

Boko Haram and politics: From insurgency to terrorism

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Abstract

Based on the case of Boko Haram, or *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* ("People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad") to give it its real name, this chapter introduces a general discussion on the relationship between Islam and politics in Nigeria. Unlike Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, or the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Boko Haram is neither a political party nor a charity network. It is political because it contests Western values, challenges the secularity of the Nigerian state, and reveals the corruption of a "democracy" that relies on a predatory ruling elite, the so-called "godfathers". But Boko Haram also remains a sect, now engaged in terrorist violence. From Mohammed Yusuf to Abubakar Shekau, its leaders have never actually proposed a political programme to reform and govern Nigeria according to Shariah. In this regard, Boko Haram raises an important question: why has Nigeria never had a religious political party, either Islamic or Christian? Federalism and the alleged 'neutrality' of military regimes do not explain everything. Compared with the situation in Northern Sudan, the structure and division of Islam also help us to understand why Nigerian Muslims have never succeeded in setting up a political platform to contest elections with a religious programme, and why violence became an alternative channel for reform.

Introduction

The Western media and many Nigerians see the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram as part of a wider global religious war between Muslims and Christians. The *New York Times*, for instance, claims that "the radical Islamist group ... has struck mostly at Christians and burned churches" (Worth 2012). As for the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), it insists on the possibility of a religious war, and it has found fault with President Goodluck Jonathan's statement that Boko Haram killed more Muslims than Christians (Akowe 2013). However, the first and main targets of the radical Islamist organisation were indeed the security forces and 'bad' Muslims, not Christian communities. The problem is that passions and a large variety of opinions confuse the analysis of the objectives and the evolution of an indigenous sect turned terror group. Depending on positions, Boko Ha-

ram is thus considered a political uprising, a religious organisation, a social movement, or a purely criminal affair.

As is to be expected, the official narratives of Nigerian security forces tend to reduce the radical Islamist group to a gang of armed robbers, devoid of any political or social leaning. The founder of Boko Haram, the late Mohammed Yusuf, is himself described as an opportunist and a religious entrepreneur who built a massive audience of followers and attracted donations to become influential and obtain material rewards. Many Nigerian politicians from the South also deny that the sect is a freedom-fighting movement cast in the mould of the MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) in Ijawland, the OPC (Oodua Peoples Congress) in Yorubaland, or the MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra) in Igboland. Actually, Boko Haram is not ethnic based, even if its main stronghold remains in Borno. Moreover, it developed in a remote region, far from the resources of the oil-producing areas that fund most of the budget of the federal state. Hence, it does not have the same financial leverage to negotiate an amnesty or a political agreement with the central government. Last but not least, its militants are often said to be able to commit suicide attacks because they are poor people who have nothing to lose ... and to gain, unlike MEND fighters who struggled for their share of the 'national cake'.

However, religious authorities have different views on Boko Haram. On the one hand, some Islamic scholars simply deny that the followers of Mohammed Yusuf are Muslims. The nickname Boko Haram is quite useful in this regard, since it turns "the radical group into an exotic eccentricity and hides its embarrassing connection to the leadership of well-established Salafi organization", the Izala (Brigaglia 2012: 38). On the other hand, many evangelicals insist on the role of religion and Quranic schools in breeding violence. While pressing the US to declare the sect a foreign terrorist organisation, the President of CAN, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, argues for instance that the movement of Mohammed Yusuf is neither a political nor a social one. To him, Boko Haram is first and foremost an extremist group "fuelled by a religious fundamentalist ideology". He acknowledges that the sect indoctrinated the poor and was manipulated by politicians. But he claims that it was not driven by misery and compares Mohammed Yusuf to Osama bin Laden, who came from a very rich family.¹

By contrast, I argue that Boko Haram is basically an indigenous uprising with a religious ideology, a political meaning, and some social support locally, unlike transnational professional terrorist groups that can strike anywhere in the world. Obviously, the sect is not the armed branch of a party. It does not have a political program as such, and its members did not attempt to contest elections. On the contrary, the followers of Mohammed Yusuf retreated from the state to dream of

¹ Interview by Eriye, Festus (30 Sept. 2012), "The trouble with Nigeria", *The Nation*, 24, 25, 50.

a Shariah-based caliphate. Yet I consider that they form an embryonic political group because of their targets, their rejection of Western values, their contestation of a secular post-colonial state, their manipulation by politicians, the legitimacy they built during the repression, and the fear they provoke in Borno and all over Nigeria. To facilitate the reading of this chapter, I use the name Boko Haram rather than *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* ("People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"), the real name of the organisation. I qualify the group as a sect because of its distinctive religious beliefs, its deviance from mainstream Islam, its intolerance, its claim to possess unique access to the truth, the selection of its members, their fanatic indoctrination, and the fascination exerted by their former guru, Mohammed Yusuf. I also describe Boko Haram as a movement because of its social basis. And I call 'terrorist' the faction which began to plant bombs and resort to suicide attacks after the killing of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. My position does not mean that I support the labelling of the whole movement as a foreign terrorist organisation, precisely because of its grassroots and its genesis.

A political uprising: From insurgency to terrorism

Since the first recorded act of violence committed by the so-called 'Taliban' in November 2003, Boko Haram has actually struck against political targets: police stations which were sometimes the only effective presence of the state in remote villages; prisons which were attacked to release militants; schools that symbolised Western education and the colonisation of the mind; mosques and Muslim scholars who contested the moral authority of the deviant sect; politicians and godfathers who were fraudulently elected and who were accused of failing to implement properly Islamic Law, etc. After the assault of the army and the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri in July 2009, the group then started to operate outside of Borno and Yobe, hitting churches in Jos in December 2010 and United Nations offices in Abuja in August 2011. At the time of completing this chapter in September 2013, it was also speculated that Boko Haram aimed to further destabilise Nigeria by going to the South to attack strategic targets such as bridges, power plants, the radar facilities of international airports, and radio and television transmitters. If it did not yet have the capacity to do so, this did not mean that it was not engaged in a full war against the government.

