Performance in Boko Haram's Religious Fanaticism

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Abstract

The activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria evolved within a very short time from a religious sect professing hatred for western values, into a violent dissident group. The group has become a threat to the social and political stability of Nigeria and neighboring countries, and they are believed to have links with ISIS and Al-Qaeda. The group's media-attention strategy includes recording vicious moments of slaughtering captives, displaying victims' mangled corpses, and sending threatening media messages. Though seen as a propaganda strategy by the group, this paper contextualizes the group's activities as an extreme and sadistic form of public performances—an otherwise descriptive strategy for complex fanaticism. This article explores a historiographic and analytic description of performance and fanaticism, and underlies the relationship between the two terms as tangible sociological constructs that serve the terror group as mechanism of representation and communication. By applying the frameworks of historical and performance theories, the article describes how the concept of fanaticism shapes and constructs the identity and public actions of Boko Haram.

Keywords: Boko Haram, fanaticism, performance, civil society, counter-public

Introduction

Religious insurgency and violence in Nigeria predate the emergence of the Boko Haram group. The northern part of the country has been susceptible to these kinds of volatile eruptions since the early 19th century. Scholars like Mambula (2016) and Falola (1998) have suggested that this can be traced to the 1804 radical resistance of Uthman Dan Fodio, who accused the political class of un-Islamic vices and declared jihad against them. The exploits of Uthman Dan Fodio, who is seen by some Nigerian Muslims as a reformer, background modern acts of religious insurgency in northern Nigeria, and it is from this context that the Boko Haram group emerged in the religious and political space of Nigeria.

There has been extensive research and there is much written scholarship on the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria. The media, both local and international, and public analysts consistently describe Boko Haram as a fanatical terrorist group. Gabrielle Blanquart (2012, 17) states that "from various viewpoints Boko Haram can be considered as a terrorist organization, freedom fighters or religious fanatics." However, these descriptions hinge on the performance of violence unleashed by Boko Haram on private citizens and state actors. This article explores the inter-related contexts of meaning in Boko Haram's public violent activities, which may be regarded not only as fanaticism, but also as performance. This linking of fanaticism and performance demonstrate how these two terms serve as tangible sociological constructs for the terror group to deploy in representation and communication. Utilizing historical and performance theories, this article describes how the concept of fanaticism shapes and constructs the identity and public actions of Boko Haram as performance. I argue that Boko Haram's acts of fanaticism that are channeled through symbolic public display, or communicated through media, are purposeful performative practices that shape its own borders as a group and serve as a totem of rebellion against "civil society." The central claim of the article suggests that the activities of Boko Haram, which have expanded to both the execution of public violence and the promotion of violence through media, is an alternative counter-public performance that disrupts the dominant public presupposition of performance as actions conceived to entertain.

Historiographic Context of Religious Fanaticism

Across disciplines, the term "fanaticism" is a problematic category, primarily used negatively to designate human actions deemed irrational by the observer. Therefore, a person who is regarded as a fanatic is perceived as someone who acts outside of prescribed social bounds. As Reinhart Koselleck (2004, 181) puts it: "This exemplifies a distinctive character that emerges when an appeal to humanity or humans intends the exclusion of other humans. They are eliminated from the universal class to which they belong as human beings, without being able to cease being 'humans.'" Sometimes, fanaticism can be applied as a condition of occasional actions. Irrational actions in protests can sometimes be seen as virtuous rather than as aggressive. Philosophers like Rousseau have considered this as civic fanaticism. However, to be conciliatory toward such acts of a less malignant fanaticism is to develop a high level of what the fanatics lack—tolerance. Following this paradigm, it is rather difficult to agree on a particular definition of the word even though there are useful denotations which have furthered the understanding of the concept. Clifford Geertz (2000, 10) reasons that "although it is notorious that definitions establish nothing, in themselves they do, if they are carefully enough constructed, provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought, such that an extended unpacking of them can be an effective way of developing and controlling a novel line of inquiry."

