HOW BOKO HARAM'S 'LIMINAL' CHILD WITCHES AND CHILD SOLDIERS CHALLENGE THE CAPITALIST STATE

An Animist Critique of Neo-Liberalism's Ideology of 'Extremism'

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> The African god Ogun kills on the right and
> destroys on the right. Ogun kills on the left and
> destroys on the left . . . Ogun kills the owner of
> the house and paints the hearth with his blood
> . . . 'Master of iron, chief of robbers. You have
> water, but you bathe in blood'.
> —Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Poetry,* 1970, 33-34.

> '"Savages" want the multiplication of the
> multiple'.
> —Pierre Clastres, *Archeology of Violence,* 1994, 167.

This chapter presents an animist critique of contemporary Western neo-liberal theories of 'extremism'. That is, political and/or religious ideas considered by contemporary ruling classes to be beyond mainstream notions of the 'reasonable' behaviour expected of elites ruling on citizens' behalf. Loperfido (this volume) conceives

extremisms to be produced as marginal spaces by a centre that defines this marginality as threatening to its very existence. Indeed, in their alter ego roles of 'bandits', African 'liberator' governments of the postcolonial capitalist state, slaughter and toss into the wastelands Islamist and anarchist groups deemed to be positioned to the state's ideological 'far-right' or 'far-left' (Debos 2012). The Nigerian state defines Boko Haram as a 'far-right' terrorist insurgency against the secular, sovereign nation-state. Yet, applying the Kapferers' (this volume) more general insight, it is conceivable that the jihadist group's fundamentalist and totalitarian war against the Nigerian 'infidel' generates in quid pro quo mode the Nigerian military's extreme violence towards all 'barbarian' combatants and unarmed civilians—and vice versa. In fact, after a decade-long war, Amnesty International (Thurston 2020) documents how jihadists *and* the Nigerian state's armed forces commit crimes against humanity.

Various writers and researchers have documented how African and Euro-American military, financial and political interests have benefitted from destructive civil and religious wars on Western capitalism's marginalized 'black' periphery. (Ellis 1995a, 2016; Reno 1998). In my view, wars invoking the divine are especially effective in masking the postcolonial capitalist state's real agenda. That is, the African ruling class belief that when 'brigands', 'bandits' and 'jihadists' threaten the state's control over its sovereign borders, elites are entitled to seize (lower class) 'illiterate' people's land, forests and pristine rivers as well as their cultural knowledge. Powerful rituals, secret songs, body parts ground into powders and blood sacrifices activate strong spirit beings and magical forces which are believed to cause death and disease (Bayart 1993). Rulers feel free to accumulate capital by violent means the states exercises directly by war, and indirectly

by theft of public funds as well as theft of sacred shrines and fetish objects. The latter destroy when they 'eat' human and animal flesh and drink sacrificial blood (Pietz 1995). African underclasses in towns and rural areas are being forcibly alienated by capital from their customary rights to forests, farmlands, diamonds, gold and other primary resources known to be present held in common.

African state and enemy insurgents kill rightless immiserated civilians with (extremist) and violent impunity. Appalling crimes against humanity, especially women and girls, continue to be committed by armies of the West African state and jihadist militias (Human Rights Watch 2013; Amnesty International 2021). Government justifies a decade long war against Islamist insurgents in order to prevent the multi-ethnic and religious Nigerian nation from collapsing into 'barbarism'. Nigeria's national motto engraved on the federal government's standard (flag) is 'Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress'. The Nigerian government conceives of state power as legitimized by faith in the one God, in theory either Muslim or Christian. In reality, this African state's ideological, military and juridical institutions are modelled on those of the democratic Western (not Arabian) state. Though associated historically with Christianity, the postcolonial African state accepts religious pluralism and is notionally nonpartisan.

On their part, commanders or amirs of jihadist mujahideen armies justify war against the state as a holy deed ordered by the one God (Allah). Their sacred purpose is to remove state corruption, an immoral Western education system, and infidels' persisting attachment to Sufism and pagan gods. In 2015 Boko Haram in Nigeria's northeast adopted the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria's black standard. On it is written in Arabic the *Shahada* or declaration of faith: 'There is no god but Allah (God). Mohammad is the messenger of Allah'.

Foucault (2003) reminds intellectuals that we have a duty to interrogate ideologies and practices of biopower in order to determine what is power's real agenda for controlling a population. This chapter takes up the challenge. I expose differences between the state and extremist Islamists for the chimera they are in reality. Secular *and* religious systems of power in the Lake Chad basin states engage in violent extremism. However, when the scale and mode of violence—physical, cultural, and psychological—is considered, I conclude that on balance the secular state's extremism is the greater.

