

Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology: A Viable Theory for Rendering Solution to Boko Haram Insurgence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

It is quite unfortunate that the form of imprecision and counterintuitive effects that violent experiences constrain on our attempt to understand and cope with violence have not been taken into proper consideration. In order to approach an integrative phenomenological analysis of violence, one has to concentrate on recovering the subjective motives for violent actions and on understanding the perpetrator's deviant point of view. For these reasons, the central aim of this paper is to use some phenomenological insights particularly of Edmund Husserl to investigate its possible relevance to Boko Haram insurgence ever since the sect could not relent in their crimeful attack while the government has been in one way or the other making effort in resolving the problem. It however summarizes that the two parties (i.e. the government and Boko Haram sect) should adopt the Husserlian phenomenological principle by bracketing all their grievances over what has happened and open up for peaceful interaction and reconciliation. Another is to bracket any possible claims that may be given by the two opponents to enable them arrive at a lasting non-violent society. It has also argued that the profound suggestions herein are not dogmatic as it remains open for criticism and alternative solution.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Boko Haram violence, reconciliation, government

INTRODUCTION

The rate at which Boko Haram sect is terrorizing the nation today is too alarming such that it needs an urgent attention. The waste of lives by the group on daily basis is becoming out of records. Individuals, groups and even our security agents are now victims. Schools (especially in the north) are no long in safe hands. Many are withdrawing themselves from schools considering that the killings and kidnappings that are ongoing in different school. In February 2021, the Boko Haram insurgence on early Wednesday attacked the Government Science College, Kagara in Niger State killing at least one student and abducting more than 40 people including students and teachers. In less than two weeks another incident happen precisely on February 26, 2021, when 317 girls aged 12-17 years old were kidnapped by armed bandits who raided the Government Girls Secondary School, a boarding school in Jangebe town, Zamfara State of Nigeria. We should also recall that in April 2014, there was an attack by Boko Haram sect where a total of 276 Chibok students were kidnapped from Government

Girls Secondary School in Borno State. They have never given up for once in tormenting innocent citizens, terrorizing the government, and opening fire of insecurity in every part of the country especially in the northern side. These simultaneous attacks (kidnappings) show that the Boko Haram sect has refused to succumb of their agitation despite the security agents mounted by the government on them. The deadly toll on human lives and properties currently going on is highly escalating and demands immediate solution before it gets out of hand. The worst of it all is that they are not attacking government directly but rather on innocent people who did not contribute anything to their claimed issues. From all indication, it is estimated that the violence has consumed several thousands of lives while properties worth billions of naira have been lost yet the violence is still burning at a very high rate.

The measures at which the Nigerian government has been taking in response to Boko Haram violence have not worked. The government has adopted the strategy of deploying special security forces to the affected areas in search of

the hoodlums. The military patrol vehicles equipped to detect hidden bombs and other weapons within a radius of 50 meters have also been used. This strategy is placed in such that the vehicles are put on the roads in suspected Boko Haram hideouts in densely populated areas of the city, and once bombs or weapons are detected, security operatives move into the area to effect arrests and seize weapons. Though many including leaders of the sect were arrested through these method, but then the problem could not be solved. Having seen that the Boko Haram sect has resistibly defied the action of the security forces, it implies that countering the sect with force alone is likely not going to yield the desired results. It is also known that the federal government has also tried some other measures like setting up panel for investigation of the root causes of the violence; inviting all the northern leaders to a round table meeting purposely on finding solution to the Boko Haram insurgence; increasing budgetary funding to security; signing into law the terrorism prevention Act; declaring state of emergency in some of the affected states and many more others. But still all they did was like having a lunch break. Today, their violent acts mainly on killings and kidnapping of people especially students are now on regular basis.

Meanwhile, the resultant effect of this Boko Haram violence shows that appropriate measure has not been taken in solving the problem. Probably because the right people involved (the Boko Haram leaders) and their sponsors have not come out to identify themselves for proper negotiation due to fear of arrest or that their interior motives for embarking on such barbaric actions have not been disclosed to the government. This is the major concern of this paper. Solution of every problem started immediately the root of the problem is identified and we believe that every problem has solution. The only thing necessary in this case is to find out truly their problem without any hidden thing behind.