Historically, the concept of fanaticism is usually featured within the context of politics or religion. However, recent decades have seen the description transformed into wider contexts, and now the term is commonly used in the areas of sport, and the social and economic conditions of consumerism. Terms such as violent, excessive, harmful, irrational, etc., are negative emphases which dominate the description of fanaticism. These terms are often accompanied with paradoxical qualities like loyalty, commitment, and even at times

martyrdom. Chung et al. (2018, 3) opine that, "Fanaticism and its cognates, 'fan' and 'fanatic,' have been defined in inconsistent, contradictory, and often, nondiscriminant ways across disciplines." They extend the argument by stating that, "There seems to be no consensus among perspectives on fanaticism, and a generally acceptable definition of fanaticism is difficult to find" (Chung et al. 2018, 4). Thus, to disambiguate the meaning of fanaticism, it may be useful to explore its use in religious and political contexts.

The term "fanaticism" was alternatively taken as "enthusiasm," but the description attained a fiery dimension in the 1500s with Martin Luther employing it in the logic of beasts and herds that are raving, and therefore must be stopped. These references were meant to denounce opposition to his theology by peasants and field preachers, who he believed were set to upend the religious and social order. For historical scholars like Dominique Colas, the clash between Luther and opposing figures with whom he had ideological and theological differences signal the beginning of an evolving chronicle to the meaning of fanaticism. Colas suggests that "fanatic" as contrived by Luther meant "false prophet," but it also came to mean "intolerant." This is a crucial part of the meaning John Locke gave to the term, and it is one of the main connotations that the word retains till now (Colas 1997). For Colas, "fanatic" applied to those who sought to destroy "civil society" in order to establish the Kingdom of God. During the Reformation, they were the "false prophets" who, with their followers, rebelled against the Catholic Church and Germanic princes. Since the 16th century, Colas argues, civil society and fanaticism have thus been related in Western political thought.

Alberto Toscano posits fanaticism as a philosophical idea and suggests that it could be connected to political action. Toscano highlights the historical and political idea of fanaticism as that of relentless passion and conviction and explores the conservative attacks on fanaticism. Like Colas, the opposition to fanatics is referenced through the exploit of Luther. He states that "the ban on political revolt as the greatest evil and impediment to salvation, joined with the legitimation of the authorities that rule over the fallen world, means that Luther, far from condemning violence as such, will extol it when it comes to the repression of the false prophet and his followers" (Toscano 2010, 70). The description of "false prophet and his followers" was a reference to Thomas Muntzer and his followers, who Luther categorized as fanatics. For both Colas and Toscano, the Luther is an ideal starting point for a historical or theological history of fanaticism. Toscano, however, suggests that the fanatic is viewed in both his secular and religious continuities as a manifestation of a blockage of utopian energies.

A modern contextual approach to the meaning of "fanaticism" generated from the era of the French Enlightenment. Locke and Hume had looked back on the religious and the civil wars of the seventeenth century from the point of view of the 1688 Revolutionary Settlement in Europe (this revolution is also called the Glorious Revolution). The "enthusiast" could be re-assessed as potential citizen and patriot, a person with political value whose moral stand could be utilized by the state in furthering the good of a refurbished "civil society." But for Kant and Hegel in the era of the French Revolution, fanaticism represented the absolute claim of politics over all domains of human life (Hegel 1985; Kant 2001). Such a claim would abolish the separation of spheres (public and private, political, religious, juridical, economic, and aesthetic) upon which "civil society" is founded.

Out of this context, fanaticism appears as a specter of an authentic politics, of political reason moved by ideology in its pure, absolute, metaphysical form, and mostly with such irrational mindset as to discountenance opposing views. Paul Katsafanas (2018, 8) suggests that "the fanatic's confidence in his ideal does not track what others would describe as its rational warrant. Most of us would experience some doubts about the veracity of these experiences; most of us would take their outlandishness and peculiarity to undermine them. But not the fanatic. Although he sees that others do not accept the ideal, he treats them as making a profound mistake." The symptomatic significance of fanaticism is categorized in the conditions of what the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) named "Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders." The DSM-5 (2013, 461) stresses that these conditions are unique "in that these problems are manifested in behaviors that violate the rights of others (e.g., aggression, destruction of property) and/or that bring the individual into significant conflict with societal norms or authority figures."

The understanding of fanaticism that is adopted for this essay aligns with a social construction of its negative emphases and follows a pattern of ethical critique. It centers on a paradigm informed by prototypical acts of violence toward the state and its citizens—a trademark of Boko Haram's infamous reputation. Fanaticism is therefore ascribed as a religious, ideological, and political distinction, as well as a psychological category.