In what follows I define violence as 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses' (Riches 1986). As noted by Bowman (2001), the act of violation breaks apart recipients' integrity as human beings whether in contexts of war or peace. In the past decade jihadist warfare has forcibly dispossessed millions of rural subaltern (underclass) family households in transborder war zones of the Lake Chad Basin states—NE Nigeria, SE Niger, SW Chad and NW Cameroon. They have been brutally alienated from customary (noncapitalist) lands and natural resources held in common. Clansfolk are separated from physical locations where ancestral ghosts, and spirit beings may manifest when approached correctly in the customary ritual manner. Families are separated from their community's priests and familiar rituals through which in times of crisis community priests, spirit mediums and others offer blood sacrifices empowering medicated objects (fetishes) and spirit beings. Ritual relations convey divine sanctions, some conveyed by priests of the Bori-Zar spirit possession cults, driven underground in urban and peri-urban areas since the 1980s by fundamentalist agents of Salafism/Pentecostalism, but still active in borderlands and beyond (Masquelier 1994). Archaeological and historical records

regarding the Lake Chad states demonstrate how forests, rocky crags and caves in the Adamawa mountain range dividing NE Nigeria, SW Chad and NW Cameroon have offered, and still provide, refuges and armed redoubts for folk 'outlawed' by fundamentalist terror and/or monarchical extreme violence (MacEachern 2018). Here, and elsewhere, Bori-Zar spirits announce 'the law' protecting the wider community from the terrifying extremism of invading malevolent spiritual and human armed forces (Monfouga-Nicolas 1972; Besmer 1983; Echard 1992). Shadowed by enemy warrior spirits, contemporary Chadic states' looting militaries break with deadly violence vulnerable kinship relations. Violent killing by state soldiers of jihadist combatants and 'cleansing' of alleged pro-Boko Haram villages further expands widespread dispossession and dispersal into nomadism of more than nine million Chadic state citizens (Maclean and Hilaire 2018). As distressed human rights observers have reported, extreme violence in the war against Boko Haram is driving dislocated kinless subaltern peasants, petty artisans and traders, clerics, itinerant hawkers and traders into death from disease, insecurity, and starvation (Debos 2016).

Socio-Political, Economic and Cultural Contexts

In the late nineteenth century, on the eve of European colonization, complex rituals in centralized black kingdoms and segmentary lineage societies centred on human and animal blood sacrifice to sacralizing spirits. Political power was enveloped by, and embedded in, the greater mystical powers of divinities, spirit beings and fertility gods, male and female. Production on lands held in common by the clan or lineage was not in general for money. It was primarily to ensure the biospiritual reproduction of

reciprocal and thus dangerous relations between spirits and human beings (Meillassoux 1970). Energizing life forces could manifest in human, animal and spiritual forms, each one of which demonstrated their incompleteness (death) without the other. Law making by family and clan heads, ancestral priests and chiefs always entailed consideration of what the ancestors, nature spirits and animals might require. At the time of Nigeria's colonization, violent mystical sanctions requiring human or animal sacrifice enforced fear of, and respect for, the spirits of the earth and the ancestors in the patriarchal Muslim north and Christianizing south. As recorded by ethnographers (Talbot 1912; Frobenius 1913; Greenberg 1949; Smith Bowen 1954) and the novelist Chinua Achebe (1958), fear of 'spirits of the law' upheld social cohesion and ensured theft was rare indeed.

After colonization, and the legal abolition of slavery, individuals were forced to pay head tax. At times they were compelled by chiefs on the white man's pay roll to perform forced labour on plantations or road and bridge building projects. Some families were driven away from ancestral farms and forests. Their lands were forcibly enclosed and exploited by foreigners and elite nationals for cash crop production. Families everywhere experienced food shortages and fell into financial debt (Forde 1946; Watts 1983). So younger males embarked on labour migration to earn the white man's money. Those who found their way by connecting with clansmen 'known' to the colonial regime might win employment contracts. Joyce Cary (1939) describes how a semi-literate youth from the bush was employed by a white district officer for a small wage. Mister Johnson saw himself as having assumed the role of (dependent) client to his white benefactor patron. The young man interpreted the relationship in customary fashion as asymmetrical *and* reciprocally egalitarian.

The first generation of Nigerian politicians were patrons who shaped postcolonial state norms to the effect that the polity should move away from the colonizer's meritocratic ideals and embrace African values. Clients at home in the bush expected patrons (e.g. wealthy traders, transporters, market 'mammies', native court magistrates and newly elected senators) to live up to customary norms of 'sharing'. A 'good' patron showed his/her unselfish intentions by getting appointments for junior relatives and other clients. In the 1960s and post-civil war 1970s 'oil boom' era, good patrons were many and helped moderate economic inequality. However, by the 1980s and post oil boom recessions, economic downsizing imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, weakened patrons' commitment to respecting non-capitalist, notionally egalitarian values of reciprocal 'sharing'. Now middle ranking Nigerian elected and appointed officials of the postcolonial 'oil boom' state were empowered as players in the emerging bourgeoisie. These 'fixers' deployed cash, commissions and political appointments to mediate between 'big' men or women of the rising political, judicial and military class and their allies among wealthy traders, big transporters, native court magistrates, and manufacturers. They attracted and dominated dependent kinsfolk who served them as 'small' men, subordinate clients. But despite these inequalities, big men and clients retained a common belief in multiple beings. The latter mediate through human emissaries (priests, mediums, diviners, herbalists) relations of life and death between human beings, ancestors, and spirits of land, water and sky (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999).

