

COLLAPSE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY, RAMPANT POVERTY AND THE ERA OF TERRORISM IN RURAL NIGER

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ABSTRACT From 2005 through 2014, a rapid rise in natural resource and food prices led to a sustained high level of economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments throughout Africa adopted policies to aggressively seek foreign investment, and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa became promising destinations for investment—a trend that was called “Africa Rising.” But in recent years, natural resource and food prices experienced a series of dramatic fluctuations, leading to substantial changes in the sub-Saharan African economy that have been referred to as “Diverging Africa.” Niger, located in the Sahel region, has been impacted by an expanding population and land scarcity, desertification, and climate change, which have led to the collapse of the rural self-sufficient economy and the spread of starvation and poverty. In a farming village of Hausa people, one of Niger’s ethnic groups, there is a saying, “Hunger is the cause of all problems.” Hunger gives rise to people’s anger and dissatisfaction with society, bitter fights emerge among siblings over the inheritance of their fathers’ lands, and armed conflicts frequently break out between the farmers and herders over land and crop damage. As the economic disparity within villages and regions grows, the problems of hunger and poverty intensify, and a steady stream of people from among the younger generation is becoming involved in the terrorist group known as Boko Haram. This paper examined the underlying causes of the outbreak of violent terrorism, which has become such a critical issue in the Sahel region, West Africa and connected it to the spread of poverty and economic disparity. The G5 Sahel nations (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad) are carrying out a military clean-up operation with the support of the United States, France, Germany, and Italy, but military operation alone is not enough to root out the terrorism. That will require a comprehensive strategy to eradicate hunger and poverty as well as eliminate economic disparity.

Key Words: Boko Haram; Famine; Hausa; Hunger; Livelihood; Sahel.

INTRODUCTION

“Today, there are Boko Haram members hiding in every city in this country. There are women who disguise themselves as men, strap a bomb around their stomach; go attend a mosque service, a child’s naming ceremony, or a wedding; and carry out a suicide terrorist attack. I’m sure there are sect members in Niger’s capital, Niamey. We know that suicide bombings are a bad thing, and we have an *imam* (conscience), so we do not kill people or commit suicide terrorist attacks, but we understand their feelings and their motivations.” This statement from a friend of mine with whom I spoke during a visit to Niger in May 2016 left me dumbfounded.

In 2017, a total of 10,632 people were killed by four major terrorist groups:

ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), the Taliban, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram. Those who lost their lives represent 57% of all victims of terrorism that year, up from 32% in 2012 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018: 15). The most active terrorist group in sub-Saharan Africa is Boko Haram, and in 2014 they were responsible for the largest number of deaths. Currently, they have divided up into a number of splinter groups, the most powerful of which is called the ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), which in 2018 constantly carried out attacks on midwives and aid workers (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019: 17).

As Nigeria experienced economic growth, brimming with prosperity thanks to oil exports that benefitted from a steep rise in crude oil prices, Boko Haram launched its activities in the northern Islamic region of that country, where development had lagged behind. The name Boko is said to have come from a Hausa word that derives from the English word “book” and it implies education, while Haram is an Arabic word for sin. In Hausa society, books themselves indicate Western education, and so Boko Haram means “Western education is a sin.” The focus of its attacks includes all aspects of Western civilization that have penetrated the Islamic world—not only Western education, clothing, and politics, but all sorts of things and activities (Sani, 2011; Maiangwa et al., 2012; Onuoha, 2012).

According to *Global Terrorism Index* (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018; 2019), the number of people killed in terrorist attacks carried out by Boko Haram reached 6,612 deaths in 2014, 5,478 in 2015, 1,079 in 2016, and 1,254 in 2017. These numbers are comparable to the victims of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which continues to wage its battle primarily in Syria and Iraq (6,073 deaths in 2014, 6,141 in 2015, 9,132 in 2016, and 4,350 in 2017). Although there is an incessant flow of daily reporting on ISIL’s battles and terrorist attacks in newspapers and on the Internet, the amount of information covered is limited.

At first, Boko Haram’s terrorist outbreaks were limited to the northeast region of Nigeria, but in January 2015, they expanded their reach across the border into the areas surrounding Lake Chad, entering Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, and therefore becoming an international issue. In the 2016 edition of the *Global Terrorism Index*, the number of victims of terrorism within Niger leapt to 649. Since the previous year’s number was just 11, this was the highest rate of increase in the world. Although the government forces of Nigeria as well as Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin are working to maintain security, there are frequent terrorist attacks even now, and the number of victims is rising. Why must terrorism continue to claim so many victims? This paper seeks to highlight the issues facing the international community today by better understanding the social issues that the Sahel region is grappling with—namely, starvation, poverty, and terrorism.

BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is believed to date back to 1995, with origins in a Sahabah group (a group of companions of the Prophet Mohammad) led by Abubakar Lawan, which was a study group to learn about Islam (Sani, 2011). It is said that many

of its members were university graduates, former servicemen, highly skilled professionals, and others with advanced academic training, and many wore beards. These members were far from being all uneducated or violent people. Abubakar took the name *Al Sunna Wal Jamma* (“follower of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad”), and he strictly adhered to the Qur’an and Hadith, a record of the words and deeds of Muhammad (Aghedo & Osumah, 2014).

The nature of the organization is thought to have changed in 2009. This is when Islamic leader Sanni Umar began to emphasize the grandeur of Islamic civilization and to popularize the idea that not just Western education but all of Western civilization itself was a sin (Onuoha, 2012). Those who were not members were viewed as *kuffar* (or unbelievers) or as *fasiqun* (a person guilty of violating Sharia law), and Boko Haram began to attack these non-members. Fundamentalism arose at certain intervals in the northern part of Nigeria and other Islamic regions, and at first, such moves were perceived as jihads by Muslims against believers of other faiths. Moreover, after 700 Boko Haram members were killed by the security authority in 2009, including Mohammed Yusuf who took military command, Boko Haram became increasingly cruel, carrying out terrorist bombings of police headquarters, a United Nations building, a newspaper company, and so on (Aghedo & Osumah, 2014).

The members of Boko Haram included a large number of young people, many of whom had graduated from high school or university but who were unable to find jobs or who were street children (Onuoha, 2012). Within Nigeria, there was ongoing development in the south, centered on the Niger River Delta, a source for crude oil production, while the northern part of the country was left underdeveloped (Fig. 1). Although many schools had been set up in every city, from elementary to high school and college, and although the number of graduates had rapidly increased, there were very few jobs available. As a result, young people were angry that their hard work was not being rewarded and they were filled with dissatisfaction toward society.

Also, the presence of street children is characteristic of the Islamic community of northern Nigeria. In that region, parents send their children to the city to have them study Islamic teachings. While the main objective is to have them acquire knowledge of Islam, this practice also means fewer mouths to feed and thus lowers food costs for parents. In many cases, these children who are sent off do not have the protection of their parents and they have no food or place to live. As a result, they become street children. A 2010 survey found that there were as many as 9.5 million street children, known as *almajiri* (Ibrahim, 2010). Some of these *almajiri* go on to become Boko Haram soldiers. There are also members of Boko Haram who are highly educated and in high-ranking positions such as high-level bureaucrats and politicians, university professors, and wealthy business-people, and the number of members is said to have risen to 280,000 (Onuoha, 2012).

At first, the terrorist acts of Boko Haram were in the form of jihads against non-Muslims, and the targets were understood to be the United Nations or police headquarters, newspapers, specific politicians, members of the military, or those who were not followers of Islam, but in July 2012, they carried out a suicide