Meanwhile, the extension of the targets of Boko Haram to Christian communities has testified to the radicalisation and professionalisation of the sect. Indeed, this shift makes more sense for a terrorist group which seeks an international audience. In the Western media, first, it pays more to attack Christians rather than Muslims – hence a better chance to publicise the local struggle of an Islamist sect. Moreover, Boko Haram can now claim to be part of a global holy war (ji-

had) when it pretends to defend Muslims against Christian aggressors in Kaduna or Plateau States – and hence the possibility of external support from organisations based in Arab countries. Also, it is sometimes suggested that attacking Christians is a way to force Nigerian Muslims to take sides. In this regard, it is important to understand the implications of the rupture of July 2009, when the remnants of the group had to run away from Maiduguri and, once in exile, faced a higher probability of getting directly in touch with transnational jihadist movements that were clearly engaged against the Jews and the “Crusaders”.

Before then, Boko Haram exclusively targeted the security forces and Muslims who did not strictly follow Shariah rules. Initially inspired by the Salafi doctrine of the Izala movement, Mohammed Yusuf was always very vocal against the African “perversion” of Islamic practices by the Sufi brotherhoods (Loimeier 2012; Pérouse de Montclos 2012: 7). His attacks focused on the Tijaniyya, who were more popular than the Qadiriyya.² Mohammed Yusuf also condemned the corruption of traditional elders and emirs, even if he continued to pay respect to Usman dan Fodio and the jihad of 1804, which was linked to the Qadiriyya.³ And he eventually fought against the Izala too, a movement which rebuked the teachings of the scholars (*Gardawa Mallams*) of the traditional Sufi brotherhoods, yet did not oppose violently Western education and the secularity of the Nigerian state.⁴

At that time, the only Christians targeted by Boko Haram were not communities but a few individuals who were killed because they informed the security forces, cursed Mohammed Yusuf, or infringed the Islamic ban on alcohol.⁵ On 24 December 2003, the coordinated attacks of the Taliban faction against police stations in Yobe happened on Christmas Eve. But this symbolic date might have been chosen because the holiday period facilitated the operation. It had nothing to do with the Christian celebration as such. The fact that Christian communities in Borno are not very visible also played a role, for it was more difficult to besiege them. First, they are very scattered, unlike in Kano and Kaduna, where they usually live together in specific areas. Secondly, they are mainly made up of indigenous people who are more integrated in local communities than migrants from the South in north-western Nigeria. Thirdly, these native Christians are ra-

² According to surveys, 19 per cent of Nigerian Muslims belong to the former, compared with 9 per cent for the latter, while the majority (56 per cent) do not identify with any Sufi order (Lugo *et al.* 2010: 147, 158, 315-317)

³ Almost all Islamist movements in Nigeria praise the historical figure of Usman dan Fodio. In this regard, it will be interesting to see if the breakaway faction of Boko Haram, Ansaru, will also refer to Shaikh Said bin Hayat, the great-grandson of Usman dan Fodio and the Mahdist leader of the Ansar community of Dumbulwa in Fika emirate in Borno. Said bin Hayat is said to have been the longest serving political prisoner of the British Empire, from his arrest in 1924 until his late release in 1959.

⁴ Actually, the Izala rather aimed to adapt and reform Islamic education to face the technical challenges of the modern world.

⁵ Various interviews in Maiduguri and Kano, October 2011; database nigeriawatch.org

ther recent. As early as 1711, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith attempted to establish a Christian mission in Borno, but to no avail as the expedition eventually ended in Katsina. When the Sokoto Caliphate fell in 1903, the British then banned Christian missions and schools in the North. Thus, in Borno, most churches developed after Independence.

Of course, this relative ‘invisibility’ does not mean that Christian natives or migrants were spared from violence. The CAN claims that in February 2006, anger over the publication in Denmark of controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed sparked riots by mobs of Muslims in Maiduguri, leaving about fifty Christians dead and many churches burnt. During the five days of violence in July 2009, it is also alleged that Boko Haram members killed 37 Christians, including three pastors, and torched or partially destroyed 29 churches in Borno State. However, these two events require clarification. In July 2009, Christians were not the exclusive targets of a more general fighting between Boko Haram and the security forces. And in February 2006, the press did not report any involvement of the sect; on the contrary, the assailants were assumed to be Hausa-Fulani who came from Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto because the indigenous Kanuri and Shuwa Muslims were too soft on the issue of Shariah (CSW 2006: 9). According to local observers, the protest against the Danish cartoons was actually manipulated by politicians to express discontentment against President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian who was sidelining his Muslim Vice President, Abubakar Atiku, in an attempt to run for a third term in office.⁶

As far as we know, it is in December 2010 that, for the first time, Boko Haram really planned and organised the deadly bombing of churches in Jos and Maiduguri. The repression certainly contributed to this evolution. Mohammed Yusuf had not advocated the slaying of Christians, neither in his book nor in his sermons left on record (Yusuf 2005). It was after his extrajudicial killing that the remaining commanders of the sect, who wanted revenge, drew closer to the global jihadist narrative against “Crusaders”. The role of Boko Haram is still disputed in some of the bombings of churches. Mohammed Yusuf’s successor, Abubakar Shekau, did not claim or deny any of them in his video releases. Although the sect attempted to exploit communal tensions in the Middle Belt, there is no conclusive evidence that it was responsible for all the attacks it claimed responsibility for, especially against Christians in Jos (ICG 2012: 15). On the contrary, the ‘original’ Boko Haram’s focus on Muslim targets caused the split off of Abubakar Adam Kamar and a dissident group, *Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan* (The Supporters for the Aid of Muslims in Black Africa), which emerged in 2012 to kidnap expatriates (see Annexes 1 and 2). From a doctrinal point of

⁶ Agang, Sunday, “Why the Cartoon Protest turned Lethal in Northern Nigeria”. <http://www.gamji.com/article5000/NEWS5671.htm> (Accessed 22 November 2012).

view, the leader of the new organisation, Abu Usamata “al-Ansari”, disagreed with Abubakar Shekau because he considered that the ‘real’ enemies of Islam were essentially Westerners. As for the faction of Khalid al-Barnawi “Abu Hafsat”, it regarded deadly attacks against innocent Muslims as a misinterpretation of Islam. It did not oppose talks with the government and eventually clashed with Abubakar Shekau, who accused it of treachery and organised the killing of its spiritual leader, Awwal Gombé, in 2012.⁷ The Christian issue has thus been a source of dissent between the three leaders who took up the baton of Mohammed Yusuf and who have been designated by the US as global terrorists: Abubakar Adam Kamar, Abubakar Shekau, and Khalid al-Barnawi.⁸

