

**HATCHED FROM THE EGG OF IMPUNITY  
A FOWL CALLED BOKO HARAM**



**By  
PROFESSOR WOLE SOYINKA**

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## **HATCHED from the EGG of IMPUNITY – A Fowl Called BOKO HARAM**

Here is a digression placed before we have even commenced – it comes in form of a question directed at prominent sectors of the international media, and even the United Nations, whose deliberations I recently watched: what's in a name? Or, straight to the point – why 'Boko Haram'? That is not the name the Nigerian pustule of a global religious inflammation chose for themselves. Muhammed Yusuf and his founding cohorts had settled for the grandiloquent name of *'Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad'* – People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad. Even if Nigerians found themselves ill prepared and ill equipped to cope with this sudden and brutal affliction, they understood and held on to the psychological weapon of – *naming!* They even declined to concede a shortened version such as – 'Committed People', 'The Prophet's Jihadists' or whatever - No, Nigerians , Boko Haram (The Book is Anathema) is what you are, Boko Haram is what your actions read. Language is also an instrument of war. This is a theme that requires addressing in its own right, as a principle of resistance.

For now, a more pressing issue is the provocation of a – not unrelated – question, one that I find myself compelled to consider periodically under a variety of circumstances, most prominently perhaps during the murderous War of Biafran secession: ***When*** is a state? Is it when you pronounce it one that it does becomes one? Or does it require a referendum? Or will a flag suffice? And an anthem? Does thinking make it so? Is a state actualized when you begin to print your own currency – as Isis – more accurately known as Da'esh - is reported to have done? In merely thinking that question, we can profitably take a cue from the battered humanity of Nigeria who seem to have resolved: *never concede a thing to the enemy, certainly not in the accessible currency of language.* ISIS – spelt out fully as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria - is *not* a state, any more than its predecessor – ISIL – the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant ever was. Both were however clear and sinister declarations of intent, and it is appalling to think that the world failed to wake up to such an unambiguous manifesto. Nor is it islamic, even by the broadest yardstick of islamic practices. Like the state, it is only another declaration of presumption and

determinist propaganda. The Arabs themselves – as the King of Jordan constantly reminds the world - refer to these as Da'esh – which translates roughly as Garbage. Alas for the world, this is garbage of a singularly toxic nature! It not only defiles humanity, it totally degrades the landscape, taking over productive terrain and rendering it progressively uninhabitable.

Here is one psychological – and material - implication that attaches to such seemingly trivial concessions, which amounts to yielding advantageous grounds to a determined enemy. Let us take the issue of recruitment. Youth is the season of rebellion. It induces the - often instinctive – rejection of any *status quo*. The irony of rejection however, is that it is a near guaranteed prelude to attachment, since attachment to something else, preferably a novelty, provides a platform for a thorough repudiation of the rejected association. The complementary attachment *empowers* the rejectionist, since it enables him or her to advocate something else as being more meaningful, more laudable an alternative, thus doubly invalidates what is being jettisoned. This applies to all creeds, all ideologies – it applied in its time to Communism, a creed that enabled the restless, youthful mind to despise society with an uncritical comprehensiveness, bask in the utopian vision of a classless society and a designation of the rivalling creed – the capitalist/bourgeois/liberal/laissez-faire society as the very pit of decadence and damnation. Some of the finest analytical minds fell under the spell of the utopian creed, submitted themselves to it both intellectually and spiritually. A number risked their lives on missions to establish the 'kingdom of heaven' here on earth. Others physically transferred to the halfway house - societies that already offered a glimpse, however dim, of this paradise, from where they looked in condescending pity on the rest of the 'unenlightened' world and its doomed inhabitants. Within that sector, a few actually placed themselves body and soul at the insurgent service of the new vision. Some, as we know, even undertook violent missions, fired by the need to destroy the present for the shimmering vista of the future.

If we sometimes resort to expressions such as 'kingdom of heaven', 'paradise' etc. etc. such expressions are not casually chosen. The emotional fervour – just that extract by itself - of a communist Valhalla was not dissimilar to what we are

witnessing today – the only missing component appears to be the quality of mind – on the average – that fell under the spell of communism – otherwise, the emotional quotient more than duplicates today’s utopian gospeling, one that we can justifiably classify as a contrasting ideology that is rooted in morbidity, albeit in religious guise. Both understand one expression however – *empowerment*. The conferment of superiority that comes with being one of the *chosen*. Well then, what has ISIS – in its full annunciation as ‘state’ got to do with this?