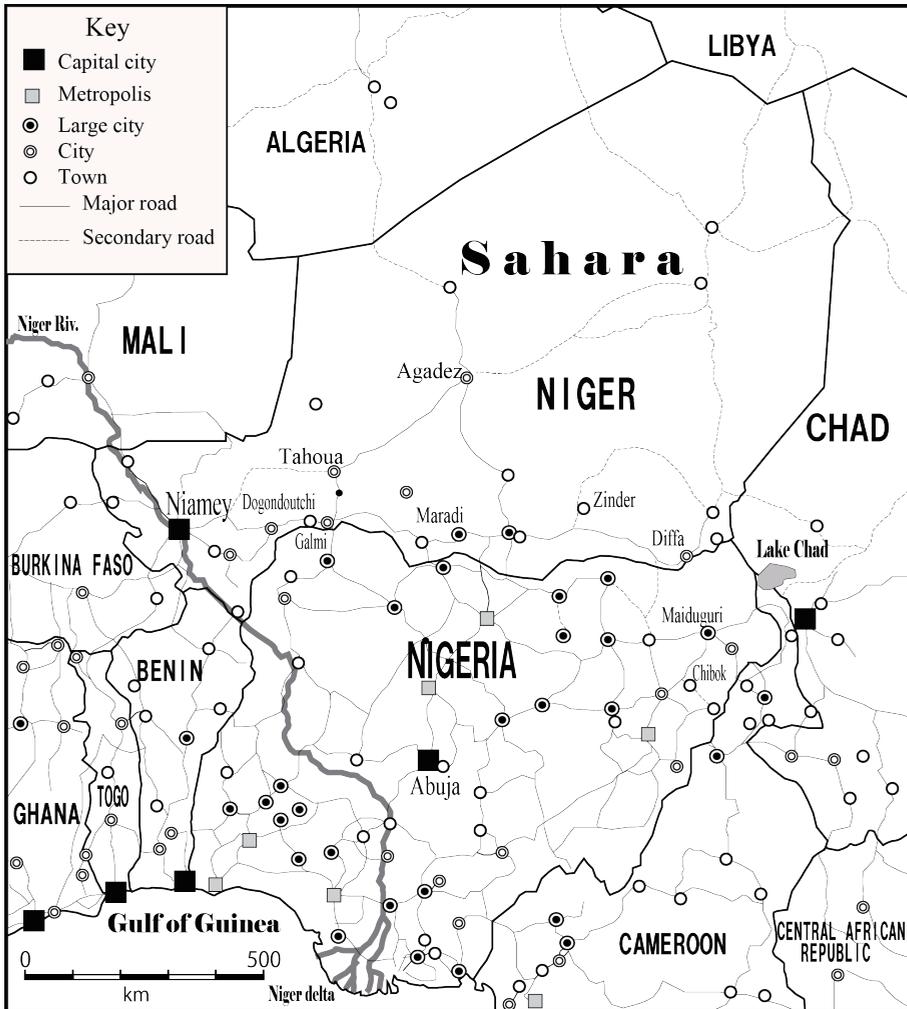


Fig. 1. Map of Niger and Nigeria.

On the inland national border, there are countless roads that are not controlled by the governments; thus large numbers of people, vehicles, and goods move across the borders.

bombing attack on a mosque, indicating that they had begun targeting Muslims as well. From April to June 2014, there was a series of indiscriminate killings of the general public, including terrorist bombings of a bus terminal and shopping mall in the suburbs of the Nigerian capital city of Abuja. April 2014 also saw an attack on a girls' school in Chibok and the kidnapping of female students.

In February 2015, Boko Haram pledged its loyalty to ISIL and renamed itself the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP). Its attacks strengthened, and it crossed the northeastern border of Nigeria into Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, repeatedly burning villages and killing residents along the borders with those countries as well as on Lake Chad and the area around it. Although it had initially

been considered a domestic problem within Nigeria, Boko Haram's terrorism began having an impact on neighboring countries and it continued to battle those countries' national armies and joint forces (Trofimov, 2015).

Also in February 2015, an anti-Boko Haram demonstration took place in Niamey, the capital of Niger (BBC, 2015). Politicians, including Prime Minister Brigi Rafini, led the demonstration and organizers announced that 35,000 people participated. Those marching held placards and wore T-shirts that said "Our Army, Our Pride," and at the end of the demonstration, President Mahamadou Issoufou gave a speech in front of the parliament building. The president strongly criticized Boko Haram, stating, "Boko Haram attacked us and you don't attack Niger with impunity." Earlier that month, the Niger military had arrested 160 people suspected of having ties to the terrorist group in the Diffa Region, while also killing 218 Boko Haram members during a battle (Deutsche Welle, 2015).

From December 2015 through February 2016, Boko Haram continued to carry out frequent terrorist attacks, including violence, arson, and massacres in Maiduguri (a city in northeastern Nigeria) and in the area around Lake Chad, forcing 2.8 million people to flee their homes and become refugees (WFP, 2016a). Of those, about 2.2 million are internally displaced within Nigeria, but another 600,000 people either fled Nigeria's northeastern region into Niger or have been internally displaced within Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In the Diffa Region of Niger, 151 schools have been forced to shut down (Trofimov, 2015). Terrorism has destroyed the basis of residents' livelihoods—agriculture, livestock, and commerce—from the roots, the distribution and market infrastructure has sustained catastrophic damage, and infectious diseases have become rampant, all of which is fostering insecurity in people's lives. In addition, because terrorism has made the area less secure, the activities of the governments and NGOs have been curtailed, which has in turn hampered refugees' access to everyday goods.

As of June 2016, there were 240,000 internally displaced refugees in the Diffa Region in eastern Niger, of whom half are women and children. The number of internally displaced persons represents 35% of that region's population (690,000 people in 2017). Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been providing food for 136,000 people; and for 40,000 refugees in places where the markets were functioning and goods were available, they have been providing cash assistance of US\$54 per person per month. However, aid from the international community is not sufficient, and it is expected that even after the rainy season begins, the refugees will be unable to set about farming or livestock-breeding and so starvation will become an increasingly serious issue. The amount of WFP aid for six months is estimated at \$20 million (WFP, 2016b).

Within Niger, there are certainly not a large number of news reports on Boko Haram—so much so that one would suspect that the reporting is being controlled by the government. People listen to the Hausa-language broadcasts of the UK's BBC or Germany's Deutsche Welle. At times, the Hausa broadcasts report on terrorist attacks by Boko Haram or battles between Boko Haram and the national forces. In Japan as well, there are few reports on Boko Haram other than the abduction and release of the girl students. In May 2016, Radio France Internationale introduced comments by a UN human rights officer in order to draw the

international community's attention to the terrorism issue in Niger (Okello, 2016). In that article, it was reported that not only was Niger's agricultural food production suffering due to climate change and desertification, conflict, and rapid population growth, but Boko Haram's terrorist acts had halted the distribution of goods, and the people were facing the risk of starvation. The officer said that \$316 million in humanitarian aid was needed, but that only about a quarter of that had been delivered because interest within the international community was low (Okello, 2016).

