews helped me prepare for my more sensitive interviews with more vulnerable people. Moreover, this trip was my first time in West Africa and my first time in a conflict zone. Therefore, though initially a little scared, learning from and spending time with local personnel helped me feel more comfortable in this new setting, as well as helped me absorb all of the things I was seeing.

To conduct my interviews, as I am not from Nigeria and do not speak any of the local languages, I sought out a local research assistant to help me with my data collection in Maiduguri. Using my previous networks with journalists that work in the region, I was introduced to Musa*, a Fulani Borno native that had previously worked with several international organisations and had vast knowledge of the conflict and the region, having lived through Boko Haram's occupation of Maiduguri. During our interviews, which were recorded, Musa posed the question to each respondent in Hausa or Kanuri and then would briefly translate their response to me before moving on to the following questions. All the while, I made notes. While my presence in the room was felt, I found that having Musa lead the interviews helped make each respondent seem more comfortable. Individuals were identified using the snowball sampling method (SSM). This proved the most effective way to identify willing respondents, particularly when identifying ex-combatants, as I could utilise the ties of previously interviewed individuals. This method also helped build trust between myself and each respondent, as I was no longer a complete stranger.

One disadvantage often raised with the snowball sampling method (SSM) chosen for this research is that representativeness is not always guaranteed. Nevertheless, SSM still has several advantages, under less-than-optimal conditions, for example, when conducting research in conflict zones. In fact, under such circumstances, SSM may be the only effective method and the deciding factor in whether research can be conducted at all. This is especially true, as acknowledged by Cohen & Arieli in their discussion of snowball sampling, when studying hidden or otherwise inaccessible research populations such as mine. This is because access to such individuals is often very hard as many are apprehensive about sharing their experiences out of fear of repercussions, both from the state, as well as from their wider community. Therefore, within such circumstances, SSM allows a researcher to utilise past ties, and prior communication with potential respondents "to gain access to and

cooperation from potential new subjects. This is especially significant in establishing contact with relatively closed populations such as societal elites, gangs, and extremist groups" (Cohen & Arieli, 2011, p. 482).

Following my initial trip in Nigeria in 2019, I had planned to return to Nigeria in 2020 for another three months to continue my data collection. However, due to the Covid Pandemic I was not able to return to Maiduguri until the end of 2021.

Following the release of the Covid19 vaccine and the progressive opening of international borders, I was able to return with added caution to Nigeria in October 2021. Using networks that I had made during my first trip, during this second trip Musa and I focused on interviewing confirmed ex-combatants from different ethnic groups that were similarly living in camps within Maiduguri. In total, we were able to successfully identity a total of 12 ex-combatants as there had been a large exodus of fighters following a promise of amnesty from the Nigerian government, increased infighting between the different Boko Haram fighters and the deaths of both faction leaders, Abubakar Shekau and Abu Musab al-Barnawi.

With the help of a senior ex-commander with a vast network of ex-fighters within Borno, we identified willing respondents using the snowball sampling method. However, while it was possible to identify some respondents to interview, access to most of the fighters was limited. This was because most surrendered fighters were being held at Hajj camp, located near the Maiduguri International Airport. Because of reports of cholera, poor living standards and ongoing riots, the Nigerian government was restricting access to the camp, including to humanitarian workers. As a result, I was still only able to interview fighters that had either been released from the camp or were staying in others around the city due to the overpopulation.

I returned to Nigeria in March 2022 to continue with my data collection for a final three months. Using a local UN contact I tried again to get access to the Hajj camp, however, continuing government restrictions meant that this was again not possible. Additionally, at the end of 2021 a number of IDP camps within Maiduguri had been closed by Babagana Umara Zulum, the governor of Borno State, and thousands of Internally Displaced Persons were forcibly expelled from the capital (Amnesty International, 2021).

To counter this new obstacle, I was advised by local UNDP staff that I should conduct my research in Bama, a city 80km from Maiduguri that still housed a lot of ex-fighters that were more accessible. However, due to the security risks on the road to the city, I would only be able to travel to Bama by helicopter, a mode of transport that my research budget could not facilitate. However, through my UN contacts in Maiduguri, I was given the contact information of Nasir*, an ethnic Babur, Bama native that had worked with the UNDP previously conducting interviews for them in IDP camps in the city. Nasir often travelled back and forth between Bama and Maiduguri for his own work with various INGPs and was due to be travelling back soon. Since I was unable to travel myself, I began investigating the possibility of Nasir conducting some interviews on my behalf.

Following our introduction, I had a meeting with Nasir where we went over the aim of the research as well as the interview questions. Following our meeting I arranged for a trial interview with Musa acting as the respondent in order to make sure Nasir was posing the questions well and that he conducted the interviews with the appropriate sensitivities and attention to relevant details pertaining to my hypotheses and research questions. As I had by then conducted all my interviews with Musa, I felt confident that he would be a good judge of Nasir's interview manners in Hausa and Kanuri, ensuring that he was asking the right questions in the right format. After Musa and I were satisfied that Nasir had taken my research objectives on board with sufficient depth of understanding, and after we had agreed upon his day rate for research assistance, he went on to carry out a total of 29 interviews on my behalf in Bama. Given his previous experience working on a resettlement project for ex-combatants, Nasir could access a wide sample of individuals that he could contact and invite

for an interview. And exactly like the interviews I conducted, no names were asked for or recorded, and instead all interviewees were identified in our records using a number for future reference. I communicated with Nasir throughout each day, ensuring that everything was going smoothly and answering any questions he had. After each interview, Nasir sent me an audio recording of the conversation and deleted all copies he had.

Moreover, though initially I relocated part of my research to Bama for practical reasons, conducting interviews in both Maiduguri and Bama allowed me to access a wider sample of respondents from all over Borno state- therefore reducing the potential effects of selection bias. This is because Bama and Maiduguri are both cities that have hosted a wide variety of individuals, from multiple ethnic groups, from all over the state, thus providing very useful places to focus my research, and to identify respondents with a diverse array of experiences and backgrounds, and from a range of different ethnic identities.

Overall, the interviews I conducted with Musa and those that Nasir conducted on my behalf comprised 52 interviews with ex-combatants with respondents aged 18-45 that identified as being from eight different ethnic backgrounds. Though the Kanuri were the majority (approx. 65%), they also included interviews with several Mafa, Margi, Waha, Shua Arab, Bolawa, Ngarmagu and Fulani ex-combatants. Additionally, of those interviewed, six held leadership roles, though, of those, only two were not Kanuri (Mafa, Ngarmagu).

Throughout the project, Nasir and Musa were invaluable to my research. This was not only because they both had first-hand experience with Boko Haram's activity in Borno, having both lived through the height of the group's expansion. Their backgrounds also helped build rapport with interviewees. As one interviewee mentioned to Nasir during an interview: *"you know what happened in Borno, you were here*."[12] It was evident from the rapport each was able to build with interviewees, that Nasir and Musa were much better positioned to build relationships that allowed respondents to talk comfortably and freely about their experiences. As LeeAnn Fujii comments in her reflections on relational interviewing, it is not always attainable to build good rapport with interviewees, despite textbook advice to this (Fujii, 2017). The reality is the structural, positional, and identity-based factors can intervene in this endeavour despite the effort researchers may put into breaking down such barriers. This is particularly true in contexts such as mine, where insecurity and mistrust are rife. Additionally, most of my respondents that were ex-combatants still held very conservative Muslim beliefs; as a result, both Musa and Nasir, who are both Muslim, and male, were better positioned to make respondents feel more comfortable when discussing their experiences. The ability to make small talk, or a culturally relevant joke with a respondent, created a foundation for shared knowledge and experience that put respondents quickly at ease. In one interview, for example, Musa joked about how one respondent was not married yet, noting: "*you are taller than I am."*[13] This very minor, but very easy and natural comment helped create a bond between the two men, which in turn helped everyone feel calmer and more open. Unfortunately, my attempts to connect with my respondents often did not have the same effect, as I learnt following an early interview with a respondent that was the same age as me. I shared with him a smile, to which I received a blank look. The ease with which both Musa and Nasir were able to create safe, intimate and empathetic interactions and experiences for respondents, opened up precisely the space needed to discuss the topics I was interested in learning about with sensitivity and nuance. The informal and friendly dynamic, that I was often unable to foster despite my best efforts, facilitated frank and open discussions that shone invaluable light on delicate questions of ethnicity, power, religion, ideology, and personal experience.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews served as the best possible medium to collect the type of data I was most interested in, as the questioning style helped create a more relaxed atmosphere and helped interview respondents feel more comfortable. Additionally, all the interviews were conducted in

[12] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[13] B4: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022

private in Hausa or Kanuri, either in a makeshift home in IDP camps or a local office that I had rented out, in order to ensure the anonymity of those interviewed.

While there are many different ethnic groups and ultimately many ethnic languages in Northern Nigeria, Hausa and Kanuri are widely spoken throughout Borno, irrespective of a person's ethnic group. Additionally, because of the large number of Kanuri people in Boko Haram, many people that lived with the group learned Kanuri, therefore speaking Kanuri or Hausa did not feel foreign.

Before commencing each interview, oral consent was obtained following an explanation of the purpose of the research. After it had been given, each interview began with some simple questions that focused on the respondent's background. For example, we asked where respondents were born, how many siblings they had, what ethnicity they were, and what ethnicity meant to them. These questions were all probed to understand the individuals better and give them time to get used to the interview format before progressing to the more sensitive questions.

Following this, the interviews moved on to questions concerning the individuals' experiences with Boko Haram. In particular, for those individuals who had either lived with or fought for the group, questions were centred around the respondent's first interaction and subsequent entry into the group. After this line of inquiry, the interview questions focused on the respondent's experience living with the group and the people they lived with. In particular, the questions focused on the nature of the respondent's unit, including the demographics, the leadership, group operations and disputes. These questions were developed and used in order to uncover any variation in experience as well as the driving reason for this.

Each interview lasted between 1-2 hours and was recorded on a recording device and immediately uploaded onto a secure drive online. While both Musa and Nasir translated the interviews they conducted for me, my project depended heavily on an interpretivist sensibility that meant I was interested in capturing the meaning conveyed by respondents, I felt it was important not to rely too heavily on Musa and Nasir's interpretations. Given their own positionality and knowledge of the conflict, and how much I learned from each of them, I was committed to ensuring I also had some understanding of my respondents' words independent of the interpretations of Musa and Nasir. With this in mind, I felt it was important to seek out additional translations, and applied for further funding from my university for this end. Due to my project's interpretivist sensibility, this request for additional translation costs was granted, and I was able to recruit Hausa and Kanuri speakers to assist in this pursuit. This served both as a form of quality control and to ensure I was not missing out on any information being given during the interviews. Since my second translator had not been involved in the interviewing and data collection in any form, and was only tasked with translating the audio word for word, the translation felt as neutral, impartial, and independent as I could get. Before starting, an NDA and contract provided by the university were signed to help ensure data protection. Additionally, all interviews were assigned numbers not names, and recordings excluded explicitly identifying information.

This exercise proved very fruitful and validating, as, in addition to a great many commonalities concerning the core themes, I also encountered a few things were translated differently by different people. For example, in many interviews, I posed the question 'what does peace mean to you?,' in order to try to better understand each respondent's positionality vis-à-vis the conflict, as well as stagger the introduction of talking about violence. I provide a specific example of some of the divergences I encountered between translators below.

In an interview with a Mafa ex-combatant, one translator recorded his response as:

> *[Peace is] to have no problems with anybody. So that's why it's very good to live in peace and harmony with anybody. It is destined by God."*

Alternatively, the other translator recorded the same respondent's answer as:

> *Peace is not bearing grudges against anyone and I know that whatever happens to me in life has already been destined by God*.[14]

Therefore, while both quotes capture very similar meanings, analysing both together helped me gain a richer and more precise understanding of what was shared during the interviews.

Using an interpretivist approach, the goal was not, therefore, "to achieve a singularly accurate objective snapshot of the world, but to develop an explanation of how people socially construct and understand the world in which they are embedded and the logics they use to navigate those worlds" (Fujii, 2018, p. 74). As a result, while my interviews were aimed at understanding ethnicity, they also helped me gain a deeper understanding of each respondent, and their relationships to and characterisations of their own life experiences.

As demonstrated by the above, I thus drew on a variety of ethnographic and interpretivist approaches and sources to understand my interviewees' experiences in their community as well as their understanding and positionality within the conflict more generally. These myriad tools each played a vital role in helping me construct and evaluate my hypotheses, and understand how and why ethnicity emerges as salient in some contexts over others, as represented by those living within the conflict.

This research contributes to the wider study on the nature of rebel groups. In particular, it speaks to the ever-growing body of research on rebel group viability, recruitment and group dynamics. It also contributes to a large body of literature on identity – and its intersection with politics – more generally. A central aim throughout this project has been to uncover how contemporary insurgent groups operate within the sub-Saharan context and add further nuance to our understanding of how conflicts and groups evolve within the region. In particular, with the changes in the nature of conflict in Africa since the publication of Ethnic Groups Conflict in 1985, as well as the works of Fearon and Laitin (2003), this dissertation hopes to add to our understanding of ethnicity and conflict with in-depth qualitative research conducted through a more nuanced interpretivist lens. While previous research in the region many have been attentive to the ethnic composition of armed groups and their leaders, this scholarship has left space for further study to uncover the effects ethnic identity has had in shaping the evolution of armed groups, alongside other political projects. In doing so, the project places the cultural and identity dynamics that exist in sub-Saharan Africa at the centre of the study.

## Plan for the rest of dissertation

The dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter Two explores the current literature on rebel groups. I highlight the salience of unit and group dynamics in understanding variation in the use of violence or coercion against civilian populations, drawing on work by Kalyvas, Weinstein, and Hoover Green. Chapter Two also explores reasons behind the different governing styles and socialisation methods used by groups, drawing on work from Mampilly, Weinstein, Arjona, and Wood, among others. The chapter ends by focusing specifically on ethnicity and religion in sub-Saharan Africa, drawing on works by Lewis, Deng and McCauley.

Chapter Three then explores the history of ethnicity and religion within the region, before providing crucial background and context on northern Nigeria and the rise of Boko Haram in the region.

Following on from this and laying the foundation for the following chapters, Chapter Four uses primary data to examine the recruitment strategies Boko Haram uses to recruit its diverse population, particularly following their expulsion from Maiduguri. In particular, it explores the important role ethnicity plays in helping disseminate information and convince people from different ethnic

[14] B1: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022.

backgrounds of the group's doctrine. The chapter closes by exploring the significance of Kanuri identity, given that the founders and most of the leadership were Kanuri.

Given the group's success in recruiting people from different ethnic groups, Chapter Five then builds on my discussion of the dissertation's primary dependent variable discussed above, exploring how and in which arenas ethnicity most commonly manifests when it is foregrounded within specific units. In particular, the chapter highlights how ethnicity shapes some individuals' experience of punishment, resource distribution and military operations. The variation in experiences across groups lays the foundation for the following chapter.

Chapter Six then presents my discussion of the role that leadership and, importantly, leadership socialisation play in explaining this variation. In particular, I discuss the significance of the mechanisms through which leaders enter leadership roles in helping us to understand when and under what conditions ethnicity becomes most salient within particular units, and when ethnicity is supplanted by the group's overarching religious doctrine and ideology. Specifically, I show that when leaders were recruited through conventional channels, their training, indoctrination, and promotion within the group leads them to value the organisation's professed ideology over any prior ethnic loyalties. This, in turn, shapes their relationships with their subordinates, particularly in the areas discussed in the previous chapter: resource distribution; military operations; and punishment, wherein group members are treated equally regardless of their ethnic identities. I show the mechanisms through which different paths to leadership are effective at dismantling ethnic loyalties within the group with crucial implications for ethnic cohesion. On the other hand, when leaders are appointed quickly to leadership positions by virtue of battlefield successes or patronage networks, ethnicity continues to take center stage, heavily shaping subordinates' experiences of resource distribution, military operations and punishment within the unit. Chapter Six summarises these dynamics, and presents evidence in support of my core argument.

The dissertation concludes with some implications of my argument in other settings, and suggestions for future research on insurgent group dynamics within the region.

# Chapter Two – Insurgent Organisation

## Introduction

> Boko Haram first came to George's village after they were pushed out of a neighbouring one by the military. When they arrived, they gathered everyone from the village and told them they would kill anyone who didn't join. Everyone complied.
>
> When I asked George how the group treated them, he answered, "*they treated us well… if you are going to follow their ideology you can live in peace and harmony… we had no other option but to follow them, and we follow their doctrine and follow their regulations and that is why they are treating us fairly*".
>
> When George and I spoke about ethnicity in Boko Haram however he spoke about how some Kanuri Emirs favoured Kanuri people and treated them differently compared to non-Kanuri members.[15]
>
> Peter first met fighters from Boko Haram when they came to his village to preach. After hearing what they had to say, and because he had no job and no money he decided to join, despite his uncle trying to dissuade him. During the three years that Peter spent with Boko Haram he said he had a good life. He told me that he found a wife, and he lacked for nothing, "*whatever I wanted, they provided*".
>
> However, Peter also spoke of the favouritism. When speaking about ethnicity he said, "*whenever we bring back items that we acquired from conquered towns, in most cases the Kanuri amongst us are given shares while those that are not Kanuri are given smaller shares*". He added, "*when we attack a particular community and most of the people there are Kanuri, they would be spared. On the other hand, if the people are not Kanuri, they would be executed.*"[16]

George and Peter's testimonies, like many of the other stories I heard in the course of my field research, demonstrate that for some, ethnicity mattered deeply for the ways in which combatants and civilians in Boko Haram were treated. Their anecdotes direct particular attention to the arbitrary killing of non-Kanuri, while Kanuri are often spared. They also highlight the uneven distribution of goods following raids. Despite the fact that Boko Haram's conflict is not an "ethnic" conflict per se, and is rarely framed in ethnic terms, Peter and George's testimonies reveal a distinct ethnic dimension, which matters deeply for the functioning and organisation of particular units.

Within the literature on insurgent groups and leadership dynamics, many works have sought to uncover and understand the different ways in which groups socialise recruits to achieve cohesion among combatant and rebel communities. In this chapter, I first review the literature on social endowments, including strategies of compliance, the ways in which rebel groups foster legitimacy, and the role and importance of ideology and socialisation. Following this, I move on to review the literature on the role of pre-existing social networks, before a discussion of ethnic politics and rebellion. Finally, I discuss the role of leadership in understanding how socialisation occurs.

[15] George*, speaking about his experience under the control of Boko Haram. Maiduguri, November 2019. George spoke of the strictness of the ruling style of Boko Haram, and the doctrine that he did not agree with and ultimately made him escape.

[16] Peter* speaking about his experience as a fighter for Boko Haram for 3 years until he was captured by the military on the way to raid a village. His ethnic background is Glabda and comes from Gwoza. When we spoke, he had just turned 19, having joined the group when he was 15.

## Theorising Social Endowments

Within the literature on rebel groups there has been a significant amount of scholarly attention to when and under what conditions armed or insurgent organisations are able to instil commitment, a sense of belonging, and a notion of shared community and values among diverse sets of recruits. Such sense of community may be particularly important when recruits are needed to wield violence against their own communities and kinship groups. For this reason, a great deal of the literature on insurgent group socialisation and political education emerges from examining variation in the use of violence or coercion against civilian populations living under armed group control. Weinstein has famously argued that groups are more likely to commit violence against civilians when they are rich in economic or material endowments as they would attract opportunistic individuals. In such contexts, group leaders do not need to engender cooperation or support from civilian populations; rather, they can "pay" them off or purchase their support through material reward. This can result in laxed discipline among combatants and higher rates of indiscriminate violence. However, if a group is resource poor, the group will necessarily be required to rely more heavily on what Weinstein terms social endowment, developing cooperative relationships with civilians and thus resulting in shows of restraint (Weinstein, 2007). Similar logics can be applied to social cohesion and political ideology within a group. It is plausible that when organisations are able to materially incentivise combatants, they are better able to shape military behavior through material reward. When organisations are resource poor on the other hand, or when they require significant costs or sacrifices from members, then some form of deeper socialisation is necessary. Deep socialisation, a phenomenon Checkel (2017) breaks into three phases, requires the full displacement of pre-existing ties and loyalties with a new governing ideology (Checkel, 2017).

The literature on violence against civilians has explored the conditions under which groups are able to inspire loyalty and discipline, as well as shape the behavior of members. Assuming that opportunistic violence against civilians is somewhat inevitable, Hoover Green argues that extrinsic incentives alone will not produce restrained behaviour. Rather, in addition to rules, rewards, and punishment, restraint requires commanders to shape combatant preferences – through what she terms a 'political education' of restraint, so that restraint itself is intrinsically rewarding (Hoover Green, 2016). This process of fostering necessarily requires learning, socialisation, and intensive re-education.

In the sections that follow, I summarise various strategies and efforts undertaken by armed groups, though predominantly by leaders, to engender cooperation among combatants, support personnel, and civilians to shed light on when, by whom, and through which openings, ethnic identity can impinge on group dynamics at a sub-unit level. I further explore the conditions under which pre-existing loyalties and commitments – often of an ethnic nature – are displaced by the organisation's overarching religious and political ideology.

## Fostering legitimacy

The internal governing styles of insurgent groups and the ways in which commanders shape and enforce expected behaviour, has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention. Indeed, despite the desire to emulate state armies, with recognised hierarchies and stable standardised units (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2018), most insurgent groups lack the necessary capacity to achieve this. As a result, insurgent groups are reliant on other means and mechanisms to develop and maintain unit and group cohesion. This is even more pertinent when the distance between the combatants and leaders increases during which time higher benefits, payoffs and incentives may be needed to compensate the lower ability to punish defection (Gates, 2002). For example, within his analysis of insurgent groups, Weinstein uncovers a number of operational strategies that are used to shape behaviour and prevent defection. In particular, Weinstein highlights the utility of hierarchical structures, as well as the importance of training, and the need to build an organisational environment that reflects shared expectations (Weinstein, 2007).

Though focusing on state militaries, Manekin argues that "participation in counterinsurgent violence is best explained by the effectiveness of the mechanisms that induce soldiers to commit violence on behalf of the military"- which she refers to as mechanisms of organisational control. These mechanisms "are broadly defined as any process that aims to motivate and direct members to act in ways that are consistent with and advance organizational objectives. While some of these mechanisms are formal, such as rules, discipline, and sanctioning", some of the most powerful "control mechanisms are *social* and include such tools as socialization, persuasion, leadership, and the creation of a shared identity and culture" (Manekin 2020, p. 5).

Rebel governing styles over civilians have similarly spurred a number of works that shed light on the different ways rebel groups choose to govern the areas that they control (see, for example, Mampilly, 2011 and Weinstein, 2007). In particular, recent efforts have focused on the ways in which these groups create and maintain legitimacy among civilians, be it building from pre-existing societal orders (Worrall, 2017), or evolving over time due to insurgents' behaviours, state intervention, and civilian perceptions (Schoon, 2017). It is evident that a group's governing style can have a lasting effect on the trajectory of the political regime following the end of conflict (Huang, 2016).

In this vein, building legitimacy within and among groups has received a significant amount of scholarly attention, particularly with regard to ensuring compliance and commitment among "followers". Legitimacy, as a concept, has several characteristics. Duyvesteyn notes that it is relational, relying on an interactive relationship between a social/political actor and his/her supposed constituents, as well as a dynamic relationship with evolving claims, progressive acceptance, and increased actions demonstrating allegiance to the emergent social order ( Duyvesteyn, 2017, p. 673). Without devoting some attention to the effective establishment of certain governing institutions or norms, rebel groups seldom succeed in establishing themselves as viable and long-lasting. It is not only the case that legitimacy and buy-in is needed among members, but also among the communities within which armed groups are embedded. Sometimes, strategies for fostering legitimacy and compliance among members and non-members echo one another. Other times, they diverge considerably. A crucial aspect of guerrilla warfare has long been understood as the perceived support for insurgent organisations among civilians and the political, psychological, and material resources they can provide for rebel groups in asymmetric warfare.

Within her exploration of the Colombian civil war, Arjona creates the distinction between rebelocracy (what she terms a 'rule of rebels' where armed groups intervene broadly in civilian affairs) and aliocracy (where armed groups only intervene by collecting resources and regulating conduct with security forces). Following this categorisation, Arjona goes on to argue that armed groups with lasting or long-term time horizons prefer the former over the latter. This is because, firstly, rebelocracies facilitate territorial control which allow armed groups to monitor and regulate activity within a given territory; secondly, controlling an area allows rebel groups to create and transform institutions that can further their interests; and finally, by influencing local life, the group also manages to elicit civilian cooperation. One of the main ways that such an approach elicits cooperation is through creation of judicial courts that can adjudicate disputes objectively (Arjona, 2016). Revkin and Abram highlight similar dynamics within Islamic State controlled Syria. Many people were impressed with the group's ability to fairly resolve long standing disputes, which in turn increased loyalty (Revkin & Ahram, 2020). However, viewing rebellions as a planned action can also miss important real-life processes that render their characterisation much less straightforward than the 'initial conditions' would predict. Guichaoua notes that rebelling can actually resemble a gradual and fragile "bricolage," whose changes can be influenced by external forces – notably by state repression – and disturbed by internal struggles over power (Guichoua, 2009). This is especially important in uncertain and unpredictable environments, where command structures are fluid or unclear, and time horizons are short. In such contexts, leaders are potentially compelled to rely more heavily on pre-existing structures, and sources of division, in order to engender discipline and control. Building legitimacy reveals itself to be a lengthy and cost-intensive process.

In building his argument on the significance of resources, Weinstein argues that the expectation of mutual exchange between rebel armies and civilian population is crucial for creating support and buy-in, among both recruits and host communities. In Uganda, the National Resistance Army (NRA) instituted a formal democratisation of local government, replacing previous structures that lacked legitimacy, and enshrining power-sharing. In return, the group faced little resistance in gathering contributions and enabled the NRA to keep the military out of civilian homes (Weinstein, 2007).