The issue is that of the alarming level of recruitment that is being finally recognized and become worrisome for a number of nations, and how the notion of a ‘state’, the heavenly realm materialized on earth, acts as a palpable critique of existing society, and further galvanizes youthful rebellion. Needless to stress that this is especially true for minds that have been already been softened through the indoctrination of human existence in original sin, thanks largely to the penetrating power of Internet. We can take other forms of discontent for granted – conditions of alienation through unsatisfactory material social conditions, even racist experiences, especially for immigrants in European societies etc. etc. Generally however, Youth now knows where to go, physically, for salvation. Such minds perceive a physical slab of earth on whose citizenship they can lay claim in repudiation of their current physical estate. That alienated mind has acquired citizenship of a new order made manifest on earth. Nor should we fail to recognize that, in some already delinquent minds, that new “order” corresponds also to an absence of restraint. Such receptive recruits already envision a state where the lowest instincts – and by this I refer even to street-gang mentality – can be fulfilled – but this time as a citizen and warrior of the kingdom of – Allah!

So when the empowerment hungry youth listens to the world’s media announcing that yet another aid worker, or a woman who carelessly exposed an inch of flesh while breast feeding her child has been “executed by the islamic state”, you must place yourself in his mind, and what that mind grasps is – *my* state has imposed its own laws, enforced its rights as a state, just like any other. *My* state has executed an enemy – for which also read – *infidel!* That mind is freed from contemplating the optional view: that a bunch of psychopaths have just murdered an innocent man – no

– his reading has become: my nation has *legitimately* – rid itself of a traitor, an infiltrator, an individual found *guilty* of a crime - thus, my state has protected itself and stamped its sovereignty on the face of the globe. It is not possible to quantify the effect this has on that distant adherent, but its potential effect had better be taken into consideration. The state is taking shape through nominal recognition, and that youth cannot wait to report for duty as a citizen of this new entity, albeit founded on the doctrine of morbidity.

This is what was denied Boko Haram of Nigeria by their compatriots – you are neither a state, nor a caliphate. You are enemies of enlightenment whose first charge is the destruction of all that spells knowledge or creativity – symbolized by the book, hence the name - Boko Haram – The Book is *haram* – evil, damned, anathemized. Call yourselves what you will, their fellow Nigerians insist - you are *Boko Haram*. That name has stuck, and so alas, have the bearers of the name, a rampaging insurgency, the nature of which the nation called Nigeria had never known.

Within that nation space, the humanity of the North – especially the north-east - has taken the brunt, but all of Nigeria is traumatized. The populace is still trying to puzzle out how we ever came to such a pass – unfortunately many give scant attention to the intellectual antecedents and evolving ideology of a movement that revels in such brutality. Many today cannot even recall the pronouncement of one Sheik Abubakar Gumi, which went straight to the heart of his islamic renewal agenda. “A Christian president for Nigeria?” he once declared. “That will happen only over my dead body”. Again, it was the same cleric and scholar who blurted out the famous words: “Christianity is Nothing”, a declaration to which I owed the inspiration of one of my public lectures at the University of Ibadan in the late seventies – *The Credo of Nothing and the Being of Nothingness*.

Those who attempt to trace the antecedents of Boko Haram tend to place it at some date that short changes actuality and thus, court the danger of becoming content with just a physical containment of a malaise with deep roots. I shall probably be liable on the same charge, since I have no intention of going all the way back to the beginning of one of its enabling movements in Saudi Arabia, given the name of

Wahabism. For our purposes however, as these involve a colonial enclave that bears the name Nigeria, obtaining its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, Sheik Gumi is as good a sign post as any to begin any serious enquiry.

Sheikh Gumi, we must begin by stressing, was a totally different breed from Mohammed Yusuf, founder, or Abubakar Shekau, successor of the movement now known as Boko Haram. Gumi was a relentless debater and polemicist. For someone capable of such an extreme utterance as “Christianity is nothing”, he could still be counted even something of a progressive. For instance, he believed in female education and the promotion of their electoral rights. What matters is that this cleric created, both directly and indirectly, a sizable and committed followership. His hard, uncompromising pronouncements on national politics also affected the attitude of a number of national leaders in crucial positions – social development, foreign policy etc. etc but - education most especially. This paved the way for religious indoctrination over and beyond even the reaches of the madrassas, those islamic schools where the foot soldiers of today’s Boko Haram were nurtured.

Gumi cast his long influence, directly and covertly, over the nation’s educational structures that were supposed to be national in character and presumably secular. That infiltration of Nigerian educational system also produced some of the current acknowledged “godfathers” of Boko Haram, even as it primed some of the future ideological propagators and actual midwives of the benighted movement. The extent of Gumi’s influence in national affairs can be gauged by the following extract from a paper delivered at a 2014 Lagos symposium:

Gumi spearheaded neo-Salafi Islamic reform for about forty years challenging what he believed were the Brotherhood’s un-Islamic innovations [bidah], sponsoring the upgrading of modern Islamic education and insisting on the need to fully implement Sharia law at all levels in Nigeria. Gumi’s exposure to neo-salafi groups like the Muslim Brotherhood had an impact on him. He was a strong advocate for increasing Muslim women access to education and their participation in electoral politics. Gumi translated the Quran into Hausa.