TERRORISM PROBLEM CLOSE UP WITH NIGER

I interviewed four people in the Niger capital of Niamey about Boko Haram's terrorist activities, speaking to each one individually in Hausa, to clarify how people view this issue. The interviews took place in November–December 2015 and May 2016, a period during which there were frequent attacks by Boko Haram in Niger. All four were long-time friends of mine. The first was a woman named Mrs. B⁽¹⁾ who was 43 years old at the time of the interview and working as an English teacher in a middle school in Niamey. Her ethnicity is Kanuri, which is the same ethnic group to which the main members of Boko Haram belong. The second person was Mr. I (46 years old), a technical officer at the national bureau who is an ethnicity of Fulbe. The third was Mr. Y (37 years old), a farmer who lives in Dogondoutchi, about 250 km from Niamey. His ethnicity is Hausa, one of the predominant ethnic groups in Niger. The fourth person was Mr. A (47 years old), a herdsman living in Dogondoutchi. His ethnicity is Fulbe. All four are Muslims who believe in Islam.

First, at the outset of my interview with Mrs. B, she told me, “The Boko Haram issue is a topic that you can discuss with people who are close to you, but you cannot speak freely about it with outsiders.” The reason is that Boko Haram's terrorist activities take the lives of about 6,000 people every year, and even among one's neighbors, you do not know who is a Boko Haram member. Mr. A said, “There are Boko Haram members hiding in every city in Niger—in Niamey, Agadez, Maradi, and Zinder—and they have a hold over every city.” Many people warned that Boko Haram members were hiding even within Niamey, which is more than 1,300 km away from the area where Boko Haram is active, and it became clear that, as an issue that lurks close by, the Boko Haram issue is not a topic of conversation that one engages in with a lot of people or with strangers.

Next, I asked them who the members are. Mr. I asserted, “The actions of Boko Haram are not the acts of Muslims who believe in Islam.” He emphasized that Islam is a religion that desires peace (*salaam* in Arabic), and so killing people and bombing mosques is not something a Muslim does. Mrs. B also stressed, “They cut people's heads off like cattle, videotape it, and broadcast it on the Internet. That is not something a Muslim does; it is not a human act in the first place. At first, Boko Haram called it a *jihad* (holy war) and attacked non-Muslims, repeatedly kidnapping people. However, in recent years, they are carrying out

suicide bombings at mosques and market, and are killing Muslims as well; that sort of cruelty is not Muslim, so Boko Haram is contradicting itself. It is not how a Muslim should behave, and they have veered from the moral way of life.” The impression I received from the four interviews was that the Boko Haram’s terrorist activities clearly do not have the support of the average Muslim.

Mrs. B’s younger brother and his wife live in Bosso, which has come under assault from Boko Haram, and she spoke about the way they live there. On the day that I was conducting the interview with her (May 21, 2016), there were news reports that the town of Bosso had been attacked by Boko Haram and that ten homes had been burned down and six people had died. “My younger brother and his wife live in Bosso, which is on the border with Nigeria, and I call them on the phone to see how they are doing. In the town, the national forces and the police are on high alert and so it is safe more or less. But despite that, there are frequent attacks by Boko Haram.” In 2012, before the Boko Haram issue had emerged, I traveled around the Diffa Region. Traveling east from the regional capital, the city of Diffa, the transportation infrastructure quickly worsens. National Highway No. 1 is covered in sand and the pavement is gone, making it difficult for cars to travel there (Fig. 2). Even if you go by four-wheel drive, the tires get stuck in the sand, bringing you to a standstill. This makes it very difficult to keep the peace, distribute relief supplies smoothly, and assist refugees.

Mrs. B tearfully continued her story: “In the town of Bosso, since the Boko Haram attacks, there is a 6 p.m. curfew, after which residents are not allowed to go outside; the residents cannot go outside at all. The shops and merchants cannot do business either. My brother and his wife are so frightened that they cannot walk through the town and cannot even go to the farmlands. What’s more, they



Fig. 2. The weak transportation infrastructure in eastern Niger. The areas in which Boko Haram is active are less-developed regions. National Highway No. 1 has not been maintained for many years, so the pavement is crumbling.

cannot fish in the nearby stream either. As a result, they cannot live. It is forbidden to use motorcycles, since that is what Boko Haram members use as their means of transportation, and wearing the *hijab* (the headscarf for Muslim women) is also forbidden. I pray for their safety, and every month I send them part of my salary to help support their livelihood, although it is just a small amount.”

The Komadougou Yobe River runs through the village of Bosso, and so irrigated agriculture and fisheries prosper there, but because there is no telling when Boko Haram will attack, the residents are living in fear. Unable to pursue farming, livestock-breeding, or fishing, and with merchants unable to pursue their trade, the lives of the villagers are precarious. There are attacks on elementary schools as well, and so children are unable to go to school. The concerns of the people continue to mount. During the daytime, it is hot in Niger, so shopping for food and everyday items is usually done after the sun sets, but because it is forbidden to go out after nightfall, that severely restricts people’s daily lives.