In this wise, this paper deems it necessary that what should be done is to seek their subjective motive of the ongoing violence. Their conscience and the rationality behind these actions need to be understood and addressed. Experience shows that actions never take place from a position outside the mode of thought. The rationality of person/s determines his/their reaction to every situation especially on violent issues. The rationality behind every violent

action remains the basic issue that needs to be tackled as it is the root that sets the fire of violence burning (Agama 2020). Thus, from the context of phenomenology, this paper will bring out the implicit solutional assumptions in Husserl's philosophy and develop it to form a more improved theory that will help to investigate properly the rationality behind this perpetrators' (Boko Haram sect) abnormality. The possibility of capturing their real motive will help to solve this menace. Therefore, this paper is of the opinion that government should adopt this strategy by first of all recovering the subjective motives of the sect for their violent actions and understand their main point of view as the already claimed reasons given by the Boko Haram sect may not really be the fact. Even though that government must have made a similar investigation, but might not be enough. A second trial with this method will open up for peaceful interaction and reconciliation. The Boko Haram sect should also be ready to open up and reveal their interior motive if they are still in their sense and really know what they want. With this, the both party (Government and Boko Haram insurgence) can easily adopt the Husserlian phenomenological method by bracketing their grievances and have a way of arriving at a lasting non-violent society.

Understanding the Concept of Phenomenology

The term "Phenomenology" has two constitutive etymological elements. The word "phenomenon" has a Greek root Phainomenon on derived from the Greek verb phainesthai which means "that which shows itself or that which reveals itself". The original Greek meaning of "Logos" is discourse, which "opens to sight" or "let something be seen" thus phenomenology, properly understood as the Logos of the phenomenon is the disciplined attempt to open to sight that which shows itself, and let it be seen as it is (Summer 1989). According to Iroegbu (1995), in this specific fact of being a method of research into reality, phenomenology differs from other Logos-compounded sciences like biology, theology etc. When it comes to the areas like the above mentioned disciplines, the Logos or discourse is attached directly to the object of inquiry: Logos of life, Logos of God etc. This reason behind this argument may be that every phenomenologist appears to come up with diverse styles of phenomenology. This makes it difficult to claim one single definition of phenomenology just as Giorgi and Giorgi

(2003) observe that “a consensual, univocal interpretation of phenomenology is hard to find”. But in philosophy and as a method of inquiry, phenomenology is not just a Logos of phenomenon. It is only a procedure, but a crucial and significant one, of inquiry and of discovery of reality (Iroegbu 1995). This is the Husserlian aspect of phenomenology. It is central to the concept of description of the invariant aspects of phenomena as they appear to consciousness. So, the classical phenomenological research method with Husserlian framework of descriptive research in the words of Crotty (1998) focuses on ‘seeking realities not pursuing truth’ in the form of manifestation of phenomena as it is in the form of life world made of interconnected, lived experiences subjectively. Thus, it is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness, a descriptive of the givens of immediate experiences. By extension, it is an attempt to capture experience in process as lived, through descriptive analysis. It studies how things appear to consciousness, and not how they are in themselves, even if it is known that the given contains more than or is different from what is presented.

However, as regards to the course of this study, it is a method of learning about another person by listening to their descriptions of what their subjective world is like for them, together with an attempt to understand this in their own terms as fully as possible free of our preconceptions and interferences.

Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Position

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is the first to give the name “phenomenology” to a whole system of philosophy, which he tries to “raise to the rank of exact, universal, and radical science and make the matrix of all theoretical knowledge (Summer 1989). The central idea of Husserl is that scientific and everyday practices take the things around them for granted or conceive of them according to casual accounts that place the understanding of the thing outside of the thing itself. In order to actualize the proper foundations for understanding, we need to return “back to the things themselves”.