In this regard, there are two ways – global and local – to understand the extension of the targets of Boko Haram. The first is to analyse this evolution as a strategic move to destabilise a government led by a Christian president, Goodluck Jonathan. Such a development is usually seen as going together with the internationalisation of the sect, its alleged involvement in northern Mali, and possible links with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). A strategic alliance with Saudi Salafi groups actually remains doubtful because the doctrine of Mohammed Yusuf does not fit the Wahhabi model. One should remember that Boko Haram is itself a dissident group that broke away from the Izala, the main Salafi movement in Nigeria. In Abuja, courts could never prove that Mohammed Yusuf received funding from Saudi extremists after his two *hajj* trips to Mecca. Likewise, the Nigerian State Security Service (SSS) alleged in 2006 that Boko Haram had sent some children to an Al-Qaeda training camp in Mauritania and to some *mujahideen* fighters in the Republic of Niger. Yet the Kano businessman they arrested in connection with this, Mallam Muhammad Ashafa, was later released because no evidence could be laid against him regarding funding from Al-Qaeda Tabligh Headquarters in Lahore, Pakistan. In 2007, again, an Abuja High Court had to drop charges against the proprietor of the *Daily Trust* newspapers’ group, Mallam Muhammad Bello Ilyas Damagun, who had been accused of receiving funds from Al-Qaeda to train terrorists abroad and support the Taliban branch of Boko Haram.

⁷ *Africa Confidential*, various issues, 2012 and 2013.

⁸ Abubakar Adam Kamar is said to have been killed by the Nigerian security forces during a raid on his hideout in Kano in mid-August 2012. As for Khalid al-Barnawi, he allegedly got closer to AQIM and was to supply funds to both Ansaru and Boko Haram. According to sources that could not be cross-checked, Abubakar Shekau appointed as his deputy a disciple of Ansaru and Khalid al-Barnawi, Babagana ‘Assalafi’, when the French launched their military operation in northern Mali in January 2013. The Nigerian army eventually claimed that Abubakar Shekau was wounded in a gunfight and died later on in Cameroon in August 2013. As for Ansaru, it followed the model of Al-Qaeda by kidnapping and killing expatriates, and it was proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the British Home Office in November 2012.

In 2012, the fact that some Nigerians were said to have fought with AQIM in Timbuktu did not prove either that they were sent by Abubakar Shekau in order to extend and coordinate various attacks in the region.⁹ In northern Mali, evidence of their nationality and their affiliation to Boko Haram remained weak. From a purely tactical point of view, it is very likely that the sect cooperated with foreign jihadist groups to train fighters and get supplies of weapons. In 2009, just after the death of Mohammed Yusuf, the acting leader of Boko Haram, Mallam Sani Umaru, was even reported to have signed a statement supporting Osama bin Laden to “carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamised”.¹⁰ But this expression of solidarity did not mean that his successor, Abubakar Shekau, was to destabilise Nigeria under the supervision of Al-Qaeda. On the contrary, the extortion of local businessmen and the multiplication of armed robberies since 2011 tended to show that he had to continue relying on domestic funding. Moreover, Boko Haram was international from the beginning, since it operated from a region with porous borders.¹¹ At the end of the 1990s, Mohammed Yusuf first used the regional networks of Izala to extend his influence outside of Borno and his home state Yobe. This took him and his supporters towards neighbouring countries like Chad and the Republic of Niger, where the Nigerian Izala had begun to preach in the mid-1980s, launching their own organisation, Adini-Islam, in Niamey in 1993 (Zakari 2007). After Mohammed Yusuf broke his relationship with the Izala, his supporters still used neighbouring countries as rear bases, for instance in the region of Diffa in Niger and in the Mandara Mountains of Cameroon around 2003-06.

Terrorism and fear

Thus, the possibility of an operational connection with AQIM does not explain properly the spatial extension and the strategic move of Boko Haram against Christian communities to destabilise the Nigerian government. The internationalisation theory is more relevant when it refers to models of terrorism, rather than

⁹ Relying on a single secret American source, journalist Serge Daniel claims that Boko Haram received 2 million euros (probably ransom money) and sent twenty men to be trained by Al-Qaeda after signing a “pact” in June 2010 (2012: 204-6). US Representatives Michael McCaul *et al.* do not provide any further evidence in this regard, as they quote press reports of journalists who were not even in Mali. They claim that Boko Haram is funded by AQIM to recommend that it should be designated a foreign terrorist organisation. But they also admit that, to be able to make bombs, the sect had to steal commercial explosives and detonators used in quarries and mines within Nigeria (2013: 18).

¹⁰ <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/boko-haram-ressurrects-declares-total-jihad/#>

¹¹ The sect also attracted curiosity. Before 2008, for instance, Chadian ministers of Finance and Transports, Abbas Mahamat Tolli and Abdelkerim Souleyman Terio, were said to attend Friday prayers at the Boko Haram mosque in Maiduguri and allegedly gave alms to Mohammed Yusuf. According to rumours that could not be confirmed, this connection eventually became a diplomatic case because Abbas Mahamat Tolli was a nephew of President Idriss Deby and Abuja pressed the Chadian government to dismiss him.

religious doctrines. As early as 2003, the first *mujahideen* fighters of Boko Haram called themselves “Taliban” even if they had no operational link with Afghanistan. Since then, some of them have made references to other jihadist battlefronts like Somalia. Yet the main change was, in 2011, to resort to suicide attacks after the model of Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. This is indeed a real novelty in Nigeria, a country where non-Muslim groups also used terrorist techniques and bombs against the military junta in the 1990s, but no suicide attacks. As such, the international dimension of Boko Haram is not a new phenomenon if we look at the history of Islamic protest in northern Nigeria. All the main Sufi brotherhoods had a foreign origin, while the Izala followed the model of Saudi Arabia, the *yan schi’a* of Ibrahim el-Zakzaky looked at Iran, and the leader of the Maitatsine, Muhammad Marwa, hailed from Cameroon. From a doctrinal point of view, it would also be spurious to claim that Mohammed Yusuf was more radical than other forms of Islamic protest in northern Nigeria, from Mahdism to Quranic integralism.¹² His rejection of Western modernity, for instance, was much more accommodating than the position of Muhammad Marwa, who forbade his followers even to ride a bicycle. Likewise, the deadly impact of Boko Haram has never reached the proportions of the Maitatsine insurgency in Kano, which resulted in the killing of more than 4,000 people in just 11 days in December 1980 (Hiskett 1987; Isichei 1987).

