

## **Towards Curbing Terrorism in Nigeria: The Role of Kanuri Literature**

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### **Abstract**

Terrorism is one of the major problems bedeviling Kanuri land today and Nigeria as a whole. This paper examines the role of Kanuri literature towards curbing the said terrorism in Nigeria. The paper depicts examples of terrorist attacks which denotes the level of insecurity in Kanuri land. Descriptive research method was used with analytical approach. Data were collected from Kanuri literature, more particularly proverbs and adages (wise-sayings). In analysing the data collected, the paper employed a qualitative technique using descriptive approach, thereby provided a background information about a 'proverb' under examination (where applicable). Furthermore, description of teachings of the 'proverb' and its intolerance to terrorism were displayed. The paper asserts that if Kanuri literature is carefully studied and its teachings are rightly applied, will work towards curbing terrorism in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the study of language and literature should be channelled towards fighting terrorism as a means of controlling the catastrophe.

**Keywords:** 'proverb' Kanuri, Language, Literature, Curbing, Terrorism, Insecurity and Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Security is the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be achieved and sustained. Nigeria as a nation state is witnessing unprecedented series of agitations in the forms of kidnapping and abduction, armed robberies, bombing, and carnages of all forms and magnitude. The most dastard so far is the activities of a group of some Islamic militants that called themselves the ‘Boko Haram’, predominantly in Kanuri land and banditry in Zangarewa. Apart from the frequency and intensity of deadly attacks and carnages, insecurity situation in Nigeria cuts across cities, towns and villages that there is hardly anywhere to run to for cover. Lives and properties are not safe for urban dwellers as well as for the rural dwellers. People live in apprehension almost every day. This is unequivocally an act of immorality, wickedness, vicious and unethical.

Nigerian government and people leave no stone unturned in finding out remedy to this catastrophe and devastating situation. This paper comes to illuminate the treasure of Kanuri literature (proverbs), to showcase the ethical teachings, values, morals, norms contain therein.

Furthermore, description of teachings of the ‘proverb’ and its intolerance to terrorism.

## **The Kanuri land People**

Babagana, described Kanuri (also known as Barebari, Bornowaji and Kolejo by some other neighbouring African ethnic groups) as;

‘a dialect continuum spoken by some Eleven (11) million people, but there are approximately additional Seven (7) million Kanuri people that do not speak the language as at the year 2017. The Kanuri people mainly lives in North –Eastern Nigeria, Eastern Niger , South Western & Eastern Chad and Northern Cameroon republics as well as in small minorities in southern Libya and by diaspora in Sudan and the Republic of Gabon, Congo and Eritrea are also among the list of countries with very small population of the Kanuri people. Others lives in Lafiyar Barebari of Nasarawa state, Zaria in Kaduna state, Hadejia, Kerikasamma and Mallam Madori all in Jigawa state of Nigeria, plus some other remaining few ones not mentioned here’ (Babagana, 2017).

The Kanuri Kingdom with its remnant cities, provinces and states like Borno and Yobe states in Nigeria, Damagaram (Zinder) in Niger, Mao the capital of Prefecture of Kanem in Chad as well as Kusri and Baghirmi in Cameroon republics were said to have originated from the East. Some historical sources assert that; the Kanuri people came all the way from the Arabian Peninsula and settled at about 640 kilometers north of the present day Lake Chad which latter emerged as the great Bornu kingdom and later known as the Kanem-Bornu Empire (One of the two greatest Empires in the history of Africa) (Babagana, 2017).

The Kanuri language was the major language of the pre-colonial Kanem-Bornu Empire and still remains the major language spoken in Borno and Yobe sates in the modern day Nigeria, Diffa and Damagaram in Niger republic, Mao-Kanem in Chad as well as in Kusri and Kolfata in Cameroon Kirikasamma and Malam Madori of Jigawa state –Nigeria, plus some few others in the Western Sudan.

### 3. Terrorism : The Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism does not lend itself to one single acceptable definition. The term according to Terrorism Research (Undated) is better understood from the point of view of the person that is being represented. This is because to the victims of terrorism the perpetrators are terrorists while to the perpetrators, terrorism is an act targeted at reforming or enforcing change. Against this background, Terrorism Research (Undated) describes terrorism as a tactic and strategy, a crime and a holy duty, a justified reaction to oppression and an inexcusable abomination. For Hornby (2000), terrorism is the use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or force a government to act. The United States Department of Defence cited by Terrorism Research (Undated), defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.” The people or individuals that carry out acts of terrorisms are known as terrorists.