His aim is to think deeply on how our consciousness grasps individual objects. Husserl terms the *modus operandi* for arriving at the thing itself the “phenomenological epoche” (Husserl 1982). This method involves

suspending or bracketing the natural attitude in order to bring one’s conscious experience to the forefront of reflection. Mortari & Tarozzi (n.d) in reference to this method of inquiry proclaim that it is a transcendental method with core emphasis on phenomenological description of the invariant aspects of phenomena as they appear at consciousness. This means that Husserl’s aspect of phenomenology is a scientific method of understanding human beings at a deeper level of their conscience. This involves suspending or bracketing the natural attitude in order to bring one’s conscious experience to the forefront of reflection.

However, Husserl tries not to make this doing of the natural attitude nihilist scepticism. For him, the phenomenological epoche does not doubt that things exist. Rather, the existence of things external to the mind is simply taken for granted and the phenomenological task is to unpack how these things present themselves as phenomena to ones consciousness (Husserl 1982). This, however, is not like Rene Descartes’ “Cogito ergo sum”, which gives one certainty only of oneself as a thinking being. Husserl’s position is that the phenomenological epoche demonstrates that we are being experiencing other things. Consciousness for Husserl is always consciousness of something” (Husserl 1982). Therefore, the doubting and reflexive attitudes demonstrate the existence of both an experiencing subject and things experienced.

Husserl also uses the term “intentionality” to describe the relation between the conscious subject and the object of consciousness. Intentionality describes the particular conscious act (like perceiving, remembering, wishing etc) by which we direct our attention toward an object. The process of this intentional act is in such that it elects an object in the world from the flow of experience and brings it into consciousness. Secondly, it imbues the object with specific qualities, characteristics, and meaning. Intentionality orients the person to an object in a specific way and so carries an “interpretative sense” or “meaning-context” that is dependent on the person’s particular perspective and the temporal referent with which he or she views the object. Consequently, the same object can be given different interpretations because its meaning is dependent on the type of act in which the object was intended (Russell 2006). Husserl often desires to provide a permanent grounding for the sciences within consciousness. This he further argues that

these different interpretations could be overcome to arrive at a certain essential understanding of the thing itself. He argues that phenomenological reflection allows consideration prior cognitive processes which could be synthesized to “intuitively grasp” the unchanging characteristics of an object uncovered in each situated intention act. That is, for Husserl, one can grasp the central characteristics of an object through an “eidetic method” whereby one considers all the variations of an object experienced in prior perceptions, imaginings and remembrance, and then determines what remains constant throughout these previous cognitions. This constant is the element without which the object of consciousness would cease to be experienced in prior perceptions, imaginings and remembrance, and then determines what remains constant throughout these previous cognitions. This constant is the element without which the object of consciousness would cease to be experienced in any fashion; it is its essential structure (Russell 2006).

In addition, Husserl demonstrates that this understanding of objects unfolds in “internal time” whereby, based on prior experiences, we anticipate an object as having certain characteristics and then find that anticipation given in full “evidence” as it is fulfilled in current experience (Husserl 1982). This temporal character reveals that our experiences can penetrate into a unified stream, the individual ego (Husserl 1982). Phenomenological description thus demonstrates how we experience an external object, its essence as immanent to our consciousness.

This approach gives a detailed and intriguing description of a single reflexive individual's experiences. Husserl (1982, esp. Mediation 5) extends his phenomenology beyond the individual ego to an intersubjective realm. He argues that consciousness not only experiences transcendent objects but also experience other individuals. He notes that the limits of human consciousness mean that “neither the other Ego himself, nor his subjective process or his appearances themselves, nor anything else belonging to his own essence, becomes given in our experience originally. According to Russell (2006), this is precisely what demonstrates that the other individual is in fact another and not one's self. Nonetheless, we do observe the bodies of the other and can use our self-awareness of our own embodiment “as the