Governance does not only involve formal structures of rebel civil administration, but also the symbolic processes that governments and rebel groups deploy to give meaning to their actions. Like governments, insurgents also engage in aesthetic activities that promote solidarity and social cohesion among a diverse population, while imbuing those living around them with a sense of moral unity. Examples include flags, anthems, and uniforms, which often accompany narratives of shared belonging. Due to their relatively low cost, symbolic assets like these allow insurgencies to economise their use of material resources (Mampilly, 2015).

However, while these scholars have highlighted key aspects of how rebel groups build and hold legitimacy, further scope remains. In particular within more contemporary contexts, in understanding the role that their wider society has on them.

### Strategies of compliance: socialisation and ideology

Within his work on combatant socialisation, Barnoa (2019) argues that a soldier's process of socialisation takes place during three different phases: a preliminary phase – separation, a transition phase, and an aggregation phase. In the first phase, *separation*, recruits abandon the social position and behavioural forms they held in their former life. During this phase, all previously acquired habits and previously learned norms and values are erased. In the second phase, recruits pass through a *transition* period in which they are neither on one side nor the other, but find themselves in an intermediate space between the state of departure and that of arrival. The last phase of any military training is *aggregation*. During this phase, the individual is 'introduced into society', and becomes a relatively stable member, that is, with specific duties and rights (Barnao, 2019).

Somewhat similarly, insurgent groups are often said to share many of the same characteristics as modern military organisations that operate against a social and political backdrop of conflicting, intersecting, or sometimes competing loyalties. Like military organisations, they train personnel, gather information, raise funds, and mediate between their own decision-makers and the broader vulnerabilities, defences and countermoves of their adversaries (Leites & Wolf, 1970). Given the potential for fragmentation however, how do rebel groups create buy-in and achieve socialisation and cohesion, particularly in contexts of limited resources? This is perhaps a particularly pertinent question for armed groups that use forced or coercive recruitment and episodic violence against their own members.

Within recent scholarship it is widely acknowledged that ideology still maintains relevance in contemporary conflict. Indeed, membership in an armed group can have a significant effect on one's ideological development (Ugarriza & Craig, 2012). Moreover, ideology can serve an integral role within the internal dynamics of rebel groups, and can even prescribe the institutions and strategies to be taken for the realisation of the group's objectives (Ahmad, 2016) (Sanin & Wood, 2014), as well as affect levels of civilian victimisation (Ahmodov & Hughes, 2017) and women's participation (Wood & Thomas, 2017). As a result, rebel groups generally spend significant amounts of "time and resources producing, transmitting, and discussing ideas. They divide and fight around ideas. And they use ideas when taking 'literally life and death decisions'" (Sanin & Wood, 2014, p. 213).

However, not all emotions and ideologies are equal. Costalli and Ruggeri argue that radical ideologies are essential non-material components for violent collective action. They argue: "indignation is a

powerful trigger of armed mobilization because it impinges on the links between individuals and the people around them, relying on a shared conception of what is right and what is wrong. Radical ideological networks supporting the use of violence against the status quo, have a crucial role in causing armed mobilization because of the specific content of their doctrines." And it is because of these networks that individual discontent can aggregate and lead to collective action. Moreover, Costalli and Ruggeri distinguish between *political entrepreneurs* and *followers*, arguing that first political entrepreneurs profess a given interpretation of facts that politicise a state of affairs, and then followers join the ideological network following an emotional shock that stops them from accepting the current state of social relations. This gives political entrepreneurs the opportunity to reach out to them "with their specific frame of grievance against the regime." This in turn then alters their action tendencies (Costalli & Ruggeri, 2015, p. 120). However, not all networks are the same. Strong and entrenched networks – such as those existing by virtue of familial ties, strongly held political convictions, or shared ethnicity – can help to ensure that individual discontent can be mobilised towards collective action.

Equally, the ways in which actors – or what Ruggeri and Costalli term "followers" – are inducted into the norms and rules of a new community has spurred an expansive research agenda. For example, Cohen finds that the performance of engaging in public violent group acts, such as gang rape, can socialise otherwise non-committed members into an armed group, giving them a shared sense of community and purpose through collective behaviour and intimacy. This proves important to achieving what Weinstein terms the creation of "distinctive identities and dense interpersonal networks that can be readily mobilized in support of collective action" . Cohen notes too that gang rape restores masculinity and social status, and creates strong bonds between fighters (Cohen, 2017). Within his work on gang socialisation in Nicaragua, Rodger similarly queries the processes through which socialisation unfolds, regarding socialisation as a fluid and evolving iteration. In particular, Rodger finds that different forms of violence are related to distinct forms of socialisation that change over time depending on the group's circumstance, and often for very contingent reasons, although he acknowledges continuities and connections between different forms. For example, from 1992, following the 'maturing out' of politicised gang members that took part in the country's revolution, the Luis Fanor Hernandez gangs in Nicaragua became linked to local contexts of belonging to the neighbourhood and territorial identity, rather than to their previous political identity. As a result, violence revolved around semi-ritualised forms of gang warfare that involved either attacking or protecting a neighbourhood to engage enemy gangs (Rodger, 2017).

Hoover Green (2017) argues that combatant socialisation can be achieved through four types of armed group institutions – recruitment, military training, political education, and disciplinary procedures. These institutions which shape a combatant's behaviour, rather than their true preferences or beliefs implicated in internalisation, serve as important ways that armed group elites attempt to socialise new combatants to group norms (Hoover Green, 2017). However, the more a group grows, the more chances there are for conflicts to emerge. This is particularly true when there is growing heterogeneity among members who perform different functions. Within such circumstances shared descent and common grievance are no longer of assistance as regulating patterns. Therefore, in order to avoid conflicts of interest between units, like any other growing institution, rebel groups need to create legitimate procedures and decision-making bodies through which conflicts can be channelled. Schlichte argues that this can occur through 'formalisation', and 'patrimonialisation', although, empirically, one will always find a mixture of both (Schlichte, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that efforts at socialisation often encounter myriad barriers, obstacles and challenges, deriving from pre-existing loyalties and identities. We can learn a lot about the role of both ideology and socialisation in examining resistance and deviation within rebel movements. Indeed, as Manekin shows, armed groups at times do experience resistance from even the most well-socialised soldiers. Resistance can take countless forms: ranging from covert, everyday practices like evasion and foot-dragging, to (more rarely) "outright insubordination". Focusing on the Israeli Army as a site of extremely effective socialisation, Manekin highlights three factors that generate resistance. First, resistance can emerge when situations do not properly fit those experienced

during training, creating a sense of ambiguity which, in turn, can generate normative conflict. Second, resistance may arise among fighters who hold conflicting, more limited rules regarding the appropriate use of violence in a given situation. Finally, resistance should increase and become more overt when soldiers have social support systems that validate their dissent (Manekin, 2017, p. 607). Other research, such as that by Oppenheim et al. show that individuals who join rebel groups voluntarily for ideological reasons are less likely to defect than those that join for economic reasons. However, they are likely to disarm or side switch if the group deviates from its ideological precepts (Oppenheim, Steele, Vargas, & Weintraub, 2015).

Perhaps even more puzzling is how armed groups that use forced recruitment foster retention, commitment and compliance, a practice that was widespread throughout Boko Haram. Gates argues that there are three mechanisms of socialisation that work to ensure retention: *Type 0*, compliance whereby punishment and fear are what drive retention and decisions are based on the rational calculation of incentives; *Type 1*, role learning, where a person learns to play a role in the organisation, however, the person does not need to internalise the new norms, rather they work to create a separate identity that distinguishes them as a member of the group; and *Type 2*, internalisation, which involves preference changing which then leads to group allegiance (Gates, 2017). However, as Revkin and Ahram (2020) note, it can be difficult to discern the meaning of cooperation in highly coercive or otherwise authoritarian contexts, since compliance that is motivated by fear and coercion is: "observationally equivalent to compliance motivated by genuine belief in the legitimacy of the group" (Revkin & Ahram, 2020, p. 6).

Existing work on ideology and socialisation demonstrates that armed groups rely on a number of strategies to foster a sense of collective identity, often necessary for ensuring mobilisation and compliance. These range from education, training and indoctrination surrounding a core idea or set of ideas that a group might stand for (Hoover Green, 2016; Ruggeri, 2015); to the forced or coerced participation into acts of violence that create shared bonds among recruits (Cohen, 2017). These strategies become increasingly pertinent when rebel groups are faced with opposition that in turn can make fighters feel demoralised and susceptible to calls for disarmament and demobilisation.

Pre-existing social relationships can provide a canvas onto which the orchestration of these shared experiences can map. Shared religious identity can make it easier for unit commanders to create solidarity among troops. Yet, other identity fissures, such as ethnicity, can create additional bonds and sources of motivation layered onto a primary group cleavage. Multiple layers of identity can also create variation in levels of ownership, buy in, and investment in a movement, and be used to sow division and hierarchy. This creates a superior sense of purpose and ownership for some, while sacrificing or denigrating others. The next sections examine the literature on ethnic politics, and the effect and role of pre-existing social networks on rebel group organisation.

### Pre-existing social networks: ethnicity and religion in sub-Saharan Africa

Regarding insurgent organisations, Staniland has argued with reference to 'social-institution theory' that the structure of the pre-existing social networks upon which an armed group is built determines the organisational integration or fragmentation of the group (Staniland, 2012).

Schlichte similarly argues that the internal structures of armed groups frequently derive from the social contexts in which they emerged. More specifically, armed groups seldom exceed the degree of formalisation of their social origin. They cannot invent society anew, but depend instead on existing concepts of power, and pre-existing relationships and structures of networks of allegiance. These prior social structures create boundaries for what is possible as an organisational form. As Schlichte notes, leaders, staff, and followers do not come unstructured, but with "particular socialisations that shape their social habitus and patterns of perception and evaluations" (Schlichte, 2009, p. 154). Within sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps the most visible pre-existing social structure is that of ethnic kinship ties.

Indeed, ethnic affinity is regarded as a strong motivator for loyalty and is a readily identifiable trait (Oppenheim, Steele, Vargas, & Weintraub, 2015). Given these dense existing social networks, it is plausible that ethnic identity can serve as a powerful lever to both build legitimacy, and to engender commitment. Moreover, kinship ties can be so strong that the assumption that non-participation in a co-ethnic rebel movement affords less risk to an individual can be deeply flawed: indeed, the costs of non-participation can be extreme. Put differently, "the classic collective action formulation of collective benefits versus private cost mis-describes the nature of a major subset of violent conflict…individuals may participate in rebellion, not in spite of risk but in order to mitigate it" (Kocher & Kalyvas, 2007, p. 183). Joining a rebel group could mean a better life and better protection from the state as well as provide basic provisions that might not be awarded otherwise– a reality which a number of respondents of this study would corroborate.

Yet, given that successful rebel groups in sub-Saharan Africa frequently form in ethnically homogenous areas, the more they grow and expand into new territory, the more groups will be required to interact and recruit people from different ethnic backgrounds. This drive for enlargement and support also introduces differences among constituencies into the group itself. The larger a group gets, the more difficult it becomes to maintain coherence (Schlichte, 2009, p154). It seems clear that the relationships, societal networks, and allegiances that exist within the wider community will inevitably shape dynamics within the group as it grows and evolves.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, Ubantu philosophy holds that it is only through interactions with others that we discover our own human qualities. More specifically, an individual person is an integral part of society and individuals can, thus, only exist corporately (Venter , 2004). In sub-Saharan Africa, these interactions can encompass a canvas of social and political identities. While all identities are subjective, and "what people perceive themselves to be that principally establishes what they are" , the primary and most visible markers of identity tend to be ethnic, linguistic, and religious.

Therefore, despite the continuously evolving dynamics that are at play in the sub-Saharan region, many attributes within society are still notably influenced by these visible markers. Therefore, in order to ensure that our understanding of the region is similarly evolving, this project seeks to marry our understanding of these identities within a more contemporary context.

### Ethnic Rebellion

The role of ethnicity in the emergence of conflict, and particularly ethnic grievance in civil war, has been explored at length by scholars of international relations. Collier (2006); Balcells et al. (2016); Gurr (1993); Haysom (2018); Hoeffler (2012); Horrowitz (1985); Ilorah (2009); Kasara (2017); (Lewis 2017); Sambanis (2001); Thurston (2017); Wimmer et al (2010) for instance, have each noted the significance of political exclusion and rivalries in the competition for resource allocation in ethnically mixed societies. For example, within Horowitz's (1985) highly cited work 'Ethnic Groups in Conflict', he stresses the social, psychological and cognitive underpinning as well as the symbolic dimensions, of violent ethnic mobilisation, giving particular emphasis to comparative, anxiety-laden judgement of group worth and competing claims to group legitimacy.[17] Others, like Fearon and Laitin (2003), have questioned the significance of ethnicity as the driving catalyst of conflict, highlighting dynamics including poverty, mountainous terrain, and other geographical features of conflict-affected environments.

Building on Horowitz (1985), Denny and Walter argue that while not all members of all ethnic groups have a desire to rebel against the state, civil wars are more likely to form around ethnic cleavages. This is because ethnic groups have been historically more likely to hold grievances against the state and would have an "easier time organizing support and mobilizing a movement, and face more difficult-to-resolve bargaining problems, than groups organized along other lines" (Denny & Walter,

[17] Horowitz writes: "the contest for worth and place is the common denominator of ethnic conflict among unranked groups" (Horrowitz, 1985).

2014, p. 207). While Denny and Walter's analysis highlights the utility of ethnic ties in conflicts, they do not offer much in the way of commentary on the ways in which ethnic ties are utilised, or the effect this has on trajectories of social and political organising. While they attribute ethnic grievance as a catalyst for conflict, there is little mention of the mobilisation tactics ethnicity permits. While these works thus provide a strong foundation for exploring sub-Saharan violent organisation and rebellion, they typically fall short of examining how and in what ways ethnicity serves as an instrument of mobilisation, nor how it is used in ostensibly "non-ethnic" conflicts.

Lewis and Larson (2017) come closer to explicating a purpose of ethnic identity in violent rebellion and uprising, exploring the role of ethnic networks in ethnically homogenous and heterogeneous areas respectively. Using data collected in Uganda, they find that information spread by word-of-mouth travels to eight-times the number of people in ethnically homogenous areas compared with ethnically heterogeneous areas. This finding offers some insight into how and why mobilisation and recruitment may be more effective in contexts of ethnic homogeneity, given close network ties (Lewis & Larson, 2017).

Incorporating religious identity into the discourse on ethnic conflict, Gurses has questioned the utility of religious or other identity cleavages in supplanting ethnic ties, challenging the assumption that Islam has served as a unifier of ethnicity. With reference to the Turkish Kurdish conflict, Gurses argues that the utility of the Islamic brotherhood thesis has been overstated and is inadequate in addressing strong ethno-nationalist demands from a large segment of the Kurdish population (Gurses, 2015). Moreover, Souleimanov (2018) comments on the impact of ethnicity in shaping Dagestan's jihadi groups and argues that while ethnic identity is still salient, within urban areas, Salafi-Jihadi ideology is more pronounced, as it is used to overcome ethnic diversity compared to rural, mono-ethnic areas.[18] Additionally, Souleimanov notes that ethnic ties often dictate the group's targets, with members not wanting to attack co-ethnics (Souleimanov, 2018).

In looking at competition within militant groups, Conrad et al. (2021) find that groups that share the same general political motivations are more prone to competition. In particular, militant group dyads sharing the same ethnic field are more likely to engage in rivalry than dyads that do not share the same ethnic field. This is because said groups claim to represent the interests of the same discrete population, thereby triggering (at least the perception of) a zero-sum game. Additionally, militant group dyads are also more likely to engage in rivalry as power asymmetry increases. However, the impact of power asymmetries is only associated with rivalry among groups representing the same ethnicity (Conrad, 2021).

Regarding mobilisation in Africa, McCauley explores why some conflicts are ethnic and others religious. Using examples from Nigeria, Sudan and Ivory Coast, McCauley argues that social identity types – such as ethnicity, religion – evoke different preferences, therefore political entrepreneurs are thus able to frame and reframe conflicts in ways that inspire collective action and that advance their goals (McCauley, 2017). However, while McCauley's work provides key insights into conflict mobilisation in Africa, his work leaves scope for further research on the effects of each mobilisation tactic on group dynamics.

Evidently, ethnicity has featured extensively in the literature on conflict and violence in sub-Saharan Africa. While it was previously argued that ethnic diversity, in part, was the cause of instability (Morrison & Stevenson, 1972), a number of works since have challenged this notion, with many now viewing wars and uprisings as situational rather than due to structural factors, or as a result of opportunity (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Nonetheless, despite this resistance to the reductionism or simplification of ethnicity in conflict, many civil wars clearly still have ethnic dimensions to them (Denny & Walter, 2014).

[18] Dagestan, officially the Republic of Dagestan, is a federal subject of Russia, located in the North Caucasus region.

## Clashing loyalties: leadership and socialisation

As noted, following recruitment, insurgent groups seek to socialise new recruits through several mediums. However, despite their best attempts, socialisation often encounters a myriad of barriers. In particular, pre-existing loyalties, such as ethnicity, frequently come into conflict with new values, commitments, and political ideology. As argued by Lyall, military recruits are not blank slates on which training inscribes a new identity (Lyall, 2020). If not tackled, these previous identities can diverge from the organisation, and when they have social support networks that validate their divergent choices, resistance is likely to increase and become more overt (Manekin, 2017).

Therefore, in order to mitigate the likelihood of previous identity tropes impinging on group cohesion, insurgent group institutions, in particular, political (re)education, as well as military training, are integral. This is because they serve to dislodge pre-existing loyalties and supplant earlier kinship ties with a new sense of belonging to a new political identity. Scholars such as Checkel (2017), Hoover Green (2017), and Weierstall (2013) have similarly spoken on the role and significance of group institutions in socialising combatants.

Moreover, following recruitment, the role of a unit leader is to continue to shape the group's culture in line with that of the group through continued political education at the sub-group level. As a result, said leaders have a profound effect on shaping group culture and the continued socialisation of its members. However, as a result, the level of socialisation that the leader has attained is very important and has a direct impact on the unit dynamics.

Although the pathways to leadership roles within groups like Boko Haram are not standardised or regulated for lower-level positions due to the environment in which they exist, individuals often demonstrate their suitability and distinguish themselves from their comrades through three main pathways: military accomplishment, religious intelligence, and ethnic affinity.

However, if an individual is promoted as a result of a pathway that does not ensure their internalisation of the group's ideology, it can have a significant impact on the unit dynamics, in particular, the salience of ethnicity.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, there has been an extensive amount of work done by scholars seeking to understand the inner workings of rebel groups, as well as the role ethnicity and religion might play in shaping group ideology, governance, and cohesion. Nevertheless, there is still clear scope for further study on how these three phenomena interact in recent and ongoing conflicts. In particular, building on multiple works cited throughout this chapter, this thesis aims to add further clarity to our understanding of how insurgents operate in contexts where different sets of loyalties come into contact with one another, and how these interactions shape how the group and its members operate.

Before moving on to present this dissertation's key arguments and findings, Chapter 4 first offers some brief background and context on the interaction between ethnicity and religion more broadly in sub-Saharan Africa, before moving on to provide some historical perspective on northern Nigeria and the emergence and evolution of Boko Haram.

# Chapter Three - History

> *The Kanuri people, …right from the word go are Islamized. I can refer you to one of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, when he was in Medina on mountain Uhud where they fought one of the worst battles and he raised up his hands and said amen, amen, amen. So when he got down, his followers asked why he did what he did and he said it was Angel Gabriel that called me and I climbed up. He told me that there are people in the far west surrounded by a very good lake which has the best fishes (referring to Lake Chad), God says that even before you were born, they have accepted that when you come to the world, they will accept you and your religion. God has blessed them and that was why I said amen. When he was further asked who were these people? He said they are normally black in nature, after a century or two they will come and identify themselves with their tribal marks to know that these are my right followers, that is, Kanuri*.[19]

I met Samuel in the car park of a building near Maiduguri University in 2019 during my first trip to Nigeria. After greeting, we walked towards some shade and sat under an Acacia tree to hide from the midday sun. He spoke with excitement and pride throughout our conversation, eager to teach me about the Kanuri people, and their religious history. He spoke on the connection between them as a people and the Islamic religion, and how they "*are the true Muslims;[how]..any good Kanuri man, before he takes his son or daughter to school will first educate them in the Islamic way*".

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Both ethnicity and the most popular religions in sub-Saharan Africa have been heavily influenced by exogenous actors. For example, both Christianity and Islam, which today are the two largest religions on the continent[20], were introduced and spread by foreign actors, e.g., traders and missionaries. Today more than a third of all Muslims are concentrated in Africa, and this is projected to increase, with Islam set to take over Christianity as the largest religion in the world.[21] One reason for this is that Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, on average, are younger and have a higher fertility rate than the overall population (Hackett & Lipka, 2017).

Similarly, ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa, as it is known today, is the result of interference from exogenous actors, mainly colonial powers. Nevertheless, over time, religion and ethnicity have become intertwined. Today many ethnic groups view their ethnic identity as synonymous with their faith; for example, as can be seen in Samuel's words above and in the way the Kanuri people pride themselves on having been the first Muslims in what is now Nigeria.

In this chapter, I will explore the history of ethnicity and religion in sub-Saharan Africa as well as multiple histories of Nigeria, including the events and catalysts that led to the advent of Boko Haram. By doing so, this chapter aims to better contextualise the conflict, laying the groundwork on which to build our understanding of the questions this dissertation takes on.

## Ethnic identity in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ethnicity, at its core, is a shared identity between people; one constructed through interaction- though mainly inherited at birth, bestowed to an individual to satisfy the human need for belonging and one that remains after all else is lost, almost like providing "a psychological safety net" (Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006, p. 102).

[19] Samuel: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2019
[20] 93% of the population (Pew Research Centre, 2016)
[21] Muslims currently constitute 30% of religious people in Africa (Pew Research Centre, 2016)

However, while individually our understanding of ethnicity can be reduced to something simplistic and digestible, collectively, it is far from this. In fact, there is no formulation for the delamination of group membership that holds for every recognised group (Lynch, 2015). Nevertheless, ethnicity frequently overlaps or replaces other concepts, functioning like a joker in a card game– it can be introduced into various play sequences, taking on whichever characteristic the player wishes.

While its presence can be seen worldwide, it is in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, that ethnicity has perhaps attracted the most fascination from onlookers. Within academia, the number of scholars that have sought to explore and, at times simplify, its role is vast. Earlier perceptions of ethnicity as a primitive concept have been abandoned. Nonetheless, when you ask an African person what their ethnicity is and what it means to them, an answer frequently given is one akin to an 'extended family'. In northern Nigeria, when I asked my interviewees this question, they often replied with the same answer, or as one respondent called Mary explained: "my ethnic identity is very important to me, and I'm very proud of my tribe even though I don't quite understand it".[22] Despite all the negative connotations ethnicity still holds, even referred to at times as an 'African problem,' when analysed in relation to its effect on nation building, millions of people still regard it with value – and whether its significance is good for the continent or not, it would be foolish to ignore this fact.

Historically, its foundation is similarly the product of interaction. While there was significant heterogeneity in political centralisation with reportedly centralised decision-making processes in pre-colonial Africa (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013), it was only during colonialism that ethnicity developed into what it has come to be understood as today. This is often attributed to the different governing styles that colonial powers used (Mamdani, 2003).

Methods of direct and indirect rule were chosen to deal with what was known as the 'native problem':[23] the fear that "detribalised' natives, freed from the yoke of traditional power, would stretch policing powers thin. This prompted colonial officials to find and delineate tribes and tribal leaders with whom they could work with (Lynch, 2015, pp. 96-97) – though they only ruled at the pleasure of the colonial state (Robinson 2019). In exchange, they provided incentives such as access to centralised resources to foster relationships, in time often creating entirely new ethnic communities. The result was the cementing of ethnic grouping and connectedness– partly helped by European missionaries who shaped the content of new communities by standardising local languages to disseminate 'God's Word'. Moreover, subjects were encouraged to associate with specific areas, and geographic space became intertwined with particular ethnic communities, fuelling a sense of difference and tension between 'locals' and 'outsiders' (Lynch, 2015).

Following the end of colonial rule, many new African leaders sought to create more unified states that transcended the ethnic legacy left by the continent's previous powers. However, despite the introduction of new unifying concepts like 'Pan Africanism', the colonial experience persisted in encouraging "Africans to think and act ethnically" (Lynch, 2015, p. 99). Of course, there was still lip service given to the idea of national identity, but deep-down sentiments and actual practice portrayed a different reality, and allegiance was placed on other markers. As a result, the sense of national identity remained the least developed of all the political identities in Africa. And African leaders, who, instead of correcting the legacies of colonialism, adopted a similar stratagem of divide-and-rule, one that manipulates ethnic loyalties to retain power. This led to an accompanying feeling from the wider populace that one's co-ethnic was, and is, the best option to ensure that they share in the available wealth.

Within conflict, ethnicity has for decades been regarded as a villain. Africa not only has the highest level of ethnic diversity, but also the highest incidences of civil war (Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006). As a result, ethnicity, over nationalism, is often perceived as a fissuring plague on society, one that turns

[22] Mary: Female, Mandara. Borno 2019
[23] How to rule a large number of subjects with so few European personnel.

'man against man', resulting in incomprehensible levels of violence against civilians. However, while the past debate on whether ethnic diversity is the cause of conflict is somewhat settled (Wimmer et al, 2010), it does not mean that its effect on conflict is no longer worth studying. Moreover, while "ethnicity is powerful, it is neither absolute nor immutable, nor is it inherently destructive" (Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006, p. 102). Therefore, as the nature of conflicts develop, so should our understanding of its role.

## Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa

Islam reached Africa through two routes: the east and the north– navigating unheeded through the vastness of the Indian Ocean and the Sahara (Levtzion & Pouwels, 2000). Given its long history, it is not unreasonable to argue that, in parts of the continent, Islam has "been inextricably, and intimately, linked since the inception of the faith in the seventh century CE" (Reese, 2014). In fact, oral tradition claims that the first Muslims in Africa appeared while the prophet Mohammed was still alive (BBC World Service , 2021). Additionally, Bilal, a former slave from Africa is said to be one of Muhammad's earliest followers and is regarded as the first Muezzin (Reese, 2014).[24] Since then, Africa has had its own continuum of high and low indigenisation of Islam. At times this has been violent, as well as more peaceful through the absorption of traditional practices-–though at times, this has created a pretext for Jihad (for example, with the killing of Sufi leaders in Somalia by Al Shabab (Al Jazeera , 2018). Nevertheless, this absorption created societies which were thoroughly Muslim on one hand and thoroughly indigenous on the other (e.g., The Sudan, and parts of the Horn of Africa) (Platvoet, 1996).

However, while the Islamic faith is undeniably grounded in African society, it is also equally connected to a much broader global community exchange, with African Muslims playing an active role in the creation of the multidirectional flows of knowledge that crisscross Islamic space. In fact, African Muslims have for a long time been pursued as teachers and experts in the Islamic sciences. For example, in the eighteenth century, the famed Indian scholar Murtada al-Zabidi sought constant advice and maintained extensive epistolary relationships with several scholars from Western Sudan. Most notably, this included Jibril bin Umar, an early teacher of Uthman dan Fodiyo, founder of the nineteenth-century Sokoto caliphate– though more on him later (Reese, 2014).

Nevertheless, like Christianity, Islam won most of its converts in Africa after 1920. This was because the infrastructure that the colonial state developed (Platvoet, 1996) ironically, allowed for religious texts to pass easier and faster. For example, it was the Dutch East India Company that introduced Islam to the southern tip of the continent, helping form the Cape Malay Muslim community (Reese, 2014).

Despite the different mix of endogenous and exogenous religions being practiced in Africa, the region has predominantly experienced the peaceful coexistence of religions (Lado, 2014). However, in the past decade, armed conflicts with religious overtones in countries like the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Nigeria and Somalia have been on the rise, especially when you look at their share of conflicts overall.[25] This is despite the fact that religious discrimination is the lowest in the sub-Sahara compared to other parts of the world, including the Western world. However, within their research on the drivers of religious conflict, Basedau and Schaefer-Kehnert found that discrimination is not a direct driver of religious conflict[26], though it can contribute to it when you take into account

[24] The individual responsible for calling believers to prayer.
[25] In 2017, eight out of ten conflicts had a religious dimension
[26] There are two kinds of religious conflicts; 'interreligious armed conflicts', which refer to violence between factions that differ according to their religious identities – for example, Muslims and Christians – and theological armed conflicts, which refer to violence between parties that are incompatible with regard to religious ideas – for instance, the role of religion in the state– and which are currently often, but not always Islamist conflicts (Basedau, 2017).

contextual conditions (such as state failure to provide law and stability), and not so obvious, indirect causal mechanisms – all of which allow quasi-religious narratives to become instrumentalised.

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## History of Nigeria and the road to Boko Haram

The Nigerian state, as it exists today, did not exist until 1914, when Frederick Lugard, the 1st Baron Lugard, combined the British Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The resulting colony was notably diverse, with 374 ethnic groups (Mustapha, 2005) and a Muslim north and a Christian south.[27]

About 100 years before the British arrived in Nigeria, the northern region was captured by the Fulani shaykh Usman dan Fodio, a well-respected Fulani Islamic Scholar who is considered the founder of Islam in Nigeria (Comolli, 2015). He was critical of the previous Hausa Kingdom for mixing Islam and pagan tradition and gained a number of followers amid the growing conflicts between and within the regions states.[28] As noted by Maishani and Maishanu;

> Apart from the insecurity to which the peasantry was subjected, they were over-burdened with heavy taxation and extortion by the ruling class… This coincided with the rising awareness of Islam among the peasantry… As Islamic awareness increased…[Islamic] scholars become more and more critical of their societies…with all of [their] iniquity and un-Islamic attitudes (Maishanu & Maishanu, 1999, pp. 122-123)

Over some time, and after gaining a number of followers, Dan Fodio started to encourage his followers to carry arms and commence a Holy war. This ultimately led to the formal declaration of a Jihad; however, interestingly, Comolli notes that Dan Fodio and his followers also used religion as an instrument with which to assert Fulani ethnic supremacy over the then powerful Hausa, cultivating resentment even amongst the non-Muslim Fulani (Comolli, 2015). This is because the nomadic Fulani, who normally received grazing rights from the local Hausa, often clashed with their hosts over the use of water resources and damage to farmlands or crops. "The jihad thus afforded the Fulani clansmen the opportunity to recalibrate power relations in their favour. Many Fulani clansmen simply rode on the jihad to overthrow the local Hausa kings and emerge as Emirs" (Fyanka, 2021, pp. 1-2).

Known as the 'Sokoto Jihad Movement', which Miles describes as "the most classic Jihad", Dan Fodio and his followers conquered most of the Hausa territory and established the 'Sokoto Caliphate' in 1804 (Miles, 2000).[29] Following that, the Caliphate was divided into two and "entrusted, for administrative purposes to 'Abd Allah Fodio and Muhammad Bello, the brother and son of Dan Fodiyo" who once in power, entrenched Islam and enforced Sharia Law, while Dan Fodio retired to a life of asceticism and scholarship; creating manuals that served as guides for the Caliphate until he died in 1817 (Maishanu & Maishanu, 1999, p. 129).

By the end of the 18th century, however, British, French, and German interests were competing for the territories of the caliphate– which by then wielded more spiritual than military power (Miles, 2000). By 1903 British predominance had been extended through force (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 86) and Sokoto eventually succumbed to the British. However, while the European Christian

[27] "Many indigenous leaders welcomed Christian missionaries in the belief that these missionaries would help them gain influence with their god and with British political agents against their rivals in times of political instability and economic transformation" (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 89).
[28] Known as Jamā'ah, who gradually evolved into a separate, assertive community (Maishanu & Maishanu 1999).
[29] It was only the Borno Kingdom which never fell, with its leader Muhammad al-Kanemi successfully fighting off the Fulani attack by defending a combination of Qur'anic principles and pre-Islamic practices.

missionaries were successful in spreading Christianity in the south of the country, it did not spread significantly in the Islamic territories, even after official British rule was established (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Nevertheless, despite their defeat, the Sokoto Caliphate still holds importance for Muslims in Northern Nigeria, as well as throughout the world. Its history is a source of pride, and its legacy provides a sense of community and cohesion. Moreover, it also left "behind a structure of traditional governance, centred on the caliphate emirs and their inheritors. This pride is reinforced by the fact the caliph did not surrender to British rule but fought to the death" (ICG, 2010, p. 4).

### Colonialism

As noted, as was their governing strategy in most of their colonies, the British developed a system of 'indirect rule'. This system placed indigenous peoples in leadership positions to govern over the local populace in a way that the local people were accustomed to.[30] More specifically, rather than replacing them with British officers and institutions, they "maintained and utilized the region's existing forms of administration, from regional emirs to local judges" (Reynolds, 2001, p. 601). In Northern Nigeria, the British simply replaced the "administrative superstructure that had governed the Sokoto Caliphate with a British duplicate… The kofa, who had once overseen the activities of the emirs on behalf of the Sultan of Sokoto was replaced with a British Resident, who reported directly to the high commissioner" (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 115). One reason for this approach was because the British were mindful of their colonial experience in Sudan and their initial defeat by the indigenous army during the Mahddist revolt and, as a result, were aware of the power of local rulers to mobilise opposition to their presence along religious lines (Comolli, 2015). [31] Nevertheless, this placed "the political and military elite of the northern part of Nigeria in a position to play a dominant role even after independence (Robinson, 2000, p. 139), in particular, the Hausas and Fulani. However, given the imbalance of power seen in the North, one result of indirect rule was the conversion to Christianity for many of the regions' minority groups who saw it as an escape from subordination by the emirates placed in power.

British rule had several lasting impacts on the region. Firstly, while the British retained Islamic law, they restricted Sharia law to the jurisdiction of local-level indigenous courts. Towards the end of their rule, they objected to Sharia law and claimed it was incompatible with citizens' rights in a religiously plural society. As a result, the north region accepted the 'Penal Code', which established Sharia law, but only for Muslim personal law. However, many Muslim leaders saw this as elevating Christian jurisprudence over Islamic judicial heritage. Secondly, they altered the region's economy and demography by attracting migration from the south to the north and cities more generally. However, this ethnic migration did not lead to integration. Local leaders were very territorial and the British discouraged non-Muslims from moving to Muslim areas, designating them to the 'strangers' quarters'. This distinction between indigenous and stranger "sharpened ethno-religious identities and reinforced discriminatory practices that continue to influence relationships between the Hausa and the Fulani and other urban dwellers" (ICG, 2010, p. 5).

Independence in Nigeria was ushered in by regionally based political parties with memberships that were divided among ethnic lines. As a result, the independence "achieved in 1960 was a fragile one, unified under a federal constitution in which politically conscious ethnic groups vied for control of the central government" (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 137). As noted by Chief Obafemi Awolowo;

> Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English,' 'Welsh,' or 'French.' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a

[30] However, they were still subordinate to British officers who maintained overarching power.
[31] Lyall argues that one reason for their victory was due to the egalitarian and inclusive notions of collective Mahdist community that translated to low military inequality.

> distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not (Onwubu, 2008, p. 399).

Moreover, some northerners objected to the end of British rule. They thought it would mean that the more developed south would dominate them given their higher levels of European education. This view "among Muslims concerning public authority in the far north – mistrusted in its relations with secular or Christian "others" (external powers, neighbours or compatriots) – continued after independence" (ICG, 2010, p. 7).

### Post-colonialism and the rise of anti-state resistance

Nigeria achieved independence on October 1, 1960. The state was then divided into three federal regions (Northern, Western and Eastern), with the northern region led by Sardauna Ahmadu Bello of the Northern People's Congress (NPC). [32] However, despite being coined the 'Giant of Africa', instability and conflict, driven partly by a lack of national identity, would later mar the large nation. In the north, Bello proclaimed a 'One North, One Nation' principle and worked to replace the transplanted southern employees in the regional and provincial civil services with northerners, though his efforts did not take into account the region's minorities. Additionally, Bello also sought to promote Islam as a unifying tool and oversaw the conversion of over 100,000 non-Muslims– which in turn created a fear of Islamic hegemony (ICG, 2010).

Despite efforts from local artists and scholars to try to create a new shared Nigerian identity, corruption, ethnic bating, and bullying dominated the political landscape of the First Republic, which governed from 1960-1970. Moreover, attempts to create a shared identity were met with fear from most Nigerians as they saw it as being dominated by another identity. Southerners from the eastern and western regions feared northern domination, and as noted, Northerners feared southern domination. These fears eventually led to flawed elections in 1964 and 1965, after which many Nigerians believed that the Federal system did not work. This all culminated in the overthrowing of the civil democratic regime by military officers in 1966 with the killing of Bello,[33] and again between 1967 and 1970 when the eastern region attempted to secede from Nigeria.[34] However, an alliance of the other regions was able to reincorporate them back into the state (Falola & Heaton, 2008).[35]

Following the end of the civil war (Nigerian-Biafran war), the Nigerian economy grew significantly, thanks to the petroleum sector's expansion in early 1970. However, the wealth was unequally distributed and only benefitted those who had access to state power, rather than improving living conditions. The result was a government apparatus that was increasingly divorced from its subjects, resulting in a disconnection between the needs of the people and the actions of the government. Three different regimes, two military and one civilian, oversaw the growth of the oil economy between 1970 and 1983. However, all three mismanaged funds and helped create a kleptocracy. As a result, a number of dissatisfied populations turned to religion, with many demanding the adoption of Sharia law– inspired in part by the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 (Comolli, 2015). While there were several peaceful movements, one of the more radical sects that emerged was the Maitatsine movement in 1980 in Kano. The group, which was led by Mohammed Marwa, opposed the corruption and decadence that was going on, and were thought to have been smuggling weapons into Kano. This led to a state clampdown of the group, which in turn led to wide-scale rioting. In the end, 5000 people

[32] Each region was dominated by a majority ethnic group the Hausa–Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Ibo in the Eastern Region. The remainder of the population in each region consisted of a number of minority tribes with their own separate culture and languages– included in this group was the Kanuri in the Northern Region

[33] This was a particular setback for the North as it ended Bello's effort to forge greater unity, as well as restore the heritage of the Sokoto Caliphate (ICG, 2010).

[34] Known as the Nigerian-Biafran War.

[35] With many recruits and new officers who were from the northern minority groups.

were killed, including Marwa, as well as substantial property damage (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 206).

Democratic rule did not return until 1999 under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military ruler turned politician.[36] However, its return was a sober occasion for many in the far north who had lost control of the political power they possessed under the previous military regimes and now were faced with the challenge of designing new strategies for regional self-assertion in the federation. It was within this context that the Zamfara state governor in the north initiated the campaign for restoration of Sharia due to the controversies over the country's religious identity.

Since 1999 Nigeria has maintained democratic rule under the leadership of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015) and the return of Buhari from 2015 to date, though a number of unknown health scares have put his presidency at risk (Daily Sabah, 2021). Moreover, while to date, several new security issues, including an increase in violence in Kaduna State, can be seen, for the first time since 1999, none of the candidates in the upcoming 2023 presidential elections are an incumbent or former military leader– a source of hope for many Nigerians (Micheni, 2023).

### The Advent of Boko Haram

Boko Haram started to establish itself in northern Nigeria in early 2000, and while their strategy has evolved, their central message stayed the same.

Beginning as a mass religious movement and transitioning to an armed struggle (Thurston, 2018) since its shift into violence, Boko Haram has continuously evolved, the leadership has changed, and the group split into two main competing groups, namely, JAS and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). And while their strength today is uncertain, ISWAP at least is known to still operate within the region.

### Back story

The group's founders Mohammed Yusuf and his future successor Abubaker Shekau, both Kanuri, were born in rural settings, though they became mobile as young men and developed a growing political and religious consciousness. Nevertheless, most accounts of Boko Haram cite 2002 as the year the group formed. During that time Yusuf began preaching in Maiduguri, initially at the Indimi Mosque, under the tutorship of Ja'far Adam. However, by 2003 he had been pushed out and later established his own mosque complex, 'the Iban Taymiyya Markaz' (Centre). Moreover, Thurston notes that, at least in part, the friction that led to Yusuf's exit from the Indimi Mosque had ethnic dimensions. In particular, some Kanuri attendees at the mosque felt that Adam, who was Hausa, had monopolised the platform and denied Kanuri Muslims leadership roles. As a result, when Yusuf left Indimi, he took the Kanuri followers with him.

Nevertheless, during these early years Yusuf was able to gain a large following given his youth perspective and his command of the Qur'an. Throughout his lectures, Yusuf demonstrated skill and speed in on-the-spot translations of Qur'anic verses into Hausa and Kanuri.

Once in control of his own mosque, Yusuf's following grew even more, though at this stage was considered no more than a nuisance by the local elite, despite his scathing critiques of the government. As his influence grew however, the elite began to become aware of his political influence, particularly among his constituency of poor and working people.

[36] There was a period of unstable civilian rule from 1979 to 1983, though it was cut short by the coup of General Buhari.

In 2003 the group members, particularly those with more hardliner views, left Maiduguri and settled in Zaji-Biriri village in Tarmuwa Local Government (LGA), Shekau's home LGA. Here they established a commune outside Kanamma, Yunusari LGA, near the border with Niger. Initially, the group stayed away from the wider society in the area, only occasionally working on nearby farms for money. However, after some time, the hardliners began to clash with locals, most likely over resources or the conscription of local men to work in their camps. This led to clashes with authorities who destroyed the camp and arrested members causing others to rise up in December 2003. Around sixty fighters attacked Kanamma's police station, then raided the town of Geidam before marching to Damaturu, Yobe's capital, where they faced a stronger resistance from the military and were subsequently crushed in Geidam and Kanamma.

The extent Yusuf was involved in the Kanamma group is unconfirmed. Some speculate that he helped plan the group's activities, while others claim he knew nothing about it. Moreover, at this stage, the extent to which Yusuf's views aligned with the hardliners is equally conjecture—often fluctuating from the supposed rejection of secular governments to permitting cohabitation as long as it does not contradict Islamic principles. However, he would later settle with the hardliners who called for jihad.

### Turning point

The application of Sharia law to ensure morality both politically and socially has been a long-standing issue for many northern states in Nigeria. It began in 1999 when Ahmed Sani Yeria, the governor of Zamfara announced he would fulfil his campaign promise and implement Sharia law throughout the state's legislative process. However, the response from the southern and middle-belt Christians was extremely negative– with politicians arguing that it was unconstitutional and would bring about unwanted new rules and restrictions.

In Borno, in order to win the state elections, it is speculated that Ali Modu Sherif, the former governor of Borno gained the support of Yusuf and his supporters by promising to apply a strict form of Sharia law (de Montclos, 2014), as well as bring Yusuf's movement into his government. However, the alliance did not last. Soon after the 2003 elections Yusuf was no longer needed, and the promise of Sharia law was never achieved. After this, Yusuf became a nuisance for Sherif, and the following election in 2007 marked a new phase in the rapture of their relationship– during which time Yusuf's relations with authorities also deteriorated.

In April 2007, after members of Boko Haram were arrested, hundreds of Yusuf's followers attacked a police station in Kano to free them, evoking a military deployment to calm the situation. The following year, Yusuf was repeatedly arrested, but the police and the State Security Service (SSS) were disorganised and repeatedly failed to show up for court hearings. Nevertheless, the more Yusuf was repressed, the more his support grew. Additionally, throughout the first months of 2009, Yusuf continued to travel around the north, though he was often met with hostility from local authorities. As a result, by the spring of 2009, Boko Haram members were leaving Maiduguri for paramilitary training.

In November 2008, Sheriff launched an anti-banditry program called '*Operation Flush II'* with joint military and police participation, increasing tension on Borno's roads. Though Operation Flush was not targeted directly at Boko Haram but rather at banditry in general, Yusuf saw the program as being inherently anti-Boko Haram. As a result, when the operation started to detain and fire on Boko Haram fighters, the stage was set for a conflict, in particular, following the enforcement of motorcycle helmets and a banning of riding bikes at night. As noted by Kyari Mohammed;

> *The immediate trigger for the clash was the introduction of the wearing of crash helmets and the ban on the riding of motorcycles in Maiduguri metropolis after nightfall, and the attempt by the Operation Flush II to enforce it. Maiduguri residents seem to have reluctantly acquiesced to these orders and violators had been flogged while motorcycles were seized with*

> *impunity. Note the followers of Mohammed Yusuf who refused to wear crash helmets, often ride three – in – one as overloading in motorcycle is called, and continued to ride their motorcycles after nightfall. They dared the state and openly called the state governor expletives for harassing innocent citizens. In Governor Ali Sheriff's emporium where there is no room for dissent, Mohammed Yusuf was the only man still standing and openly challenging him.* (Mohammed, 2009)

Once the uprising began, Yusuf described Boko Haram as the victims of state violence rather than aggressors and the conflict as existential and spiritual. However, it was not until an IED explosion killed its manufacturer Sani Balami, as well as several attacks across the northern states, that authorities became aware of the magnitude of the threat and the need to act quickly (Mohammed, 2009). To which they responded with brutality.

On July 29th, security forces stormed Yusuf's compound in Maiduguri, though they did not find Yusuf until the 30th. Nevertheless, following an interrogation, they shot and killed him "either by the official account, because he tried to escape, or, more likely because someone in the chain of command had decided that the only way to end the conflict was to kill him".

### Boko Haram's return

Despite the belief by some state officials that the suspected extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf would bring about the end of Boko Haram, the group was more than able to regroup and reorganise. As accurately noted by Kyari following the death of Yusuf;

> *The next Boko Haram like uprising is a matter of when and where, and not if. Second, in swiftly despatching Mohammed Yusuf, the state only succeeded in killing the public face of the Boko Haram movement. Thus, rather than dealing with a known figure with fixed address in Mohammed Yusuf, the state has now pushed the sect underground and martyred its leadership with deleterious consequences for national security.* (Mohammed, 2009)

By September 7th, 2010, following the ascension of Shekau to leadership, the group returned, launching a number of hit and run attacks as part of the group's restructured reorganisation into a jihadist, guerrilla force. "As Boko Haram turned to terrorism, the sect sought not just to present itself as a victim of Christian aggression, but also enflame Muslim-Christian aggression". However, by spring 2011 the attacks became more indiscriminate. By late 2011, the group was carrying out attacks on major cities outside of Maiduguri, including in the capital Abuja.

## Internal Splintering

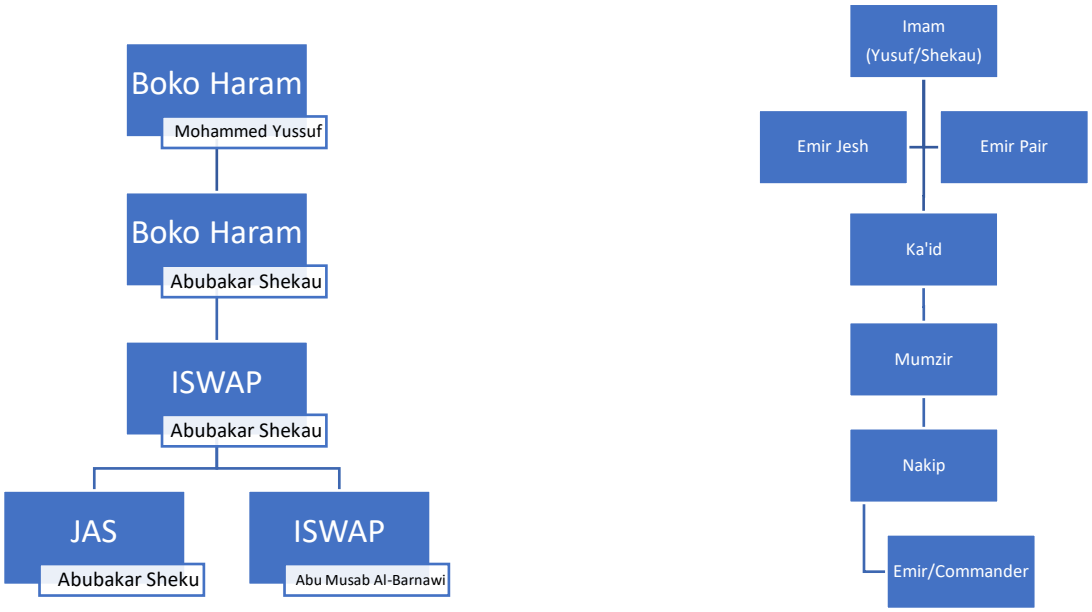


*Figure 1- Boko Haram and its Splinter Groups and Group Hierarchy*

The Boko Haram leadership structure comprised of seven levels. At the top of the hierarchy was the Imam, who was Abubakar Shekau until his death in 2021. Below him was the *Emir Jesh*, followed by the *Emir Pair, Ka'id, Mumzir, Nakip*, and finally, the local unit *Emirs* who controlled the different communities in the region, also called commanders.

Prior to the ascension of Shekau to leadership, following the killing of Yusuf in 2009, his lieutenants, namely, Abu-Bakr Sehaku, Khalid Al-Barnawi, Kaka Allai, Mustapha Chad, Abu Maryam, and Mamman Nur, alongside some followers, went into hiding in the Sambisa Forest during which time Shekau was chosen as the new leader. The Jamatu Ahli AlSunna lil Da'wa Wal Jihad (JAS) shortly emerged and quickly became the deadliest terrorist group in the world (Ahmed, 2014), attacking any persons or body that was suspected to be sympathetic to the state, or did not follow the group's tenets– including Muslims.

Additionally, following the death of Yusuf, Shekau attempted to forge a relationship with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), requesting assistance with funding, training, and expertise, such as bomb-making and waging tactical asymmetric armed campaigns.[37] However, while initially al-Qaeda provided support, this relationship soon soured because of accusations made about Shekau as a leader, particularly his interpretations of Islam. As a result, eventually a group of dissidents from within the Boko Haram leadership, or shura council, including Boko Haram's previous third in command Mamman Nur, sent AQIM leaders letters accusing Shekau's leadership of being incompatible with the tenets of Islam.

[37] "This trend of local groups seeking deeper affiliation with global parent groups upon loss of leadership would also be seen in the case of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) in Sinai and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Congo.

For their part, the dissidents, realising that Shekau was unlikely to change his stripes, struck out and, in 2012, formed the breakaway Boko Haram faction called Ansaru. At its core, Ansaru's formation was motivated by Shekau's penchant for gratuitous violence against Muslim civilians, his inability to handle criticism and, most significantly, the poor theological justification for his misguided leadership. However, one respondent noted that it was because "*Mamman Nur also wanted to be a leader, and if he had not defected, he would not have gotten a chance to become a leader*".[38] Nevertheless, Shekau was able to retain most of the group's fighters– a result of his 'charismatic' appeal, as highlighted by a number of respondents– and sought out alternative international affiliations.[39] Namely, AQIM's rival, IS (Ahmed, 2014).

By 2015, Shekau pledged allegiance to IS Caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, as a result of more ideological commonalities between the two groups, to which Al-Baghdadi accepted and named Shekau 'Waly' (leader) of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Moreover, following the formalisation of the allegiance Nur and his fighters would reintegrate into Boko Haram at some point after Ansaru ceased to operate in 2013; however, his reservations with Shekau remained.