Social inequality in recognizable class format was emerging into public view. In the early 2000s, Nigerian political, commercial, judicial and military elites were consolidating their position as a ruling elite that, in Marx's

terms, was a class in and of itself (Ifeka 2004). As they honed their thieving skills, they accumulated seriously large sums of money. Some of their strongest material and cultural ties were with family and clan members in the African diaspora. Certain youngsters in Europe and the USA learned how to engage clandestinely in offshore banking and money laundering through investing in global real estate and corporations. Back home, ruling elites were accumulating even more capital by stealing public funds to the tune of millions, and in a few cases literally billions of US dollars (e.g. an oil minister's reported theft of $22 billion in 2010–14). Though the senior echelons of the Nigerian ruling class still shared the 'dividends of democracy' with influential clients, the latter were drawn less from rural and urban underclass households and more from junior ranks of the burgeoning ruling class (Mustapha 2014).Intraclass marriages between senior and junior Nigerian families are reminiscent of the English landed aristocracy's dynastic alliances that consolidated their hold over political and financial power in the eighteenth century. Contemporary marriages between daughters of Nigerian politicians and sons of well-educated banking, legal, IT and financial families confirm the importance of ties of kinship and affinity in enhancing the relative power of a few dynastic families at the expense of others. Yet overfocussing on popular consciousness obscures the realities of power in a two-class capitalist dominated society. Nigerian society today is divided significantly into a tiny ruling elite and a very large, growing underclass. A small, relatively insecure bourgeoisie of professional, administrative and commercial families intermediates the sociopolitical divide between ruling elite and majority subaltern class. Secular ideologies of the African nation-state reinforce this division through ruling that in constitutional law politicians are accountable to all

citizens regardless of ethnic and religious differences. Interestingly, capitalism's division of the population into ruling holders of private property and largely unpropertied labouring workers is counteracted by the principle of one nation regardless of ethno-religious identities. This unity is upheld by a longstanding trend in social life. Elites and subalterns share common beliefs in the reality of spiritual powers who, if approached correctly, can make the poor rich. They can also protect power holders from 'spiritual attack' by envious witches and sorcerers, who emanate from elite and/or subaltern classes.

A predominantly non-capitalist petty commodity producing sector harbours the majority of Nigeria's estimated 180–200 million inhabitants almost equally divided between Muslims and Christians in whose shadow subsist a small but growing animist ('pagan') minority. In the country's ever expanding urban fringes and vast rural hinterlands most women, men, youth and older children work for subsistence and a small cash surplus. Usually these indebted family households sell what modest amounts of food the household can spare, obtaining marginal rates of return. Some households of wealthier cattle herders or farmers cultivating fertile riverine lands employ migrant and local labour on a casual daily basis. A number of households are also small-scale for-profit capitalists. They operate rented or self-owned medium-sized farms, fabricator workshops, and small IT enterprises (Ifeka 2013).

Contemporary bourgeois ideology constructs state power as secular, ideologically non-partisan, and singular. This model reflects the monocentric theological authority of the Western Christian god. At the political centre are positioned elected presidents, church bishops, the armed forces commander in chief, the nation's supreme court chief justice. The Chadic state defines itself as centrist

in part through its armed opposition to Salafist forces it defines as far to its right. Customary egalitarian values of reciprocity, sharing and equality before sacred law are waning before the hierarchizing forces of competitive for-profit individualism. But there are still many subaltern communities whose social relationships are influenced by customary norms inculcating in the young respect for clan rituals of communication and sacrifice to the multiple powers recognized as ancestors, gods of the land and sky (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). These original owners of the landed commons still uphold spiritual sanctions whose mystical attacks on wrongdoers are feared.

Verticalization of Power Relations

Population growth at about 2.8–3% per annum, an unproductive subsistence rural economy, and massive unemployment propel frustrated majorities to seek money making by illicit means (Ifeka 2010). Nigerian state governments turn a blind eye as senior office holders and corporate sector patrons operate through their 'managers' who employ 'boys' to toil in (illegal) tin and gold mining, logging inside national parks, narcotics and human trafficking rackets. Organized criminal syndicates in the role of propertyless client or property holder patron fashion their relationship not in terms of class but in the customary moral language of 'trust' widely used between buyers and sellers in the market. Patrons 'helping' a trafficking syndicate should reciprocate by 'sharing' with clients the business's financial 'dividends'. Patrons aim to merge this illegal capital with legitimate gains. In so doing the Nigerian political class integrates the state's criminal and legitimate economies. There is another consequence. As a few very powerful persons and dynasties dominate capital

flows in licit and illicit economies of accumulation they verticalize power relations in national society. Keen to avoid detection when moving their ill-gotten gains overseas, the mega-rich and powerful in the Nigerian state and global criminal syndicates disconnect themselves from minor patrons and clients at home. They focus vertically and upwards toward Western or Asian metropoles, centres of risk taking financial capitalism where some Nigerian diaspora entrepreneurs are building substantial fortunes.

Bayart (1993) describes the African ruling class's outward facing investment engagement with overseas capital as 'extraversion'. This is an obfuscating concept. As Loperfido argues (this volume) verticalization is a key function of peripheral imperialism. 'Extraversion' fudges the pivotal role of dispossession and financial capital in generating greater profits from imperialist wars, colonialism, and present-day land grabs. Bayart's concept obscures too many realities of life on capital's colonial peripheries that Rosa Luxemburg (1951) analysed so brilliantly. She argued that to stay alive profitably, capitalism must invade non-capitalist worlds. The boundary between these worlds is conceptual, not geographic, though the two often coincide. Increasingly though, greed ensures surplus value (profit) is located in fewer global and African locales, and is concentrated in a handful of increasingly wealthy ruling family dynasties. as capital becomes ever more financialized (Amin et al. 2010).

