From the Loss of Identity to the Martyrization of Peasants in the Boko Haram Era: A Study Based on the Displaced Peasants of Mora in Mayo-Sava

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of terrorism in the Lake Chad basin results from the various social, economic and security changes observed. Boko Haram has infiltrated this sub-region and is spreading terror in the main border areas. Gradually, a net depopulation due to the massive mobility of populations was noticed. This study focuses on the direct effects of the expansion of terrorism by Boko Haram on internally displaced peasants who are the main victims. It therefore relies on displaced people from the Mayo-Sava department in the Far North of Cameroon; in a context of belonging to a group in which an individual is identified by his own habits and customs. Thus, this research tries to solve the following hypothesis: the attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in the border areas of Cameroon, lead to a loss of identity of the peasants who in reality are full victims of the crisis generated by Boko Haram. To verify this hypothesis, random surveys were carried out with a representative sample of 300 people, all displaced from the department. In addition, interviews with target persons were carried out. Thus, it appears that peasants confronted with Boko Haram are losing their identity. Uprooted from their origins in the quest for security, adapting to a new social living environment is still not favorable to them. This rupture represents this loss of identity.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Identity, Internally Displaced Peasants, Mayo-Sava.

I. INTRODUCTION

The events of September 11, 2001 (Cettina, 2001), led to the globalization of organized crime. The resounding alarm has given rise to meteoric rises in terrorist movements, globalizing all spheres of the earth's surface in general. In Cameroon in particular, it is the terrorist sect Boko Haram which has had the heavy responsibility of terrorizing the border areas of Cameroon with Nigeria. Born in Maiduguri in Borno State in Nigeria in 2002, Boko Haram took advantage of a turbulent socio-political context to infiltrate Cameroon in 2012 (Pokam, 2018, p.10). Pushed back by the Nigerian army in 2003 (Mbarkoutou, 2014, p.13), the dispersal of populations and war fighters led to the propelling of individuals into Cameroon territory. This rural exodus allowed the sect to find a way to expand its activities in this host country with the objective of establishing an Islamic State in the sub-region. Subsequently, the forced mobility of populations following the expansion of the sect caused the depopulation of the Nigerian and Cameroon border areas (Mbarkoutou, 2014). This leads to confirm the thought of Barry Buzan: “it is in its neighbours, with whom it shares a history, that a State first sees a threat—or not—to its security” (Pokam, 2018, p.15). The rise of Boko Haram, generating various insecurities, is producing colossal dynamics in the Chadian Lake Basin sub-region with massive displacements of people.

In this relentless movement by Boko Haram to make its ideology prevail while radicalizing the greatest number, a direct actor (victim) and indirect (co-perpetrator) are at the center of the present investigation. It is the “peasant”, person, who maintains close ties with the land. No doubt, they face a dilemma in this war between terrorists and the government. This situation makes the inhabitants of the Far North region the first victims of the conflict with Boko Haram; from which has been witnessed not only a deterioration of the humanitarian situation, but also a loss of identity of local residents which tends to be confused with martyrdom. In transit movements, the distinction between choice and necessity becomes somewhat difficult (Mahamat, 2021). The forced break with the original environment creates a break in the functioning of society (Gonin & Lassailly-Jacob, 2002) and subjects them to a chronic vulnerability. In addition, the forced
displacement of the usual users of the places has often resulted in the occupation of these spaces by other actors (Magrin, 2018). Cross-border insecurity in the Far North region is at the center of the region's socioeconomic unrest (Saïbou, 2012).

In the sense of Harroff-Tavel (2005), identity is a collective representation, the fruit of the group's imagination. It is around several factors that this representation crystallizes in a particular religion, ethnicity (as a tool of demarcation), way of life (agriculture or breeding), place of residence (valley or mountain), language, or even nationalism (especially when the group claims territory). Based on this thought, it turns out, however, that the belonging of indigenous peoples to their cultures of origin has been weakened, even shaken since the resurgence of terrorist attacks by Boko Haram. What is the place of the peasants in the Boko Haram war? What are the repercussions of the war on the peasant? What future for the peasant in the context of a security crisis? Thus, this study would like to demonstrate that there is a feeling of loss of identity among peasants following the disastrous, nightmarish, and obscurantist activities of Boko Haram. The break with the natural environment (habitus in Bourdieu's sense) following the manifestation of violent extremism is a source of an identity crisis. This study focuses on internally displaced persons in the Mayo-Sava department, focusing on peasants, the main victims of the insurrection of the Boko Haram terrorist sect in the Far North region where this security crisis and the subsequent dynamics have led to the deterioration of cultural values.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Materials and Methods