Despite the initial territorial and military success, an increased counteroffensive by the Nigerian government and continued pressure by the regional response teams provided by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) put the new ISWAP on the defensive. Additionally, internally, some ISWAP leaders were facing the same issues that motivated dissidents when Shekau was at the head of Boko Haram. As a result, the Shekau was subsequently dislodged from power and replaced by Yussuf's son Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, in what Warner et al. describe as "perhaps the most passive-aggressive leadership pink slip to be issued in the history of 21st-century terrorism".

Following his removal, Shekau declared that al-Barnawi and his followers were infidels–"an accusation which the militant leader often cited as justification for acts of violence against Nigeria's Muslim communities—and that he had been both deceived and betrayed". This then led to the group's splintering into two factions, as seen figure 1, Shekau's group known as JAS and Barnawi and Nur's group as "ISWAP".[40] Moreover, JAS continuously lost significant numbers of fighters following the splintering. Additionally, due to desperation, they routinely engaged in indiscriminate killing and frequently raided whole villages– abducting women and children. In contrast, ISWAP led more sophisticated, organised and large-scale attacks, focused on military and police camps and oil exploration sites (Ahmed, 2014).

In 2021, it was claimed in an audio recording of al-Barnawi that Shakua killed himself by detonating an explosive after a battle between the two groups. In the recording, it contended that ISWAP fighters hunted down the warlord and offered him the chance to repent and join them; however, 'Shekau preferred to be humiliated in the afterlife than getting humiliated on earth,' (BBC News, 2021). While this does not mean the end for JAS, it has left the group in chaos. Without strong leadership or international support, as well as continuing attacks from both ISWAP and the Nigerian military, many JAS fighters have since surrendered to the military– helped in part by the announcement of an amnesty for combatants. However, on October 2021, the Nigerian military announced the death of al-Barnawi (BBC News, 2021)**.**

[38] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023

[39] Within his work on how and why people submit to individuals Weber identifies three types of authority, one of which is based on charismatic grounds. In this case " it is the charismatically qualified leader as such who is obeyed by virtue of personal trust in his revelation, his heroism and or his exemplary qualities" (Weber, 1978, p. 216)

[40] Mamman Nur, who was viewed as 'softer', was reportedly killed in 2018 by one of his close lieutenants "over a dispute relating to the Dapchi girls, a group of school students who were abducted in February and later released" (Maclean, 2018).

To date, little confirmed information is known publicly about ISWAP or JAS. Additionally, many fighters are continuing to surrender to the government. However, many remain, both out of conviction of the group's pursuit and out of fear of punishment. Additionally, the treatment of many fighters in camps such as the Hajj camp has meant that many fighters remember their time with the group very fondly. Therefore, while many within the Nigerian government hold that the conflict is near its end, many who had first experience with the group are not as hopeful.

| # | LGA | ETHNIC GROUP |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **ASKIRA-UBA** | **PUTAI; BURA-PABIR; GUDE; KIBAKU; MARGHI CENTRAL; MARGHI SOUTH; NGGWAHYI; NYA HUBA** |
| 2 | Bama | Shuwa Arabic; Yerwa Kanuri; Wandala; Maffa |
| 3 | Biu | Bura-Pabir; Dera; Ga'anda; Jara; Putai |
| 4 | Chibok | Kibaku; Putai |
| 5 | Damboa | Kibaku; Marghi Central; Putai; Mulgwai; Kanuri |
| 6 | Dikwa | Shuwa Arabic |
| 7 | Gwoza | Cineni; Dghwede; Glavda; Guduf-Gava; Gvoko; Hide; Yerwa Kanuri; Lamang; Maffa; Sukur; Waja; Wandala |
| 8 | Hawul | Hwana; Putai |
| 9 | Jilbe town | Jilbe |
| 10 | Kaga | Yerwa Kanuri; Putai |
| 11 | Kala/Balge | Afade |
| 12 | Konduga | Shuwa Arabic; Yerwa Kanuri; Maffa; Putai; Wandala |
| 13 | Kukawa | Yerwa Kanuri |
| 14 | Kwaya-Kusar | Bura, Putai, Marghi South |
| 15 | Maiduguri | Yerwa Kanuri; Maffa |
| 16 | Monguno | Yerwa Kanuri; Maffa |
| **17** | **NGALA** | **SHUWA ARABIC; YERWA KANURI** |

*Figure 2: Ethnic dynamics in contemporary Borno (Borno State Gov 2023)*

Borno is the largest of the 36 states in Nigeria, with an area of 69,435 square kilometres and is the relic of the historically much larger Kanem-Borno Empire that covered many parts of present-day Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad, Niger and some of Libya. The state is made up of majority Kanuri people, and as a result, Kanuri is widely spoken throughout the state, particularly in the capital Maiduguri. Additionally, Borno is home to many other ethnic groups, including the Babur/Bura, Marghi, Glavda, Mandara, Shuwa Arab, Ngarmargu, and Kibaku. Regardless of the diversity, the Kanuri people, who are regarded as the founders of Borno, are the most respected. As a result, their language and culture dominate over some ethnic groups, which has led to their assimilation, "especially from some of the Marghi and the Ngarmargu who have been 'Kanurised' or become 'Beriberi'" (Monguno & Umara, 2020, p. 214).

Islam is the most dominant religion in the country; however, there are also a number of Christians in the south of the state, especially on the Biu Plateau among the Bura and the southern foothills among Kibaku in Chibok– an area that welcomed Christian missionaries compared to the north of the state. As a result, like in wider Nigeria, the acceptance of Christian missionaries brought an acceptance of western education, consequently leading to significant disparities in education levels within the state compared to other areas that were more influenced by Islamic education. "This inertia today reflects in the level of development of southern Borno compared to the central (except Maiduguri) and northern parts in particular. Borno indigenes from the south thus form the bulk of the workforce at the state and federal level" and are present in all sectors, especially education and health. However,

politically, Borno south plays a secondary role due to the large number of Kanuri people scattered in and around the rest of the state (Monguno & Umara, 2020, p. 215).

Additionally, in terms of party affiliation, the state has usually been led by the opposition rather than the ruling party at the federal level. Many citizens of Borno State believe this has partly accounted for the low level of infrastructural development compared to relatively younger states such as Gombe that have always belonged to the same political party as the federal government.

## Catalysts

### Religion and political reneging

Multiple factors served as catalysts for the inception and successful expansion of Boko Haram and its subsequent splinter groups. Within his work on Boko Haram, Thurston argues that "cutthroat election; pervasive corruption; severe inequality; and violence and impunity that surround approaches to conflict management" (Thurston, 2018, p. 27) are the main drives of the group's existence. Indeed, while it is the many failings from the government to address these challenges that played notable parts in the run-up to the advent of Boko Haram, perhaps the main impetus for the conflict was the request for the implementation of Sharia law and the reneging from state officials to formalise its role within the state– an issue that has a long history in Northern Nigeria. While the identity mobilisation themes in Nigeria have not changed much since the post-military era began in 1999, the major transformation in the country regarding ethnoreligious identities has centred on the re-introduction of the Sharia (Islamic) legal code or its expansion from personal to criminal matters (Okpanachi, 2012). In fact, Islamic-based resistance to supposedly unjust authority in Nigeria has been more prominent since the colonial-era (Miles, 2000 p 211).

The issues regarding the implementation of Sharia stem from the split in beliefs between the different religions within Nigeria's borders. Additionally, Vaughan argues that this intersection between Islam, Christianity and indigenous religions has been decisive in the making of modern Nigeria. In particular, the way Muslim and Christian movements have flourished in modern Nigeria because of how their institutions and doctrines are consistently "embedded in the structures of society, shaping social relations and the configurations of power" (Vaughan, 2016, p. 2). In fact, "the intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world" (Paden, 2008). Underlying this deep religious identity is a deep distrust and at times a feeling of animosity toward the other. While the Muslim population believes that Sharia law is the pure law revealed by God, the southern, middle belt and northern Christians fear that the movement will violate their rights and reduce them to second-class citizens (Okpanachi, 2012).

Within the Muslim population, there are sentiments such as "the status of a country is that of its ruler: If he is a Muslim, his country …is Muslim and if he is not so also is his country. It is…unlawful for Muslims to live in a non-Muslim country" (Maishanu & Maishanu, 1999, p. 128). Additionally, from a Muslim perspective, implementing Sharia law also serves as a unifying system that bridges all other identities, especially within a context where the population has felt fragmented and historically dominated by a Christian population. Within the Islamic faith, following the establishment of the faith, a new social order was inaugurated. One that left behind tribalism and nationalism in favour of unity under divine laws. Mohammed codified this when he said, "you are all descended from Adam and Adam was created from the soil, the most noble in the sight of God is the most pious. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, except by their God continuousness". (Alkhateeb, 2014). Additionally, for many Nigerian Muslims, the implementation of "full Sharia" with the return to democratic rule in 1999 was a restitution of their rights which they had lost during the colonial period (Ludwig, 2008).

As a result, by the end of 2001, 11 states, (including Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, and Yobe), joined in making their jurisdictions more 'sharia compliant', incorporating both civil and criminal matters. However, while some states were able to do so temporarily, within

Borno, "there were different views on the question of whether the jurisdiction of criminal matters should be conferred to the Shari'ah Court of Appeal", and which the Borno State High Court considered unconstitutional (Ludwig, 2008, p. 611).

The reason for this is that according to the constitution, the Nigerian state is secular, and no other law can prevail. This, therefore, limits Sharia jurisdiction to only personal law, and any effort to extend it beyond this clashes with other provisions of the constitution regarding citizenship rights (Agbiboa, 2015).[41]

Regardless of the feasibility of its implementation, the sharia debate offers political entrepreneurs an ideal opportunity to mobilise individuals along religious lines, providing an ideal umbrella to shelter or define their identity (Okpanachi, 2012).

## Conclusion

Ethnicity and religion have had a long and, at times, turbulent hold on sub-Saharan Africa. Today, both ethnicity and religion are central identity tropes in the region, often intertwined, and introduced or reinforced by exogenous forces.

A very representative experience of these two phenomena can be seen in Nigeria. Religion, particularly Islam, was introduced in the 11th and 12th centuries, and ethnicity was enforced by the British during colonisation – and was further cemented following independence. Moreover, unfortunately, since independence, Nigeria has been plagued by a number of both ethnic and religious conflicts. In northern Nigeria, one of the longer-running conflicts started following the advent of Boko Haram in 2009. Driven by Islamic extremist ideology, the group has since fractured several times and gone through several leaders, most famously its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, and his successor, Abubakar Shekau.

Moreover, despite a number of its leaders being killed, the group has grown and forged several alliances with key international terrorist organisations, including, more recently, ISIL. And though, to date, the continuing Nigerian military operation has greatly reduced the group's hold, including its membership base, its main splinter group ISWAP is known to still operate within Borno.

Perhaps the main impetus for the conflict was the request for the implementation of Sharia law and the reneging from state officials to formalise its role within the state– an issue that has a long history in Northern Nigeria. Additionally, however, as will be discussed in the following chapter, both poverty and ethnic kinship also played critical roles in allowing the group to spread throughout the region and mobilise thousands of fighters.

[41] This is mainly because Sharia law does not regard all citizens as equal with regards to Muslims and non-Muslims.

## Chapter Four – Recruitment

> *My hand was empty, if you gave it fire, it will ignite.*

Obi*, a 27-year-old Kanuri ex-combatant, explained to us during his interview that before the advent of Boko Haram, he worked as a fisherman in the Lake Chad region. However, following the group's expansion, it became unsafe "to move freely to other towns". This meant that he was "*forced to stay home; [and] there was no money to buy the things".* During the same time, a friend of his would come over "*with a lot of money*" and when asked *where he got the money from,* he told them that if they were interested, he would show them the way.

After indicating their willingness, Obi explained*:*

> *One day, he took us to a place where he introduced us to two people; they had guns and other weapons and he said they were his superiors. They asked us questions and we answered in the affirmative because we were eager to leave their presence and at the end, they gave us a hundred thousand Naira each and told us that if we joined the group, they would give us three hundred thousand each…That was how it started and each time there was any operation we were invited to participate.* [42]

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Within their study on the drivers of extremism, the UNDP found that grievances associated with growing up in multidimensional poverty adds to individuals' susceptibility to certain narratives, which in turn invites them to channel such associated desperation into the cause of violent extremist groups. As a result, while the profile of many violent extremists in parts of the world other than Africa may well be one of relative privilege, this should not negate the relevance of poverty and underemployment as a driver of recruitment in Africa (UNDP, 2017).

While many personal factors often led to an individual's recruitment into Boko Haram, throughout the interviews conducted, socioeconomic factors were quoted as the most significant driver. In fact, almost all respondents noted that the biggest appeal when joining the group was money.

Normally through friends or an acquaintance that they interacted with in their local village or town, when voluntarily introduced their exposure and subsequent envelopment was slow. After an initial interaction, they were offered gifts or large sums of money, after which the group would start to preach to them the governing ideologies of the group.

This approach, which was often carried out secretly, allowed for "a gradual process of socialization, indoctrination and radicalisation". This is because "members of terrorist groups don't become killers and beheaders overnight. For disaffected young Muslims… becoming a jihadi is a big step up: from anonymous nobody to righteous warrior who commands respect, wields power, has opportunity to rise– and, not least, is attractive to women". In recent history the richest terrorist groups at one point were making millions of dollars a day. This offered young, alienated individuals a sense of excitement and romance, a link to a grand history, and a chance to be part of a winning team with fighters from all over the world (Chau, 2018).

In northern Nigeria, in addition to the use of economic incentives used to recruit, ethnicity also served a more subtle role in helping the group recruit. In particular, despite the group's transethnic appeal and aim, the significance and utility of ethnic kinship was not disregarded, rather often incorporated into

[42] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

the group's operational arsenal when expanding its membership base. This kinship was particularly important when it came to the appeal of the leadership's ethnicity to their wider co-ethnic population. As was explained by one Kanuri respondent when reflecting on his time with the group:

> *I thought the insurgency was about advancing the course of Islam and knowing that the Kanuri are the custodian of Islam in this part of the world, I felt honoured to be part of the group.*[43]

Building on this, the chapter aims to explore in detail how Boko Haram successfully recruited fighters, as well as the role ethnicity played in this with regards to the dissemination of information, the significance of the leadership's ethnic identity, and the appeal this had on some of the wider co-ethnic population.

The chapter then examines in detail the various ways in which individuals were recruited into the group, focusing on the period after their expulsion from Maiduguri into more rural areas around Borno State following the death of the group's founder. It then explores the role and effect of ethnicity within recruitment.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the foundation of our understanding of how Boko Haram was able to recruit its multi-ethnic fighters and demonstrate the supplementary role that ethnicity played. In doing so, the chapter sets the scene for the upcoming chapters on when and how ethnicity emerged as a mechanism of organisation despite the group's governing ideology. This is because, while ethnicity is not the driving factor behind recruitment or the group as a whole, forgoing its existence and utility can result in a somewhat limited understanding of how such groups operate within the sub-Saharan context.

## Recruitment

Since their inception, Boko Haram and its splinter groups have employed a number of tactics to recruit fighters. While under the leadership of the group's founder Mohammed Yusuf, it was his "personal charisma and knack for speaking about problems facing ordinary Nigerians [that held] … an unbelievable appeal". During this time, sales of audio and video recordings of his sermons were widely sold and shared, widening his reach to include young men from Chad and Niger, as well as members of the upper class. Drawn in by his message, young people found in him an "organisation that offered jobs and the prospect of leadership positions" as well as dignity and self-worth" (Kendhammer & McCain, 2018). Following his death in 2009 and the Nigerian government's subsequent military offensive, the group relocated to more rural areas and gained strength from local communities. However, during this time, under the leadership of Shekau, more violent methods were also used to grow their membership base.

Within her work on recruitment into insurgent groups, Richards differentiates between voluntary, coerced and forced recruitment when explaining an individual's entry into an armed group. She defines voluntary recruitment as recruitment that involves no interpersonal threat or coercive environment. Alternatively, coerced recruitment is when one agent threatens another with a sanction if they refuse to enlist. While associated with harm, there is still room for the individual to refuse and receive the stated sanctions. On the other hand, forced recruitment is when "an individual is faced with an inter-personal threat" where the sanctions are severe enough to remove all choice (Richards , 2014).

[43] B3: Male, Kanuri: Borno 2022

In Nigeria, the experience of most ex-combatants interviewed muddily falls into two of Richards' three recruitment categories: coerced and voluntary. Initially more voluntary, as the group expanded, they shifted tactics when recruiting combatants to include more coercive recruitment tactics.

### Coerced recruitment

After their expulsion from Maiduguri, while Boko Haram extensively used forceful tactics when relocating populations to the '*bush*' for a number of logistical reasons (see Arjona, 2016 and Weinstein, 2007), most of those transported were only invited to become fighters after some time. In particular, while in the bush, following an initial imprisonment, individuals would be preached to about the group's beliefs, after which they would be offered the opportunity to become fighters. Those that agreed would receive military training while others who did not want to fight and "*refuse to accept the teachings …. become slaves*". [44]

This experience was shared by many. For example, following the capture of Bama, a town with a population of 270,000 in 2014 (BBC News, 2014), Ali*, a 33-year-old Bama native who spent six years living with the group in the forest explained:

> *If I could remember, it was 1st September 2014, when we came under siege in Bama, then we tried our best to leave Bama, but it wasn't possible because we were surrounded; we were captured and this was how I found myself in the forest.*[45]

In such instances, following their often-violent entry into the village or town, residents were rounded up and divided into different groups depending on the role they could fill for the group. Alternatively, members would initially enter villages non-violently, inform the residents of their ideology, invite people to join, and then leave peacefully; however, they often soon returned more violently and took over the leadership. When this happened, local populations had no choice. As was explained by two respondents who noted that: "*they had no choice but to do what they wanted of us, they gathered us and took us to the fores*t", "*…those who are willing to join can join. Those who do not want to join are still taken away*".[46] As was explained by one ex-combatant during his interview:

> *We will separate the young and virile boys who are also knowledgeable about the things of Islam and recruit them into the group; those not worthy of the cause like the captured security personnel and local vigilantes will be executed because we despise them.*[47]

As noted earlier, following their capture, Boko Haram would then preach the group's ideology in the hopes of convincing individuals to become active combatants. During this time, they would be taken care of and shown the potential rewards they could access once they became fighters. However, these rewards were not seen as earthly rewards but as rewards from God.[48] For example, one local INGO staff member explained how:

> *"There were many that were forced to and gradually it became part of them…. they were met when they were in the villages and surrounded them. Then they brought them together. They kill some of the people in their front and they lay rules and regulation. Before you know it,*

[44] Particularly under the leadership of Shekau.
B15: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
The Sambisa Forest is located in Borno State in the south western part of Chad Basin National Park, 60km southeast of Maiduguri. Since their expulsion from a number of bigger cities in Borno, the Sambisa Forest was known as the last stronghold of the group, to the extent it is almost synonymous with the group.
[45] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[46] B21:Male, Mafa. Borno 2022/ B35: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022
[47] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[48] We see similar patterns when looking at women and girls who were coerced into becoming wives for Boko Haram fighters while others who refused and became sex slaves.

> *they became under their Dwala…. They start dictating how they will go carry out their lives. They abduct all their children and say that we are going to teach them the Quran… and in some of those villages you don't have a single policeman, or any security personnel.*
>
> *The group takes all these advantage….Over the course of the fighting, they will go to a certain local village and kill people and take all their belongings as a loot, as a war spoil [*and they*] get used to taking whatever they want".*[49]

Overall, this approach proved very efficient with many captured later choosing to pick up arms. As was explained by one Kanuri ex-combatant:

> *"When we first arrived, they didn't bother about us; we were like slaves working in the camp. We were not given guns until after a period of time that they decided to teach us about guns, and we were also given our personal weapons. Thereafter, we were asked to go to various locations to raid communities….Initially I was not happy because I was coerced to join the group, I later enjoyed it because of the money they gave, I spent money here and there and I didn't fret because I had enough….I enjoyed the jihad; how we looted different communities and came back with various items like domestic animals and there was plenty of meat".*[50]

However, while many did choose to pick up arms following their relocation, some also chose not to despite the subsequent lower quality of life. As was explained by one respondent during our interview, "*I was like a slave to them…. I was put in the farm to look after animals and produce crops*" as "*it is not everybody that goes for the war, unless they trust you and they believe you can deliver it.*[51] Additionally, in some instances, if an individual possessed a skill the group valued, they were able to avoid becoming a fighter while still maintaining a higher-than-average quality of life. For example, Ali* in his interview:

> *"For me, life with them was good because of my vocation (auto mechanic) and I was very valuable to them, and they took care of me. But this was not the case with other people; they suffered immensely in the hand of boko haram. I was treated well because of my skills; each time their vehicles got damaged; I fixed them".*[52]

Alternatively, in some instances, though not forcefully taken to the bush, after raids in a village, some individuals joined in order to protect themselves or for a better quality of life. For example, one Shuwa Arab respondent:

> "*They came to our community and after raiding it, they took away our livestock and thereafter I decided to join the group; besides, my dad was old, and we have lost our livestock".* [53]

Therefore, while many individuals were forcefully taken to the 'bush,' the decision to become a fighter is more aptly described as coercive, although this may be subject to debate. Moreover, as will be discussed, ethnicity still played a role not only in the group's ability to effectively recruit such individuals but also in influencing the treatment they received while in the 'bush'.

### Voluntary recruitment

Within the political science literature on recruitment, several factors are acknowledged, at least in part, as influential. This includes ideological commitment, search for meaning, following family and

[49] Adam: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[50] B15: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[51] Alex 2019, B37: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[52] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[53] B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022

friends, slick recruiters, and adventure seeking. This is as true of the Islamic State (ISIS) when it appeared in 2013, as it was during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s (Reno & Matisek, 2018).

In Nigeria, in particular, however, 39.1% of people live below the international poverty line. A "further 31.9% of Nigerians have consumption levels between $1.90 and $3.20 per person per day, making them vulnerable to falling into extreme poverty when shocks occur" (World Bank, 2021). In northern Nigeria, this experience is further exacerbated by the effects of climate change (Nett & Rüttinger, 2016), rising unemployment, and the very visible wealth disparities that exist (Oxfam, 2022). Therefore, while not every Boko Haram recruit came from a poor socio-economic background, the reality is that many of the people targeted by the group did come from extreme poverty. As a result, capital was a very effective tool used to entice individuals to join. Additionally, while several scholars have noted the significance of the Sokoto Caliphate as inspiration for combatants, only six ex-combatants interviewed knew the history of the caliphate or Don Fodio. However, they also said that it played no part in their joining.

When recruiting, Boko Haram members often exploited the socio-economic background of local populations as an initial point of entry, creating an aura of fascination and grandeur, after which they would start to preach to the individuals. As a result, as noted by one respondent, many individuals "*accepted to join boko haram…because they were poor and had nothing to do. They were given money and a gun and off they went.*[54]

However, it is not that they were going around poor areas giving out money in exchange for membership. Rather, their approach was much slower, more subtle, and less transactional than one may assume. Recruiters built trust and gained respect before they attempted to invite the recruits to join. As explained by one respondent, "*they offered …money, they used money to catch … attention; after giving… money, they also gave us motorcycles too, and then we followed them. Then they gave us guns*".[55]

This experience was echoed by Ali, a 25-year-old Mafa ex-fighter that I met during my visit in 2021. During our conversation he described how:

> "… I *first come to know about them when I am entering bush for hunting. So, whenever they saw me, they will dash me money, you know, sometimes they will send me for an errand to go and buy something for them if I come back then they will reward me. You know handsomely, they will give me plenty amount of money. Then after they started preaching to us, small small they started preaching to us, and showing us that they are religious people, that we should come and follow them also. We are going to enjoy our life, that was how I find myself in the group".*[56]

This experience was mirrored in 16 conversations with ex-fighters. Either through friends or strangers operating in the local community, following an initial stage of gift giving, the group members would then start to preach the basic tenets of the group, before extending out an invitation to join.[57]

As was explained in detail by one senior ex-commander respondent:

> *"So there are two things involved. They used to give us money and they used to preach for us. Because most of us are illiterate ….so and unfortunately for us, these people come and distorted our mind, and for us we have a shallow knowledge of the religion. And as for the*

[54] B32: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[55] B4: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022
[56] M5: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[57] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

*Western education, we have not done it. And these are the type of people the Boko Haram needs for them to succeed in recruiting them.*

*So when we worked our farm we always used to see them on motorcycle. They will just come past. They won't tell us anything, but sometimes they will tell us, well done and they will just go. Yeah, we only used to see each other whenever they will pass. They won't tell us anything and we won't tell them anything.*

*Then it has come to the points when they come to pass, they will stop and talk to us. Sometimes they will say please if you are coming to the farm tomorrow, come with so and so things….*

*…. they will send us to buy something for them because they don't want to enter the city. They will send us to buy some things to bring them to the farm so that when they come to pass they will collect it. And sometimes when they sent us, they used to give us extra money. They will like ask how much are they selling so-so things in the city, when we tell them they will double the money and give it to us then we will be happy with this. We will just go and provide them with what they needed. Sharp, sharp and bring it to them…Imagine someone will come and send you something for 1000 Nira and he's going to give you 3000 or 4000. He will say to you keep the rest of the money and just provide him with what he sent you, which is not more than 1000 or 1005. And sometimes they will come with foreign currency. I have never seen all this Dollar and Euro. It is from them that I started seeing it.*

*They will give you Dollar to go and change it. And they will show it to us and we will be like, what is this? Which type of currency is this? ….At a point they once gave me one of the Euro. And to my own surprise, when I went to change it it is a huge amount of money. You know when we showed them that we don't know such currency then they would just laugh at us and just collect their money and go.*

*There was a time I changed Euro for them. And it cost like 120,000 Nira….And when I brought the change to them, they say OK, did you take your transport fare?*

*I say yes. Then they say OK. They only collected 100,000 and they say take 15,000 nira, 5000 nira, your transport fare. And I was so happy, I was so happy.*

*And sometimes they will come and say they need a motorcycle to hire. They want to hire. They want to go and work with it and bring it back. And luckily for me I have motorcycle and I gave them for hire. They promise that they will bring it to me the following day.*

*They went and came back and gave me 5000 Naira. I was like, this is too much. So, I was so happy. What they usually do is, what we negotiated is different to what they will give me. They will give me something higher than what we negotiated.. There I was so surprised. And I was so happy about it. At a point the commander of the Boko Haram now came into our town…he just come temporarily just to stay, so whenever we went to him to run and greet him …He will be giving us money. He will be praying for us. Then he started teaching us the doctrine.*

*That's how we found ourselves inside the group".*[58]

This progressive contact, the continuous flow of gifts and rewards, and the slow but effective indoctrination either effectively convinced many that the group and its members were good and were doing what God wanted; or it introduced them to a quality of life that they had never seen, even if it

[58] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

was just for a while, and "*when the money finishes, you meet the leaders, and more money will be given to you".*[59]

Additionally, as the conflict went on, many lost their livelihood or family breadwinners at the hands of both the group and the state military. This left them more receptive to joining, as explained during one interview:

> *"…. we were fishermen… as a result of the insurgency we couldn't fish or do business, we were forced to stay home; there was no money to buy the things we used to buy and this was when a friend came, and whenever he came, he bought items like chicken, goat and a lot of things. He also came with a lot of money, so we asked him where he got the money from and he told us that if we were interested, he will show us the way. We indicated our willingness and one day, he took us to a place where he introduced us to two people; they had guns and other weapons and he said they were his superiors.*
>
> *They asked us questions and we answered in the affirmative because we were eager to leave their presence and at the end, they gave us a hundred thousand naira each and told us that if we joined the group, they will give us three hundred thousand each. When those two left, our friend told us that we are now members of the group and we should not tell anyone about it; he then brought out a bullet and told us that if we revealed our identity as boko haram to anyone, he would kill us. That was how it started and each time there was any operation we were invited to participate".*[60]

Similarly, two other respondents shared how:

> *"When we were all in Maiduguri, my grandfather advised my parents to move my brother and I to our village, Gubiyo because soldiers were arresting young people arbitrarily. We went there and later we moved to Damasak where my brother was arrested by the military and life became hell for me because he was the breadwinner; l didn't have anything to eat, so I decided to join the group.*[61]
>
> *I first joined the group when Mohammed Yussuf was head of the group. I used to go to his mosque and listen to him in Maiduguri. Even during my secondary school I told my parents that I was going to leave the school and fully join, but my parents told me not to do so, and that I had to finish my secondary education. If I like I can join after.*
>
> *During this period is when the start of the real fighting of Boko Haram started. In 2009. But I wasn't in Maiduguri. I was in my hometown. After this all happened, all the different Boko Haram members scattered all over Nigeria. I also went to Abuja to stay with some friends. After I came back from Abuja, I went straight to my village and there was a solider from his community that was promoted to Major General. When he visited the village, he ordered the military to do a mop operation, to check the people in the village. During this they killed eight people who are not even linked to the Boko Haram sect. They don't even know what is Boko Haram. I was so lucky that I was not among them, but after that I decided not to go back to Abuja. What happened pained me so much I could not go back. So I entered the bush so that I could take my revenge".* [62]

[59] B6: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[60] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[61] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[62] M9: Male, Glabda. Borno 2023

These examples shared by ex-combatants showed that in addition to capital being a very effective pulling tool, several personal push factors were present. All of which helped the group gain multi-ethnic recruits.