A once more differentiated postcolonial political economy is homogenizing into two main classes. There is a mega-rich, dominant and highly acquisitive elite utilizing military and legal apparatuses of state power to further increase and integrate licit and illicit sources of capital flows. Siphoning off funds that could be utilized to grow national productivity, and pay labour a true living wage, diminishes the real incomes of major sections of the

underclass, for example petit bourgeois, waged work-
ers and subsistence farmer households. As in Nigeria's
northern war zones, failing petit-bourgeois family house-
holds collapse into, and merge with, rising numbers of
impoverished underclass (subaltern) households. They
seek a means of subsistence by labouring or marketing
small products and services in both the non-capitalist and
capitalist licit and illicit economies. Formerly, they were
often sustained in times of famine, drought and conflict
through clan based customary reciprocities. Today, vast
numbers of subaltern households (40 million in 2019 out
of a reported estimated total of 43 million households;
EuroMonitor International 2019) in a national population
at the time of about 180–200 million, live precariously
without consistent extended family assistance. In Nige-
ria's northeast abutting Lake Chad, the decade-long war
against Boko Haram has forcibly separated Christian and
Muslim peasant farmers, small artisans and petty traders
from subsistence farming on common lands. Relatives for-
merly exchanging home-farm-produced food for payment
of a child's school fees, are now unable to help feed a poor
client's family. Social bonds are attenuating in Nigeria's
northeast as the state's soldiers forcibly 'remove' (termi-
nate) men and boys suspected to be Boko Haram support-
ers. The army transports survivors, mainly women and
children, to refugee camps or fortified settlements with
tiny allotments for minimalist cultivation. Family units are
reduced to a young woman with perhaps her mother and
surviving children. Humanitarian agency reports estimate
about nine million people in NE Nigeria, SW Chad, SE
Niger and NW Cameroon have been propelled by extreme
violence into an African version of bare life: kinless and
therefore rightless destitution, despair and degradation
into dehumanization (Maclean and Hilaire 2018; World
Food Programme 2020).

Boko Haram

Map 3.1. Map of Nigeria and Lake Chad Basin States. Made by Tom Farrington with Natural Earth free vector and raster map data@naturalearthdata.com.

Verticalization of power and capital is also a feature of those religious fundamentalist organizations the sovereign state defines as 'extremist'. Boko Haram is much discussed as a terrorist entity, too often on the basis of barely credible and repeatedly recycled data. First, the group has been little analysed in regard to the civil war's impacts in reordering social relations and class divisions in Nigerian and Lake Chad Basin war zone populations. Little or no attention, other than that of Prieri and Zenn (2018) and a few francophone scholars (Debos 2012, 2018) and Lombard (2016), is given to ways in which

mujahideen and Nigerian soldiers (Muslim, Christian) are interpreting extreme violence. They are drawing on non-capitalist cosmologies. and constructing a common culture of hybrid beliefs in multiple spirit beings, some of whom manifest in malevolent attacks by adult and child witches. Millions of Chadic state subalterns dispossessed by 'bandits', 'brigands', 'criminal gangs' and jihadists experience themselves as enduring unending 'spiritual attack' amidst war imposed 'spiritual insecurity' (Lombard 2016; MacEachern 2019; Ellis 1995 a, b). Most Western observers deny African people's very common belief that mystical assaults create spiritual insecurity causing disease, despair and death. Analysts insist, rather, that in northeast Nigeria all nonarmed populations, especially women and children, live in a state of generalized 'civilian insecurity' on account of Islamist terrorism (Dowd and Drury 2017; Oriola 2017). Second, there are few explorations of similarities and differences in how the jihadist group's rhetoric of its sacred duty to kill the 'infidels' might or might not differ compared to the Nigerian or Cameroonian state's ideologies of righteous killing of (jihadist) 'barbarians'(Barkindo 2016). Finally, most scholars fail to situate Boko Haram analytically in relation to the civil war's restructuring of Nigerian society in the northeast and further afield into two classes: that is, ruling and ruled groups intermediated by a shrinking bourgeoisie. These topics are discussed further below.

Until 2015 Boko Haram's full name was *Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad* (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad) (Thurston 2018). After giving allegiance (*bayat*) to Islamic State in 2015, the group was known for a couple of years as Islamic State in West Africa Province. But the latter operates today as a separate entity from Boko Haram, which is still under Amir Abubakr Shekau's violent leadership. I

use the group's Hausa nickname 'Boko Haram' (Western education is sin) by which it continues to be known notwithstanding Salafist criticism (Brigaglia and Iocchi 2017). Scholarly writing on religious warfare in Nigeria's northeast, especially Bornu state in the Lake Chad region, focusses on Boko Haram's organization: its 'mad' leader Amir Abubakr Shekau, and the Nigerian state's struggle to contain the perceived chaotic violence of jihadi warriors in Nigeria and the West African Sahel (Zenn et al. 2013; Barkindo 2018).

Boko Haram certainly does not see its conception and practice of political power under the one God as similar to the Nigerian state's ideology and practice of political power. Viewed from Boko Haram's perspective, the Nigerian state—'the tyrant'—and its security forces carry out acts of unparalleled illegitimate ferocity against the group's 'brothers' in the Lord. That is, commanders, wives, children and other Salafist Muslims. But whether Christian or Muslim, subalterns do not call these massacres violent religious extremism. They are not 'exposed', as Nigerians say, to the international and national political elite's concept of legitimate power and the illegitimacy of groups deemed to be 'far-right' or 'far-left' of the bourgeois state's political centre. Underclass and petit bourgeois subalterns include petty traders, farmers, fisherfolk, graziers, artisans, *mallams* (Qur'anic teachers), butchers, and petty clerks. They are mostly unfamiliar with the manners and thinking of Western and Nigerian political elites. Subalterns' underclass position in the social formation is evident in their exclusion from positions in government from where they can struggle to carve out remunerative gatekeeper roles in state ministries. The latter hope to receive bribes from multi-national corporations in exchange for securing lucrative state contracts. Unlike most subalterns, elite contacts mean gatekeeper

notables may be familiar with English idioms used in international organizations' reports that Salafist 'violent religious extremists' violate 'human rights'.

For Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, and several Malian Salafist groups, the West African ('crusader') state is sinful and utterly illegitimate (Thurston 2018). All these groups invert the state's ideology of their 'criminality' so jihadists assume the righteous position of controllers of legitimate god-sanctioned violence. In their view, it is the 'tyrant' state and its armies who demonstrate their 'wildness' when massacring Muslims with illegitimate killing force. On the other hand, the Nigerian and Chadian armies slaughtered up to 4,000 innocent civilians including babies and small children when, in 2015, they recaptured Gwoza, the capital of Boko Haram's Caliphate (Amnesty International 2020).

Declared Boko Haram's Amir Abubakr Shekau in 2014, 'I enjoy killing anyone that God commands me to kill.' Allah commands him to avenge Nigeria's injustice to 'our brothers' (McCoy 2015). Revenge justice is thought to be reciprocal. It may restore a customary balance between, for example, two tribes, each of which sees the other as perpetrator or victim of the other's perceived wrongful violence (Gluckman 1963).

A Boko Haram *mujahideen* leader explained to the world in January 2015 why they massacred an estimated 2,000 and more men, women, and children in the town of Baga (Borno state, northeast Nigeria): 'they are infidels . . . We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood . . . killing, slaughtering, destruction and bombings will be our religious duty anywhere we invade' (Adekunle 2015; McCoy 2015). Boko Haram declared via video link that the massacre was in God's name. Therefore, as Allah commands, the blood of the dead will cleanse and purify society of the sin of unbelief. Refusal to convert to

Salafism is a symptom of society's and the state's collective sin. That is democracy, the constitution and Western education must be erased because they represent and reproduce unbelief or social disorder. This is synonymous with the chaotic polytheism of the multiple. In Allah's reported words 'Disorder is worse than killing . . . kill them wherever you find them . . . ' (Qur'an 2:191).

Animist Practices of the Multiple

Political and military elites of both monotheistic religions are reluctant to admit they consult animist ('pagan') priestesses/priests and diviners for magical protection against jealous rivals' witchcraft. Many soldiers of the Nigerian state as well as Boko Haram's mujahideen buy magical charms that claim to protect the wearer from enemy bullets, witchcraft, and sterility. Amulets placed under clothing directly against the skin give the believer the power of invisibility on the battlefield (Ellis 1995a, 2004; Prieri and Zenn 2018: 651–660).

Perhaps neighbouring Cameroon's lifelong dictator, President Paul Biya, feels the same. A Catholic, in 2016 he overrode his country's legislation criminalizing witchcraft. The president ordered up-country chiefs to use their witches and wizards to fight and destroy the 'blood thirsty sect'. A Cameroonian IT-with-it journalist tweeted enthusiastically that chiefs, hunters, and vigilante youth must use their spiritual powers to wipe out the group. Hundreds of youth rushed to consult marabouts (holy men) and buy magical charms to place on their bodies, boasting no Boko Haram bullet will touch them (Afriem 2016; Locka 2017).

West Africa offers another perspective on the cleansing powers of the blood of sacrifice by mujahideen martyrs in Allah's name. Monotheist and polytheist foot soldiers and

jihadists as well as subaltern civilians and ruling elites, across Nigeria, identify Boko Haram with mystical powers. These energies rush like the wind (*iskoki*) *(*Greenberg 1949; King 1967; Masquelier 1994, 2001). In war zones they are even wilder, endangering but creating potencies from the blood of (human) sacrifice and wild slaughtering of 'enemy devils' (McCoy 2015; Kramer 1993; Ellis 1995a, 2004). Animist sensibilities are indicated in popular discourses of Boko Haram's proclaimed sovereignty over Nigeria's Sambisa Forest. This is a vast 'black' (spiritually dangerous) bushy space in the Adamawa mountain range dividing Nigeria from Cameroon. Until recently the group's long term operational headquarters was located in Bornu state's Sambisa Forest, as were some senior commanders and their families. Women and children cultivated small farms and livestock (Matfess 2017). Sambisa is physically and mystically on society's margins, long feared for its dangerous spirits and sorcerers. These beings are commonly symbolized as demons in snake form as well as in Amir Shekau's bloody executions of rebellious commanders. Their heads, impaled as a terrifying deterrent on posts close to refugee camps and market towns, attest to unending killing, bloodshed and terrifying insecurity. Frightened journalists shuttling between villages and small towns under the contested jurisdiction of Boko Haram, Islamic State *and* the Nigerian government call this bloodshed 'our new normal'.

Liminal Zones, Child Witches and Child Soldiers

Victor Turner (1969) demonstrated in his classic analyses of Ndembu rituals how such 'anti-structural' drives are produced in liminal marginal contexts. There, relational processes in practice oppose *and* support a centre's ongoing reproduction as structurally dominant.