Characteristically, terrorism involves the following:

- Use of unlawful violence believing that violence will usher in a better system
- Use of unlawful and assorted dangerous weapons

- Motivated by goals that might be political, religious or ideological
- Secretive in membership recruitment and locations of residence
- Fewer in number comparable to the larger society they attack
- Have strong will and could die for the course they uphold
- Most times, operate as syndicates
- Derive financial and military supports from national and international loyalists
- They are militant, they use coercion, intimidation and instill fears in people

Their tactics involve:

- Suicide bombing, car bombing, rocket propelled grenades, assassinations, abductions and kidnapping, disguising and hijacking.

Their targets are extermination of human lives and destruction of properties. These are achieved by attacking:

- Public squares, government buildings and installations, churches and mosques, schools, bridges, police stations, military barracks and installations as well as market squares and prisons to free inmates particularly their members incarcerated.

Terrorism is of both national and international concern. This is because their activities most times are not concentrated in a particular place. Its waves span across geographical boundaries both local and international.

Terrorist activities had led to displacement of people, loss of lives and properties, feelings of suspicion, anger and hatred as well as psychological and emotional trauma and general state of

insecurity.

## **Kanuri literature towards curbing terrorism in Nigeria**

### **Kanuri Literature and Positive Values**

Literature is a body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution (Kenneth, updated 2023). Verily, the definition of the word literature tends to be circular. The 11<sup>th</sup> edition of Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary considers literature to be ‘writings having excellence of form or expressions and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest’. However, it is very necessary to qualify these statements because, to use the word writing when describing literature is misleading, for one may speak of oral literature or the literature of preliterate peoples. The art of literature is not reducible to the words on the page; they are there solely because of the craft of writing. As such literature might be described as the organization of words to give pleasure ‘or wisdom’ (Kenneth, updated 2023).

Kanuri oral literature is the focal point in the context of this write up, more particularly its genres of proverbs and adages with the aim of portraying the positive values therein, and describing how they became vigorous instruments in curbing terrorism in Nigeria

Hornby, (2010) defines values as beliefs about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. Values are those important and lasting beliefs or ideas shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. The term values are relative. But no matter what, there are some cherished societal beliefs or ideals that are stable or enduring. These enduring beliefs/ ideals that are noticeable from Kanuri literature are supposed to be skilfully studied and applied for mutual co-existence and effective socialization. Particularly now that most Nigerian youths have become animals than human beings. What characterizes most Nigerians; distinctly the youths today are wrong/false or negative values. Values such as hard work, discipline, respect, honesty, truthfulness, integrity, love for one another and respect for laws and orders have given ways to excessive quest for materialism, apparent worship of money, taking side with the powerful even when they are wrong, lack of patriotism, tribalism and ethnicity (Omede, 2014).

Values such as honesty, obedience, discipline, hard work, love for one another, and truthfulness are continuously fading amongst the Nigerian populace.

“Boko Haram” and/ or terrorism is not and cannot be unconnected with wrong moral, values and religious education. In as much as the Nigerian leaders are not justified due to bad governance, the Islamic militants (Boko Haram) are also not justified. Using wrong approach to correct the wrong done is double tragedies that can be catastrophic. The loss of lives due to ethno-religious crises since political independence is estimated to be over three million including psychological and material damages that cannot be quantified (Salawu, 2010).

Between 2011 and 2023, Boko Haram was responsible for thousands of deaths in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Nigeria is the country most affected by the terrorist group's attacks. States in the North-East register the highest number of deaths. Borno is by far the most threatened state, in that, Boko Haram has caused over 38,000 deaths in this area. Among the news on attacks mostly present in the media, the kidnapping of 276 female students from a secondary school in Borno in 2014 received a global response (Doris, 2023). 4.2 Lesson from Kanuri Proverbs and Adages towards Curbing Terrorism

Proverb is succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs. Proverbs are part of every spoken language and are related to other such forms of folk literature as riddles and fables that have originated in oral tradition (proverb updated; Nov, 24 2023).

Below is a catalogue of Kanuri proverbs that teaches positive values. Which if carefully studied and its lessons are rightly applied will work in no small measure in instilling morality, positive norms and values in the mind of Nigerian. Doing so will undoubtedly give an immense contribution towards restraining terrorism and other associated immoralities:

✓ Nontseninkampunyelanentsia, ategerganemmi.

(If one who knows thee not, or a blind man scolds thee, do not become angry).

It teaches the habit of patience and the spirit of forgiveness to wrong doers, making excuses, constituting condonemen instate of being furious and angry that will bring about dismemberment, disintegration and annihilating the spirit of harmony and concord.

✓ Gedikanadibentsannawa

(At the bottom of patience there is heaven)

The proverb teaches endurance, perseverance and submission as it fights rebellion and inconsistency.

✓ Kannutamtsebui

(Fire devours a man)

It gives warning against any power and/ or human action that can destroy and devastate his well-being, happiness and prosperity.

✓ Kamkamtseragenidugoagonantsentsimageni.