However, it should be noted that while this paper describes recruits as coerced or voluntary, and not forced, many recruits were children. This brings to question whether their recruitment should be regarded as forced given their age. The Rome Statute holds that individuals under the age of 15 cannot be used in armed conflicts. [63] Nevertheless, Boko Haram actively targeted young boys for recruitment. As was noted by one respondent during his interview:

> *What they like picking is those small-small people that are below the age of 18… because they will easily convince them. Everybody that is above the age of 20 is already fully matured, so they will find it difficult to indoctrinate them… small children they like them because they will grow inside the ideology.*

The reality was shared by one 20-year-old ex-combatant who explained how:

> *We were sitting in our district; then there was nothing to do and when one is offered money in such situations, he will definitely accept. I was twelve years old when they took me to join the group. They had plenty of money to spend and they used it to cajole me.*[64]

Additionally, while money was widely utilised as an effective tool as an initial point of entry to start preaching the group's ideology, ethnicity and ethnic ties also played a role in several instances in helping to disseminate information to different populations and help convince some to join, as shall be explained in the following section.

### The utility and significance of ethnicity and the leadership effect

In ethnically heterogeneous groups such as Boko Haram, members who share the same ethnicity as the group's founding members are often the most respected identity group compared to those who do not share this ethnic identity.[65]

### Kanuri ethnicity within Boko Haram

Though the group did attract fighters from different ethnic backgrounds, Kanuri members made up the majority of fighters in a number of the units of those interviewed. Additionally, as noted previously, historically, the group's leadership has been almost exclusively Kanuri.

This ultimately made the group more appealing to their co-ethnics compared to other ethnic groups. Such a dynamic constituted a far more complex sociological process, created in particular by the existing dynamics of the border space. Over time these dynamics have structured strong networks which have turned out to be stronger than mere community bonds, easier to mobilise, and more suitable for the expansion of the insurrection (Mbowou, 2017).

For example, as was highlighted by one Kanuri ex-commander:

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[63] When it comes to the recruitment of children, "the International Criminal Court has agreed that the line between voluntary and forced recruitment is not legally irrelevant but particularly superficial in the context of children in armed conflict" (UNODC, 2017, p. 12). Therefore, in such instances, this dissertation does concede that their recruitment should be regarded as forced.

[64] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

[65] or its core leadership

> *"the Kanuri… are the bedrock. Yeah, they are the bedrock…. Even started the whole team. So the reason why the Kanuri are the majority, because you know even the founder of the sect is Kanuri, that is Mohammed Yussuf.*
>
> *So that's why you see there are many Kanuri there, but then it's just for you to be able to convince people if you speak Kanuri. So any place you go, if you preach to them in their own, you know tribe, they will find it easier for them to join. So that's why they are the majority… and our fellow Kanuri, whenever they will come, they will stay with us, they will exchange banters, they will great each other, so that's how they tell us and join the sets, because our fellow Kanuri are doing it, so we thought it is a good thing".* [66]

Moreover, as noted, despite the group's ideology rejecting ethnic bias or superiority, the Kanuri people were the most respected. This was because, as was explained by a number of respondents, *"all the leaders are Kanuri*", and because they "*have the largest population of members*".[67] However, one respondent shared that this was only the case when they were in the majority. In particular he noted that, "*where they are majority, people respect them, but where they are minority, people don't respect them".*[68]

Nevertheless, of those interviewed, when asked who the most respected population was, only three people stated something other than the Kanuri people. For example, that "*the least respected were the non-combatant members; they were like slaves*".[69]

When asked how they felt about being the majority or about being in the same ethnic group as the leadership, almost all Kanuri respondents expressed feelings of varying degrees of happiness. This was because, as was explained by one respondent:

> *"If you are in a place like Lagos and you meet a Kanuri, how would you feel? You will be overjoyed isn't it? This is because you have found your brother even though you are not related. That was how I felt.*[70]

Similarly, all the other Kanuri respondents explained that they felt good about it, at least at the time. This was because many Kanuri felt they were the vanguards of the movement and doing god's work. For example, one respondent noted that he found "*it was heart-warming knowing that my tribe's men were in the forefront of God's work; so I was very happy*".[71]

Another noted that "I *felt happy then, knowing that my tribe's men were the only people doing Allah's work*".[72] Or that they had thought that "*the insurgency was about advancing the course of Islam and knowing that the Kanuri are the custodian of Islam in this part of the world, I felt honoured to be part of the group*".[73]

Additionally, one benefit of the positionality held by the Kanuri was the ability to dictate the group's norms. This ability, known as bargaining power, is contingent on, among other things, control over the resources (material or immaterial), for instance, if holding all of the prominent leadership positions. Though this shall be discussed in the following chapter.

[66] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[67] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022, B15: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[68] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[69] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[70] B30: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[71] B15: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[72] B11: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[73] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

As a result, as noted by Bunce and McElreath, individuals from an out-group (e.g., non-Kanuri) may start to adopt said group norms as identification with said out-group, and access to resources controlled by the out-group all play roles in the adoption of out-group norms (Bunce & McElreath, 2017, p. 347). This phenomenon was similarly seen within Boko Haram. For example, many non-Kanuri members interviewed learnt to speak Kanuri while in the *bush* to better assimilate with the wider community. For instance, one respondent noted how:

> *I was in the midst of two Kanuri and all of a sudden, they started speaking Kanuri. Although Hausa is the general language here but most times when you have two or more Kanuri, they sometimes switch to Kanuri even though there are other people that don't understand Kanuri. This has prompted me to learn the Kanuri language*.[74]

However, this sentiment was not encouraged by the majority of the leadership who sought to create a unified environment, as well as a shared sense of buy in– again, as shall be discussed in chapter 5. As was explained by a Kanuri ex-combatant, "*you know the leader is Kanuri, so if everyone is not treated fairly, other tribes might not support the cause".*[75]As a result many non-Kanuri "*didn't feel anything because our religion was what brought us together and not our tribes*".[76]

Additionally, unfortunately, throughout the conflict many Kanuri outside of the group were treated as complacent by security forces which only pushed more people to the group. As was highlighted by one ex-combatant:

> *there were times I listened to the radio while in the forest and the news was about how the Kanuri were the people championing boko haram. During this time, a lot of Kanuri were stereotyped and it gave me a lot of concern.*[77]

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Despite Kanuri dominance within the group, the governing principle of Boko Haram is Salafi Islam and not ethnic superiority, protection, or promotion. As a result, their aim and ability to recruit people from different ethnic backgrounds should not be understated.

In fact, when asked if Boko Haram cares about ethnicity when recruiting during our interviews, all respondents noted that the group did not care. They "*are interested in every tribe*".[78] For example, Yussuf*, an ex-combatant explained:

> "*no, they don't care about one's tribal affiliation; the only thing that matters to them is that you should believe in what they believe*.[79]

As a result, many units were comprised of a number of different groups, including *Margi, Ngarmagu, Shuwa, Kanuri, Fulani, Mandara, and Mafa* alongside *"others too numerous to mention*."[80] However, while convincing populations of their beliefs, ethnic identity was not as underplayed as many interviewees initially suggested. Rather, it was often utilised in order to widen the group's reach.

Specifically, when a community did not share the same ethnic identity as the leadership, the group employed co-ethnics of that community as an initial point of entry when attempting to convince

[74] Alex: Male, Borno 2019
[75] B2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[76] B26: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[77] B24: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[78] B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022
[79] B5: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[80] B26: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022

potential recruits to join. One ex-combatant highlighted this strategy, noting that "*in my experience with Boko Haram, if a person is from a different ethnicity and he believes in what they do, such a person will be highly placed in the group*".[81] This is because such a person is often better positioned to recruit and attract their co-ethnics to join, compared to a non-co-ethnic.

A respondent from Ngarmagu provided an example of this practice by sharing how the group had utilised his ethnicity after he joined. They recognised his efforts and effectiveness, especially in his community where he knew every detail, and so they gave him a leadership position.[82]

Therefore, by utilising community organisations, the group was able to quickly expand its territory by appointing a local leader and incorporating the community into its territory. In fact, of those interviewed that joined voluntarily, 10 out of 15 noted that they were introduced to the group by their "*tribesmen"*.[83] One respondent who lived in Gwoza while the group was operating in the area illustrated:

> *…Yeah, they used tribalism to recruit. For instance, we have people from community A and B who are from different religious and ethnic backgrounds; when they are recruited into the group, they make efforts to return to their ethnic groups to convince those that have not joined the group to try and do so by way of appealing to their ethnic prejudice*…[84]

Moreover, ethnicity also played a beneficial role during coercive recruitment. In particular, one ex-Emir shared that even though he was forced to join, the fact that the people that came to his community were fellow Kanuri made him feel more comfortable. In particular, he noted that it:

> "…*gave some encouragement; though I was forced to join, when I saw that they were my fellow Kanuri, I felt more comfortable as he would not get harmed*".[85]

Therefore, while ideologically the group did not possess any ethnic sentiment, when trying to understand how the group grew successfully throughout the region, it is important to acknowledge when and how members utilised ethnic kinship.

## Conclusion

Since its inception, Boko Haram and its splinter groups have used multiple tactics to spread their ideology and successfully recruit thousands of people to join. Additionally, while this chapter has shown that money was perhaps the most significant pull factor, several other variables also helped catapult the group's reach, including ethnicity. However, while the effect and role of ethnicity should not be over emphasised, for many, it was a 'psychological safety net' and brought a form of solace after recruitment.

As will be discussed in chapter 6, after recruitment, Boko Haram utilised a gradual process of socialisation, indoctrination, and radicalisation (Chau, 2018) to embed their ideology and supra-identity. While this process was effective in most instances, ethnic identity was salient and influenced unit dynamics under certain circumstances. This was most visible within three operational realms: military operations, resource distribution, and punishments.

[81] B2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[82] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[83] B13: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[84] Jack: Male, Borno 2019
[85] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

## Chapter Five – Ethnicity and its effect in Boko Haram

Mohammed* was the first interview I conducted after returning to Maiduguri after the worst of the Covid19 pandemic had passed in October 2021. During our conversation in the small temporary office I used for several interviews, he spoke about how the group first entered his community. He shared how:

> "N*obody knew what was going on; we heard gunshot sounds and thought they were soldiers, it was later in the morning that we got to know that they are Boko Haram members and they started chasing people and most of us ran to the hills. After some days, we left the hills and moved to Madagali in Adamawa State and they also came there and accosted us."* [86]

Despite the Kanuri being in the majority when he was first introduced to the group, throughout the conversation Mohammed explained how, initially, there was a segregation because of the group's religious beliefs. However, after a while Mohammed soon realised that in practice, ethnicity did matter. In particular he stated that: "*there is no tribalism in Allah's business… they are practicing it, and that was how the problem started*."[87]

As noted, Boko Haram as an organisation was centered around a governing ideology and identity meant to supersede all others. This guiding philosophy was communicated to me by many individuals in various roles within the group. However, as shall be explored in detail in chapter 6, while this message was internalised and reproduced at the unit level in some situations, it was unsuccessful in others. As a result, this dissertation explores why and under what conditions ethnic divisions and fractures emerged among group members, undermining the group's ideological cohesion.

In particular, as highlighted in this chapter, when attempts to suppress ethnic identity were not successful and ethnicity became salient, cleavages and fractures based on ethnicity resulted in differential treatment for individuals. I observed these divisions in three operational areas: recruitment and military operations, resource allocation, and punishment.

### Resource Allocation

During conflicts, access to resources – and their distribution – are consequential for survival, power, and wellbeing. The destruction of resources can sometimes create more catastrophic harm than other more immediate forms of violence, not only for victims of the conflict, but also to combatants. However, within the current literature on resources, while many rebel governance scholars have discussed the effects of access to resources on how rebel groups mobilise, as well as their propensity for violence, beyond the study on the initial mobilisation stage the literature on the distribution of resources for combatants is still quite limited. In particular, there has been limited focus on the ways resources are held and distributed amongst combatant communities. This may be particularly salient in contexts where resources are scarce, such as in the Sambisa Forest where my research took place.

Within Boko Haram there were two main ways that resources were shared. The first of these was known as Fai'u. This was when good were seized without any or much resistance and as a result these goods were shared equally amongst with group as a whole. Alternatively, there is Ghanima, which are goods that are seized following a heavy battle. These items are mostly shared between the fighters as a reward for their efforts. As was highlighted by one respondent who explained that:

> *"anything that they got, that is called Ghanima, because we fought for it, that one they share it separately. The way it is shared is different because Fai'u you didn't work for it".* [88]

[86] M1: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[87] Ibid
[88] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

Additionally, over the course of Boko Haram's lifespan available resources for recruits fluctuated significantly. As a result, disputes over access to resources were seen not only among combatants but also amongst the leadership. Dissidents of the group's former leader Shekau, for example, in their letter to AQIM leaders, complained about how he "was prone to banishing those who challenged his claim to the "spoils of war" to the exclusion of others in the group.

Moreover, at times, everything was in abundance and active combatants and their families had access to both necessary and even, at times, luxury items. For example, one Kanuri ex-combatant explained:

> We *had everything; money, cars, food and meat… We ate all kinds of food and they gave us everything we needed. We were never hungry, in fact, they gave us assorted drinks, and everything was available and so we were well fed*[89]

However, at other times, over the course of the conflict resources were scarce and many experienced malnutrition. As was highlighted by one respondent who explained how they *"could go for days without food"*.[90] As a result, members looked forward to Fai'u as it meant that they knew that they would get new supplies.

Nevertheless, following each successful raid, it was the commander who controlled what happened to the items. This is because following raids it is the leaders that dictate where it is sent or distributed. As was explained by a Kanuri ex-combatant:

> "*The entire properties will be taken to the camp, the Imam will inspect them, after the inspection, he will select the ones to be sold, and the rest will be shared to the members who carried out the attack*".[91]

This practice was mirrored by all respondents who all similarly explained how after each raid they would "*hand over the goods to the commander and he will send some of the items to the overall leader, whatever is left will be sold and the money will be given to the members",* however, *"if the attack was initiated by the Markas camp the things will be kept there and used by them".*[92]

Additionally, over the course of my research, I found that ethnicity frequently emerged as an explanation underpinning the logic of resource distribution. In particular, a number of respondents noted because they were not the same ethnic group as the leader, who was often Kanuri, that they did not get an equal share of the group's resources. In particular, one Mandara respondent claimed during our interview that:

> *Whenever they wanted to share the bounty gotten from conquered villages there is always some sort of argument between the Kanuri and Ngamargu fighters. The Ngamargus claimed to be the real fighters while the Kanuri claimed to hold the doctrine.*[93]

Similarly, another ex-combatant stated how the Kanuri leader would keep the best quality good for his co-ethnics and leave the worse quality stuff for the non-co-ethnic. In particular, he noted how:

> ... "*by the time they are ready to share the loot, they will keep the best items for themselves and toss the bad ones to us. As a matter of fact, I have not forgotten the way they segregated us and I still feel the pain in my heart*".[94]

[89] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[90] B38: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[91] B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[92] B34, B5. The Markas camp was the main leadership camp.
[93] Kenneth: Male, Mandara. Borno 2023
[94] B25: Male, Ngarmargu. Borno 2022

Another young Glabda respondent, called Peter, who was caught by the military and arrested on the way to raid a village noted that:

> "*Favouritism is usually displayed whenever we bring back items that we acquired from conquered towns. In most cases the Kanuri amongst us are given larger shares while those that are not Kanuri are given smaller shares*"[95].

Such biases were even noted by Kanuri respondents with many aware of their position of privilege. For example, when asked about what happens to the goods after a town was taken over, another Kanuri respondent explained that:

> *It is shared; everyone gets, but there is injustice done which I do not like. The way the Gamargu and Mafa tribes are treated, they are the ones who battled, won and collected these properties, but when it's time to share, they are not treated fairly; they are given little from the loot while the Kanuri are given most of the loot, even those who did not go out for raid.*[96]

Another example of this was highlighted by a Marge ex-combatant who shared how:

> *….. there was a time we went to one village to attack …. Then I saw a motorcycle and I tried to take it and come with it to the camp. After we finished the battle they collected it from me, which I am pretty sure if I am Kanuri, or if I speak Kanuri they will not collect it from my hand. And other people they have collected. They pick motorcycle and they didn't collect it from them. That's the thing that I will never forget. And the commander that seized my own motorcycle is Kanuri. If he is Marge, that is my tribe, I know he is not going to collect it. But because he's Kanuri, he has collected.*

Moreover, he also believed that "*it is ethnicity that …. brought about the faction between Mamman Nur and Shekau because Shekau doesn't like giving some certain group weapons and food items and when it comes to women also, he would only choose for himself*".[97]

Additionally, during our interview, an ex-Nakip who controlled over 700 men noted that when requesting weapons for an attack, he was often denied the necessary weapons if his superior was not a co-ethnic, whereas he would receive them if his superior was a co-ethnic. In particular he noted that:

> *Sometimes even if you want to go for a war, if you come to request for a weapon you will see, if you are not his tribe, he is going to give small amount of weapons, that even if you go to war, it is not going to be enough for you use.*[98]

However, these experiences were not uniform for all respondents interviewed. Rather, a large number held that ethnicity did not affect how leaders distributed things. For example, four respondents simply and firmly stated 'no' when asked if they ever witnessed any form of favouritism within their units, and that everyone was treated equally.

Alternatively, a number of respondents noted that after a successful raid their leader would share items equally within the community and showed no bias towards their co-ethnics.

For example, one Ngarmargu respondent noted how after a raid:

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[95] Peter: Male, Glabda. Borno 2019
[96] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[97] M5: Male, Marge. Borno 2022
However, it is widely understood that the divisions between Mamman Nur and Shekau were the result of Shekau's actions against the wider Muslim populations.
[98] M10: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023

> *They will gather the items and the leader will take charge; those to be sold will be sold while the rest will be shared to the members*.[99]

As a result, these leaders, who were widely respected, always ensured that everything was shared equally, and were well remembered even after some of their deaths. For example, one Kanuri ex-commander shared of his experience with one Emir who he noted was well loved amongst combatants. In particular, he noted how:

> *…because of his sincerity, and he's trustworthy. He doesn't do all these favouritisms. You know, he doesn't discriminate among people, even if you go to battle or combat. Anything that you get, he will share it equally without any favouritism. And he will share everything you will never see him taking so much for himself… He was killed in a battlefield*.[100]

In addition to goods seized, the division of arable farmland and property ownership also caused friction that resulted in ethnic divisions– of which the leadership either perpetuated or allayed. This was because some Kanuri felt that they had a large claim to the land, and as a result they deserve the most arable plots. This perception was highlighted by a Shua ex-combatant who explained that the Kanuri people saw them as:

> *People coming from the rock, we are not people of the land. Sometimes they are treating us fairly and sometimes they are not. For example, even if the community leader is sharing land for people to go and farm, they give us land that is not fertile and not good for farming.*[101]

As noted, while initially food was in abundance within Boko haram communities, at times there was very little. As highlighted by a Mafa respondent when asked what life was like in the bush:

> *It was a life full of trouble; we fought the soldiers, and we ran for dear life. Sometimes we could go for days without food and sometimes we had lots of food to eat*.[102]

Therefore, access to food was a high-value commodity. As a result, certain populations sometimes would "*intimidate others and collect their properties."* [103] When this happened the other ethnic groups would "*retaliate and before you know it, it turns into a fight*[104]. When this happens, such disputes are settled by the leader. As explained by one Shua ex-combatant:

> *Yes, people are having arguments. Sometimes it is ….on sharing materials…. How we resolve issue is they will call the attention of the other leaders to read the Quran and the Hadith to resolve it*. [105]

However, while many leaders would settle disputes fairly– in line with the group's governing ideologies– several respondents shared how often disputes over land would lead to infighting, particularly between the Kanuri and the Ngarmagu. When this would happen, the leader would then have to come and settle the dispute. However, in some instances some leaders would unfairly rule in favour of their co-ethnics, demonstrating again how ethnicity, at times, influenced access to resources.

For example, as was highlighted by three ex-combatants:

> *(Kanuri)*

[99] B39: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[100] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[101] B3.4: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2023
[102] B38: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[103] M2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[104] Ibid
[105] B3.5: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2023

*It was not always peaceful; we usually have arguments to the extent it will lead to fighting and killing. The Ngarmagu are very strong, and they intimidate others and collect their properties. When the Kanuri recovered, they decided to retaliate and before you know it, it turns into a fight.*[106]

*(Kanuri)*
*The only problem we had with them was about a piece of land; we didn't like the land they gave us to cultivate because it wasn't fertile. We asked them to give us another piece of land but they refused, then we started firing our guns into the air until Abu Ali came and settled the matter".*[107]

*(Mafa)*
*There was a time when a Ngarmagu native went to his farm and he fought with a Kanuri. The matter was reported to the Amir; after the hearing, the farm was confiscated and given to the Kanuri…Evidently, it is because the Kanuri is his kinsman….Those who benefitted were mostly Kanuri.*[108]

As a result of such disputes, some respondents noted that they preferred to have leaders that were their co-ethnics in order to ensure that they were treated fairly. For example, one Marge respondent shared how:

"…[*the] commander I am living under him is also Marge. I am happy that he happens to be our own tribe. Because I know I will not see any favouritism*".[109]

Therefore, while in most instances, ethnicity did not affect the way resources were distributed, the example given above nevertheless highlights how under some circumstance's ethnicity did affect the access that some individuals had. When and under what conditions ethnicity emerged to dictate the distribution of resources is the subject of the following chapter.

### Recruitment and military operations

Combat operations and raids were common strategies used by Boko Haram units in order to collect the necessary resources to sustain themselves. Raids also included the cooptation and, sometimes the forced recruitment, of new fighters. Before conducting a raid, or going to battle, the commander would be informed by a more senior leader of the upcoming mission. After that he would choose fighters from within his unit to participate in the mission and give them combat instructions, including on what to do once the town was seized. In particular, the captured women would be married off to fighters or kept as slaves, young men who agreed to follow them would be enlisted, and elderly people would be enrolled into Islamic education.