motivational basis for the analogizing” apprehension of (another's) body as another animate organism” (Husserl 1982). In other words, the other's body presents the awareness that, like one's own body, it is not simply an object but contains an intentional consciousness capable of manipulating objects in the world. We can therefore conclude that “the other” is like ourselves and that we are like “the other” moreover, each consciousness, according to Husserl, exist “in an international community” (Husserl 1982) with other persons. Through these intention relations with other individuals, the objective existence of the objects of our consciousness and the meaning we give to our experiences of them is confirmed. Hence, Russell (2006) explains thus; “A solitary ego's intentional arc can provide ‘evidence’... but an object can only be posited as a really transcendent object thanks to the mediated experience of that object as also given evidently to others”. On the basis of this intersubjectivity, Husserl concludes that the phenomenological epoche reveals both one's own and others experience of a common world; there necessarily exists, in Husserl's opinion, both transcendent objects and a transcendent ego. Meanwhile, it is the Husserl's phenomenological position that constitutes our departure with its relevance to the existing violent nature of Boko Haram sect.

The Boko Haram Insurgence

Boko Haram is an Islamist terrorist group in northern Nigeria. The group was formally adopted by the name “the congregation of the people of tradition for proselytism and Jihad” (Ogaga 2013), or as it is translated in Arabic, Jama' at ahl as-sunnah Li-d-da'wa wa-L-jihad meaning “the Group of the People of Sunnah for preaching and struggle” (Ahmed 2012). The group was originally formed in Maiduguri where the residents dubbed it to Boko Haram. The term “Boko”, which is originally derived from a Housa word with meanings such as “fraud” and “inauthenticity” (Nweian 2013) and the Arabic word “haram” which according to “Nigeria's Taliban'enigma' has it to figuratively means “Sin” (literally, “forbidden”). Ordinarily, the name could mean “western education is sinful”, putting a stop to what it deems Westernization. Anything western is said to be corrupting Muslims. But do the Muslims as a body really have the same view? In what way does the western education corrupt the Muslims? Should the Boko Haram sect in any

way deny the advantageous use of western education? If the phenomenological truth about the above questions cannot be given, then it means that they are simple, confusionists as “locals who speak the Housa language are also unsure what it actually means (Rodolico 2012).

The group is known for attacking Christians, Muslim and government targets as well as for bombing Churches, Mosques, schools and police stations. The group also kidnaps Western tourists and has assassinated members of the Islamic establishment who have criticized the group. Historically, Nigeria has had long and unfortunate sets of different communal conflicts, tribal wars, militants' violence, ethno-religious violence and so many others. But the worst of it all is the Boko Haram violence. Their violent operations have lasted so long and still burning higher than ever before. Record has it that the group carried out its first terrorist attack in Borno State in January 2010 killing four people (Nigerian Tribune, 2011). During the following few years, the violence escalated in terms of both frequency and intensity. The Boko Haram insurgence has never had rest in terrorizing the country. Mass killings, bombings and kidnappings by the sect have reportedly been given at all the time. But the worst of its kind is when the group started kidnapping the innocent school children. It can be recalled that on 15th April, 2014, the terrorists abducted about 276 female students from college in Chibok in Borno State. Currently, abduction of school children (mostly girls) has become order of the day. Having known that the group abducted 40 students including teachers in Kangara college, Niger State on 17th February 2021 killing one student at spot. While on February 26, a midnight attack on a Secondary School in Zamfara resulted in at least 317 school girls being kidnapped, all in one month.

From every indication, it is obvious that the Boko Haram sect does not want western education, and some other thing the group might have in mind. Innocent children are now their target. It is too challenging that the freedom one seeks to enjoy is overtly deprived. No wonder, Levinas (2001) declares that “it is an experience of terror that brings a free man under the domination of another”. As a consequence, the Boko Haram has brought forth not only deaths but also suffering and pain to the great number of people. Thus, Levinas (2001) would rightly say that pain brought by suffering and coming from violence becomes the central phenomenon

of the diseased state. Reflection over the said going will simply summarize that violence especially in the case of terrorists like this is obviously unwanted. As a matter of fact, we shall, through the relevance of this work unfold the phenomenological epoche of Boko Haram insurgence and proffer solutions to the problem.