Boko Haram's Counter-Public Performance

Boko Haram in Nigeria perceives itself as a kind of Manichean moral harbinger with the aim to upend and purify the Islamic code of jihad, and to destroy anything that has to do with the kind of enlightenment that formal (Western) education brings. This sense of religious order alienated the group from other members of society and also caused divisions among Boko Haram's own members. The group discountenances the ideas, opinions, and lifestyles of others who do not share their specific understanding of faith. Boko Haram elevated its campaign to ensure that its belief system is not threatened by social-political forces in Nigeria. To make sure that its pattern of belief is not invaded by other systems, a distinguishing creed of violence was built as mechanism of boundary-making and resistance. The group started out as an Islamic religious group with an apparent radical approach to the fundamentals of its ideology. The name "Boko Haram":

> [i]s derived from a combination of the Hausa word, boko meaning "book" and the Arabic word haram which means something sacrilegious or sinful. Literally, it means "the sacrilegious book," but its contextual meaning is that Western education and civilisation are sinful, ungodly, and should therefore be forbidden. Those who live according to this belief system are seen as living a righteous life that fits with the group's interpretation of God's will, and those who do not are labelled with certain negative or derisive words, such as "kuffar" (disbelievers; those who deny the truth) or "fasiqun" (infidels) (Salaam 2012, 148).

The group's violent proclivities became publicly evident towards the end of 2003 in Yobe State in northern Nigeria when they took up arms, invaded public buildings including police stations, and started to kill people and commit arson. Due to provocation from what

members of Boko Haram perceived as the extra-judicial killing of their founder, Mohammed Yusuf, by the Nigerian state in 2009, the group's violent operations gained immense sophistication and intense ubiquity throughout the northern parts of Nigeria. By 2015, what started as a fringe Islamic group had gained global prominence as the most ferocious terror group in Africa.

The acts of public violence by Boko Haram entice a massive media following. The group purposively constructs its violent acts to generate media coverage so as to ensure wider reach and audienceship. Thus their acts of fanaticism can be regarded as a form of performance. Performance, either as rehearsed or improvised spectacle, is constitutive of elements which revolve around the notion of "doing." Doing is action, and action becomes normative when it is undertaken by someone or some group of people for a particular purpose, in a defined space, or through a certain channel, and perceived by others. Richard Schechner (1988, 243) reflects that, "At the descriptive level there is no detail of performance occurring everywhere under all circumstances. Nor is it easy to specify limitations on what is, or could be treated as, performance." To control its image and the public's impression of its actions, Boko Haram's spectacle of fanaticism adopts performative and dramaturgical contents. Consequently, there is a cultural context to the production of these violent spectacles that the group renders to the public.

Boko Haram's performance style is a counter-public strategy. Its agency of interpreting performance contents completely distorts the cultural complexity in which the discourse of performance is expressed. The group reconstructs and re-appropriate their modes of performance to fit into a legitimized cultural and ethical context that undermine the congenial characteristics generally applied to the normative definition of performance. The group's style of performance, which involves the public decapitation or execution of victims, and the recorded broadcasts of these acts, were conceived to produce graphical and understandable object lessons—ones that were planned as dramatic events intended to impress certain audiences by their symbolic significance. Like in other performances, the performer intends to draw the audience's attention and urge them into the performer's assumed alternative worldview. However, the odd counterpoint is that Boko Haram's unbridled creative emotion yields to intractable disruption of the logic of artistic propriety. Mark Juergensmeyer (2013, 124), in his study of global violence from religious fanaticism states that:

> The very adjectives used to describe acts of religious terrorism— symbolic, dramatic, theatrical—suggest that we look at them not as tactics but as performance violence. In speaking of terrorism as "performance," I am not suggesting that such acts are undertaken lightly or capriciously. Rather, like religious ritual or street theater, they are dramas designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. Those who witness the violence— even at a distance, via the news media—are therefore a part of what occurs.

Since 2010, Abubakar Shekau, a leader in Boko Haram, has been the most consistent character in the forefront of the group's media broadcast activities. He can thus be regarded as the public face, the director, and the lead actor of the group's performance of fanaticism. His media broadcasts are constructed to promote awareness of their activities, and to invoke

consciousness in the minds of the public. The broadcasts are informed by the group's desire to assert its power and to further promulgate its creed. Thus, Boko Haram processes their act of fanaticism into a performance spectacle. Apart from the manner in which these acts of violence are perpetrated in the public—and mostly in the presence of their victims—the gruesomeness of the broadcasts itself induces the public to become "forced" audience.