(One does not love another, if one does not accept anything from him)

The proverb is promoting generosity, liberality, munificence and open-handedness, and at the same time is highlighting unity, uniformity and love as the fruitage of exhibiting the said behaviour.

✓ Tamasugodiniabe.

(Hope is the pillar of the world)

The lesson drawn from the above include; confidence, vision and prospect are the strong and solid foundation for success in all human endeavour on earth

✓ Lemansugodiniabe

(Riches are the pillar of the world).

✓ Lemansugorobe

(Property is the prop of life).

The above two proverbs are inculcating the spirit of hard working, strenuous devotion and bold determination in the quest for worldly glitters, as against emasculate tendencies and behaviour. This teaching is always guided by the instruction/ counselling of below adage (Kanuri 'wise-saying'):

✓ Agokomandentsinite,dunonmanem,pandembago.

(If thou sleekest to obtain by force what the Lord has not given thee, thou wilt not obtain it)

This Kanuri 'wise-saying' is inflaming a religious belief of predestination, a belief that all human actions and interactions, affluence and pauperism were preordained by Allah and are

subject to no change by person's commitments and efforts. Individuals were enjoined to work but to believe that the fruitage of their work will not go beyond the finitude of predestination.

✓ Sobatsirebemuskondintei.

(Hold a true friend with both thy hands).

This adage is enjoining Kanuri people (Barebari) to grasp to good friends, and to be highly considerate of the bondage of friendship as a strong relationship between two parties united by love, loyalty and support for each other at all times. As against foe, adversary, antagonist and general animosity. By this precept, violent, hatred leading to active opposition, active enmity, and energetic dislike are all prohibited.

Other Kanuri proverbs and adages for considerations include:

✓ Kargete,simikamkannurotsatin,simakamtsannarotsatin (It is the heart of that carries one to hell or to heaven).

✓ Kamkargenkamtseteitesimakerdigo. (He is a heathen who holds another in his heart)

✓ Kamnemamwurabetsatseranitenemekkitabubetssetserani,kamnemekkitabube tsateseranite,nemekomandebetssetserani.

(He who does not believe in what the elders say, will not believe the sayings of the Book (the Qur'an); and he who does not believe the sayings of the Book, will not believe what the Lord says).

✓ Kamteagongaladimia,allayengalanniropatsartsin.

(If one does well, Allah will interpret to him for good).

✓ Kamkomandetatatsinnama,asirtseallayetsaktsenamago.

(The man to whom the Lord gives children, his secrets Allah covers).

✓ Agofugubete,komandegenya,ngudodabukurugamitsuruibago.

(As to what is future even a bird with a long neck cannot see it but the Lord only).

✓ kamkanakuguibentsetsomabagosaialla (No one can kill the appetite of fowls save Allah).

✓ kanuwarinonemmikwoya,kanuwatenonemiba?

(If thou dost not know hate, dost thou know indifference)?

✓ Sintsetilodinian,tilolairan.

(He has one foot in this world and one in the next).



✓ andingafolukranbenbonye

(We shall sleep behind the Koran)

✓ afiyayeallayeafemesagenatesitemaruiyen.

(What Allah has decreed for us we shall see) □ Allahartsekibeiantse! (Allah give thee good luck)

✓ Allabarganemorallabargando(gotse)

May Allah take his blessing from you

✓ agogedintsebagotenemerosiaram

(It is forbidden to tell anything that has no foundation)

✓ meiramkirgakoitsinbago

(A princess never makes a slave her friend)

## **Conclusion**

Terrorism in Nigeria is retarding the economic and technological advancement of the nation. Many Nigerians live every day in tensions and suspicion. Many productive lives have been lost, available ones are displaced and live in constant fears and pain of the loss of loved ones. Foreign investors are scared away from Nigeria. The nation's educational institutions are not spared either as institutions of learning are equally points of targets and attacks of terrorists and other hoodlums. Business and financial institutions are not reserved. Terrorism is a symptom of poor moral and values. Kanuri literature, proverbs and adages are treasures of morality and positive values. They are instrumental in restraining terrorism in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper recommends:

1. That people should be exposed to Kanuri oral literature more particularly the genres of proverbs and adages.
2. That morality and values are vigorous instruments in fighting terrorism in Nigeria, as such those moral virtues and positive values should be sourced from our indigenous language and literature, to be put together as a single subject to be named Character education and taught to the students at all the levels of the educational system in Nigeria in their increasing levels of difficulties.

3. That school curriculum planners identify relevant contents in Kanuri oral literature that could make up for healthy character education and arrange them appropriately to be taught by teachers.
4. The demand is on government to reward acts of good moral display by individuals openly and instantly to promote inculcation of such behaviours to others.
5. Government agents expectedly are to be models of good moral values. Their lifestyles should support the virtues they want to promote so as to go down well.

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