Husserlian Phenomenology and Boko Haram Insurgence

The essential purpose of this paper as indicated at the beginning is to use some phenomenological insight of Edmund Husserl to investigate its possible relevance in solving the problem generated by the Boko Haram sect. Our contribution to stopping the ongoing violence in Nigeria is simply by borrowing from the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, ideas that would be considerate for solving the crimeful deeds of the group. The adoption of ideas of Husserl for the solution of this deadly menace may appear strange and ironical. But the truth, which we are trying to maintain in this paper, is that Husserl's phenomenology can serve a solution purpose. In actual fact, the realistic stage of Husserl's phenomenology which came earlier can be interpreted to the means of solving the problem of Boko Haam violence.

Firstly, the dictum of Husserl's phenomenology *zu dar zachen* “To the things themselves” can be given a resolvable interpretation. Although the meaning of this strapline in Husserl's philosophy is the essence of things should be clearly understood, by investigating it in its original nature, we can however, give a resolvable meaning to it as it concerns the Boko Haram violence. This position of Husserl can be interpreted to serve a solvable meaning if we posit that “to the things themselves” means that Boko Haram should be understood within their original meaning.

The phenomenological strap line means for us that whatever one wants to understand should be traced to its original situation. We (government and individuals) should first and foremost trace the original situation that generated these crimeful deeds of the group. We should avoid bringing in prior and previous preconceptions in our attempt to understand the situation. Husserlian phenomenology therefore, talks of studying and understanding the phenomenon in its pure state, what Husserl's phenomenology says is that one should try to see the phenomenon within original or particular

situation that generates it. Therefore, let us look or seek for the original situation that generated this violent nature of Boko Haram Sect.

Phenomenological epoche is another cardinal principle of arriving at reality in accordance with Husserl's phenomenology. Accordingly, this methodical approach entails that one must first of all set aside all philosophical presuppositions, and accepted ideas about things. This involves all the information one has received about interior and exterior worlds and the internal and external sense.

Epoche is the Greek word for 'bracketing'. The method of phenomenology consists in focusing on my part or all of my experience and then observing, analyzing, abstracting and describing that experience by removing myself from the immediate and lived engagement in it. I must observe the experience in question from a distance (Husserl 1970).

Thus, the setting aside of these and of all other knowledge and prejudices (positive and negative) that one possesses already, is technically called by Husserl: phenomenological Epoche. Epoche is the shifting aside, veiling out, or bracketing of whatever initial knowledge one has as this may adversely affect the unprejudiced arrival at the truth.

Correspondingly, for us to get to the root (i.e. the remote and to the immediate cause) of the violence and the way out, the principle of phenomenological epoche should be initiated as regards to the problem at stake. The phenomenological epoche is to be interpreted and applied in two ways:

Bracketing any possible reasons that may be given by the two opponents

Bracketing all their grievances over what has so far happened. Just as Husserl emphasized that phenomenological epoche does not doubt that things exist but should not be taken for granted. Let it be that the complaints and reasons given by the Boko Haram sect are not doubted. When they claimed that western education is corrupting their people (the Muslims at large) being spiritually corrupted, lacking in religious piety, and guilt of criminally enriching oneself to the Muslims Umma (community). Let it not be taken for granted. Even though that the Boko Haram, as a group clearly does not utterly reject the modern world out of hand. The group's use of mobile phones, video cameras, DVDs, youtube, chemical explosion, automatic

weapons, cars etc, shows it is more than prepared to use the fruits of western education when it suits them. Yet the implications of wiping the claims making it a tabula rasa in the words of John Locke will simply create a room for peaceful reconciliation. Secondly, this phenomenological epoche as Husserl suggests simply reveals that in order to secure the proper foundations for understanding the motives of Boko Haram insurgence; we need to return "back to the things themselves" that is, by refreshing their central aims and annoyances to the tables of social interaction. Ever since the method of phenomenological epoche involves suspending or bracketing the natural attitude in order to bring one's conscious experience to the forefront of reflection; the Boko Haram sect, the government and the individuals should bracket all their grievances and open up for peaceful dialogues. These present type of violence (mass killings, destructions and kidnappings) will through this method stop and bring everlasting solution to the problem. In this process, the two parties and the people who are directly or indirectly affected should doubt all prior understanding of the existing violence, the experiences they have encountered, and the way they have operated. Doubting in this case should not be seen as though they did not really happen (yet it truly happened) but doubting (bracketing) in such that there should be a general pardon from the two sides.