Boko Haram and Performance Audience

Boko Haram's audience is segmented into the wider public and the government. The graphics and editing of their broadcast materials are resourceful, and the audience can discern the gradual but consistent evolution in content and production value of the group's performance. Most times, the broadcasts capture violent attacks, killing (mainly through beheading or shooting) of their captives, and displaying abducted women and girls who are regarded as spoils of war. The broadcasts are packaged as threats, demands, desires or warnings. On March 24, 2014, Abubakar Shekau broadcasted a video message stating that, "University is forbidden, girls you should return to your homes. In Islam, it is allowed to take infidel women as slaves and in due course we will start taking women away and sell them in the market" (Mahmood 2017, 10). Few weeks after this broadcast, on April 14, 2014, the group abducted almost three hundred schoolgirls from the rural village of Chibok, in northern Nigeria. The effect of this performance spectacle was to transform their audience beyond just the local context. The audacious act was followed up by another video broadcast in which the group took responsibility for the abduction and threatened to sell the girls. At this juncture, we see the interface of emotion between the performer (Boko Haram) and the audience (public). While the performers develop their own emotional landscape required for the situation, the audience often seeks some form of catharsis that is entirely different from the experience of the performers. Performers share a temporal and spatial sphere with their audience, while inhabiting a separate emotional realm. This is a paradox, because the emotional interface is part of the connection required to justify that the performance is or has taken place. Despite a performer's ability to create distance from the audience, he or she remains dependent on audience connection and feedback. Thus, performers must necessarily maintain a link to community through the audience. In this way, the performance content may resonate with the audience's broader society, extending from that present into the past or towards the future. In other words, the communal aspect of performance and theatre cannot be ignored. Jill Dolan's (1993, 82) opinion is that, "Theatrical performance embodies a complex interchange wherein performer and audience share space, time and emotion, and are thus able to form a temporary common bond."

Boko Haram's performance of fanaticism is also maintained by the constant declaration of war against other religions. As their sentiment and adherence to a form of Islamic practices, which they regard as the only true religion, increases, then the group casts mainstream Islamic practices as belonging to "other" religions. Jeremiah Alberg (2009, 188) opines that, "Fanaticism occurs when one religion believes that some sort of special revelation elevates it to a status such that others must believe in it or be condemned." The notion of violent "otherization" of external religious practices by Boko Haram arose from the supposed persecution of the Islamic religion and the alleged mistreatments of Muslims (especially those Muslims who adopt the groups' special ethos) in the Nigerian state. This

narrative seeks to evoke sentiment and develop a scenario that sets Boko Haram as the defenders of Muslims in an unjust society, especially when the Nigerians government has failed to defend them and their beliefs. Their spectacle of violence is thus premised on performances that are aimed at enacting a ritualistic dictate of their religious beliefs before their audience. Given that the consequent violence of their performances overwhelmingly resonates with their target audiences, the group and its actions are cast as a terroristic ensemble. This aligns with Juergensmeyer's (2013, 330) view that:

> Any incident of terrorism is a kind of performance violence—a dramatic act meant to achieve an impact on those who witness it—but the performative character is heightened when it is associated with religion. The spectacular assaults of September 11, 2001, are a case in point. They were not only tragic acts of violence but also spectacular theater. The dramatic nature of the acts was found to be even more disturbing when it was revealed that they were conducted in a ritualistic way.

Sometime in January 2012, Abubakar Shekau posted one of his broadcasts to the Internet: "We are also at war with Christians because the whole world knows what they did to us . . . they kill us, they burn our houses, they burn our mosques" (Mahmood 2017, 29). The group supports its public performance of fanaticism by their interpretation of Quranic injunctions. Those injunctions then serve as theological justifications for their actions. The Quran becomes a performance script or prompt that is studied by the performers to enable them to enact a spectacle for the public. In their conception of the Quran, its fiat becomes more important than any other thing or reasoning in the world. This religious inclination corresponds with Geertz's (2000, 112) assertion that:

> The religious perspective differs from the common-sensical in that, as already pointed out, it moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them. It differs from the scientific perspective in that it questions the realities of everyday life not out of an institutionalized scepticism which dissolves the world's givenness into a swirl of probabilistic hypotheses but in terms of what it takes to be wider, nonhypothetical truths.