KAMIKAZE

The ban on women wearing the *hijab* is because “*kamikaze*” have become an issue. This word, which they pronounce the French way, as “kah-mi-kahz,” is derived from the Japanese *kamikaze* corps at the end of the Pacific War in World War II. In the local communities, it refers to suicide terrorist bombings. On the Internet, there are numerous comments that caution against comparing the Japanese *kamikaze* corps, which was fighting to protect the Japanese homeland as well as their parents, wives, children, and families, with the suicide terrorist bombings that repeatedly bring destruction and slaughter (Oyama, 2016). As was noted in the November 22/28, 2015 edition of the magazine *Jeune Afrique*, suicide terrorist bombings are referred to in French as “*kamikaze*” (kah-mi-kahz), and in Niger which was once a French colony, they are called “*kamikaze*” as well (Jeune Afrique, 2015). There are frequent terrorist incidences where terrorists strap bombs around their stomachs, conceal themselves with scarves, and blow themselves up in the market. Many of those terrorists who carry out the suicide bombings are women and children, and particularly young girls.

Boko Haram is believed to have been involved in four suicide bombings in 2014 that were carried out by children, but that number rose dramatically to 44 in 2015 (Chinedu, 2016). Of these 44 cases, three-fourths involved girls. UNICEF asserts that girls who carry out these attacks should not be treated as the perpetrators of terrorism but as victims. Why would a young girl carry out a suicide bombing?

Mr. A answered that question for me:

“The answer is simple. It’s because parents sell their children to Boko Haram. Everyone is suffering from poverty (*tarauchi* in Hausa). Like myself, many of the people who live in rural Niger have trouble getting food to eat every day. Boko Haram has money. I don’t know why they have money, but in order to get cash to cover living expenses, parents sell their children to Boko Haram, and they strap bombs around the stomachs of girls. Young

children don't know that it's a bomb, so they go to the market and set off a suicide bombing. People are not on guard around a young girl and they can hide the bomb under the *hijab*, so it's convenient. There was an incident where an adult woman dressed as a man and carried out a suicide bombing at a mosque. In that incident as well, the woman is said to have been forced to sacrifice herself due to financial hardship in order to get money for the living expenses of her husband and children. The suicide bombings were a last resort in order to protect the lives of their families.”

This type of information is not provided in the news and not something that people bring up, but it is well known among the farmers and herdsman living in rural villages. We must be careful about verifying the authenticity of these stories, but it is a fact that in the local community, the discourse about people carrying out suicide bombings (*kamikaze*) to protect their families from poverty is prevalent.

So why do young people join Boko Haram? Mr. Y spoke to me about this.

“Boko Haram talks to the young people—those 15 to 30 years old—who are living in rural villages about how terrible current society is (*aikin banza* in Hausa) and they call for a change. Why are all young people poor? Why are there rich people in the cities? Most young people go unrewarded no matter how much effort they make. Who created that kind of society? When the young people understand the need to change society, then the members give those youths weapons. They pay them a regular salary. The pay is good, and that money is attractive to young people struggling to eat in rural villages.”

In the rural villages, the administration is usually controlled by elders (in their 60s to 70s) called *chizo* in Hausa language. But the *chizo* of their fathers' generation cannot read or write, they cannot read government documents that arrive from the city, and during the time of famine, they cannot write a letter to the local government to request assistance. And even if they do request aid, the government and politicians do not do anything for them. The *chizo* cannot use cell phones or ride motorcycles. All they can do is use a radio. It is very typical for a man to have two or three wives and more than ten sons, so they are not able to leave enough farmland or property for our generation of sons to live on. There is a strong danger that Boko Haram's ideas of changing an awful society will spread among the youth dissatisfied with rural communities. In the next section, let us look at the way in which people live in Niger's rural communities.

“HUNGER IS THE CAUSE OF ALL PROBLEMS”

“Hunger is the root of all problems (*Nyunwa gidan matsala*),” is a saying I often heard from Hausa people as I carried out my research. When people are starving, the economy of rural villages comes to a stop. The Hausa people often use the word *harkuki* in their everyday lives, and when people are reduced to

starvation, they say they lose this *harkuki*. The word means “overall activity,” but it refers to activities such as farming, livestock-breeding, commerce, working away from home, and so on—the activity of people, livestock, things, and money—and is also used to refer to domestic politics and business as well as economic trends. When people greet one another by saying, “*Ina harkuki?* (How is your activity?),” it includes the nuance that they are asking about the village economy and people’s way of life. When the economy is good, people, money, and products move briskly, but conversely, when the economy is bad, that activity becomes sluggish. In the Hausa community, everything is expressed as *harkuki*.