Definitely, the real novelty of the sect in Nigeria is to resort to suicide attacks and terrorist techniques that follow (but presumably do not obey) a global jihadist model. In this logic, targeting Christian communities makes sense because it creates panic and challenges the secularity of the state, especially regarding freedom of religion.¹³ To get a national audience despite being based in the periphery of Nigeria, Boko Haram plays with the fears of southerners regarding forced conversion, the Shariah, and the jihad of Usman dan Fodio in the nineteenth century. This is rather easy in a society which often perceives itself as being divided between a Muslim North and a Christian South. According to surveys conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa by the Pew Research Center, for instance, Nigeria is the country where a majority of people (58 per cent) see conflict between religious groups as a very important problem. Individually, however, respondents do not feel personally threatened by the other religion of the Book: only one out of five said that Muslims were hostile towards Christians, or vice-versa (Lugo *et al.* 2010: 43-44). But these perceptions vary widely across the country. Surveys conducted in 2001 and 2007 showed that the fear of Islam was stronger in regions where Muslims were a minority. A majority of respondents in non-Shariah

¹² Amongst many academic works on the issue, see for instance Christelow (1985).

¹³ In Nigeria, secularity does not mean that the state is separate from religion, but that it is neutral in a multi-religious society.

states believed that the implementation of Islamic Law would increase ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. Yet there was a minority that thought so in Shariah states (Kirwin 2009).

In this context, Boko Haram fits quite well the terrorist model of insurgents who aim to create panic in order to destabilise the state. Since this chapter is written from a Western perspective, however, it is important not to overemphasise the rationality and the global logic of a sect which often targets outsiders to retaliate against attacks on its members. For instance, it is difficult to understand why the 'original' Boko Haram did not try harder to trigger a mass exodus of Christians from the North and revenge killings in the South. To provoke ethnic-cleansing and a religious all-out war, it would definitely make sense to focus attacks on Christian migrants in the North, instead of natives. In the past, such targets have caused retaliation that led to the Biafra secession in 1967 and riots in Aba and Onitsha in 2000. But today, the self-defence system of Igbo migrants in the ghettos of cities like Kano has developed so much that it helps to prevent Islamist attacks. It is also suggested that Boko Haram does not want to provoke retaliation that would drive large numbers of Muslim northerners out of the South, where they have settled to earn a living. The sect prefers to organise gradual and sporadic attacks on churches to intimidate and pressure the government to negotiate.¹⁴

Parallel to the internationalisation theory, local dynamics also explain the radicalisation of the group and the extension of its targets to Christian communities – the so-called Nassarawa in Hausa – that symbolise the intrusion of foreign powers. Indeed, the rejection of Western values – at least those which are seen as incompatible with Islam – is coherent with the demand for full Shariah and the utopian creation of a caliphate in Nigeria. Even if the followers of Mohammed Yusuf prefer to be called *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*, their nickname *Boko Haram* is quite telling when it is understood as a warning against the colonisation of the mind through 'bad, forbidden books'. The word *boko* refers both to deception and sorcery (*boka*) in Hausa, and possibly to *book* in English.¹⁵ Today, Nigerian Islamic scholars are often trained in modern schools (see Annex 3). But in the past, many shunned all forms of Western education and its certificates based on false evidence (*shahadatul zur*). The words *amaryar boko*, for instance, refer to a fake bride in Hausa marriage customs, and apparently it was used by the Muslim ruling elite when the British introduced their system of education, as only Quranic teachings were regarded as true (Ayuba 2010: 263).¹⁶

¹⁴ I wish to thank Johannes Harnischfeger for this suggestion.

¹⁵ For an etymological analysis that contests links to the English word *book*, see Newman (2013).

¹⁶ For a reference to old anti-Western education songs in Hausa in Jos, see also Abdulkareem, Mohamed Babangida (2010), *The paradox of Boko Haram*, Kaduna, Moving Image Ltd., 50-51.

More generally, Western education is accused of having failed to develop the North. This critique is not specific to Boko Haram and expresses a long-standing opposition between tradition and modernity.¹⁷ To put this in perspective, it is worth quoting the views of Usman Muhammad Bugaje (1997: 85), a political activist from a secular party, the Action Congress. He indeed raises the question:

Has this western system of education made (Nigeria) any happier place to live in? The greatest promise of the imperial system of education, fully secured in its secular niche, has been material development. We must now ask, has it delivered; what with the crushing weight of corruption, inefficiency, poverty, disease and hunger on our frail shoulders? How much hope can we nurse today? Can the scholars of this western system of education deliver us from the prevailing tyranny and injustice that has today become our lot in the same way Muslim scholars and the Jihad leaders of the early 19th century delivered their society from the tyranny of the Hausa rulers?

To try to get an answer from the point of view of Boko Haram, a quick analysis of the doctrine of Mohammed Yusuf is necessary here. The rejection of Western modernity by his followers is often seen as an expression of their backwardness and lack of education. Mohammed Yusuf himself is described as a lunatic guru, amongst other things because he contested the Copernican Revolution and the assumption that the Earth revolved around the Sun in a system of planets named after pagan Roman gods: Saturn, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Pluto, Neptune, Uranus and Mars. Yet the founder of Boko Haram did not reject all modern technologies. Unlike Muhammad Marwa, for instance, Mohammed Yusuf drove cars, used mobile telephones, had computers, and did not ban them for his followers. Moreover, his condemnation of Western values was rooted in local Muslim complaints against the colonisation of the mind through education. The targeting of modern medicine, for instance, echoed the rejection of polio vaccination by some *ulama* who feared a US conspiracy to sterilise Muslims after the death of several children in Kano due to unfortunate pharmaceutical tests by the American company Pfizer. This context gives more sense to the 'irrational' Boko Haram burglary and murder of a pharmacist in February 2011, the bombing of a medical store in June 2011 (both in Maiduguri), the assassination of three North Korean doctors in February 2013 (in Potiskum), and the killing of ten polio immunisation workers (in Kano), also in February 2013. David Cook (2011: 20) even sees the suicide attack against UN offices in Abuja in August 2011 as a form of protest against the World Health Organization.