The State vs. Boko Haram: Performance and Counter-Performance.

Boko Haram proposes their fanatical ideology to be for the public good. They assume the roles of both theologians and philosophers, and thus they are consumed by an ethical paradox: the need to be theologically self-conscious, so as to be philosophically sophisticated. The violent outreach of the group is patterned in consonance with a dialectical historical process in the evolution of religion in past centuries (like the example of Uthman Dan Fodio, who was noted above). Juergensmeyer's (2000, 6) remarks that "Within the histories of religious traditions—from biblical wars to crusading ventures and great acts of martyrdom—violence has lurked as a shadowy presence. It has colored religion's darker, more mysterious symbols. Images of death have never been far from the heart of religion's power to stir the imagination." A great number of scholars of philosophy and religion, like

Marcel Mauss, Emile Durkheim, and even Sigmund Freud, have probed these phenomena in their work.

Over the past decades, the art of performance has been utilized as a public tool in radical quests for power and acknowledgement. There exists a wide body of literature in performance scholarship that categorizes civic actions and public protests as forms of performance, even though they are situated within the contexts of political statements. This style of radical performance proposes to subvert the status quo of the civil society in a determined context of suggestive counter-political formation. The design of the performance is always oppositional, radical as well as rebellious. The extreme level of radical performance adopts violence as essential methodology. This is the tactic of Boko Haram; hence they can be regarded as rebels not only to government but of the entire society. As rebels of the "civil society," wherein they cannot be trusted and approved by the state, the performance of fanaticism provides the group with moral legitimacy to attract attention to their violent spectacle. We may thus infer that the ideology of the group is not only projected at their discontent at what they perceive as the undermining of the Islamic religion, and their aggression towards Western education, but also towards an intuitive quest for some source of power and dominance in a sovereignty. As it is with most extremist groups:

> The deepest and most enduring source of discontent, however, affects the doctrine even when its standing has been reconciled with both perspectivism and empiricism, and when its scope has been limited to human psychology. It is created by a particularly inviting interpretation of power in terms of control, or domination (as in an agent has power over someone or something). To will power, in this interpretation, is to seek to control or dominate (Reginster 2006, 104).

Salaam (2012, 151) seems to agree with this position when he states that "the idea of the Boko Haram is not only about rejecting Western education per se; it is a judgment about the failure to provide opportunities for better lives, and thus becomes an instrument for mobilising and radicalising the unemployed, unskilled, and poverty-ridden youths to join its cause and dislodge the secular controlled state, as an alternative and plausible answer to their misery." Thus, Boko Haram presented itself as a group with religious and political ideals, and with a counter-public expression of fanaticism. In definitive terms, the group effectively gained currency through power relations to and within the Nigerian structural contexts. They have been able to impose their dominion over a large area of the northern part of the country to secure their revolutionary voice.

There have been counter-terrorism and counter-offensive mechanisms by the Nigerian state towards neutralizing the power of the group and dismantling it. Muhammad Suleiman (2015, 21) responds that, "In spite of the offensives, the group continues to thrive." Sometimes, there are full-scale engagements between the group and the national military. When this happens, news items and gory images of soldiers killed by the terrorist group are generated in Boko Haram's media outlets. This massive media outpouring has become part of the group's performances, aimed at invoking a negative public opinion against the military and the state while also weakening the psyche of state soldiers. In a bid not to lose its legitimacy in the face of the public, the state has had to embark on counter-performances to

rupture the imagined sense of audience applause for the group, and also to reinstate its own dignity. The contested zone of the war therefore transits from the real battleground to the media. The state's military has taken up its own performance of broadcasting videos of captured members of the group. Corpses of Boko Haram members littered on the ground, following heavy combat, have been posted via video and photographic formats in both mainstream and social media outlets. Military leaders have given several press conferences and interviews on how the state has been able to emasculate the group and retake territories that the group had earlier put under siege. The commander-in-chief of the Nigerian armed forces, who is also the president of the country, has made several media broadcasts, assuring the public of the capability of the state to annihilate the Boko Haram. In one of his broadcasts, he claimed that the group has been technically defeated. Yet, the group remains strong and continues to wreak havoc with devastating effects on the lives and property of citizens. The state's counter-performance, which is designed to respond to Boko Haram's performance, can thus be regarded as a form of resistant performance that utilizes media forms and its representation to counteract power and influence.