The latest round of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) reports 377,877 displaced people in the Far North region (DTM, round 24, 2022). In addition, the department of Mayo-Sava has a total population of 348,890 inhabitants for 168,753 IDPs (DTM, round 23, 2021). The department of Mayo-Sava, located in the Far North with the capital Mora, received displaced persons from the department of Logone and Chari and the department of Mayo-Tsanaga because of its geographical position and the rise of the Boko Haram conflict in its locality and its surroundings. As shown in Fig. 1, Mayo-Sava has three subdivisions; Tokombéré, Kolofata, and Mora. Bordering Nigeria, the department shares the same border and stands at the foot of the long chain of the Mandara mountains between 11°02'52'' North latitude and 14°08'06'' East longitude and covers an area of 2736 km². Its climate is dry and arid.

Fig. 1. Location of the study area.
As shown in Fig. 2, the department of Mayo-Sava has sheltered war victims of all kinds, namely: internally displaced persons, Nigerian refugees and war returnees (former Boko Haram fighters). As part of this research, the emphasis is on IDPs who were victims of the attacks of the Boko Haram sect.

B. Data Collection Tools

As part of this research, data collection was made from physical and digital documentation. It covers most of the scientific works and scientific journals available to the researcher in libraries. The researcher also made use of the various IOM reports, which were very beneficial in increasing the value of this work. They allowed having the continuous evolution of travel in the department. Also, field surveys were carried out. These are observation, interviews and focus groups. To obtain the figures, the researcher administered an open questionnaire to allow respondents to express themselves freely. On this basis, the definition of the sample led to a simple random draw, thus giving the possibility to each individual of the target population to be chosen. For a study population of 168,753, 300 individuals have been chosen, they are distributed among the various host sites. To this end, individuals without gender distinction respectively, 184 women and 116 men were interviewed, including 180 farmers, 77 breeders, and 43 traders. The questions focused on the sense of belonging of IDPs in their new living environments. The researcher sought to understand to what extent they felt uprooted from their origins and habits.

The results of the IOM survey show that the displaced population represents 48% of the total population in the Mayo-Sava department, i.e., 168,773 IDPs out of a population of 348,890.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE I: NUMBER OF VILLAGES SURVEYED AND SHARE OF THE DISPLACED POPULATION OUT OF THE TOTAL POPULATION BY DEPARTMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Departments</td>
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<td>Logone-Et-Chari</td>
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<td>Mayo-Danay</td>
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<td>Mayo-Sava</td>
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<td>Mayo-Tsanaga</td>
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<td>Total Region F-N</td>
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Sources: DTM, IOM, round 23, July 2021.
C. Data Analysis and Processing Method

The quantitative data from the field surveys were analyzed and processed using Excel software. It allowed to the establishment of the figures and tables. The Sogefi software contributed to the establishment of location maps of the study area and the flow of Boko Haram war victims. The results provide information on the consequences of sudden separation from the natural living environment, which sometimes becomes dissociated from the host environment. A disruption of the life cycle is observable. Individuals feel a lot of resentment following the situation experienced since the incursions of the terrorist sect Boko Haram in the department of Mayo-Tsanaga.

III. RESULTS

It is in a failing security context that the terrorist group Boko Haram interfered in the political life of the Cameroonian State, thus encroaching on the daily life of the indigenous populations.

A. Reasons for Population Mobility

Indeed, the security climate imposed by Boko Haram fighters has resulted in the displacement of populations in the Far North region. This situation applies to the department of Mayo-Sava. The reasons for these movements are then elucidated.

According to the study conducted by the DTM in June 2021, the conflict between the war supporters of the terrorist group Boko Haram and the Cameroonian defense forces has had notorious repercussions on the populations, imposing forced displacements for this reason. The causes of these displacements are 71% due to attacks in the localities of origin, 31% of the displacements were caused by fires in the villages whose homes were burned and damaged. 30% in a neighboring locality, 13% out of simple fear, 12% following clashes with the army, 9% in relation to the economic impact linked to the conflict and 6% under the orders of the military authorities (see Fig. 3).

B. Confrontation Between Peasants and Boko Haram

Field investigations show that the incursions of the sect have often highlighted peasants and elements of the Boko Haram sect. This face-to-face often led to a question of life and death for the victims.

As shown in Fig. 4, when asked whether the respondents had had a direct confrontation with Boko Haram, 84% said they had rubbed shoulders with members of the sect, while 16% said they had no direct contact with them.

C. Peasants Terrorized by the Boko Haram Sect: A Matter of Life or Death

The multiple attacks of Boko Haram in various ways have sown terror in the hearts of the peasants, creating psychosis, burning their homes, looting their property, etc. As a result of these abuses, many have been forced to risk their lives, see their close family members being killed, running towards unknown paths without a certain direction with the sole objective of saving their lives.