In the rural communities, during the rainy season, pearl millet and cowpeas are grown together (Fig. 3). The rainy season lasts for three months, from June to September, and that is when farm work is carried out. The millet grown in the field is used to make a thick porridge that is a staple food there, and for lunch, one might have that along with a drink called *fura*. In the heat of Niger, people hydrate and cool their bodies by drinking *fura*, and they can fill their stomachs. Sorghum and maize are also grown, but because of the shortage of precipitation, it is only possible to harvest them in years when there is substantial rainfall. The quantity of the millet harvest depends on the fertility of the soil, and because the grains are small, at most it comes to about 1.1 tons per hectare (Oyama, 2015). The soil there is called Arenosol, which is a sandy, poor nutrition soil, and when millet is planted over and over, the fertility of the soil decreases



Fig. 3. Mixed cultivation of pearl millet and cowpeas. The tall plants are pearl millet, while those close to the ground are cowpeas. In rural villages, 80% of households have not achieved food self-sufficiency, so it is necessary to take unstable jobs away from home or have a side business in order to gain cash income.

and becomes barren. If the daily land management is neglected, the land begins to deteriorate, and both the millet and the cowpeas become impossible to harvest. However, because the lack of land has become a serious issue, the fact is that they must plant the same crops in the fields over and over.

The food situation in rural villages varies depending on rainfall conditions, the field acreage one possesses, and the soil fertility. According to the residents, in 2003–2005, 2010–2011, and 2015, crop growth was poor, and in the years that followed they experienced severe food shortages. During those times, people sold off their livestock and gathered firewood to sell in order to buy food, and they even gathered and ate wild tree leaves and wild grasses to fend off starvation. In June 2006, many of the villagers had no food, and they became gaunt, with the veins standing out on their faces. This physical condition is known as *yarami* in the Hausa language. The worsening crop yields were caused not only by draught and the deterioration of the land, but also by the arrival of desert locusts (Rowley, 1993).

In May 2016, I surveyed all 61 households in the village about their food reserves. The harvest time is mid-September, so I asked about the food status at the time of the interview and for the following four months. Based on the residents' estimations, 10 households (16.4%) answered that they had sufficient food supplies to last until the next harvest, 25 households (41.0%) responded that they had food supplies at that moment but not enough to last until the next harvest, and 26 households (42.6%) responded that they had already run out of food and had to engage in income-generating activities just to eke out a living until the next harvest. Despite being an agricultural village, more than 80% of the households were not able to provide their own food and were making a living through a combination of going to the cities to find work and taking on side jobs.

This difficult situation in terms of food self-sufficiency and going away to seek work is continuing every year (Oyama, 2015; 2017). The drop-off in crop yields is contributing to dissatisfaction and anger among rural residents. There is a saying in Hausa, “Starvation (*nyunwa*) gives rise to people's anger (*fushi*).” If farmers just see the Fulbe or Tuareg herdsman with their livestock grazing near their fields, they ask the herders to compensate them for the damage to their crops or they try to take some of the livestock (Fig. 4). In August 2015, for example, a farmer discovered a cow's footprint in his field, and just because of that, he requested that the neighboring herdsman pay 150,000 CFA franc (US\$300), while in November, a farmer said that a cow had been eating the pearl millet in his field and demanded 100,000 CFA franc (US\$200) from the herdsman.

Needless to say, the herdsman are not about to pay compensation simply because the farmers ask, and they will not stand by and watch while their livestock is taken. They fight back with the sword they have on hand, and increasingly they launch counterattacks. One time, a complaint from farmers that herders had willfully drawn water from the village's well led to a large-scale armed conflict in which nine people—both farmers and herders—were killed. The outbreak of famine and the shortage of land is worsening the relationship between farmers and herders and causing the number of conflicts to rise and, at the same time, these conflicts are becoming larger in scale and severity.



Fig. 4. A Fulbe herdsman watches over his grazing livestock during the rainy season. During the rainy season, all arable land is used to grow pearl millet, cowpeas, and groundnuts, so the grazing land disappears. The farmers dislike it when livestock enters their fields, and the herdsmen have to pay close attention to their grazing herds in order to avoid armed conflicts that is induce from the crop damage by their livestock.

NIGER: A COUNTRY WHERE CHILDREN ABOUND

There are many children in the villages. Niger is a country where children abound. According to UN statistics (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017), the population of Niger is increasing by 4.0% annually, making it the highest rate of natural increase of any population in the world. This pace of population increase means that the country's population will double every 20 years. The average number of children that a woman will give birth to in her lifetime (the fertility rate) for the period of 2010–2015 was 7.63, which is also the highest in the world.

In the Human Development Index (HDI) released by the UNDP in 2014, Niger was ranked lowest out of all 187 countries, and it scored extremely low on all indices, whether it be economics and people's living standards, medicine and health, education, or women's participation in society (UNDP, 2014). If we look at some of the data that serves as the basis for calculating the HDI for Niger, we find a series of harsh statistics: the adolescent birth rate was 204.8 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years; the perinatal mortality rate was 590 deaths per 100,000 births; the infant mortality rate was 63 infant deaths per 1,000 live births; for children under the age of 5, the mortality rate was 114 deaths per 1,000 children; malnutrition among children under the age of 5 was 43.9%; the population receiving less than US\$1.25 a day in income was 43.6%; and the average lifespan

was just 53.8 years for men and 58.6 years for women. The HDI is seen as an indicator of how easy it is to live in each country. Therefore, unfortunately, of all the countries in the world, the most difficult place to live in is Niger.