A thorough analysis of the doctrine of Mohammed Yusuf offers a radical religious reading of the travails of Nigerian politics in this regard. Obviously, the fight against the corruption of traditional chiefs and governors does not mean that

¹⁷ As Murray Last wrote (2005: 79), it is not sure in this regard that the Western education system would have been more acceptable for the conservative Sokoto Caliphate, had the British not colonised northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram was to become a kind of ‘armed branch’ of Transparency International! In his speeches, Mohammed Yusuf did not explicitly condemn the bad governance and the electoral fraud of the ruling class. In fact, we do not even really know if Nigerian Muslims reject modern corruption and if they consider Islam to be the best way to reform the moral economy. To the rural *talakawa* masses in Hausaland, for instance, colonisation and British taxes were seen as just a continuation of the oppressive exploitation of the Sokoto *Sarakuna* aristocracy, with another name and a new legal framework (Pierce 2006). But clearly, the Boko Haram dream of a ‘pure’ Islamic society and the blank refusal to be governed by a non-Muslim government reflected strong disillusion with post-colonial Nigeria, party politics, and the failure of the so-called “democracy” since the return to a civilian regime in 1999. Unlike other Salafi groups that also wanted to establish a caliphate, Mohammed Yusuf did not accept the modern rule of a secular state as a temporary necessity. Consequently, he forbade his followers to accept employment in the government, especially in the areas of judiciary and law enforcement (more than in social services), and he did not recognise the authority of the present Sultan of Sokoto, a former military man (Anonymous 2012: 126).

An ambiguous relationship to the state

In this logic, the demand for full Shariah, social justice, and Islamic purity could not be seen as compatible with a parliamentary regime in a plural society. Interestingly enough, other radical groups like the *yan schi’a* of Ibrahim el-Zakzaky came to the same conclusion, but without advocating armed struggle.¹⁸ The main argument was that a secular government could not properly apply Islamic Law. The doctrinal and divine foundation of Shariah could not be placed under the supremacy of a constitution written by men. The basis for a ‘secular’ rule of law was weak indeed. Even in the South some scholars challenged the legality of the Nigerian Constitution because it was promulgated by a military decree in 1999. But the extension of Islamic Law by some northern governors clearly compromised the secular neutrality of the state, especially with regard to the condemnation of apostasy, which contradicted freedom of religion. In addition, the severity of Shariah punishments could not be reconciled with the proscription of cruel and inhuman treatment by various international human rights conventions to which Nigeria was signatory.

¹⁸ In Katsina, for instance, the so-called *yan schi’a* taught students to disregard the national anthem and the flag because they eroded the faith of Muslims in Islam. They also encouraged them to ignore the school’s time-table when it coincided with the five daily prayers. And they did not recognise the laws of Nigeria that did not conform with the Quran (Sulaiman 1997).

Contradictions were quite obvious. Shariah, first, was discriminatory because citizens were no longer equal before the law. At Independence, specific punishments for Muslims had generated little controversy since offences like adultery or the consumption of alcohol already existed in the Northern Nigerian Penal Code. But discrimination became more visible after 1999, when Shariah-compliant states extended the domain of Islamic Law and imposed a stricter penal regime on Muslims. For instance, a Muslim culprit who stole a bicycle would face amputation while his non-Muslim co-offender would be sentenced only to prison. Likewise, a Christian adulterer would not answer to any criminal charge, while a Muslim could be sentenced to death by stoning (Iwobi 2004: 149). From a political point of view, such discrimination dismissed the argument of conservative religious scholars, for whom the more rigorous penal regime sanctioned by Shariah would be regarded by devout Muslims as a benefit.

After the end of the military regime in 1999, the extension of Islamic Law definitely exacerbated the most visible contradictions of the Nigerian parliamentary system. In the North, for instance, Shariah was officially to be implemented by the corrupt and ineffective police force of a unitary federal government that forbade the creation of specific religious and regional militias like the Hisbah in Kano. The various interpretations and the uneven application of Islamic Law raised another problem, with different legal frameworks from one northern state to another (Ostien 2007; Naniya 2002). In addition, some of the governors who claimed to have banned alcohol did not refuse the *haram* (forbidden) money of their monthly federal allocation, which was partly funded by taxes on alcohol levied in the South. Up to now, this contradiction has not been resolved.¹⁹

An important issue after 1999 was actually to know whether it was the role of the state to extend, promote, and implement Shariah. Some Islamic scholars thought so and accepted playing the ‘democratic’ game by lobbying political parties and cooperating with the government. Indeed, many Nigerian Muslims considered that “an Islamic law system helps legitimize the state” (Laremont 2011: xx). But others did not agree. This does not mean that they followed the radical reasoning of Mohammed Yusuf. On the contrary, moderate and quietist Muslims thought that religion should not interfere with secular politics because it belonged to the private sphere. Historically, they argued, Shariah was not developed by states but by the population growth of the *ummah*, the necessity to formalise Islamic Law, and the expansion of the business of traders who needed universal

¹⁹ In *The Nation* dated 10 April 2007, for instance, Akintola Benson, a Senior Special Assistant to the (Muslim) Governor of Lagos State, Babatunde Fashola, was calling for federal compensation because alcohol consumption represented a major share of the local revenue of Value Added Tax (VAT), yet funded northern regions.

standards to sign contracts and circumvent the variations of local rules.²⁰ Other scholars added that it was not possible to call for the political authorities to apply a uniform and codified version of Shariah, which had always coexisted with native customs and whose versions had been disputed by several legal schools since the eight century. Using the Quran as the principal, or even the only, source of Shariah, as some Boko Haram members advocated, was not sustainable either. The text contains few explicit rules. Out of 6,235 verses, between 350 and 500 are said to be relevant from a legal point of view. Yet even these verses deal mainly with rituals, devotional issues, marriage, and trade. In the whole Quran, only thirty verses are really concerned with crime, prescribing specific punishments for the famous five *hudud* infractions: theft, drunkenness, fornication, defamiation, and highway robbery (Hallaq 1997: 12; Vikør 2005: 32-37).