When asked how the victims, now IDPs, were able to escape the captivity of Boko Haram, it emerges that 59% of individuals said they had hidden during the attack which led them to take the key to the fields; 36% claim to have fled immediately and 5% admit to having played dead before trying to escape (see Fig. 5). No doubt, during these massacres orchestrated by the sect, people paid with their lives, from which the respondents testify to the facts.

In one way or another, the displaced people interviewed claim to have lost a loved one in the bloody attacks of Boko Haram. So, as shown in Fig. 6, 9% declare having lost their daughters, 3% their mothers, nine in turn have lost their sisters, 5% have lost their aunts, 18% their sons, 19% their brothers, 11% their uncles and 13% their fathers. On the other hand, 22% say they have not lost any loved ones.
Have you ever experienced a direct confrontation with Boko-haram?

Fig. 4. Clashes between peasants and Boko Haram.

How did you manage to escape during Boko-haram incursions in your locality?

Fig. 5. Technique Used to Escape Boko Haram.

Which family member have you lost?

Fig. 6. Loss of a Loved One.

Why do you think you have a loss of identity?

Fig. 7. Feeling of Loss of Identity.
D. Towards a Loss of Identity Markers

The present research reveals an identity disparity since the incursions of the Boko Haram sect in the Mayo-Sava department. The peasants who were deported to other sites in the hope of finding refuge in these environments and being able to settle there for reconstruction are sometimes disappointed.

By categorizing the feeling of loss of identity among the respondents, the researcher reached three levels. First of all, 47.96% of the peasants believe that they are demoralized by the new way of life they are confronted with, and affirm that they are not fulfilled in this system. Then, another category claims at 24.49% to be taxed as members of Boko Haram, which gives them a label that is not theirs. Finally, 27.55% say they live like beggars, which is a dishonor for them (see Fig. 7). Moreover, the climate of life to which the internally displaced are subjected in the host environment is a source of apprehension of the situation experienced, which arouses in these individuals a desire, although not very fierce, to return to their villages in order to resume their previous life.

Field investigations reveal that 84% of the population would like to return to their lands of origin, while 14% prefer to stay there for various reasons and 2% cannot decide on a probable return, either efficient in their respective villages (see Fig. 8).

IV. DISCUSSION

A. A Deprivation of a Blooming of the Peasants

The Far North region for several decades today has been based on various conflicts that are recurring over time (Saïbou, 2014). That said, the department of Mayo-Sava has always been the victim of a security weakening in which the peasants are at the center of the upheavals of individuals without faith or law. Apart from the raids and the irruptions of the cutters, Boko Haram wants to be more virile. Indeed, the manifestation of the violent extremism of this terrorist group is what upsets the daily lives of individuals. Beyond highway or cross-border banditry, Boko Haram sows terror and holds in captivity, either physical or moral, individuals who have only the “mother-nurturing” earth for strength. Indeed, the peasants who identify with the relationship they have with the land, finds themselves lost, because the are forced to adapt to a new form of life in a different land that serves as their refuge. Sometimes, it is within host families or spontaneous sites that they live. Unfortunately, the relationships and the way of life to which they must now adapt do not always contribute to their development. Cohabitation with new people even if there are family ties is not always obvious, financial and nutritional dependence is another means of destabilization of the peasant who finds it difficult to recover.

In any case, the situation experienced by the victims of Boko Haram and mainly the IDPs is a representation of the societal disorder long ago. The ambient and continuous insecurity that reigns not only in the department, but also in the region is being rebuilt over the years. Deprived of any fulfillment, rural populations live under incessant fears sometimes leading to psychosis and psychological trauma. The war, which continues to claim victims, is increasingly degrading the living conditions of rural people. Leaving or no longer fleeing, abandoning his land in order to save his life is the relentless struggle of the poor who derive their enjoyment from the fruits that their only good “the land” can produce for them. Hence the loss of identity. The fracture with his natural environment with which he identifies for the quest for a secure shelter leads him to dissociate himself from his ways of doing, thinking or acting. Life in another community is sometimes difficult because integration is sometimes not given. Accommodation to new life practices suggests a deterioration of the basic culture. In the midst of a society where discrimination and real and inevitable facts constitute the daily life of peasants who seek only to save their lives. The scarcity of resources makes IDPs more vulnerable, who continue to hope for state and humanitarian aid. Without doubt, the State in its sovereignty has the duty to ensure security and support for these disoriented peoples for a noble life despite the security crisis.