The rural village I surveyed had 41 households and 280 people as of the year 2000, but 10 years later, in 2010, those numbers had risen to 65 households and 504 people. This implies that over that decade, the annual rate of population increase was 6.0%, which is extremely high, indicating that the village's population will double every 12 years, which is an astounding pace (Oyama, 2015). This rapid population growth is directly connected to the issues of farmland shortages, drought-related famine, and poverty.

Niger's dry season is long. During that long season from November through May, Hausa men actively leave the village, heading to the cities to work. In addition to the major cities of Niger, including Niamey, Maradi, and Tahoua, they go to work in small businesses in small towns such as Galmi, or in businesses in the cities of northern Nigeria, Benin, or Côte d'Ivoire. The men place chocolates and candies on trays and sell them, they place lemons and bananas on wagons and sell those, or some people work for motorcycle taxi businesses. There are also some who take the risk and go to work in gold mines in Algeria or Burkina Faso. The capital for these activities comes from the agricultural production of their home village. By selling their produce for cash, they scrape up the funds they need to travel to the cities and purchase the goods they sell in the city. Decreases in agricultural production due to changes in rainfall have a major impact on people's outside employment and economic activity. If there is a drop in *harkuki* due to irregularities in rainfall amounts, it puts a halt to people's activities both in cities and in rural villages, and we can expect an increase in those suffering from poverty.

In rural society in the Sahel region, even after young people marry and couples have set up a household, in part because there is a lack of land within the village, many people do farm work in their fathers' fields and often eat meals together with their fathers and brothers, their sisters, and their brothers' wives and children (Oyama, 2015). Fathers, who are the heads of households, rely on the income they receive from the crops raised in their own fields, from their livestock, and from the side jobs they and their sons do in order to cover meals for the year. This continues until the fathers die or until they reach an advanced age and the farmland is divided up. For the sons, living with their fathers has the advantage of providing protection for their family, but at the same time it has a disadvantage in that their fathers control their labor and income. In Hausa society, young men experience a mixture of a spirit of independence, whereby they want to create their own household, and a feeling of dependence, whereby they want to rely on their fathers and relatives when they are facing predicaments such as drought and famine.

The amount of farmland that young people inherit from their fathers is very small, and it certainly is not enough to secure their future livelihood. Many fathers have three or more sons, and if they have two wives, they may sometimes have around ten sons. Land succession issues lead to fierce disputes within families. As a result of such disputes, their father's land is divided up, but the area of the

fields the sons possess is definitely smaller than that of their father's generation. "Fathers could not provide enough food for themselves, so there is no way that their sons' generation can live peacefully." This is the honest opinion of the young people living in rural villages. There are also those who say that the farmland that today's children receive will not even be big enough to serve as the site of their home. It is natural, then, that there will be a rise in the number of people living in poverty, called *talaka* in Hausa.

Niger is a country that has substantial economic disparity. There are many luxurious homes in the high-end residential areas of Niamey, with many cars and security guards always protecting the entrance. You can see many nice Land Cruisers and Mercedes Benzes. In Niamey, you can find more *hadji* and *hajiya* (men and women) who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In my interviews, many people spoke of Niger not as a poor country, but as a country where the distribution of wealth is distorted and where the growing economic disparity is a problem. Frequently, many of the country's politicians and high-level bureaucrats are businesspeople who have side businesses, and while the wealth is concentrated in this small privileged class, the majority of the people are struggling just to eat. Boko Haram has infiltrated this disparate society, which allows them to make inroads into the community. The reason why people avoid referring to the Boko Haram issue in their daily lives is that people in Niger have a certain element that makes it possible for anyone to join Boko Haram.

When I interviewed Mr. Y, he told me, "Young people who want to join Boko Haram must first pledge their loyalty to the organization by slashing to death the throats of their fathers, who symbolize the creators of today's society. The youths join Boko Haram due to their dissatisfaction and anger with society. Sometimes my young daughter asks me, 'Daddy, is there no food today?' and when in fact our stock of food is gone, I feel pathetic and a surge of anger, and I sometimes understand how those youths who join Boko Haram feel."

The Boko Haram members ask the young people, "Why are you struggling to get food to eat every day? Why can't you get work? Why aren't you rewarded for your efforts?" The young people sympathize with Boko Haram, they become members, and they head down the path toward violence. In Niger, it is said that the starting point for the increased terrorist activity by Boko Haram was when the village elders asked the police for guards and they failed to take action, responding, "It's your own sons, so take care of it within your own village" (Trofimov, 2015).