In other words, Boko Haram was not alone in rejecting the possibility of a secular state to apply Shariah. The difference is that Mohammed Yusuf did so with fiery arguments that precipitated violence yet did not solve ideological contradictions. Indeed, Shariah has historically been a moral and an ethical power, rather than a blueprint for government organisation. Thus, the sole demand for full Shariah, which was the main objective of Mohammed Yusuf, did not help in understanding the political meaning of his actions. Undoubtedly, Boko Haram has had an ambiguous and puzzling relationship to the Nigerian state. Scholars do not agree in this regard. Muhammad Sani Imam and Muhammad Kyari (2011: 29), for instance, argue that by calling for isolation from the government and the city, Boko Haram wanted to abrogate the state, which was regarded as satanic and off-limits (*taghut*). Meanwhile, Andrew Walker (2012: 9) claims that Mohammed Yusuf wanted to set up a parallel political organisation in order to, ultimately, “replace the actual state”. Hence he had a cabinet, a Supreme Council (*Shura*), specialised departments (*Lagina*), and various emirs posted according to the Nigerian administrative territorial units of local government areas. According to Micha’el Tanchum (2012: 79), this “alternative society” eventually formed a “miniature state within the state”.²¹

From a political and ideological point of view, Boko Haram reveals many inconsistencies in this regard. As we have seen, Mohammed Yusuf and his followers did not hesitate to use modern technology imported from the West to carry on their struggle. In the same vein, they condemned entertainment, including cinema, but they broadcast videotaped sermons; before 2009, Mohammed Yusuf was even allowed to preach on the Borno television station. His Izala arch-rival Jafar

²⁰ See for instance the position of An-Na’im (2005: 333). The famous historian Marshall Hodgson also reminds us that if Shariah was born in the Arab garrison-town, it was mainly applied by merchants and travellers, rather than peasants (1974 vol. 1: 319-347, vol. 2: 122).

²¹ See also Onapajo, Hakeem & Ufo Okeke Uzodike (2012), “Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria”, *African Security Review* 21(3): 28.

Adam also noticed that the founder of the sect used a passport from the Federal Republic of Nigeria – the secular government Yusuf supposedly abhorred – to obtain the visa necessary to perform the holy pilgrimage to Saudi (Anonymous 2012: 138). Following the logic of Muhammad Marwa, Mohammed Yusuf should have refused to travel on roads constructed by the state with revenues from usury and taxes collected from alcohol manufacturers. Today, Boko Haram members are also incoherent. On the one hand, they condemn secular justice. On the other, they ask the government to punish the people responsible for the execution of Mohammed Yusuf and his unarmed followers. Likewise, they justify bank robberies because banks charge usury and are owned by big men who siphon public funds. Yet they steal and use *haram* money.

A politicisation by reciprocal manipulation

Do such inconsistencies mean that Boko Haram is not a political uprising, but just the irrational revolt of uneducated and lunatic young fanatics from the poorest sections of the society, especially Quranic students? I do not think so, because of the way the sect has encountered the Nigerian state, which politicised the group through manipulation and repression. Of course, I would agree that political targets and religious grievances do not make up a political programme, no more than they make up a guerrilla movement. Bank robberies and retaliations on both sides have confused the political meaning of the attacks of Boko Haram. Many politicians, Muslim leaders, and traditional chiefs were assassinated by the sect to avenge the killing of its members rather than to implement a comprehensive strategy to destabilise the Nigerian state. Likewise, the security forces often went on the rampage to retaliate against the slaying of soldiers or policemen, without any counter-insurgency planning to win the hearts and minds of the people. This is precisely what killed Mohammed Yusuf.

But the sect has also played with local politics. In its love – hate relationship with the Nigerian state it both manipulated, and was manipulated by, its political sponsors. In Borno, it is on record that Governor Ali Modu Sheriff used Boko Haram to win the elections of 2003; in exchange, followers of Mohammed Yusuf were rewarded: Alhaji Buji Foyi was promoted to Minister of Religious Affairs, and Abubakar Adam Kamaru was released from jail, where he had been held for armed robbery. In fact, such kinds of ‘deals’ were not specific to the sect. Elsewhere in the North after the end of the military regime in 1999, politicians also played with Islamic issues to get elected. Thus, in 2001, the leader of the opposition and the All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP), Muhammad Buhari, was reported to have called for the introduction of ‘total’ Shariah across the country.²²

²² <http://www.news24.com/xArchive/Archive/Calls-for-total-Sharia-in-Nigeria-20010827>

Nicknamed Abacha People's Party after the former military dictator, who was a Kanuri from Borno, Buhari's group was strongest in the North, especially in Zamfara where Governor Ahmad Sani Yerima was the first to extend Islamic Law after 1999. Yet the ANPP was not the only party to advocate Shariah. Northern governors of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), in power in Abuja, were quick to follow suit.

In this regard, Boko Haram exposed the misbehaviour of politicians who did not hesitate to manipulate Islam and hire private militia to kill their opponents. The sect certainly benefited from the lack of legitimacy of fraudulently elected leaders. Conversely, it contributed to delegitimise a mafia-like parliamentary regime that did not follow Islamic principles of government. More than poverty, bad governance in Borno helped Mohammed Yusuf to become popular and politicise his struggle.²³ The difference with the neighbouring Republic of Niger is quite striking. To William Miles (2003), who studied Hausaland on both sides of the border, radical Islamists actually developed more in Nigeria because of bad governance. By all standards, the Republic of Niger is much poorer, yet it is better managed and hence has a lower sense of alienation and social injustice. Such variations result not only from the French and British colonial legacies of direct or indirect rule. In the Republic of Niger after Independence, local politicians did not try to set up private armies with traditional watchmen, the so-called *yan sintiri*, a Hausa word derived from the English 'sentry'. Likewise, the *yan daba*, who hailed from the Vanguard youth movement of the Nigerian Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in Kano at Independence in 1960, did not transform into a political militia when they formed neighbourhood watches for self-defence in Niamey in the 1990s (Göpfert 2012).

By contrast, Boko Haram got involved in dirty politics as soon as Mohammed Yusuf became popular and was potentially able to bring votes to the governor of Borno. Today, it is quite unlikely that local officials still attempt to manipulate the remnants of the sect to win elections or destabilise opponents – a very risky operation. But Boko Haram has generated all sorts of conspiracy theories that have further contributed to delegitimise the parliamentary basis of a secular government. The press, the blogosphere, and street conversations speculate on who benefits from the insurgency. In the North, some believe that Boko Haram was first and foremost a plot by the PDP to destabilise the opposition. They argue that violence mainly affected ANPP states like Borno and Yobe, whereas in neighbouring Bauchi, Governor Isa Yuguda, who changed allegiance to the PDP in 2009, is suspected of having harboured members of the sect to avoid being at-

²³ For an alternative perspective, claiming that youth unemployment is the main driver behind Boko Haram, see Meagher (2013). For an opposite view, showing that poverty is not limited to Borno and is even more or as severe in Sokoto and other Shariah-compliant states where Boko Haram is not very active, see Pérouse de Montclos (2012).

tacked by them. Many Muslims from the North also claim that curfews and the war on terrorism prevented the opposition and Muhammad Buhari from campaigning in 2011 and that it will help the PDP to rig the next elections in 2015.²⁴ Interestingly enough, such speculations mirror the opposite views of southern Christians, who think that Boko Haram is a Muslim conspiracy to destabilise President Goodluck Jonathan, or “a Frankenstein monster created by some elite of the North” (Okpaga *et al.* 2012: 85).