Moreover, the theory of intentionality which is also another cardinal principle in Husserl's phenomenology can also serve as a viable theory for solving the problem of Boko Haram insurgence. Thus, the Husserl's use of the term "intentionality" as to describe the relation between the conscious subject and the object of consciousness (Polizzi 2001), depends on the flow of experience (i.e. how it was experienced) before bringing it into consciousness. Intentionality as it was earlier stated orients the person to an object in a specific way and so carries on "interpretative sense" or "meaning-context" that is dependent on the person's particular perspective and the temporal referent with which he or she views the object. By implication, this theory of intentionality here simply entails as it relates to the Boko Haram insurgence that our suggestions to the problem is not dogmatic. The theory of intentionality suggests that there are many ways of looking at things. Consequently, it means that if there are some other ways in which the violent problem

created by Boko Haram sect could be solved other than the one we have given, nothing stops it. Everything depends on individual's perspective and the way he or she views the problem. For instance, in this case of violent act, if the individual imagined the problem in the context of a starting point (i.e., the war is just beginning) or if the individual looks at it as the ending point (i.e. coming to an end), then the same problem can be given different solutions. What matters most is that the problem is solved.

By extension, and in line with Husserl, Merleau Ponty deals with violence as an integral part of social reality (an embodiment) and advocates that the world should be shared with others thereby making effort to understand one another(1969). The fact is that the Boko Haram sect has not satisfactorily made an effort to share (negotiate) their problem with the government as they have never come close in any form to interact with the government. At least a problem shared, they say, is a problem partly solved.

Accordingly, to Popitz (1992), violence is an integral part of social reality in the sense that it embodies an irreducible and omnipresent option of social action. While Merleau-Ponty (2002) says that even if violence might possibly break all socially derived patterns of interaction, it still presupposes a primordial bodily relation to the other. Therefore, in order to avoid mystifying explanations, violence must be reified or essentialized but has to be accounted for from the interacting subjects point of view.

As acts of violence might seek to intentionally suspend the intersubjective foundation of action, one has to acknowledge a fundamental neutrality of humans towards their options of acting.

Consequently, an "ethical epoche" (the principle of bracketing of one's whole previous life and a universal critique of it, oriented towards a radical renewal according to ethical ideals) should be practised, in order to prevent us from normative interpretations for historically varying structures of action, which remain open to yet further delimitation. Hence, relating violence back to normative justification or rational motives, on the contrary, is a reductionist approach: regarded closely such that it runs the risk of not only obscuring the dynamism that is distinctive of this phenomenon, but also the creative potential of human potential in general (Rapport 2000).

Given the fact that the Boko Haram insurgence has claimed so many souls (Innocent lives), this paper argues that we should phenomenologically analyse these type of experience by suspending our ways of taking things for granted. Because they force us to step outside the machinery of everyday life and average understanding, they can be used as leading clues to understanding and the categories derived from them.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented Edmund Husserl's phenomenology as an important method of investigating the monstrosities of Boko Haram sect. It argues that using a phenomenological approach inspired by Husserl as it is amended and developed, Nigeria can actualize a lasting solution from the claims and shackles of Boko Haram insurgence. This tenacious violence of Boko Haram can be put to remedy by bracketing – breaking free to remove oneself from the situation and begin a process of self-restructuring. It is also considered that the existing violence let by the group should be put towards the phenomenology of sharing that is, an understanding built on the practice of sharing life world. An overall conclusion of this work is that although some of our phenomenological approach may not proffer the ultimate solution to the problem, but a trial will bring a positive result. Hence, the profound suggestions herein are not dogmatic as they are open for criticism and alternative solution.

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