Following that, a senior ex-commander explained:

" *If we are to go to a village to fight...*

*If we go, we are not going to Konduga directly. We will branch in Meleri. Meleri is a village very close to Konduga. Then we will send like three or four people to go and do a kind of spy for us. [They would] go and check where the Nigerian military are keeping their own*

[106] M2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[107] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[108] B21: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[109] Ibid

*equipment, where they are keeping their own food, how many of the soldiers are there in their base.*

*Then we will use that information to know how to manoeuvre to know how to go and fight them. Then when they come back with the information the commander will lead…Whenever you hear the gunshot of your commander, then you just open fire.*

*And we normally divide ourselves into three categories. There are those that are just combatants, that are just fighting opening fire to the enemy …and the other group we'll just be following you whenever one of us was killed they will carry the corpse, and the other group are the group that you know, when we kill the Nigerian army, whenever we kill a soldier, they will be the one to collect the rifle in the hands of their soldier. They will collect his gun and [his] …belongings".*[110]

Generally, when it came to selecting combatants to take part in attacks or raids, a number of respondents claimed that there was no favouritism, and that they picked fighters from every ethnic group. For example, in an interview Ajan* informed me that Boko Haram unit leaders would: "*just select [the fighters] randomly*." He added: "*there is no specific tribe meant for war, every tribe is included.*"

Similarly, during our interview, Hassan*, a Ngarmagu ex-combatant shared that they did not pick fighters based on ethnicity. In particular he noted how:

*They don't pick a particular tribe; they send every member of the group.*[111]

These examples highlight how, when it came to carrying out one the main practices of the group, everyone was treated equally. However, such deference to the group's cohesive and inclusive ideology was not apparent for all group members. A number of respondents described the ways that ethnicity was often foregrounded during military operations.[112] In particular, throughout my interviews, several respondents claimed that certain ethnic groups were more likely to be selected to go to war by commanders, as well as being "*placed in the forefront of the battle*" and "*not given the necessary weapons.*" They often compared these experiences to the experiences of other ethnic groups. For example, one respondent claimed that: "*anytime the Boko Haram goes out to war and comes back defeated,*" certain ethnic groups carried the blame. Ali* told me: " *it [is] as if they are the direct cause of the defeat".* [113]

This practice was highlighted by one Kanuri respondent when asked about how raids were carried out, he explained that:

*We will discuss our best options; know when the communities are vulnerable, when everyone is asleep or they least expect. We usually strike during a storm or at night time because during these times everyone is caught unawares. Often times, unknown to the people, we take up to three days studying the community…*

*Garmargu and Kanuri are the tribes we usually use for our attacks. Firstly, we the Kanuri are more in number. Secondly, we use the Gamargu tribe because they lack Islamic knowledge and they are like slaves to us because they are docile people.*[114]

[110] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[111] B26: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[112] B4: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022, B5: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[113] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[114] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

Others shared similar sentiments. When asked how combatants were selected for raids, one Kanuri combatant told me:

> *"Ngarmagu"….* Why? *"Because they are brave and very energetic and they are not literate; they are told that if they die fighting, they will go to paradise and they believed"*.[115]

Another echoed:

> *They mostly send the Ngarmagu up front then the Kanuri will follow because they are the leaders.*[116]

And another:

> *If you are not Ngarmagu, even your welfare is different from other people. The Kanuri people have the best welfare, they are well taken care of…Even if we are going for a war to attack a village, it is the Ngarmagu people that would lead the war front, and then later on, after winning the war, or if anything happens, then the Kanuri people will come in. That is the leaders…. If we come out with victory, initially they used to pack up with things and go with it, that is the Kanuri leaders.*[117]

Another Ngarmagu ex-combatant who joined the group in 2013 named Sul* noted that:

> *If there is anywhere that people need defence, it is the people of Ngarmagu that will mostly be called. If there is fight or war, we are the ones that they will always call. We will never turn our back on our enemy … They are the ones ruling in the bush, and we are the ones suffering on the war front. Initially, most of our people were dead because we are the ones going to war*[118]

These experiences, which contrast those previously noted, demonstrate the variation within Boko Haram regarding the salience of ethnicity, particularly during military operations. While in some units, all combatants were treated equally, other units seemed to have very apparent favouritism practices.

Moreover, some respondents also spoke of their aversion to being led or leading a non-co-ethnic, and very vocally shared how they preferred their co-ethnics. In particular during our interview, one Ngarmagu ex-commander explained how he often faced a number of challenges including insubordination when giving orders to the Kanuri combatants under him. In particular, he noted how:

> *My major problem was insubordination; because I am Ngarmagu and also a leader, most of my Kanuri subjects were always defying my orders because I am not Kanuri...*
>
> *…I hated the constant quarrelling and fighting especially between my tribesmen and the Kanuri; we were always at each other's throat and it affected us in so many negative ways. Most times I am compelled to report to the highest authority and because our top leaders are also Kanuri, they hardly take punitive measures against their fellow Kanuri.*
>
> *…they were mischievous…., telling lies against me because they wanted to take over my position. Each time we went to attack communities and I request for backup, they will not come to my aid because they want to see me fail … Whenever I order them to carry out a task*

[115] B32: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[116] B23: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[117] B27: Male, Ngarmgu. Borno 2022
[118] Sul: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

> *they don't because they feel I am not Kanuri, therefore I don't have the authority to order them.*[119]

As a result of such dynamics, a number of respondents noted how they preferred to either lead or be led by their co-ethnics. In particular, some leaders shared how they would actively seek out or spare their co-ethnics when carrying out raids in order to bring them back to bush under their control. For example, as was explained by one Ngarmagu ex-combatant:

> *When they are recruiting people if they go to a community, they select their own people, they select the people of their own tribe, they select the Kanuri to take them to the bush. When they take these people to the bush, then other people from [other] tribes that they are bringing in will be the minority and will be like their slaves. Even me now, when we went to operations, I targeted the people of my own community to take them to the bush. The reason why I do that is 'cause if I gather the people of my community together, I'll have more strength to defend myself and to carry out more activities in the bush.* [120]

Other respondents confirmed such preferences, including a Kanuri and Shua ex-combatant who shared how their unit leaders actively sought to recruit their co-ethnics rather than treat any potential recruit as equal, regardless of their ethnicity.

In particular, they noted how:

(Kanuri)

> "[Our commander] *was not comfortable with us because we are Kanuri and there was a time he replaced us with his tribesmen*".[121]

(Shua)

> *The majority there likes to go and preach to their own people and bring them to the bush from the community …They are becoming selective when it comes to go and preach. It's like every tribe will go and preach to their own people*.[122]

However, once again, this practice was not uniform throughout all units. Rather, several other respondents noted that the group's leaders were not selective when picking people to recruit, either forcefully or coercively. In particular, such respondents noted that "*there is no partiality*", or when asked if there were any criteria when selecting individuals to bring to the bush, they would firmly state that the only thing that mattered was that they accepted the group's ideology.[123]

These examples given nevertheless demonstrate how under certain circumstances, ethnicity was very salient and foregrounded during several key military practices. In particular, it seems that while some unit leaders treated everyone equally, others chose to favour their co-ethnics or held biased sentiments towards specific ethnic groups and, as a result, treated them differently.

### Punishment

Perhaps the most infamous attribute of Boko Haram was the draconian punishments given to anyone that breaks their governing rules. These punishments (which ranged from receiving lashings for

[119] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[120] B28: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[121]B24: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[122] B3.5: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2023
[123] B39: Male, Borno 2023, B3: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

having sex when not married to having an arm cut off for stealing or execution for having sex with someone that was not your spouse) were given to anyone who broke any of the group's rules in accordance with very strict Sharia law and was not meant to be subject to debate. This is because such rules are regarded as beyond human reason and, as a result, cannot be challenged by terrestrial values like individual autonomy, public welfare and happiness or many other values derived from them (Ghassemi, 2009).

Therefore, when such a crime is committed, most respondents noted that everyone, regardless of identity, would be punished accordingly. For example, as was explained by a 27 year-old Kanuri ex-combatant:

> "*With them there is no mercy. When you commit a crime, you must face the consequences... "The offender will be surrounded by people, they will hear his statement after which judgment is passed. The offender is either flogged or killed; depending on his offense…. They said it is the Quran that guides their decision and whatever the Quran says, they will execute*".[124]

And when punishments are administered you cannot question any rulings that are given as it can result in you being punished or killed.[125]

Additionally, when someone commits an offence where the punishment is not as clear cut, then the matter would be deliberated, and the leaders would decide on a punishment for the accused. For example, as was noted by a 31-year-old Kanuri ex-combatant:

> "*Sometimes people commit offence and the punishment for such offences will become debatable because there would be conflicting ideas*". When this would happen "*the matter will be taken to the leaders and after hearing from both parties, he then gives his verdict*".[126]

Nevertheless, regardless of the matter that is debated, or the punishment being given, in most instances, many respondents noted that all offenders would be punished the same and that no favouritism or leniency was ever shown, regardless of ethnicity. For example, one Kanuri ex-combatant shared how when it came to punishment, everyone was punished. In particular, when asked what happened when someone did something wrong, he noted that the individual would always get punished:

> "*at all times, because there is no form of favouritism".*[127]

However, a few respondents still noted that when debatable offences were committed, some people got different treatment based on their ethnic identity. In particular, several respondents noted that if the accused shared the same ethnic identity as the unit leader, the leader would often be more lenient compared to non-co-ethnics, who were often noted to be unfairly punished before proper due diligence was carried out to confirm that they were guilty. For example, one Kanuri shared how when it comes to carrying out punishment, sometimes leaders show favouritism, "*and if a member needs help that does not go against our doctrines, they may also show some form of favouritism*".[128]

One example of this was shared during one interview with a Kanuri ex-combatant who explained how when he was with the group, he witnessed a Ngarmagu man wrongfully punished instead of the

[124] B2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022
[125] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[126] B24: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[127] ibid
[128] B15: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

Kanuri commander because the Kanuri man shared the same ethnic identity as the senior leaders who had to adjudicate on the matter. He noted how:

> *"Ngarmagu man had a little disagreement with a Kanuri commander, and in truth, the commander was at fault because we witnessed everything. But we were scared to say a word for fear of being killed. When the matter was brought to the boss, they absolved the commander though they knew he was wrong".* When asked why he thought the commander was absolved, he claimed that "*they did it because the boss and the commander are of the same dialect*".[129]

Similarly, Henry*, a 46-year-old Walah man, shared how he often heard of people receiving different treatment because of their ethnic identity and how a member of his family was killed over a minor infraction because he was not from the same ethnic group as the Kanuri. In particular, he noted that:

> *according to information by our women who witnessed most of the fights, they told us that even amongst the insurgents there is tribal segregation. As a matter of fact, my father-in-law, who was a member of the group, was slaughtered along with his comrades who were not Kanuri because of a minor problem but the Kanuri were spared*.[130]

This practice was similarly echoed by another Mandara ex-combatant who noted how:

> *If a non-Kanuri commits any offence no matter how little, they will kill him; but if a Kanuri commits an offence, they will overlook it*.[131]

As a result, one Ngarmagu ex-Amir explained how if he saw another Ngarmagu combatant he would often not report it to the senior leadership because he saw how the Kanuri would favour their own co-ethnics:

> *When people under me commit an offence, I hardly report them to the top commanders because they will mistreat them and punish them severely. This is because they are not Kanuri….if you are their kin they will favour you and relax the law when it comes to punishments.*[132]

Overall, these varying experiences shared by multiple combatants demonstrate how, despite the group's strict adherence to Sharia law and the fact that ethnicity should not matter, under certain circumstances some leaders showed favouritism towards their co-ethnics, once again demonstrating how ethnicity is foregrounded within unit dynamics.

Overall, the experience shared throughout this chapter demonstrates how, despite the group's governing ideology that is meant to transcend ethnicity and treat everyone equally, this sentiment and subsequent practice was not uniform throughout the group. Rather, we find that, under certain circumstances one's ethnicity can become foregrounded and influences the treatment received.

In particular, one notable observation that can be made from the examples that were shared during our interviews was that, firstly, unit leaders possess a lot of power over unit practices; this includes controlling and distributing goods, adjudicating punishments and selecting fighters for battle. Secondly, some leaders possess either sentiments of prejudice or preference towards certain ethnic groups when deciding what treatment individuals receive. As a result, within such units, ethnicity was

[129] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[130] Henry: Male, Waha. Borno, 2019
[131] Harry : Male, Mandara. Borno 2019
[132] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

notably salient compared to other units in which the leader treated everyone the same, regardless of their ethnicity.

Given this, the following chapter will uncover why some leaders still possess ethnic sentiments while others do not. In particular, the chapter finds that individuals appointed leaders due to attributes not contingent on their successful socialisation, for example, as a result of military skills, are more likely to possess sentiments of ethnic bias.

## Conclusion

When ethnicity is foregrounded, as has been argued in this chapter, it is most visible within three operational areas. These are *military operations (including recruitment and selection for raids), resource allocation, and punishment– all of which are at the discretion of unit leaders.*

*For example, a number of respondents noted that certain individuals from specific ethnic groups often received an unfair share of goods, compared to people from other groups. In particular, this was seen most often with the Kanuri who also often held most of the leadership roles. However, this practice was not uniform, and a number of other respondents held that everyone was treated equally, and that the group did not care about ethnicity*. Similarly, some leaders are also more likely to show preference in the form of leniency for co-ethnics when infractions occur compared to their non-co-ethnics.

Additionally, during military operations, some leaders are also more likely to select fighters based on their ethnic identity, as well as spare villages that are inhabited by their co-ethnics. Other leaders, on the other hand, exhibit no such favouritism. This is evidenced by several other respondents who noted the uniformity when it came to the treatment that everyone, regardless of ethnicity, received.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, a cause of this variation in leadership practice is whether or not they are successfully socialised and have fully adopted the group's new supra-identity.

# Chapter Six – Combatant Socialisation and the role of Leadership

During our conversation in 2022, I asked one Kanuri ex-combatant about his experience as a fighter for Boko Haram and the unit leader he served under. In particular, despite fearing him, he explained how people trusted him because he carried out Allah's bidding and treated everyone justly.

As our conversation went on, I also asked him how an individual becomes a leader, to which he explained that if you are influential, knowledgeable about the religion and brave, they will make you a leader. [133]

Alternatively, during a different conversation with another former ex-combatant, I posed a similar question. However, this time the respondent explained that his leader was chosen because of his knowledge from the battlefield and once in a position of power he would show preference to his fellow Hausa.[134]

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As highlighted in the previous chapter, despite Boko Haram members sharing the same religious identity, we observe significant variation in how ethnicity affects resource allocation, military operations, and punishment. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that this variation can be understood as a function of leadership. Specifically, I attribute their behaviour to two factors: the socialisation of leaders into their positions (i.e., the pathways through which they became leaders), and the role leaders play in shaping the culture of their group or sub-unit.

In this chapter, I first show how unit leaders either retain or dislodge prejudices or preferences towards certain ethnic groups, depending on their personal trajectories into leadership roles. Second, I illustrate the power and influence they exert over unit practices as a result of this. As a result, ethnicity assumes a greater significance in some units compared to those in which leaders treat everyone equally, regardless of their ethnicity.

The chapter is organised in three subsections. I begin by discussing the role and effect of combatant socialisation, with a focus on two key institutions that are used by insurgent groups like Boko Haram. Following this, the chapter explains the significance of the leaders' socialisation, and the effect this has on unit cohesion. The final subsection provides evidence from interview data to illustrate the variation among different leadership trajectories and their outcomes, as described in Chapter 5.

## Combatant Socialisation in Boko Haram

Combatant socialisation is a critical component of an insurgent group's success, as it enables combatants to operate as a unified body and carry out large-scale violence often against non-combatant communities. To achieve this, insurgent groups use a variety of institutions to socialise new recruits into the group's governing ethos and ideology. These institutions are part of a broader repertoire of political (re)education, which is designed to create a cohesive social community with shared expectations about what is right (Manekin, 2017). These processes, when effective, deeply shape the behaviour exhibited by the group and their ability to work effectively together towards the same goal.

[133] B9: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[134] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

Within his work on combat socialisation, Checkel notes three distinct socialisation outcomes, 'Type 0', 'Type I' and 'Type II'. 'Type 0' is the least powerful, resulting primarily from a rational calculation of group members in response to particular incentive structures. Under these circumstances, no internalisation occurs, and individuals would not be expected to uphold the group's norms and practices once they leave. Types I and II are more powerful outcomes, resulting in deeper internalisation of group norms and practices. With Type I, an individual exhibits pro-group behaviour by learning their role. In such circumstances, a recruit acquires knowledge that enables action in accordance with group expectations. The beliefs associated with this role do not replace earlier values but are "superimposed" on them and are entirely dependent on continuing membership in the group. Appropriate group behaviour simply demonstrates that conscious instrumental calculation has been replaced by role-playing (Checkel, 2017).

Finally, Type II is the deepest form of socialisation and it is associated with a high level of commitment to the group's goals and objectives. Under this model, new recruits accept and internalise group norms as the 'right' course of action, and have adopted and internalised the interests or identity of their new community. In such examples, both conscious instrumental calculations, and role playing, alongside the individual's prior values and commitments, have been displaced by full immersion into the group's ideology, values and politics.

Overall, these forms socialisation are influenced by numerous institutions, two of which shall be discussed below. However, neither fit neatly within a specific *type* – though can be aimed at a specific type of socialisation (Hoover Green, 2017).

In contexts like sub-Saharan Africa, where ethnic identities are so often deeply entrenched, a central goal for armed organisations that are not ethnically homogenous is to foster loyalty to the group over any ethnic, religious, political, familial, or other pre-existing ties.[135] To achieve this, insurgent organisations often focus on establishing shared identities based on their governing ideology for new members, after recruitment but before active combat. They do so by establishing institutions to indoctrinate and re-educate their members and eliminate divisive attitudes, such as perceptions of superiority.

Nonetheless, insurgent organisations vary in their goals and objectives. For some groups and leaders, institutions are established that seek to shape combatant behaviour, but are not designed to transform the true preferences or beliefs of members implicated by internalisation (Hoover Green, 2016). Others place much greater emphasis on indoctrination into a new group ideology (Ahmad, 2016; Sanin & Wood, 2014) (Maynard, 2019), which can also attract certain types of recruits (Wood & Thomas, 2017). Some scholars have attributed this variation to the material resources available to group leadership (Weinstein, 2007). However, this does not hold true for Boko Haram. Throughout their lifespan, regardless of the resources at their disposal, indoctrination has always been central to the way in which they socialise recruits. Moreover, as shall be discussed below, in order to decrease the chance of internal conflict and ethnic fractures, it is essential that institutions not only shape combatant behaviour but fundamentally alter their identity and beliefs to align with the group's identity and beliefs (Type II).

Within the literature on socialisation, several scholars have documented the different institutions that groups use to shape and control recruited combatants. These institutions include recruitment (Hoover Green, 2017), violence (Rodger, 2017), including sexual violence (Cohen, 2017), and ideology (Sanin & Wood, 2014). Various combatant groups have utilised these mechanisms in different forms. In the following sections, I focus on two specific mechanisms present in Boko Haram – political education and military training – which play crucial roles in fostering a shared ethos and community among

[135] (Type II) rather than simply compliance (Type I).

members and serve to dislodge ethnic ties. I then discuss how leadership trajectories shape sub-unit variation in organisational culture and cohesion.

### Political education

Political education is often the formal channel through which organisational leaders communicate a conflict's social or political purposes, impart new norms, and connect the conflict purposes to the behaviour and conduct of members (Hoover Green, 2016). In particular, political education induces an identification on the part of the recruit with the role of combatant, and dictates a course of expected behaviour that follows. This creates shared knowledge, community and belonging that deepens cohesion by fostering collaboration (Sanin & Wood, 2014).

While the specific content of political education may vary, and in some instances may be entirely absent from armed group socialisation, within many armed groups political education exists at the core of how the group operates. In the case of Boko Haram, it is the religious ideology of the group that is the central reason for their mobilisation and must be communicated and instilled in new recruits.

As a result, from the moment a potential recruit is introduced to the group, either voluntarily or coercively, the group's unifying dogma is taught during religious sermons and teachings– in combination with the othering of those who are not members. This religious education is emphasised early on in the lifecycle of new recruits, and prior to formal military training.[136]

Religious education in Boko Haram is designed to instil a brotherhood-like network of connection and loyalty among members that supersedes the importance of all other networks, including ethnicity. Moreover, the global Islamist identity allows the group to better recruit political support across ethnic and tribal divisions than if they were locally defined groups (Ahmad, 2016).

Policed by the group's leaders, this form of education continues following recruitment, often with the strict enforcement of continued learning to ensure dedication to the cause. Such practices serve the explicit goal of increasing the likelihood of achieving Type II socialisation.

By educating recruits around the group's governing ideology, groups like Boko Haram are able to instil their supra-identity, as well as the rules and moral standards that serve as guides and deterrents in the management of recruits' everyday lives (Bandura, 2006). This, in turn, reduces the chance of any internal fracturing, including the chance that members' prior loyalties, values, and ethnic bonds will supersede that of the group's.

### Military training

Another fundamental part of combatant socialisations is military training (Manekin, 2017). The aim of military training is often to enable an individual to kill or perpetrate violence on behalf of the group, and sometimes against opponents that were previously known to group members. Military training falls under stage two of Barnoa's three-phase solider socialisation process noted in Chapter 2, wherein recruits pass through a *transition* period during which they are neither civilian nor combatant but find themselves in an intermediate space between the state of departure and that of arrival. During their initial military training courses, recruits may have abandoned their former positions in the 'civilian' world, thanks to the previous separation phase, but are not yet 'soldiers'. As a result, activities carried out during military training aim to shape and forge the 'military soul' of the social actor who wishes

[136] As noted in chapter 3, during both coercive and voluntary recruitment, the group's ideology is shared with all potential members, after which there has to be some form of agreement to adopt the group's doctrine before their recruitment.

to be part of the military institution. They learn the rituals of formal training (marching, salutes, etc.), and carry out basic training (regarding weapons and combat). Additionally, a special relationship may be established between instructor and recruits, though it seems to swing between that of 'welcoming father' and 'executioner' (Barnao, 2019).

Alternatively, military training can also fall under Type I socialisation, as it involves the acquiring of knowledge that enables action in accordance with group expectations. Knowledge does not necessarily replace earlier values, but is 'superimposed' on an individual's existing commitments, and remains entirely dependent on an individual's continuing membership in the group.

Within groups such as Boko Haram, military training forms an integral part of the socialisation process.[137] In particular, following recruitment, recruits are taught several skills needed for upcoming combat, each of which help to transform their identity from ordinary civilian to combatant, seeking to break any previous moral barriers and dehumanise the enemy (Weierstall, 2013). However, within such conflicts, an overemphasis on military training within sufficient political re-education can result in less controllable, and often undesirable combatant behaviour (Hoover Green, 2016; Weinstein, 2007).

### The limits of socialisation and the role of the leader

One central aim of socialisation is to create a cohesive social community with shared expectations about what is right. However, socialisation is not always successful, and individuals may resist socialisation efforts for several reasons. These range from a profound commitment to a different identity that is reinforced by existing social ties, to the inadequacy of the re-education program. As a result, organisations may achieve Type I socialisation, but not achieve the desired Type II.

One reason for this is that military recruits are not blank slates on which training inscribes a single identity. Rather, new recruits bring with them a variety of values, norms, and attitudes formed through prior arenas of socialisation. Lyall argues that, far from being blank slates, individuals in militaries are carriers of their ethnic identities, and in situations where pre-conflict hierarchies and inequalities exist, individuals enter military service with collective grievances born of bitter experience, whether these are political, economic or cultural in nature.[138] These ethnic identities are durable and persist despite – and, in some ways, because of – heavy-handed efforts to indoctrinate these new soldiers. Moreover, militaries in unequal societies can be incubators of inequalities, reinforcing rather than overturning status and privilege (Lyall, 2020). When this happens, the soldiers' identity can diverge from the organisation, and when they have social support networks that validate their divergent choices, resistance is likely to increase and become more overt (Manekin, 2017). As a result, commanders need to invest in battlefield management strategies to mitigate or hide the weaknesses of their divided armies.

Within groups such as Boko Haram, particularly considering the decentralised nature in which such groups operate, the role of a unit leader is to continue to shape the group's culture through continued political education at the sub-group level.

This is done by ensuring respect and obedience from combatants through continued absorption into the group's governing ideology. It also includes the ongoing policing of combatant behaviour. In Boko Haram, unit leaders may ensure that members always pray five times and must continuously learn about the group's ideology. This is to ensure, in part, that the environment is one where members from all ethnic groups are expected to cooperate with their fellow combatants and commanders. In order to ensure that leaders carry out these tasks successfully, it is imperative that

[137] Though only in combination with political education, particularly religious learning.
[138] Lyall's argument is in relation to government-sanctioned harm, though similarly holds merit within the context of other power relationships.

group leaders themselves are fully socialised into the group, and possess a firm conviction in the group's beliefs, commitments, and values – what Checkel refers to as 'Type II'.

However, the pathways to leadership roles within Boko Haram are not standardised and are rarely regulated for lower-level leadership positions. Rather, to be selected for a leadership position, individuals demonstrate their suitability and distinguish themselves from their comrades through three main, often intertwining pathways, namely, military accomplishment, religious intelligence and ethnic affinity. Though these attributes often work in combination, it is the driving attributes that influence the type of leader that is chosen, and, in turn, the extent to which it is foregrounded within their unit.

First, and most important for group cohesion, is religious intelligence, which is an outcome of successful extensive political and religious education. As noted, even before an individual is recruited, the group's governing ideology is taught through various mediums, including one-on-one conversations or religious sermons given to crowds. This continues throughout their time with the group, with the enforcement of praying five times a day, and with continued learning through preaching and the self-learning of religious texts. However, while most recruits are meant to be given the same access to religious education, some distinguish themselves from their peers to the existing leadership, by demonstrating a keen aptitude and conviction in the group's ideology. An example of this intelligence can be, being able to recite religious texts by heart.

When this intelligence, at least as a contributing factor, is identified by the existing leadership, these individuals are often likely to be promoted to more senior positions when they become available. And once promoted and in a position of relative power, these individuals are far more likely to treat all combatants under them as equals. This is because, by virtue of their political education, they are more likely to have internalised the group's ideology and identity. Therefore, in the case of Boko Haram they see their identity as Salafi Jihadi, which supersedes all others– Type II socialisation. This speaks to the influential role of religious and ideological education in socialising leaders to privilege the group's governing ideology over ethnic ties, with profound effects on social cohesion in the units under their command.