Points where centres of political and religious power clash violently constitute liminal thresholds at which 'violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence' (Echard 1992; Agamben 1998: 31). For Agamben, such thresholds constitute states of exception beyond the sovereign state's law. Terrified citizens are forcibly dispossessed of their rights, dislocated from their families and loved ones. Compelled to become refugees, homeless vagrants, beggars, and 'brigands' they struggle to create new social relations with similar others, all battling to survive as kinless and therefore dehumanized outlaws.

The Nigerian state's armies and jihadist militias violate daily the population's basic human rights. Both armed parties to the war have forced apart families, orphaned children and burnt too many alive. Mothers have lost children, husbands and supporting aunties and uncles. These desperate and despairing women struggle to survive rape, enslavement and enforced prostitution, severe hunger, loss of family members and death (Oriola 2017). Children lose a surviving parent and so are orphaned and forced to fend for themselves in war zone wastelands. Others, young as they are, are recruited or volunteer (for cash or food) to fight with small arms for Boko Haram. Some recruits use their small size to go undercover where they identify Nigerian army hideouts, roads along which convoys of food and military equipment will pass, and plan ambushes. Children are sent on highly risky journeys because they are expendable and too numerous to be fed. However, soldiers and refugees may fear stranger children's potential malevolence and trickster tactics. Children emaciated and stunted from hunger look younger than their years. They may be perceived as still attached to spirit worlds where children await birth and rebirth; such children are mystically dangerous to the living (Monfouga-Nicolas 1972).

Child soldiers play a prominent role in Africa's civil wars past and present, for example, in the Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda), the Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone) and various militias in the Liberian civil war (Ellis 1995a). Since 2015 Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province militias combat the joint armed forces of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Children, drugged and forced to detonate themselves and others in suicide bombing events, may also be deployed in armed conflict in northern Cameroon and southwest Chad. Boy, and at times girl, children are equipped as human soldiers with small arms while their spirit counterparts equip them with powers of divine violence and retribution (Allotey-Pappoe and Lamptey 2019).

Child witches and child soldiers may carry different kinds of messages. The latter may convey messages along physical roads to army officers, big men in government offices and wealthy traders asked to lend cash to customers or clients working for Boko Haram or Islamic State in West Africa Province. Child witches can help these child soldiers complete their assignment. Child witches enlist the assistance of spirit beings tasked with deploying their divine violence against the Nigerian army. Child soldiers and witches not necessarily exclusive (De Boeck 2004; 155; Geschiere 2013: 192–197; Debos 2016; Falen 2018: 41–45).

Children in particular are represented in animist thought as lacking strong socio-spiritual boundaries between human society and spirit worlds. A child witch may morph into the form of a child soldier and vice versa. Their presence among humans is fluid and flexible, they come and go. Souls and spirit elements are popularly known among the southern Nigerian Igbo as *ogbanje,* and among the Yoruba as *abiku* (Ifeka 1962; Henderson 1972*).*

Northern Nigerian Hausa people call such children *kurwa, or iskoki.* These soul substances are widely thought to be connected to spirits of the preborn, the born, the dead and yet to be born (Kramer 1993).

As Robert Brain (1970) reported in his classic study of child witches among the very rural and bushy Bangwa of the late 1960s, children may die so as to revive their relations with spirit children or they may transform into dangerous animals (Ruel 1969). Young boys and girls are therefore endowed, latently or actually, with occult ambiguous powers. In northern Nigerian war zones child witches and soldiers mediate through their occult liminality. Thus endowed, they are thought to shape relations between human (state/jihadi armies) and the spirit world's fierce projection of divine, life-giving and destroying violence. It purifies and cleanses society of malevolent or polluting substances. The child's ambiguous nature is veiled from family and community until a mother's death or disappearance. If kidnapped or sighted as having been slaughtered on a killing field, messages may reach a family member warning them of that child's uncontrollable malevolence.

Child witches can also manifest in war zones in the form of child soldiers recruited by Boko Haram (and formerly by the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, in war torn Liberia and far away Uganda) as four-foot high warriors, porters, IED and suicide bombers (Ellis 1995a; Human Rights Watch 2013). Children possessed of such malevolence must be cast out into the 'bare life' of human and spirit beings lacking rights in society. Child witches become mystically empowered as death-bringing soldiers. Imaged as incarnations of singular, uncontrollable force—power—they share mystical and social qualities of the other in the role of blood-shedding warrior.

Similarities and Differences

Several aspects of highly unequal social relations in war's freshly revealed two-class political system relate to the verticalization of political power in Nigerian society. Institutionalized power in the form of the Nigerian state and its jihadist enemy, Boko Haram, shows certain similarities. These may be a consequence of centring processes of capital accumulation, whether licit or illicit. Commanders concentrate their control over strategic resources, material and mystical, so as to make very extreme the violence they deploy to destroy the enemy other. As Marx and Rosa Luxemburg argued, human greed and the nature of capital's financialization for greater profit inevitably verticalize power relations.