CONCLUSION: TWO TYPES OF "POVERTY" IN RURAL SOCIETY

It has been pointed out that Boko Haram's activities are rooted in Nigeria's north-south economic gap problem—namely, in the problem of the north's lagging development (Anghedo & Osumah, 2014; Ojochenemi et al., 2015). For a long time, I was not able to fully understand the relationship between the underdevelopment of northern Nigeria and Niger, on the one hand, and the terrorist problem on the other. In 2015, Boko Haram crossed the border into Niger and

began repeatedly burning down villages and killing residents. In eastern Niger, located far from the capital city of Niamey, the infrastructure was neglected and not maintained. The currency most used there is the Nigerian Naira rather than the CFA franc, which is the official currency of Niger. Agricultural production remains to be low, the population growth rate is high, and it is a drought-prone area. Currently, Chinese companies have begun drilling for oil, but that yields no benefits for the local residents. Because of the starvation and poverty, young people are dissatisfied with society, so they receive money from Boko Haram members and join up. The situation is such that poverty drives parents to commit suicide bombings themselves or make their young daughters carry out suicide bombings.

In Islam, charity is emphasized as one of the Five Pillars. In the Hadith, it is written that when asked what deeds in Islam are the best the Prophet Mohammed replied, “To feed the poor and greet with peace those whom you know and those whom you do not know.” However, in current society in Niger, the issues of poverty and starvation are familiar to many people and the situation is extremely serious. There is a risk that Boko Haram will take advantage of these social conditions to make inroads into Nigerien society. As Boko Haram calls for changes to a society that is plagued by poverty and starvation, the situation in Niger is such that it is not strange for “somebody” in the neighborhood to support and join them. That has generated a sense of fear among the people of Niger.

As of 2013, 41% of the people in sub-Saharan Africa had an income of less than US\$1.90 a day, and were thus living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2017). The poverty rate has been gradually declining, down from 54% in 1990 and 50% in 2005. I previously wrote that even on an income that is below the poverty line, rural society enjoys a plentiful life in Africa (Oyama, 2011). That is because there was a strong orientation toward self-sufficiency and people produced what they consumed in every day life, so there was no strong intervention of cash in their livelihoods. I emphasized that even with a daily income of less than US\$1.90, the people were certainly not struggling to eat every day or trembling with fear of starvation.

When speaking of poverty as determined by daily income, this paper would like to point out that there are two types: the self-sufficient society model of poverty, where people are able to eat on a daily basis, and the non-self-sufficient society model of poverty, in which people do not produce their own food and struggle daily to eat. Poverty in urban areas is the latter type, and you can call it true poverty. In rural areas as well, there are instances where people cannot adequately obtain food self-sufficiency and also have insufficient cash income to secure food. There are 815 million people who are currently suffering from starvation and poverty in this way (WFP, 2017). Furthermore, as the seriousness of true poverty is increasing due to climate change and conflict, young people are being pushed toward Europe, a northern society within the global society (van der Land, 2018).

After 2000, Africa began building strong links with the global economy and the introduction of foreign capital led to the development of resources and of industry, bringing a jump in the prices of resources and spurring economic growth.

With the birth of a middle class that can drive a consumer society, the countries of Africa became a future growth market in a trend called “Africa Rising” (Mahajan, 2009; Ncube et al., 2011). But as resource prices dropped, economic growth slowed and economic disparity expanded among countries, regions, and individuals—a trend that in 2016 became known as “Africa Diverging” (Saigal, 2016). The issues of economic disparity and poverty are not unique to Niger or Africa; they are being widely reported around the world (see, e.g., Hope, 2018; Lunby, 2019).

In the Sahel region, there are a growing number of people struggling with poverty in the urban areas, while at the same time, in the rural areas as well, rapid population growth has led to a shrinking of the farmland available per person, making it impossible to maintain food self-sufficiency. The gap between rich and poor in the rural villages of Sahel is determined by manpower and land, agricultural productivity, the livestock one raises, and business activities (Mortimore & Adams, 1999). In rural villages, through the traditional custom of encampment contracts, stubble grazing by livestock redirects and concentrates soil nutrients away from poor people’s farmlands to wealthy people’s farmlands. Rich people’s farmlands produce more pearl millet, while poor people’s farmlands, with their lack of nutrients, have lower yields; hence, more than 80% of households are suffering from food shortages (Oyama, 2017).

The context for Boko Haram’s terrorism and violence lies in these issues of underdevelopment and poverty. Changing society through violence is certainly not something that should be condoned. In order to curb these types of population migrations, the US, France, Germany, and Italy are providing military assistance to the G5 Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad) with the objective of carrying out a clean-up operation to root out terrorists. However, suppression of the violence through military force and by ruling the region will never resolve the issue. The Boko Haram problem is not a social issue that is limited to Nigeria and Niger. The question of how to guarantee the livelihoods of people throughout the world will be an urgent issue facing both Islamic society, as it seeks to uphold the Hadith teachings, and the international community as a whole in the coming years.

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NOTE

(1) All names of individuals are fictitious in this paper.

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