A politicisation by repression

In any case, all these theories exacerbate the North-South divide and expose the fragility of a weak state, which is precisely the objective of terrorists. In the same vein, the resilience of the sect challenges the capacity of the government to maintain law and order. Again, the repression of July 2009 was a major rupture. First, it showed the shortcomings of a military response, which triggered a terrorist reaction and failed to win the hearts and minds of the locals. Emeka Okereke (2012: 186), a Research Fellow at the National Defence College, thus acknowledged that

contrary to the expectation that the destruction of Boko Haram headquarters in Borno State and the killing of its leaders could eradicate the threat of religious extremism in Nigeria, the sect transformed itself from a loose network of artisans, school dropouts and unemployed youths to an organised network of intellectuals and strategists, with strong national and international connections.

In addition, the brutality of the security forces and the massacre of innocent civilians led some people to believe that the Islamist organisation was a resistance group against occupying troops.

The police, which were the first target of Boko Haram from November 2003, are quite telling in this regard. All over Nigeria, they have a terrible reputation of being abusive, brutal, corrupt, and completely inefficient. In the North-East, they were involved in various human rights violations. In March 2005, for instance, they arrested six boys in different locations of Borno, charged them with armed robbery, and summarily executed them in the Ibrahim Taiwo Police Station in Maiduguri (Odinkalu 2010: 58). In other words, the population did not trust the Nigerian police even before the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf. Boko Haram probably benefited from this suspicion, as it raised sympathy for Islamic justice against governmental repression. Indeed, the massacre of hundreds of unarmed, innocent believers in July 2009 came as a reminder of how brutal post-colonial forces could be. Such traumatic events were sometimes interpreted as a proof of the necessity for Muslims to defend themselves against an aggression

²⁴ See for instance the stories carried in the Kaduna-based newspaper *Desert Herald*.

led by officers who included Christian southerners in their ranks.²⁵ As a matter of fact, many policemen do not speak local languages because a national policy requires them to be posted outside of their native region. Moreover, Maiduguri does not accommodate the police headquarters of the zonal command of Borno and Yobe, which is in Bauchi. In July 2009, most of reinforcements sent to quell the Boko Haram rebellion were outsiders.

Of course, a sense of alienation and compassion for the victims of the repression do not mean that, all of a sudden, the youth felt an urge to join the sect or that the masses adhered to the extremist doctrine of Mohammed Yusuf. To be protected, for instance, local businessmen are sometimes forced to pay a tribute to the group, yet they have no sympathy with its ideology. However, coercion is not the only reason for refusing to fight against the 'terrorists'. Because of ethnic affinities, Boko Haram members certainly found it easier to hide amongst the population in Maiduguri rather than in Kano, where they were seen as foreigners. In Borno, the locals avoided informing the security forces against their brothers and sisters, even if they were as much afraid of the terrorists. This *omertà* also reflected poor social control by traditional elders. Appointed by Governor Ali Modu Sheriff in March 2009, the new Shehu of Borno, Umar Garbai Abba Kyari, lacked legitimacy and never publicly condemned the atrocities committed by the army. As a result, he did not enjoy the popularity of the emirs of Kano or Zaria, two old Hausa cities where the population still cooperated with the security forces.

Although not a mass movement, Boko Haram has thus a social basis which has not been eliminated by the repression. Such support does not seem to have been impacted by a growing disillusionment regarding the capacity of Islamic Law to bring social justice and reform the government. The popularity of the demand for Shariah is certainly difficult to assess. It depends much on people's expectations. In Kano, for instance, members of the Hisbah militia see Islamic Law as the democracy of majority rules in a Muslim environment, while members of *yan daba* urban gangs emphasise the need for social justice and individual human rights through Shariah (Casey 2008: 81). Perceptions also vary according to education, ranks, status, regional origin, and, of course, religious creed. As we do not have data on the feelings of Muslims in Borno, it would be hazardous to speculate on a link between the demand for Shariah and the popularity of Boko Haram.

According to opinion polls conducted in 2001 and 2007, we know that the support for Islamic Law has not waned at the national level (Kirwin 2009).

²⁵ In Kano, for instance, the Nigeria Police is seen as an occupation force, yet with less suspicion, and 40 per cent of its officers are allegedly Christians, even if Northerners dominate senior ranks (Hills 2012: 52).

Movements that advocate Shariah are still vibrant. Surveys show that 56 per cent of Nigerian Muslims do not belong to Sufi orders, which are known for their willingness to accommodate local traditions and their softer views on the application of Islamic Law. Amongst this majority, 11 per cent identify with the Shia, 14 per cent with the Tabligh, 11 per cent with the Salafi, and 14 per cent with the Wahhabi movements (Lugo *et al.* 2010: 147, 158, 315-317). Likewise, 35 per cent of the *ulama* in northern Nigeria are said to be Izala, as against 24 per cent for the Tijaniyya, less than 8 per cent for the Qadiriyya, and almost 28 per cent with no affiliation (Jega 2005: 97). But the alleged predominance of Salafi scholars does not mean that believers would accept a religious radicalisation. According to the same surveys, many Nigerian Muslims who want Shariah to become the official law of their land also support democracy and freedom of religion. In fact, only a minority of them advocate the death penalty for renegades who leave Islam, stoning for women who commit adultery, or cutting off hands for thieves – a much lower percentage than in many other African countries.²⁶

Political parties and Islam in Nigeria

In other words, the radical form of Shariah that Boko Haram wants to impose does not correspond at all to the demand of a very large majority of Nigerian Muslims. By the same token, the sect appears to be extremely marginal. Despite some backing in Borno and a high terrorist profile in the media, it does not have the support of the masses that other reformist Islamic movements can claim in Egypt or Tunisia. Boko Haram used religious references to legitimise political grievances as a moral right. But it would not and could not transform into a party. Unlike the Izala, for instance, it never maintained that elections were more important than daily prayers or the pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁷ On the contrary, it contributed much to dividing further the Muslim community and the political North, a region which has not had a clear leader since the times of Ahmadu Bello at Independence.