Masochistic Scripting in Boko Haram's Performance

In the performance of Boko Haram's fanaticism, there are instances in which suicidal behaviors are generated as part of the performance action. In this case, the life of the main participating actor is compromised. Boko Haram believes that suicide killings are desirable as public spectacle, and the performance applause of such acts are imagined celestial recompense. This public suicidal act demonstrates a lack of creative dissociation from the reality of life and the illusion that must be created from a performance script. In this fatal personal drama, the performer must have been influenced to believe that the script was divinely sanctioned. Zev Trachtenberg's (2009, 208) diagnosis of this extreme behavior suggests that, "It is clear from the case of religious fanaticism that the belief in an afterlife can inspire acts of suicidal bravado." A fanatic is someone who does not entertain any iota of doubt about his beliefs.

In the opening sentence of her essay titled "Immediate Man: The Symbolic Environment of Fanaticism", Christine Nystrom (1977, 19) opines that, "Fanaticism is the triumph of reflex over reflection." In fanaticism, the delusion of enthusiasm to enact a performance script leads to dreadful disorder because the fanatic makes no investment in any form of research. In the bid to enact a performance, the fanatic disrobes himself of the necessary privilege to be concerned about epistemological temporality. Dominic Bryan (2005, 145) underscores this concern when he states that:

> To be a fanatic suggests more than being obsessive, something many ordinary people are guilty of. To be a fanatic suggests that people are so driven as to be a danger to themselves and those around them. Yet there seems to be a strange contradiction in the idea of fanaticism. Under the definitions commonly used, the fanatic is neither deranged nor psychologically ill. The activities of a fanatic are ones that appear to be made out of choice, out of free will. This is true even though a suicide bomber might suggest that s/he has no choice; that s/he is doing God's work. The

person described as a fanatic seems to take the values of their society or
belief system to the extreme.

The victims of Boko Haram's performance of fanaticism are not only those who constitute malevolent threats to the group's ideology, but also the innocent members of the public who constitute the props needed to attract the attention of the audience to the theatre of the group's alternative worldview. Though the group's performance is critically in tension with a holistic meaning of performance in the context of entertainment, or the everyday connotation of human action, its audiences are conscripted as witnesses through the news media and the Internet. These audiences are forced to perceive Boko Haram's performance as the creation of disturbing, but at the same time compelling, audio and visual spectacles. The definition of performance does not account for the objectionability of its spectacle, but for the possibility of actions that enable a relationship between the performer and the audience. Erving Goffman (1956, 8) enlists this view when he asserts that, "A 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." Thus, the architecture of Boko Haram's public broadcast and display of its extreme fanaticism, though rightly described as counter-public, can be regarded as performance.

Conclusion

This article attempts to stretch the possibility of ascriptions to the dual concepts of fanaticism and performance, as it contributes to the limited area of non-prescriptive literature on Boko Haram's violent activities in Nigeria. While the meaning of fanaticism in this article is conditioned by its negative connotations, the term "performance" is situated within a holistic categorization of actions that are undertaken for the purpose of attracting the attention of the audience with informed spectacle. The term "performance" in scholarship does not merely detail visual spectacle, but also entails the very notion of the "performative," that is, such acts that could influence action. Thus, speech or utterances constitute a form of performance. J. L. Austin (1962, 6–7), a prominent linguistic philosopher, has observed that speech is an act that is performed not only by the derivative action from it but by the perception of it: "it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not the normally thought of as just saying something." Since the focus of the article is descriptive and analytical, it does not require empirical study. This inadequacy does not undermine the possibility of the article to provide a framework for more expansive ethnographic study on fanaticism and the act of performance, especially concerning Boko Haram in Nigeria. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson have contended that research methods in theatre and performance studies are not about legitimizing the cultural authority of the research or the researcher. As they suggest, "Rather, they are about the engaged social-environmental production of systems and the cultural production of flexible research ecologies wherein tacit understandings, inferred practices and theoretical assumptions can be made explicit and can, in turn, be queried and contested" (Kershaw and Nicholson 2011, 2).

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