Important indicators of similar organizational and ideological tendencies between the jihadist group and the Nigerian state are outlined below. These processes should not be surprising. Kapferer (2004) has argued, following Gluckman (1963), that war and conflict are dynamic processes reordering and reinterpreting social relations. Nigeria's long war is exposing how the bourgeoisie's lower income households are descending into an underclass of subalterns homogenized by violence. A more socially redistributive, horizontal stratification system is being reconstituted vertically. Killing violence, enclosure, and dispossession is splitting society in Nigeria and neighbouring states into two basic strata. A small but dominant ruling elite and an expanding underclass of rural and periurban households depend for survival on non-capitalist relations and powers. Capital's addiction to war for easy accumulation by dispossession is further verticalizing power. Capital loves war because in destroying others' lands and assets it opens up fabulous opportunities for

criminal elements. In the Lake Chad Basin these include state politicians, corporate executives and lowly carpet-bagger entrepreneurs whose de facto patrons in state institutions have the means to engage with force in illicit varieties of resource grabbing (Ellis 2016). People who get in the way must be exterminated. As Agamben (1998) argues, human beings dispossessed substantially by the state's extreme violence are reduced to the lowest common denominator of rightless bare life.

(i) The jihadist war has impacted negatively on families located, perhaps temporarily, on one territorial side of the conflict or the other. Many such families were formerly units in larger labour cooperating households in rural, peri-urban and even city shanty towns. Separation from relatives and the death of parents, orphaning of children, and brutalization of women has compounded the already existing divide between elites and underclass majorities, regardless of whether they have landed up with Boko Haram or the state. In the Lake Chad Basin and Nigerian borderland war zones dispossession, poverty and unpredictable terrifying violence have reordered a formerly economically, ethnically, religiously and politically differentiated population of about nine million into a mass of suffering humanity. Fleeing into forests, wastelands, camps, hill top redoubts and caves they seek safety.

(ii) The war is generating some surprising similarities in 'mainstream' centrist and extremist ideologies of political power. The nation-state exercises a form of mythic violence which legitimates war as necessary to defend the sovereign state's boundaries and population from annihilation. In practice, protestations to the contrary, the capitalist state's ruling class welcomes war on account of many opportunities in zones of war for illegal capital accumulation. On its part, the jihadist group claims it exercises the divine violence of Allah whose Prophet

enabled true believers to live purely under Shari'a law. Yet after ten years of unending warfare, Boko Haram's ruling commanders resemble somewhat the Nigerian state's 'elected' political class. The latter proclaim their commitment to the country's coat of arms—'faith, unity, peace, progress'—but rely in practice on the nation-state's monopoly of sovereign force to repress subversive religious or political movements on the centre's far-right. Likewise, jihadism conceives of its mythic violence as a singularizing force that destroys infidel resistance. In the early years of jihad (2009–2015), Boko Haram's young martyrs were passionate about wielding the One God's divine, purifying violence. After several years the group reinterpreted its violence more in theocratic terms of the Caliphal state's enforcement of one system of taxation, forced labour, education, conversion to Islam and obedience to Shar'ia law. Adulterers, witches and prostitutes could be or were executed (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018).

(iii) Supreme power is concentrated vertically in the hands of Boko Haram's elected ruler or amir and a cabal of close associates. The latter intermediate fund-raising operations. Money is needed to cover salaries; in 2013 or so about $100 per month was paid to each new recruit. Food, logistics, ammunition and other costs have encouraged the group to adopt strategies as kidnapping wealthy persons (and possibly killing them if sufficient ransoms is not offered). Trafficking deals with regional and overseas (Indian) narcotics dealers, and arms sellers, are another popular option. Invoking Shari'a law and jihadist power's mythic violence, Amir Shekau executes commanders who appropriate money for themselves (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2018). However, the president of the Nigerian state also calls mythic violence 'lawful' when he approves the death penalty for persons the state's courts designate criminal 'bandits', 'brigands' and 'saboteurs'.

Equally, supreme power is concentrated vertically in the office of the Nigerian army's commander in chief of the armed forces based in Abuja, the national capital, and Maiduguri, Bornu state's capital city. Yet vertically organized military power is cross-cut by customary officer-foot soldier patronage relations. The Nigerian army offers ample opportunities for senior officers in the role of patrons, and clients drawn from junior ranks and warrant officers, to 'share' the 'dividends' of war in amounts proportionate to their status. Serious investment by senior officers in 'stomach infrastructure' takes place. Documented ventures include selling guns from the army's armouries, exchanging out of date weapons for narcotics, selling young girls and boys through intermediaries in safe houses, turning a blind eye (for cash) to the buying and selling of young girls to young foot soldiers and mujahideen for marriage.

(iv) The state and Boko Haram engage in extreme violence, at times in the form of tit-for-tat reprisal raids. For example, in 2014–2015 the Nigerian army slaughtered thousands of civilians in Gwoza while Boko Haram slaughtered thousands in Baga, both places located in Bornu state. Are these instances of deep brutality and crimes against humanity also instances of divine violence at work? Can divine violence like Ogun's (see the head of this chapter) replace state myths of national heroes who died fighting for peace? In reality, though, doesn't the war mask the deployment of extreme violence to achieve capital accumulation by dispossession? The Nigerian state's armed forces have also engaged in crimes against humanity for profit. Logically, then, both sides have committed serious crimes against humanity.

(v) Reportedly, by 2014–2015, Amir Shekau had become cynical. He had lost his original passion for holy war. Possibly he had been corrupted by needing money obtained

by whatever means to pay his mujahideen about \$100 per month. Boko Haram was, and is, chronically 'hungry' for the cash with which to purchase weapons and ammunition and provide fuel for tanks captured from the Nigerian army. Perhaps, though, Shekau was also corrupted by his and the group's dependence on organized crime to raise funds for the holy struggle.