Yet promotion as a result of knowledge of the group's ideology is not the only way that unit leaders end up in leadership positions. I identify two additional paths: military accomplishments and ethnic affinity.

Firstly, given the modus operandi of insurgent groups, military accomplishments and skills are well-sought-after attributes that the existing leadership looks out for. For example, when carrying out missions such as attacks on military bases/ambushes, commanders can identify individuals who have shown that they are a good soldier, for instance, following a display of bravery. As a result, following the vacancy of a role, these individuals who had previously been recognised are then promoted.

Nevertheless, if appointed solely because of this, it is also possible that the individual still holds sentiments of ethnic bias, which he can act on once in a position of power. This is because this military knowledge does not necessarily replace earlier values but is 'superimposed' on an individual's existing commitments. Therefore, whatever previous values and sentiments that remain can influence the type of leader they become and, in turn, can have a trickle-down effect on sub-unit cohesion and the experiences and relationships among his recruits.

Finally, under certain circumstances, ethnic affinity can also serve as a pathway to leadership. However, this pathway, in particular, is often tied with either of the previous two. As a result, how it influences the salience of ethnicity deviates slightly. More specifically, rather than the by-product of their selection being the introduction of ethnic dynamics within units, it often reaffirms it.

For example, if two individuals have shown that they are good soldiers, yet one shares the same ethnic identity as the incumbent leader whereas the other doesn't, and if the leader also has ethnic bias, then they will likely choose a recruit who shares their ethnic identity. However, by doing so, if recognised,

it may re-introduce or reaffirm ethnic bias for the newly appointed leader, which can influence how they behave once in power.

In the following sections, I first provide evidence that extended political education is effective in socialising leaders into Boko Haram's governing ideology. Second, I show that leadership matters in shaping the salience of ethnicity with sub-units. Finally, I demonstrate that different paths to leadership determine how leaders engage with ethnic identity in the groups under their command, and show the impact this has for the three outcomes I described in Chapter 5.

### Political education, leadership socialisation, and paths to promotion

For Boko Haram, the two key institutions essential during combat socialisation are political education and military training. Both are designed to strip away pre-existing values, commitments, norms, and identities, replacing them with the group's single cohesive governing ideology and identity. Political education, in particular, is a key mechanism in the organisation used to instill loyalty and unity.

As discussed earlier, all members of Boko Haram, regardless of their ethnicity, hold their ethnic identity in high regard. This is because it often carries a significant amount of sentimentality, connecting the individual to their wider community, similar to a relationship with extended family. Co-ethnics often invoke shared common traits, including language, to help cement these connections. For example, many respondents noted that while they didn't look down on other tribes, they felt happy and at peace whenever they met people from their own tribe.[139]

However, the desire to interact with one's co-ethnics does not automatically result in group disputes or conflicts, and associating more with co-ethnics does not necessarily equate to feelings of superiority or exclusion. Instead, Deng argues that the concept of unity within diverse environments derives from the assumption that a successful group or nation is one that is able to pool its diverse social intermixture together in a way that builds on the richness of different members' backgrounds rather than alienating any single group. Moreover, in general, for Boko Haram's top leadership, ethnicity held little ideological significance, and everyone who accepted the group's ideology was accepted. One respondent shared of the highest echelons of the Boko Haram leadership that:

> *Culture means nothing to them. Everyone, irrespective of tribe, will be accepted into the group. They are only bothered about religion*.[140]

In order to firmly embed this sentiment, Boko Haram's leadership focused on entrenching the group's supra-identity, centred around their governing ideology and was intended to supersede all other loyalties. They sought to achieve this through a rigorous and intensive commitment to political education. In particular, the organisation's leaders sought to embed Boko Haram's core values, namely, drawn from Wahabism, through the continuous preaching of the group's central unifying ideas during religious sermons and schooling.

From the moment individuals were introduced to the group, whether voluntarily or coercively, the group's unifying dogma was taught to recruits, while those who were not members of Boko Haram were perpetually otherised. This was the same practice used for most members, including those joining at different levels.

After recruitment, political education is conducted through the strict enforcement of daily prayers, frequent sermons from emirs, as well as during allocated times for individuals to study the Quran.[141]

[139] B33:Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[140] B9: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[141] M1: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022

Moreover, the practice and experience that all respondents shared consumed a significant amount of the recruits' days and continued throughout their time with the group. Some expressed positive sentiments towards collective religious education, as highlighted by one respondent who stated that he loved reading every day when asked what they liked about being in the bush.[142] Nevertheless, this practice was very successful in instilling the group's doctrine, and multiple respondents shared that they believed what they were doing was right and that they believed they were doing the "*works of God.*" [143]

In addition to political education, military training also served as a critical institution used by the group through which the organisation's values were communicated and embedded amongst members. However, political education never stopped. Running alongside the group's religious education, military education similarly emphasised principles of religious and political loyalty. Known as *Tadrip*, the military training, which lasted a few months, taught recruits the essential skills needed for warfare, and the religious education, that ran in tandem, instilled the reason why it was needed.[144] For example, one respondent shared:

> *We had military training, but we studied the faith as well.*"[145]

Similarly, another noted:

> [I would spend the day at] *religious learning school, where [*the recruits would*] learn about the faith. After that, we learnt the skills of shooting guns, and then they started taking us out for operations.*"[146]

These twin practices of political education and military training provided recruits with an identity that ensured their obedience and made them ready to fight, kill or die in pursuit of the group's goals. During an interview with one ex-combatant, he shared that he was never afraid of death, and hated it when other fighters showed any cowardice. He attributed the lack of fear to his belief in the cause. He noted that:

> *What I hated most was the reactions of our men when we go out on operations and meet resistance, some of our men ran away when this resistance gets stronger. If truly we are out for God's work, we should be ready to die for it.*
>
> Int**:** What did you love the most at that time?
>
> *Holding a gun and killing people.*
>
> Int**:** Can you explain further?
>
> *When you hold a gun in your hand, you feel different and powerful and there is the urge to kill someone. It is not like we just kill anybody, we only kill those who have committed an offence.* [147]

Though perhaps jarring, this response demonstrates the effectiveness of the group's socialisation mechanisms in instilling the group's ideology. Moreover, while these sentiments were effective in turning Boko Haram against non-members of the group, they also often played a powerful role in

[142] B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022
[143] B10: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[144] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[145] B30: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[146] B5: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[147] B8: Male,

making it possible for individuals from different ethnic groups to peacefully co-exist as part of a cohesive, unified, and ethnically diverse unit. This was also true for those who had never interacted or co-habited with non-co-ethnics. When asked how he felt interacting with people from other ethnic groups, one respondent who had rarely previously interacted with non-co-ethnics expanded on this theme:

> *Since I shared and propagated the same ideology, I felt comfortable*".[148]

It was through the processes of religious and military education that specific individuals were identified as potential leaders by the existing Boko Haram hierarchy. In particular, as the following section discusses, individuals who distinguished themselves through their religious intelligence and/or military accomplishments were subsequently appointed to new positions after being recognised for their potential leadership qualities.

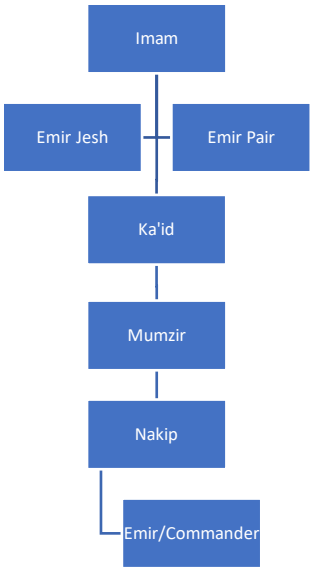


*Figure 3: Group Hierarchy*

At the time this research was conducted, and as summarised in figure 3, at the top of the Boko Haram hierarchy was the Imam, Abubakar Shekau, who led the group from 2009-2021.[149] Below him sat the Emir Jesh and the Emir Pair who control weapons and resources and approve requests of the Ka'id who are responsible for organising and coordinating war. Under the Ka'id, who are war commanders, are normally four Mumzir who assist them. Under the Mumzir are the Nakip, who are platoon commanders. Finally, under them are the local unit Emirs, who are sub-commanders responsible for collecting resources and looking after civilians.[150]

In most instances, the selection of a person for a leadership position was done by the immediate superiors in the hierarchy. For example, the Ka'id would select the Mumzir, and the Mumzir would appoint the Nakip – often from the community in question – as highlighted by one combatant who explained that most of the time, the leader selected was from *'within us"*.[151]

[148] B2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[149] Boko Haram and JAS
[150] M10: Male, Kanuri. Borno, 2023
[151] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

After the death of a former leader, which often occurred in battle or as a result of a drone strike, the leadership would select a successor based on their demonstration of a specific quality that qualified them for the position.[152] The selection process typically followed three paths. Either, leaders were selected on the basis of their religious knowledge and the degree to which they excelled in demonstrating loyalty and commitment to Boko Haram's overarching mission. Leaders selected through this channel were often the least likely to prioritise ethnic ties, favouritism, or patronage, by virtue of having fully internalised Boko Haram's religious and political unity. The second path through which leaders were selected was on the basis of military achievements. Finally, leaders were sometimes appointed by the hierarchy as a result of ethnic patronage. However, ethnic affinity typically served as a supplementary pathway rather than a primary one– though it is nevertheless significant. Moreover, leaders selected through these latter two paths were less likely to demonstrate a deep or profound commitment to the group's shared identity than to their own ethnic identity. I discuss each in turn below.

### Path one - Religious education

If an individual is recognised for having a high aptitude and a conviction in the group's ideology – described by one respondent as *'knowing the roots'* – they are likely to be quickly promoted once a leadership position becomes available.[153] More specifically, if an individual distinguishes themselves from others because of their knowledge of the group doctrine, then the leadership will often take notice and promote them to a leadership role. An individual's selection can also be accelerated if they have shown other attributes, such as positive relationships with others and an ability to communicate the group's message, ethos, and ideology to peers.[154] This is because if they have shown an aptitude for communicating the group's ideology, it will help them not only ensure stability within the group, as will be discussed in the following section, but also effectively recruit others to join the group.

For example, as was noted by one Ngarmagu ex-combatant:

> *They are looking at your braveness, secondly your intelligence. How you understand the holy book and they look critically with your relationship with people. How you can communicate their ideology with the people.* [155]

Similarly, two Kanuri ex-combatants explained:

> *There are different leadership positions; Ka'id, Nakip and Emir. If you are influential and you are knowledgeable about the religion and you are brave, they will make you a leader*.[156]

> *The leadership are within us….the one that is very intelligent.*[157]

Overall, this pathway to leadership is heavily influenced by the individual's knowledge and conviction in the group's ideology. Individuals who possess these qualities are recognised and sought out as they are often skilled at communicating the group's beliefs and values. This ability not only helps sustain the group but also plays a critical role in its growth.

[152] M10: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023
[153] Ibid
[154] M9: Male, Gladba. Borno 2023
[155] B50: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2023
[156] B9: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[157] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

### Path two -military accomplishment

Secondly, an individual can also be selected for a leadership position based solely on their military knowledge and accomplishments. For example, as noted earlier, an individual may be promoted if they have demonstrated bravery and a willingness to never withdraw during battle. [158] Moreover, if an individual has a lot of military knowledge, including knowledge of the terrain, or has successfully carried out multiple attacks, they may be approached and promoted to fill a new leadership role. For instance, one ex-Nakip shared that he was promoted because he was an excellent driver and knew the route to all the small villages.[159] As aforementioned, this often happens after the death of the previous leader. If an individual is recognised for their abilities, they are likely to be chosen to fill the position.[160]

Another way military accomplishments could lead to promotion was if an individual had participated in multiple attacks and brought back resources, including captives, to the camp. During our conversation, a Ngarmagu ex-combatant shared how individuals in his unit were promoted based on this criteria. In particular, he noted:

> *if you are going to take part in many operations, and if you come back, they are going to promote you from the initial post that you are. So after carrying out so much of an attack and bringing people to the bush, it depends on the number of people you have under you*[161]

Another told me:

> *There was a time that we went to war with my commander in Movi** and unfortunately, he got killed. So after he gets killed they are searching for someone that will be a commander, then they say I am the best person to be the commander…. They say I should be the commander. That was how I became a commander.*[162]

Therefore, given the heavy dependence on military expertise and the frequency of Boko Haram's military operations, individuals who were seen as good soldiers were often recognised and sought after. When a new role became available, these individuals were often selected and promoted. Leaders promoted through this channel did not necessarily exhibit the same commitment to the group's ideological mission.

### Path three* - ethnicity

Co-ethnicity, and in particular, co-ethnic affinity, has, on occasion, been a pathway through which individuals from dominant backgrounds are promoted. [163] There are two channels through which ethnicity can influence promotion: selection of an individual because they belong to the dominant ethnic group, or selection of a co-ethnic of a specific group that the organisation is trying to appeal to.

Within Boko Haram, Kanuri members may receive preferential treatment over non-Kanuri members, even if they possess similar skills and aptitudes. In the second channel, leaders from specific ethnic

[158] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023
[159] M10: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023
[160] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[161] B28: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[162] Ibid
[163] Although the Kanuri were often the most dominant ethnic group in Boko Haram, this was not always the case. In particular, if another ethnic group had more members and held leadership positions within a particular unit, that group would be the most dominant.

groups may be selected to increase outreach and appeal within a particular community. However, both channels can undermine the culture of unity and equality within the units in question.

If multiple individuals have shown military skill, the current leadership's co-ethnic may select a co-ethnic candidate over a non-co-ethnic one. This is because, despite outwardly professing that ethnicity is not considered when selecting a leader, some respondents noted that it did play a role under certain conditions.

For example, Abdul* and another Kanuri ex-combatant both shared this sentiment during our conversation:

> *... they used to assess and analyse which of the tribes that are trustworthy. Most of time they tend to choose from the Kanuri, that is the number one choice. The second choice is the Hausa, because the rest of the tribe, like the Ngarmagu they used to have a problem with them…. they are not trustworthy*[164]

> *You know there are different tribes in Boko Haram; yes, usually a Kanuri leader will favour his fellow Kanuri even if the Ngarmagu are much more qualified for the leadership position*[165]

Similarly, a Ngarmagu ex-combatant shared that:

> *There are so many different camps. If you are going to be promoted as a leader, if there is like 100 or 50 or 200 people, they can decide to put you as a leader. But it is more than 1000 people, like 2000 people, they must tell the commander general, that is Shekau, and he must know you and where you come from and will make some little investigation on you and the people you stayed with and your community before they give you the leadership. And even though they do this investigation you must be Kanuri before you get any leadership to have even interacted with the senior leadership in the bush.*[166]

This practice was confirmed by Abdul* during our interview. He shared that certain ethnic groups, particularly Kanuri and Hausa, are seen as trustworthy and are chosen over others for leadership positions. Abdul* acknowledged that he was selected for his position because he was Kanuri:

> *I am among the big big people…. And when I joined it didn't even reach 1 year and they started to promote me because I am Kanuri*. [167]

Therefore, ethnicity alone is rarely the sole reason for an individual's selection. Rather, it can serve as an extra advantage to further distinguish an individual. As explained by another ex-combatant:

> *If you are influential and you are knowledgeable about the Koran, you are brave with good fighting skills. And sometimes one may be appointed leader by tribalism… How do you mean? You know there are different tribes in Boko Haram; yes, usually a Kanuri leader will favour his fellow Kanuri even if the Ngamargu are much more qualified for the leadership position.*

Another related mechanism through which ethnicity emerged in the selection process was through individuals from particular ethnic backgrounds being selected because they were deemed to be better positioned to recruit and govern their co-ethnics, demonstrating again the extra advantage that ethnicity can play in distinguishing an individual for a leadership role.[168] Nevertheless, despite being

[164] M8: Male Kanuri. Borno 2022
[165] B14: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[166] B50: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2023
[167] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023
[168] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

influenced by other attributes, this pathway to leadership is notably influenced by ethnicity, in that the existing leadership would look at one's ethnicity before selecting an individual to fill a role.

Overall, as previously mentioned, it is challenging to classify these pathways into fixed categories, since two of the attributes that influence them – religious education and military achievement – are often intertwined. This makes it difficult to strictly delineate these pathways. As will be discussed in the following sections, it is the absence or minimal presence of political and religious education, and the subsequent failure to internalise the group's supra-identity by appointed leaders (a failure mostly seen in path two, although also in path three), that comes to shape the salience of ethnic identity within the group. As noted, this has a trickle-down effect on unit cohesion.

### Leadership dynamics and sub-unit variation in Boko Haram

Despite Boko Haram's efforts, often many recruits resist socialisation efforts. This resistance is unsurprising, given that recruits are not blank slates and often come with pre-existing beliefs and commitments that may conflict with the group's ideology and identity. Moreover, in many cases, as highlighted in Chapter Three, many recruits may have joined the group out of fear for their own safety, rather than a genuine desire to be part of the group. As one respondent explained:

> *We were separated, I was one of those who chose to move to the side of those who would join because I saw their faces; I knew what they may likely do, so those who indicated not to join were instantly killed. And that was how we followed them to the bush.*[169]

Those recruited through threat and fear may not be predisposed to internalise the group's ideology or identity, but rather to respond to particular incentive structures, such as the fear of being killed if they do not comply with the group's demands. This type of resistance to socialisation efforts can pose significant challenges for extremist groups like Boko Haram, as it undermines their ability to create a cohesive and committed membership base.

Resistance to socialisation efforts is not limited to fear-based motivations. In some cases, attempts to internalise the group's ideology and identity were met with significant resistance, as recruits viewed the group's identity, beliefs, and practices as incompatible with their own, or at least not strong enough to supersede them. Alex,* an ex-combatant from Borno, emphasised: "*people are different, and everyone is created differently by God*".[170]Similarly, during our interview about her experience, Elizabeth*, an ex-Boko Haram wife, shared how fighters within her unit often preferred Kanuri or women from Chad, as they were seen as more religious and therefore more likely to adopt the ideology. She said, "*they believe that Kanuri or girls from Chad are more religious and would be loyal to their cause"*.[171]

Additionally, for some recruits the Kanuri, who typically share the same ethnicity as the group's leaders, were perceived as exhibiting superiority to non-Kanuri, which made some unwilling to fully accept the group's supra-identity where everyone is equal .[172] At times, a reluctance to abandon past identities and replace them with the group's shared identity caused divisions and fractures within units.[173]

Nevertheless, it is the role of the unit leader to continue to promote and enforce the group's ideology and identity among those under their control to ensure cohesion and the successful internalisation of the group's supra-identity. For example, if there are any disagreements or disputes, including along

[169] M4: Male, Boyeye. Borno 2022
[170] Alex: Male, Waha. Borno 2019
[171] Elizabeth: Female, Mafa. Borno 2019
[172] M2: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[173] B42: Male, Shua Arab. Borno 2022/ B49

ethnic lines, it is the unit leader who is tasked with settling these, often by promoting the group's governing ideology.

This is because Boko Haram had a very fragmented structure (Curiel, 2020). After entering many of the towns—just as the Islamic State had done—Boko Haram appointed its own emirs and began to institute its own governance agenda enforced by hudud punishments (Warner et al., 202). "Some have up to ten thousand in their camp, some five thousand and some five hundred," even within the Sambisa Forest.[174] Therefore, as highlighted in Chapter Four, unit leaders had a lot of power, including over resources.

Moreover, many recruits had little contact with the group's main leaders. In fact, throughout the interviews for this dissertation, most respondents noted that they had never met or seen Shekau in person. This was confirmed by one Shua Arab ex-combatant who explained that:

> *These leaders, it is hard to even see them. That is the leaders from the Shekau camp.*[175]

This lack of direct contact with the group's main leaders highlights the importance of unit leaders in maintaining cohesion and promoting the group's ideology and identity among recruits. The unit leaders act as the main point of contact for the recruits and are responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the group's objectives and practices. They are also responsible for ensuring that any disputes or disagreements among the recruits are settled in a manner that reinforces the group's identity and ideology. Overall, the decentralised structure of Boko Haram underscores the importance of effective unit leadership in promoting the group's ideology and identity and maintaining cohesion among its members. For example, one respondent noted that: "*leaders are responsible for upholding the law and order*."[176]

As a result, when disputes happened, conflicting members often brought the issues to the unit leader to settle. As highlighted in the previous chapter, it was not uncommon for ethnic groups to argue over access to resources, for example arable farmland. However, when this happens, it was the role of the unit leader to settle the dispute and pacify angry members by promoting the group's ideology that emphasised the members shared identity and the reason why they need to work together.

For example, as was highlighted by Hassan*:

> *If we do an argument, we will call the leaders and they will resolve it…. I have never seen them maltreat anyone. And the reason is they want us to come closer to them to feel as if, yes, the ideology and the religion is real".*[177]

Similarly, during his interview, another Ngarmagu respondent explained that there were often arguments between the Ngarmagu and Kanuri within his unit. However, when these disputes arose, they would bring them to the leader, who would use the group's ideology to pacify any disagreements by preaching the group's unifying doctrine and shared identity. Specifically, he shared:

> *What usually brings argument between tribes mostly when the Ngarmagu people are discussing that we are the strongest, we understand the war better than anybody, we are very good in attacking communities and that we are supposed to be the leaders. Then the Kanuri people will start accusing us and saying, 'when did you even convert to Islam' 'what do you know about Islam' ' it is just recently that you have accepted the religion'. This is how we get to start an argument that even leads to fights…*

[174] M1: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[175] B3.5
[176] M1: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[177] B26: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

> *…How we resolve it is that at times, we talk to our leader and then the leaders will judge us and tell us what to do and what not to do, and we should stop discriminating and calling names.* [178]

Therefore, considering the potential limitations of socialisation and the noted tendency for combatants to disagree, it can be challenging to ensure cohesion without effective leadership. This, in turn, restricts the group's ability to achieve its objectives. However, if an appointed leader has not fully internalised the group's supra-identity, as will be discussed in the following section, they not only have limited capacity to deal with divisions but also have the power to propagate division, particularly concerning ethnicity.

### The salience of ethnicity as a function of leadership trajectory

While the three leadership trajectories identified above are often intertwined, it is the presence or absence of political education – and subsequent emphasis on religious intelligence as a reason for promotion – that most profoundly influences the salience of ethnicity within a subunit.

This is because if religious intelligence is not foregrounded, then it is less likely that the individual has sufficiently internalised the group's ideology and identity – what I term elsewhere: "Type II socialisation." As a result, it is more likely that such individuals have not fully adopted the group's new supra-ethnic Jihadi identity. However, if religious intelligence is foregrounded in an individual's promotion trajectory, in particular, when an individual is promoted because of their religious intelligence, then they are more likely to embody the group's overarching cross-ethnic ideology.

Secondly, as highlighted in the previous section, unit leaders have a great deal of power and influence over sub-unit culture and can resultingly have a significant impact on group behaviour and cohesion. Moreover, often those under their control would not complain if they had any issues out of respect or fear. As noted by one Kanuri ex-Nakip:

> *We cannot go and complain to the higher authority as it is a sign of disrespect to say you are going to complain, so it is hardly that you see someone punished for all these things, but it used to happen.*[179]

Nevertheless, if the leaders are fully socialised into Boko Haram, they are more likely to promote the group's values and norms to mitigate the chance of division, limiting the salience of ethnicity within the unit. This dynamic was highlighted by one Ngarmagu ex-combatant who shared how such a leader would:

> *….want to draw your attention closer to them, and they want you to believe in the ideology and they want more people to be their followers. And by doing that they create peace within the people that are staying in the bush*".[180]

This perspective was shared by several respondents who after stating that leaders were chosen because of intelligence also spoke of their fairness, as well as the absence of ethnicity as a determining factor within the unit, as highlighted in Chapter 5. For example, during our conversation, a 35-year-old Kanuri ex-combatant explained that leadership positions were given based on religious intelligence, which was central to the group's overarching identity. Additionally, he also shared how it was because of his leader's religious knowledge and conviction that he trusted him, as well as how he treated everyone equally:

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[178] B49: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2023
[179] M10: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2023
[180] B3.1: Ngarmagu. Borno 2023

Int: Who was your leader then? *He is from Mafa.*

Int: Did you trust him? *Yes.*

Int: Why did you all trust him?

*Because he was our religious leader, and he was carrying out Allah's bidding before he was killed…. He made sure everyone gets what they deserve.*

Int: How does one become a leader in the group?

*There are different leadership positions; Ka'id, Nakip and Emir. If you are influential and you are knowledgeable about the religion and you are brave, they will make you a leader.*

*Culture means nothing to them; everyone, irrespective of tribe, will be accepted into the group. They are only bothered about religion.* Why? *Because religion is the instrument used to recruit people into the group and not their tribe.*

Similarly, one Ngarmagu ex-combatant, who, during our conversation, spoke fondly of his non-co-ethnic leader and of how he treated everyone equally, also noted that the leader was selected because of his religious knowledge and conviction. In particular, he stated that:

> *They are looking at your braveness, secondly your intelligence. How you understand the holy book and they look critically with your relationship with people. How you can communicate their ideology with the people.* [181]

Mustafa*, a Ngarmagu ex-combatant, also commented on a leader that treated everyone fairly compared to other leaders. In particular, he described how he was chosen because of his religious intelligence and how he treated everyone fairly. Moreover, Mustafa noted that he always relied on religious texts to govern his actions whenever any disputes or issues arose. In particular, he shared how the leader was:

> *…Very kind. Because he is too religious and understands the religion so well. Had it been he was our leader there we would have enjoyed better. Because he is treating people fairly with justice and respect… whatever happened he would just open the holy book and then read to us and say this is what the holy book said and this is what the judgement is supposed to be.*[182]

These examples and experiences noted above demonstrate the significance and effect of a leader's religious knowledge and conviction in the group's governing ideology. In particular, while other attributes were also involved, in almost all the instances of sub-unit ethnic cohesion, religious intelligence was central to the selection of leaders in those groups. Such leaders were known to always treat those under them as equals, regardless of their ethnicity. Additionally, if any disputes or divisions occurred, these leaders were known to abide by the group's norms and beliefs in settling conflicts. This maintaining of neutrality and promoting of unifying ideas mitigated the seriousness of any potential division within a given unit from arising, including along ethnic lines, and helped to achieve ''. For example, as was highlighted by one combatant who noted that his leader would "*never allow problems to come between you; rather they will pacify you, using religion to accept their ways*".[183]

However, if an individual was selected for a promotion based solely on their military accomplishments, rather than their religious intelligence, there is a higher chance that they have not

[181] B50: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2023
[182] B49: Male, Garmargu. Borno 2023
[183] B39: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

undergone the Type II socialisation in their promotion pathway. Consequently, leaders selected through these channels may still hold sentiments of ethnic bias. In such cases, leaders have been observed to prioritise ethnicity. As discussed in Chapter Five, in these groups, ethnicity became prominent as leaders favoured their co-ethnics in particular during distributing resources, conducting military operations, and dispensing punishment and reward.