The story of Boko Haram thus leaves room for a more general discussion on the politicisation of Islam and the Islamisation of politics. Despite the assumptions of the theory of a clash of civilisations between Muslims and Christians, Nigeria did not develop religious parties as such, either Islamic or Christian Democrat. In this regard, the most populated country of the continent is quite different from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and South Africa, which have all experienced the formation of Islamic parties, with

²⁶ Interestingly enough, the same proportion of Christians (70 per cent) also favour making the Bible the official law of their country (Lugo *et al.* 2010: 11, 50, 288, 291-293).

²⁷ At the time, the Izala leader Abubakar Gumi campaigned for the re-election of President Shehu Shagari and was reported to have made this statement in the *New Nigerian* of 3 April 1983.

or without people's support and legal recognition. In Nigeria, the only exception was probably the Lagos-based United Muslim Party from 1953 to 1966. This very local organisation had no national audience and aimed only at protecting the interests of an urban minority group. At Independence, however, the two main political parties in the North were clearly linked with religious movements: the conservative NPC (Northern People's Congress) with the Qadiriyya and the aristocracy (*Sarakuna*) of the Sokoto Caliphate; the progressive NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union) with the Tijaniyya and the commoners (*talakawa*) of Kano. But their experience was short-lived. While NEPU remained in the opposition, the leaders of the NPC were killed during the first coup of 1966, and both parties disappeared during the military regimes that followed (Paden 1973; Dudley 1968).

The Second Republic (1979-1983) was more confusing in this regard. If NEPU was reformed under the aegis of the PRP (People's Redemption Party), which maintained links with the Tijaniyya, the NPN (National Party of Nigeria) in power had no clear allegiance and received support from the aristocracy of Sokoto as well as the spiritual leader of Izala, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, who was very close to President Shehu Shagari. In their formative period before their legal registration and the return to civilian rule in 1979, the Izala were on the verge of developing a political platform. Hence their different names referred either to an Association (*Kungiyar*) or a Congress (*Jamiyyar*), as in Kaduna with the "Party for the Propagation of Islam" (*Jamiyyar Ada Addinin Musulunci*) (Yandaki 1997: 48). But in the end, the Izala did not transform into a political platform to contest elections.

Since then, the voting patterns of Nigerian northern Muslims have not confirmed the existence of Islamic parties in disguise, even with the ANPP. The zoning system, which is supposed to protect the federal character of the country, also did not reflect a rigid religious divide between a 'Muslim North' and a 'Christian South'. During the presidential elections of 1993, for instance, the two candidates, Moshood Abiola and Bashir Tofa, were Muslims and the former was a Yoruba who won in the South. In 2011, again, Nuhu Ribadu and his running mate Fola Adeola, who contested the presidential elections for the ACN (Action Congress of Nigeria: the opposition), were both Muslims; yet their party did win a substantial number of votes among Christians in south-western states, and very few in the so-called 'Muslim North'.

A comparison with Sudan is interesting in this regard (see Annex 4). Unlike Nigeria, local Islamic scholars have not only run governments or participated in elections, but also created and controlled political parties in a hereditary sys-

tem.²⁸ At Independence, for instance, the Mahdi family led both the Umma Party and the Ansar brotherhood. Likewise, the Mirghani led both the People's Democratic Party and the Khatmiyya. Banned by the military coup of 25 May 1969, they later on had to go into exile when the 'socialist' junta of Colonel Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri promoted smaller Sufi brotherhoods and killed thousands of Ansar supporters of the Umma Party. However, they came back to power after the dismissal of the dictator on 6 April 1985, and they are still politically active today. As for the Islamist coup of 30 June 1989, it was very much an offshoot of the Muslim Brothers of Sheikh Hassan al-Turabi.

In the same vein, the use of Islam as the official law of the state has been much more institutionalised in Sudan. By a decree of 9 September 1983, Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri first imposed Shariah throughout the country, even in the South where Muslims were a minority and where this decision contributed to precipitating a second civil war under the aegis of the Sudan People's Liberation Army. After the fall of the dictatorship, the National Islamic Front then refused to endorse a peace agreement signed on 16 November 1988, precisely because the government had accepted repealing Islamic Law to satisfy the demands of southerners. Despite an informal approval by the Parliament to suspend Shariah on 3 April 1989, the military coup of General Omar Hassan Ahmad al Bashir did put an end to the negotiation and abrogated the constitution, dissolving political parties, banning trade unions, and closing newspapers. A state of emergency was declared and, on 5 February 1991, a decree re-established Islam as the only official law in Sudan. Adopted by 96 per cent of the voters at a referendum organised on 30 June 1998, the new constitution was extremely strict in this regard, since its Articles 7 and 10 proclaimed jihad, defence of the country, and payment of *zakat* as a compulsory duty for all, including non-Muslims.

Conclusion

No such thing ever happened in Nigeria, where the secular British Common Law still prevails, even in the North. Since 1999, Shariah courts are not permitted to try Christians without their consent and they usually settle conflicts only between Muslims. In other words, Nigeria experienced a politicisation of Islam but not the extensive Islamisation of politics that affected countries like Sudan. A better balance of power certainly explains this. Nigeria's South is much more developed than the North, whereas in Sudan, the North is much more developed than the South. Unlike Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri, moreover, the military regimes in power in Lagos and Abuja did not attempt to use Islam as their primary source of

²⁸ See for instance Fluehr-Lobban (1987); Hunwick (1992); Pérouse de Montclos (2003); Warburg (2003).

legitimacy. On the contrary, they always justified their coups and the suspension of the constitution by the necessity to ban ethnic or religious parties to restore law and order.

The federal and secular structure of the Nigerian state, however, does not fully explain why Muslims have never succeeded in setting up a political platform to contest elections with a religious programme. Notwithstanding the Yoruba Muslims in the South, this characteristic has also much to do with the internal divisions of Islam in the North. In this regard, Boko Haram should be understood as another disruptive factor within the *ummah*, much more than the trigger of a civil war and a civilisational clash between the so-called 'Muslim North' and 'Christian South'. Many analysts like to speculate on the collapse of the Nigerian state. But Boko Haram also reveals the failure of the Muslim community to unify, develop, and organise a common response to modernity. In reality, the sect of Mohammed Yusuf is a challenge to both the Nigerian state and Islam.

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