(vi) Elected politicians have supported Boko Haram's cause while in official receipt of salaries and emoluments from the Nigerian state. Patrons of both parties to the war are linked indirectly through client associates to human and other forms of trafficking. Each side utilizes profits from one commodity to raise the cash with which to purchase another desired commodity as arms or drugs. For example, the state turns a blind eye to certain families selling young Nigerian women into sex slavery in Italy where they operate on territory 'governed' by Nigerian secret societies. The latter invest prostitution monies in buying into the transatlantic narcotics trade. In another instance, the Indian head of a global narcotics syndicate allied in 2013 with Amir Shekau who reportedly travelled incognito to Lagos for a key meeting in which he hoped to receive cash for narcotics. He successfully avoided arrest!

(vii) Both sides to the war are impacted by the dislocated population's collapse into destitution living rightless in bare life in camps, remote bush and peri-urban shanty towns. Salafist jihadist and Muslim/Christian Nigerian soldier alike share a general belief in the multiple powers of gods, spirit beings and witches. Many folk believe in child witches. But, uniquely in the annals of West and East African postcolonial warfare, only Boko Haram has regularly deployed child suicide bombers, some of whom are promised martyrdom and a new life in paradise.

(viii) Liminal zones connect both sides to the war as personages (child witches/soldiers, the ghosts of murdered

clans folk, the spirits of grieving ancestors) who simultane-
ously disappear and re-appear as mystical presences medi-
ate relations between conqueror and conquered. For some
refugees, praying for help, resorting to magical charms,
flows of spiritual sociality may temporarily extend a pro-
tecting shield. Humanity's differences diminish as masses
of fleeing people are caught in zones of death diffusing ani-
mist beliefs in magical talismans among state and jihadist
soldiers and civilians. These liminal zones of danger and
spirit presences connect territories and populations fought
over and contested by Boko Haram and the Nigerian army.
A few closely guarded roads connect the army's fortified
capital city, Maiduguri, barracks, and militarized settle-
ments (garrisons) to tiny allotments for cultivation by frail
elderly men, women and children. These are destitute rem-
nants of former extended family-households. Boko Haram
mujahideen in the bush, and silent jihadi cells in the city,
also signify liminal thresholds where small groups of jihad-
ists hang out uncertainly, contiguous with state institutions
but below the military's radar. Small boys or child soldiers
may carry messages to and from, enabling jihadi cells to
relate and communicate safely. This way they avoid being
overheard by state intelligence officers monitoring enemy
mobile phones.

Does animism's divine violence interact with secular
and Shari'a legal codes in these nebulous zones? Are
there deathly flows of violence intermediating state law
based on individualizing Western values, and Islam's
more collectivist Sharia law? Do these processes signify
liminal thresholds represented by child soldiers and child
witches? Perhaps these persons of ambiguous childlike
malevolence signal the technological violence of the
Nigerian state versus the mystical and human violence of
Salafist child suicide bombers.

Seemingly their interconnecting forms and changing shapes demonstrate the liminal qualities of ambiguous multiple powers.

Animism structures human beings as being born, living, and dying in one vast open ended field of multiple mystical powers that, on occasions of extreme terror and violence, people may experience as manifesting in singular form as power. Spirit mediums, children, and natural powers as the wind and thunderbolts are all formed in and through spiritual energies. Vitalizing and destroying *iskoki* (winds) intermediate visible and invisible dimensions of existence—in war and peace—as do infants or young children. If sickly, or 'troublesome', small children and babies may be imagined as 'hanging' over their family, floating in transition between spirit and human worlds.

Conclusion

In hardcore Salafist eyes society only becomes moral when divine violence establishes the theocratic state by righteous killing of infidels and Muslim heretics in accordance with their interpretation of Shari'a law. The law institutes society's purification by the one and only God, Allah. He demands the erasure by death of infidels (e.g. Christian Pentecostalists) and heretics (e.g. lapsed or non-Salafist Muslims not living under Shari'a).

Walter Benjamin (1996) concluded his 1921 essay on divine violence with the statement that it is released in response to the pent-up sufferings of millions. Divine violence is, therefore, that which is in abundant excess of bare lawful life, lashing out at those forces and beings which restrain it. From the neo-liberal state's 'reasonable

man's' perspective we need to ask what kind of purpose is served by divine violence. After all, argues Benjamin, if this kind of violence were to express itself in revolution that resulted in political, social, or cultural change, it would be law itself making violence instead.

Law, then, in Benjamin's understanding, is unjust. Legality only serves a ruling capitalist class's means and ends of preserving its political and ideological monopoly of state power. Neo-liberalism, though, persists in its imaging of threats to the (bourgeois) mainstream from extremist groups to the left and right of the officially godless state's centrist ideologies.

This chapter has taken up Foucault's challenge to engage critically and radically with state bio-power. My animist perspective has exposed certain differences between the state and extremist Islamists for the chimera that they are. Secular and religious systems of power engage in extremism. The greater operator of direct and indirect extreme violence is the sovereign state.

Note

My research area is Nigeria and West-Central Africa. But Nigeria's Salafist war zone and impacted populations in the borderlands of Lake Chad (Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon) is still off limits to 'non-essential' workers such as journalists, anthropologists and human rights workers. This analysis, therefore, is based on my experience over many years of sociality, cultural violence and predatory ruling class exploitation for personal and familial profit in West African contexts. I thank Giacomo Loperfido for his very insightful and constructive comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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