An example of this was shared during a conversation I had with Abdul* who spoke of one Emir Jef whom Shekau appointed because of his military knowledge and achievement. However, as he explained during our conversation, after he was appointed, he began to show bias towards his fellow Hausa by awarding them gifts. In particular, he noted how:

> *There was an Amir Jesh. His name is Ali, he loves the Hausa because he is Hausa. …When it comes to gift to people, he chooses the Hausa to give and not the Kanuri.*
>
> *Before becoming Emir Jesh he was not showing that character, but after he was in that position he started showing. If not he would not have been chosen. It was Shekau that appointed him without knowing that he is as such. He replaced someone that was called … Charlie. He was the Emir Jesh before, but he was killed in a battle in the Lake Chad. When he died they said because Ali used to be his personal assistant he should just take the leadership since he knows everything that the late Emir know. That is why Shekau decided to give him. Because he knows more about their area of control* [184]

Similarly, Mustafa* who also noted that individuals were selected for leadership positions because of military successes – particularly if the value of the goods seized was high– also commented extensively about the unfair way that the leadership treated the Ngarmagu people. In particular, he shared how:

> *There are other leaders who are not truthful… some of them are doing it just to get money, some are doing it to protect their ethnicity just to gain a name and other promotions, because if Shekau hears that you are taking care of Kanuri people in the bush, he will even give you another vehicle and more money. Some are not doing it the way they preach to us what the leadership is, because of God. Later on, we come to understand that.*
>
> *How they are selecting is like politics. …they give the leadership to someone who they know can bring something…They give these big big leadership [positions] to those who can serve them. Who can do something they want. For example, if you go and attack a community, like you attack a bank and bring a lot of money, and you bring it to the bush… they will know you bring something to them.*

And when things were being shared:

> *If you are not Kanuri, if you go and collect food items, how they will be giving the food items for the Kanuri and how they will be giving the food items and how you will be getting it as Ngarmagu and other tribes is not the same. Sometimes they will be giving them rice and spaghetti and other good things, but us they will give us corn millet and other things like that. Even the places were we are collecting meat, they will not give us the good good part, and they will not give us much, but the Kanuri people, they are going to be providing very good things to them.*

He also mentioned how:

> *There was a time where we had a problem with the Kanuri people, and when they call us they said we should be his witness and explain what happened. But they said they are not going to*

[184] M8: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

*accept it, because we are Ngarmargu people, we are backing our brother. And they punished him and even us they locked us in a cell.* [185]

Moreover, as noted, one's ethnicity can be an extra advantage that leads to their appointment to a leadership position. However, similarly, when chosen based on ethnicity, the individual is more likely to hold ethnic sentiments, which they can propagate once in a position, influencing the salience of ethnicity within their given unit. For example, during his interview, one Ngarmagu ex-commander quoted in chapter 5, who shared how he was selected as a leader because of his ethnicity, also shared how there was widespread ethnic bias within his unit. He noted throughout our interview that the Kanuri favoured their fellow Kanuri and expressed how he also favoured and showed leniency towards his fellow Ngarmagu. For example, he shared how:

"*by the time they are ready to share the loot, they will keep the best items for themselves and toss the bad ones to us. As a matter of fact, I have not forgotten the way they segregated us and I still feel the pain in my heart*".[186]

Similarly, Abdul*, who acknowledged that he was promoted, in part, because he was Kanuri, spoke passionately about how only certain ethnic groups are trustworthy enough to hold leadership positions – in his case, Kanuri and Hausa. These examples demonstrate that if ethnicity was a notable factor in the selection of leaders, then the likelihood that ethnicity remains foregrounded is increased, particularly when it comes to the appointment of new leaders. Such affinities reveal the absence of Type II socialisation, causing leaders to supplant sentiments of ethnic bias or identity with those of the group, despite being given leadership positions. As a result, within such groups, ethnicity is often prioritised, as the leadership privileges their pre-existing social ties – grounded in their ethnicity – over the group's unifying supra-identity.

Overall, the observations of these former Boko Haram fighters shed light on how ethnic bias can manifest during resource distribution within units led by individuals who were promoted based on factors unrelated to religious intelligence and complete socialisation.

Similarly, within military dynamics, a Ngarmagu ex-combatant, who explained that individuals were selected for leadership roles based on their participation in multiple military operations, also commented extensively on the salience of ethnicity within his unit. As a result, he explained how he would target his co-ethnics to bring back to the 'bush' when on operations—demonstrating again the lasting ethnic sentiment within such units.

In particular, he noted:

*If you are going to take part in many operations, and if you come back, they are going to promote you from the initial post that you are. So after carrying out so much of an attack and bringing people to the bush, it depends on the number of people you have under you.*

*Even me now, when we go on operations, I target the people of my ethnicity to take them to the bush. The reason why I am doing that is because I gather them so I will have more strength…*

*Yes, it is possible to have people from different tribes but if you have more of your tribal people in your own camp you again have more recognition and you have more powers*[187]

Similarly, another Kanuri ex-Emir quoted in chapter 5, who spoke of how he would use Ngarmagu fighters in battle because they are like 'slaves to us', also noted that individuals are chosen leadership

[185] B49: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2023
[186] B25: Male, Ngarmargu. Borno 2022
[187] B28: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

positions because of military abilities.[188] This once again demonstrates how, when selected because of reasons that are not contingent on the complete internalisation of the group's ideology and supra-identity then ethnicity is more likely to become salient within units.[189]

Similarly, regarding punishments, although they are not as frequent due to the strict doctrine that governs punishments, respondents who stated that leaders were selected based on military accomplishments or ruthlessness were more likely to note that punishments were harsher or not fairly adjudicated if the accused did not belong to the same ethnic group as the leader. For instance, Ali*, a Kanuri respondent quoted in chapter five spoke extensively during our interview about the unfair treatment of Ngarmagu fighters in terms of resource distribution and punishments. He also noted that leaders are selected based on military accomplishments, and specifically mentioned that:

> *…. it could be due to how long you have been with the group, It could be due to bravery and hard work during war.*

Moreover, when asked about his experience with the group, he expressed his enjoyment, at least in part, because he belonged to the same ethnic group as the leadership. He said:

> *The way our leader was nice to me, I fell it's because we are from the same tribe, but if I was from a different tribe, I wouldn't have enjoyed all that.*[190]

The mistreatment of non-Kanuri members and his awareness of the preferential treatment of Kanuri members demonstrate the lack of internalization of the group's identity by his unit leader. This once again highlights how leaders selected based on attributes that do not ensure the complete internalization of the group's ideology and shared identity are more likely to retain sentiments that they may act on once in a leadership position.

Overall, the examples presented contrast with those where leaders were chosen based on their religious knowledge, emphasizing the significance of the group's ideology and identity in determining the relevance of ethnicity. In conclusion, the perpetuation of ethnic affiliations in leadership positions undermines the cohesion and stability of a group, leading to a lack of inclusivity and diversity in decision-making.

## Conclusion

Within his work on Islam and ethnic conflict, Gurses asks if religion can "in fact help foster a new political identity that de-prioritises ethnic identities and grievances?" He further asks: can co-religiosity really help bring peace between warring groups of the same faith? Focusing on the dispute between the Muslim Kurds and the Turks, Gurses finds that rather than being an antidote for the Kurdish conflict, Islam has become more of a tool for political leaders to strengthen their position than an ideological force to guide their platforms. And in the hands of political entrepreneurs, religious ideology has turned into another effective instrument of legitimisation and mobilisation (Gurses, 2015).

Despite their adoption of Boko Haram's ideology, ethnic identity still held a lot of importance for many Boko Haram recruits. However, while the group's interpretation of Islamic doctrine perhaps did a better job at entrenching the overriding supra-identity amongst recruits, its success varied. In particular, while in most instances an individual's identity was subservient to that of the group and served as a complementary identity, in other instances, it superseded it. These patterns can be

[188] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[189] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[190] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

attributed to the role of leadership within Boko Haram, and the successes and failures of socialisation as a function of divergent promotion trajectories.

It typically falls on the unit leader to ensure that the individuals under his control are fully socialised into the group, and to set the tone for cohesion and unity across diverse members. In instances where ethnic disputes occurred, it is the role of the leader to promote the group's unifying ideology and adjudicate fairly. However, as a result of divergent promotion trajectories, those individuals who were not effectively socialised into the group, and instead promoted by virtue of military accolade or ethnic selection, continued to possess ethnic sentiments. When this happens, rather than promote the group's supra-identity, such leaders are more likely to show bias towards their co-ethnics, which in turn allows for the salience of ethnicity within the group's distribution of resources, military operations, and discipline and punishment.

Therefore, while at a macro level, the group leadership projected a unified image, on a more micro level, within certain units, varying experiences of socialisation – which can be traced to leader promotion patterns within the group – meant that ethnicity was foregrounded to different degrees in different sub-units, profoundly shaping the treatment that people from different ethnic groups received.

# Conclusion

> Int: Has your stay with them changed your perceptions on other cultures/ beliefs and tribes?
>
> *Yes, it has, now I understand that everyone has their own way of doing things*[191]

With the aim of uncovering how contemporary insurgent groups operate within sub-Saharan African society, this thesis concentrated on understanding the role and effect of ethnicity on insurgent groups that do not identify as ethnic. In particular, "*when, why and how ethnicity emerges as a mechanism of organisation and control within armed groups, surpassing the overarching ideology, in spite of attempts and claims of cross-ethnic reach and appeal"*. [192]

Initially very exploratory, with the hopes of uncovering what role ethnicity held both at the administrative level and amongst lower-level combatants, I soon found that ethnicity played a notable role in supplementing the spreading of the group's ideology amongst different diverse communities during both voluntary and coercive recruitment. However, once recruits were brought into the group, Boko Haram focused on socialising them through political education and military training, in order to foster a shared ideology and identity among its members, and to promote unity within the group.

Despite this however, I also quickly discovered variations in the experiences of people from different ethnic backgrounds in certain circumstances. In particular, despite professing an ideology that transcends ethnicity, under certain circumstances, I found that ethnicity was notably salient and even at times was foregrounded within certain units. When this occurred, I found that it directly affected the treatment that individuals from different ethnic groups received, and at times even led to conflicts along ethnic lines.

While some scholars attribute the conflict along ethnic lines to competing claims of group legitimacy (Horowitz, 1985), limited resources, lack of leadership representation (Lake & Rothchild , 1996), none of these explanations proved capable of explaining the variation I observed at the unit level. Instead, I have argued that the main reason ethnicity is more likely to come to the fore and negatively influence group cohesion is directly related to the unit leaders' attitude and traits, which are influenced by their level of socialisation. This is because, given the fragmented organisation of the group's decentralised cell (Curiel, 2020), unit leaders possess a lot of power which can have a big impact on group dynamics.

More specifically, if an individual is promoted to a leadership role because of a military accomplishment, it is possible that they have not fully internalised the group's identity and may still hold sentiments of ethnic bias. As a result, once in a position of power, they are able to shape and enforce expected behaviour by acting on those feelings. Firstly, when disputes along ethnic lines occur, such leaders are more likely to show bias towards their co-ethnics. Additionally, as highlighted in chapter 5, if they hold sentiments of bias, they are more likely to favour their co-ethnics during resource distribution, military operations, and punishment.

However, when leaders have undergone extensive training and socialisation within the group, when disputes occur, they typically propagate religion and the group's supra-identity as the primary organising frame, eschewing ethnic privilege and dismantling ethnic hierarchies and factionalism as they emerge.

This experience notably impacted individuals' attitudes towards ethnicity and perceptions of people from specific ethnic groups. As a result, despite falling into the somewhat problematic non-ethnic dichotomous classifications of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, this thesis finds that while ethnicity is

[191] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[192]B21:Male, Mafa. Borno 2022

not the main driver of the conflict, it still plays a notable role, not only in facilitating the conflict but also, as discussed in the following section, with the potential to play a very divisive role in the post-conflict context.

Following this, the chapter then moves on to addressing the implications of my argument for social scientists interested in insurgent group mobilisation and for policymakers concerned with the behaviour and operational habits of non-state armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa before touching on potential further research projects and concluding.

### Perceptions of ethnicity post Boko-Haram

Towards the end of our interview, one of the questions that was asked to each respondent was about how, if at all, their experience with Boko Haram affected their views on ethnicity and people from different ethnic groups. Unsurprisingly, a number of respondents noted that it had a lasting effect on how they thought, particularly regarding specific ethnic groups. This dynamics was highlighted by one respondent who shared that, "*when you stay with people, you will learn a lot of things; truly, I have learnt a lot".*[193]

Within units and among combatants that were fully socialised, even after abandoning the group's ideology, their experience with Boko Haram often had a positive effect on how they thought about people from different ethnic groups. Some respondents even shared that they enjoyed staying with people from different ethnic groups. For example, two respondents shared:

> *the way people from different ethnic backgrounds interact with one another in peace and harmony*.[194]

> *When you live together with people, you will experience a lot of things. For me, I enjoyed my stay with all the people that I came across.*[195]

Another ex-combatant from Ngarmargu shared a similar experience, recounting how he lived with "*about five hundred people*" from various tribes such as Margi, Shuwa, Kanuri, Fulani, Mandara, Mafa, and many others.[196] Despite thinking that the Kanuri tribe was more prominent, he emphasised that no tribe was mistreated during battles as every member of the group was sent to fight, regardless of their ethnicity. When asked about the impact of his time with the group on his perception of people from different ethnic groups, he stated that he respected diversity and did not segregate or treat them differently.[6]

However, when combatants' socialisation was not successful, and ethnicity became salient, one of the main lasting consequences for inhabitants of Boko Haram camps was that it either created or re-affirmed rivalries on a large scale– seen most clearly between the Kanuri and the Ngarmagu. For example, one Kanuri respondent shared how:

> *….this Ngarmagu tribe, what they did to me, killing my own in-law. Has changed the way I used to see them before.*
>
> *Yes, it has changed the way I used to see the Ngarmagu people before. The Kanuri, they even been underrating them because it is a tribe that they don't have even pride.*
>
> *They are the minority, we insulted them, and look at what they have done to me now. We don't even give them any significance because we feel they are just like slaves within us. Sincerely,*

[193] B23: Male, Kanuri. 2022
[194] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[195] B21: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[196] B26: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022

*we have even insulted them. They are the minority there. And now because they have guns in their hands, they tend to be something else.*[197]

Similarly, a Ngarmagu ex-commander noted how his experience has left him:

*… wiser and more enlightened about culture and ethnicity. I have come to see that people will adore you if you are their kin and will despise you if you are not their kin…they treated us very badly, and they are still mistreating us here in the IDP camp. If this continues, we will be forced to spill blood; I pray the government does something fast so we could return to our various communities. We are tired of the way the Kanuri are mistreating us.*[198]

In addition, negative sentiments towards specific ethnic groups are not only limited to the Kanuri and Ngarmagu relationship, but also extend to the perception of the Kanuri by non-co-ethnics affected by the conflict. This is due to the fact that the Kanuri founded the group and make up the majority of its members. For instance, when asked about the impact of their stay with the group on their views and relationships with people from other tribes, one ex-combatant expressed that they now perceive the Kanuri people as "*terrible*".[199]

Similarly, Henry shared how:

*Yes it has really affected the way I see and think about the Kanuri people. Right now in Gwoza and Mubi, if they see people with Kanuri tribal marks, they will prevent such people from entering their towns. I never thought I would sit side- by-side with the Kanuri ever again but my religion encourages that I should forgive, that's why I mingle with them in this camp.*[200]

Alternatively, another Mafa ex-combatant noted how:

*right now I feel enormous hate for the Kanuri because they are the ones that brought this upon us. Lives have been lost and properties worth fortunes have also been lost; I have lost all my belongings*[201]

As well as another Marge ex-combatant who noted that:

*my experience in the BK has changed the way I see order tribe, but the thing is, even if I think of a negative thing about a specific tribe or a specific language, then sometimes I used to say OK. Everyone has his or her own attitude, so I would not generalise.*

*But actually…. Sometimes if I just feel about them, I just keep quiet, but I know they are wicked, but I know it's not good to think that, so that's why I just know that there are some bad eggs in every situation and in every language there are bad eggs.*[202]

The examples and experiences provided highlight the significant impact of individuals' exposure to Boko Haram on their perceptions of ethnicity. Specifically, the failure of socialisation and the oppression of specific populations have led to enduring animosity, particularly between the Ngarmagu. Furthermore, there is widespread mistrust and resentment towards the Kanuri community among many affected by the conflict, along with a sense of shame experienced by some Kanuri individuals. For instance, one respondent expressed their innermost thoughts about being Kanuri,

[197] M7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[198] B25: Male, Ngarmagu. Borno 2022
[199] B1: Male, Mafa. Borno 2022
[200] Henry: Male, Waha. Borno 2019
[201] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022
[202] M5: Male, Marge. Borno 2022

questioning why they were created that way and expressing gratitude for not having the identifying marks of the Kanuri:

> *…why was I created by God to be Kanuri? Again, I'm thankful to my parents that I don't have the Kanuri mark of identity*.[203]

As a result, as highlighted in the quote above, the potential for future violence between ethnic groups has increased, particularly given the lack of resources as the conflict is still ongoing, combined with the current high level of mistrust– as highlighted by one respondent when asked if he trusts people from a different ethnic group, to which he noted that:

> *In the past I would, but now it would be difficult….Now the situation we find ourselves will not permit such friendly interactions because a lot has changed and it is difficult to trust your own people*.[204]

## Contribution to the field

Although the focus of this study was on insurgent groups in the sub-Saharan region, the insights gained from this research can have broader implications. Specifically, the findings can inform our understanding of how groups centred around a strong ideology can recruit and sustain themselves, despite having a diverse population. Therefore, the results of this study can potentially be applied to other contexts beyond the sub-Saharan region.

### Conflict Framing

The argument presented in this thesis aims to add further nuance to our understanding of how insurgent groups work within the sub-Saharan region and the wider world more generally. Building on several key scholars, in particular Lewis (2016, 2017) and McCauley (2017) , this thesis highlights how, despite the shift away from focusing on ethnicity in conflicts, it still holds a lot of importance– a feature of which is often indicative of the wider society.

In particular, this study has highlighted how, even within conflicts that are not driven by ethnic grievances, ethnicity still plays a central role in facilitating recruitment, and maintains a key role within a number of operational mechanisms– all of which subsequently have a notable effect on the wider society within the post-conflict context.

As a result, this thesis holds that the tendency to categorise conflicts because of specific attributes, foregoing other features that are initially viewed as inconsequential, can limit our understanding of how such groups mobilise and operate during their life span. Instead, scholars should actively seek to better frame such conflicts within the society in which they are found to better understand how they operate and grow.

### Recruitment

The literature on rebel recruitment is expansive and continuously growing, particularly regarding terrorist organisations– all of which provides knowledge that should inform our approaches to countering and preventing such phenomena.

To that effect, this thesis has sought to add to this body of work by uncovering the systematic approach that insurgent groups use to appeal to the wider populace. In particular, firstly, the thesis

[203] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022. Referring to the nine tribal marks of the Kanuri people
[204] B22: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

highlights the role of ethnicity in facilitating the spread of group ideology through existing social networks, often through slow and progressive contact, loaded with gift-giving.

Secondly, the thesis has also argued for the significance of poverty, which, while the prevailing literature, such as Iheonu & Ichoku (2021) and Krueger & Malecˇkova, (2003), has held that it may not act as a significant factor that spurs the level of terrorist activities, other works on the sub-Saharan region, such as Darden (2019) and UNDP (2017), have similarly and somewhat contrarily to the prevailing literature noted its role as a key factor during recruitment – a factor which was encapsulated by one respondent using a Nigerian Proverb: "*My hand was empty, if you gave it fire, it will ignite*".[205]

Therefore, it is not that poverty intrinsically spurs the level of terrorist activity; rather, this thesis has shown that within the region, it acts as a key factor in effectively recruiting potential future terrorist fighters.

**Socialisation and the role of Leadership**

Additionally, this thesis has sought to add further colour to our understanding of the nature and role of combatant socialisation and leadership. In particular, while several previous works, such as Hoover Green, note the significance of 'PE' in affecting combatants' propensity for violence (Hoover Green, 2016), this thesis builds from this and highlights the role it also plays in ensuring synergy within heterogeneous groups. In particular, the thesis similarly argues for the significance of political education, as well as military training, both of which operate in tandem when socialising both voluntary and coerced recruits to entrench the group's supra-identity amongst units.

Moreover, this thesis contributes to our knowledge on leadership roles and group behaviour. In particular, and building on the work of Weinstein, this thesis introduces the concept of 'collective homogeneity', which is the role and goal of the leader to ensure that all forces and interests are the same within a given unit. This thesis holds that this concept better explains the approach used by insurgent groups, like Boko Haram, compared to 'cooperative equilibrium', which Weinstein argues for (Weinstein, 2007).

Additionally, in line with Hoover Green, who notes how "groups build institutions to create intrinsic incentives for behaviour that match commander preference" (Hoover Green, 2016), this thesis adds further clarity to how those in leadership positions work, at their discretion, to either build on and continue the work done by the group's institutions or promote their own biases when their socialisation efforts were unsuccessful.

## Implication for policy makers

A central goal throughout this research has been to provide insight on insurgent group dynamics within the sub-Saharan region that can inform future policy recommendations. In particular, my argument suggests that individual-level factors, such as the attitudes and traits of unit leaders, are more significant than broader societal or systemic factors in explaining the observed variation in group dynamics. This underscores the importance of examining multiple levels of analysis when trying to understand complex phenomena like group cohesion and ethnic divisions.

Moreover, because of how such groups mobilise, using pre-existing social networks that exist, including ethnic networks and ethnic trust, the state should be hyper-sensitive when dealing with these wider populations and bring them into the countering measures as much as possible, as well as acknowledge and identify any grievances. Previously these communities have been vilified, pushing them further away from the state and making them more susceptible to joining such groups. For example, "when Nigerian security forces reportedly killed hundreds of Boko Haram members,

[205] B7: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022

including Yusuf, in July 2009, those most adversely affected by the deaths (e.g. family and friends of the slain) were Kanuri. This embittered population served as a pool of new fighters for Boko Haram as it reconstituted itself under Abubakar Shekau" (Baca, 2015).

Additionally, countering offensive bodies need to be primarily made up of said communities as foreign combatants are often more prone to using harsher methods which further isolate the population– an aspect that some Boko Haram commanders were aware of, as highlighted by one respondent who shared how, "*most times when we go on operations like this, the persons assigned to capture the people were men from the same town and so they do not mistreat them because they are from the same place*".[206]

Finally, the state needs to have a notable awareness and sensitivity towards the wider co-ethnic population that shares the same identity with the groups, particularly within a post-conflict context. One of the many reasons for this is because the collapse or weakening of insurgent groups can provide a great opportunity for the states to reduce the potential of any future similar ideology from spreading significantly, given the widespread feeling of disillusionment amongst ex-combatants. However, to achieve this, the state must bridge the gap between said populations and the state to ensure that they do not feel isolated and demonised by society, which in turn could push them towards the direction of any splinter groups.

Rehabilitation efforts should show awareness of and aim to counter feelings of anger between possible warring combatant populations. Within Nigeria, this includes between the Kanuri and the Ngarmagu, as well as between ISWAP and JAS ex-combatants.

### Future research

The purpose of this research was to provide a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of how contemporary insurgent groups operate within sub-Saharan society. While the study revealed several new perspectives on the subject, there is still significant room for further research to deepen our knowledge.

Firstly, a potential avenue for future research would be to conduct a similar study in another state within the region, such as northern Mozambique, to assess the reliability and generalisability of the findings. This would better aid theoretical development by exploring whether the dynamics identified in this study hold true in other contexts.

Secondly, it would be valuable to conduct a similar study on the presence, role, and effect of alternative identity-based socialization mechanisms within units, such as ethnicity, gender, and age. While this study focused on the role of religious identity, it is likely that other forms of identity-based socialization mechanisms exist within units. One example of this is studying whether socialization mechanisms exist within different age groups. While Boko Haram actively sought out young boys, they recruited people of all ages.

Finally, a more comprehensive study is needed on the way in which resources are distributed within units, especially during times of scarcity. While the current literature on resources and armed groups discusses how access to resources affects how groups mobilize, there is not much literature on how resources are distributed during the lifespan of groups. By understanding how resources are allocated within insurgent groups, we can better understand the internal power dynamics and decision-making processes of these groups.

[206] B5: Male, Kanuri. Borno 2022. The indiscriminate tactics carried out by the state "failed to degrade the group's capacity and deeply alienated the region's civilian population" (Brechenmacher, 2019)

Overall, while this study provided valuable insights into the dynamics of contemporary insurgent groups in sub-Saharan society, further research is needed to fully grasp the complex nature of these groups and their operations.

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