Fig. 8. Difficulty Adapting to the New Way of Life.
On the other hand, most internally displaced persons (IDPs) live with host families, and their needs are neither assessed nor addressed by government, local, or international actors. Those living in camps receive relief, but have very limited access to healthy food, essential household items, and quality health care. Risks related to poor access to protection are widespread in areas suffering from conflict and violence, and many people are afraid to return home. If their property has been damaged or destroyed by conflict or natural disasters, many displaced people do not have a home to return to. The status of IDP will often come with many consequences, as it exposes the person concerned to victimization of all kinds. On the other hand, individuals infected with HIV, tuberculosis and other chronic diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes, go untreated for a long period of time, either because of constant travel, the closure of some treatment centers and pharmacies, or due to extreme poverty (Nouetchognou, 2015).

B. Between Machiavellian Promises and Lived Realities

The security crisis caused by Boko Haram mobilizes various development brokers. These are the State and non-governmental organizations that deploy through emergency projects at the bedside of these rural people in the process of losing their identity. At the state level, actions elucidated from “above” tend to be diluted when they arrive in the world from “below”. Internally displaced peasants, victims of the war against Boko Haram, live from charitable actions, whether for accommodation, nutrition, health care, etc. State action has many limits which in reality do not always meet the basic needs and specific to rural people. Famine, under-education, begging, epidemics and many other scourges are the unfailing daily life of these populations. State support must gain momentum and be real. The imbalance between state initiatives and existential experience deserves to be transcended. The State must at best arm itself with better conflict resolution alternatives while associating the peasants who can by themselves propose solutions for a normal return to order dissuaded by the disorder which is gaining more and more ground in today's societies, whether peasant or modern.

The humanitarian work, for its part, is remarkable in this context of crisis because of the strong deployment on the ground, but also has its limits. The mode of support does not fully meet the needs of people in crisis. The donations made in support of the investigations of the host populations and the State are insufficient for a revival in active life. Sometimes, the food and training provided by these organizations are sources of conflict among the beneficiaries. It even happens that the host populations also claim support because, although they are not direct victims of insecurity, they still experience the repercussions of the crisis in their field of activity, their way of life... Humanitarian aid or even the donation has psychological representations in the victims and produces in them two forms of mechanisms, in particular a reconstruction through the various grants granted (cash-money, income-generating activity, etc.) or a total dependence on the donation. Not only that, humanitarian aid does not always take into account the specific needs of the populations concerned. For this reason, certain donations that do not benefit the rights holders are resold by the latter with a view to being able to afford what is profitable to them. For effective aid, there must necessarily be an adequacy, much more an involvement of the beneficiaries in the development of aid projects for them.

C. Towards an Obscure Horizon of the Peasants

The sanctuarization of insecurity over the years has only darkened a powerless population in the face of its adversities that have been revealed to be more severe with the advent of Boko Haram. Indeed, it took a manifestation of terror, of violent extremism to truly understand the black experience of the populations of the Far North. The peasants, guarantors of food on a regional, national and sub-regional scale, suffer blows that make them lose their identity. Forced to leave their natural lands, adapting to a new living environment is difficult. Food, cultural, clothing habits, etc. are changing. Man is weakened in his inner being. Evil regenerates and destroys generations to come under the influence of dark experiences. In the uncertainty, either of a reconstruction in the native land or of a definitive adaptation in the host land, the peasants have no established trajectory for their future.

V. CONCLUSION

The rise of terrorism in the Far North region has caused a real demographic boom even if other causes such as climate change or rural exodus can be added to it. Indeed, the abuses of the Boko Haram sect, in particular the burning of villages, gruesome killings, looting, etc., have caused massive displacements of populations to more secure sites. Abandoned villages, dead bodies, land abandoned independently of peasants are among other undeniable marks of Boko Haram. Moreover, the loss of identity of peasants who are victims of incursions by Boko Haram fighters is a subsequent corollary. Boko Haram snatched lives, broke families, uprooted peoples whose only support was their nurturing mother “earth”. Cut off from their activities and their daily life, the displaced peasants now find themselves in the tactic of save who can.

Young people, women and men without gender distinction experience the same problems. On the run
from Boko Haram for survival, one has to deal with discriminatory remarks, the rambling of morals, the loss of physical, natural and moral goods. Of course, there are traumas in the midst of these disoriented peasants in the department of Mayo-Sava. From these results, the hypothesis that there is a feeling of loss of identity of internally displaced people following the incursions of the terrorist sect Boko Haram is affirmed. The new form of life at the expense of aid of various kinds makes more complex the life of internally displaced peasants who struggle to adapt locally in the host lands but hope day by day for a normal return, even a reconstruction in their original lands. The situation of the affected peoples remains chaotic. A stabilization of the pre-established order is claimed. The peasants who are victims need to find their bearings and the questioning of the public authorities must be obvious.

REFERENCES


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