Sheik Gumi was an equally effective organizer. From his own biography – *Where I stand* - comes the following extract, a glimpse into activities in post-independence Nigeria, and a revelation of his powers of mobilization and influence at

the very pinnacle of Nigeria's policy makers and executors. The Sardauna mentioned in the following quote was the Sardauna of Sokoto, the first premier of the Northern Region of Nigeria who also claimed direct descent from the noted Jihadist, Uthman dan Fodio, a remarkable figure in Nigerian history who had once sworn to dip the Quran in the Atlantic – that is, march all the way down south of present-day Nigeria, islamizing the nation all the way, and by force of arms. From Gumi's biography:

“I discussed it with the Sardauna, and he accepted that there was the need for a more formal organization to handle the matter. This was when we decided to sound out the opinion of some Muslims living in Kaduna. Eventually the meeting prepared the brief agenda. Present at first meeting were the Premier, Ali Akilu, Ahmed Talib, Ahmed Joda, Armita'u Katsina and many others, including virtually all the Muslim Permanent Secretaries in the government. It was strictly voluntary though, and a few did actually withdraw from the group later. We discussed at length the problem of teaching converts in this country and those who wanted to learn about Islam, because there were no qualified teachers or any serious organisation they could turn to for help. Finally, we all agreed to set up an association to render this type of assistance. --- Mallam Abubakar Imam suggested that it should also include our objective, so it was better to call it 'Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), to which we agreed.”<sup>1</sup>

This was the level of ideological pedigree to which Muhammad Yusuf and his gang aspired but for which they were completely intellectually unequipped – and the response of Nigerians, in the main, was to let them understand that there was a qualitative difference, that a fowl may be feathered, it is not the same as the contemplative owl. The name 'Boko Haram' was more befitting Mohammed Yusuf and this gang of psychopaths, and it has stuck. So, once again, have they.

And yet the irony remained - the leaders among these latter progeny were products of the very system they were indoctrinated to despise – in Northern Nigeria most conspicuously – and came to view the very existence of the state as enemy of islam. Much of the so-called radicalization of such moslem leaders took place within the universities, just as is being uncovered among universities in the very heart of Britain, France and increasingly the United States. Let us not underestimate the power of that Academy of the Air – the internet. There was nothing surreptitious about the Nigerian instance however – it was an open doctrine – the repudiation of

state and society - that stood at the foundation of the Nigerian islamist movement, and it was propagated within and under the protection of the university system itself. Its periodic manifestations are captured in the reports of tribunals such as the one that sat after student engendered riots in the city of Kano. An extract from that report paints the picture and delivers its intrinsic warning that was only partially heeded:

“On 29th September, 1980, M.S.S. (Muslim Students Society) Students in ABU destroyed many alcoholic drinks at a kiosk on the campus. The most militant of the M.S.S. members would appear to be its Deputy Chairman, Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, who was expelled from ABU Zaria on 14th December, 1979, for his role in fomenting M.S.S. unrest on the campus. El-Zakzaky was the brain behind a demonstration in Zaria by M.S.S. members on 4th May, 1980, when ten bus-loads of the members drove round the city with the following inscriptions in the buses :- (a) 'Down with the Nigerian Constitution; and (b) 'Islam only.' On 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1980, El-Zakzaky was reported to be circulating in the Northern States, pamphlets captioned, "Fadakarwa ga Musulmin Nigeria" (Calling on Moslems in Nigeria") in which he condemned the Nigerian Constitution for being anti-Islamic, called for an Islamic revolution, and urged Islamic students to rise against the Federal Government. He also demanded the recognition of the Sharia Law. El-Zakzaky is reported to have visited on several occasions, and he recently returned from Iran where he was said to have received training in planning and executing students' unrest.”

These are the early actualizing forces of Gumi's "Christianity is nothing". There were arrests, even some semblance of a trial, but it did not take long for El-Zakzaky and his followers to be back in circulation. We must make it clear however that, violent though Gumi's language was, and provocative in the extreme - both in his writings and preaching for islamic renewal, it is not recorded anywhere that he was an advocate of actual violence against the state or unbelievers. I am not sufficiently knowledgeable - nor is it of any real relevance to this discourse - to track through the movements of the various schools of islamic thought that fought for supremacy among one another, especially during the immediate post-independence period - the nineteen sixties. My interest has mostly lain within the phenomenon of insidious domination - by which I mean, that compulsive temper in a part of society to soften up the rest for eventual outright subjugation, resorting where necessary to the shock tactics of unanticipated violence, confining the privilege of choice in spiritual



matters to their limited coterie, and simultaneously building up a protective carapace around themselves – no matter with what material – secular, theocratic, or simply cultic, like the military - in order to render them unanswerable to the rest of society, no matter the degree of criminality or outrage. In short, build up a cult of immunity around themselves

“Renewal” is a common feature of most religions, and islam is no exception. Those who are interested in the internal schisms within islam however will discover that the more pacific, non-political side of islam as represented by the mystic temper of Sufism has been prominently in deadly conflict with the rest, as generally identified with the Shiites, Sunnis, the Wahabis and others. The most aggressive tend to be the most conservative, whose interpretation of ‘renewal’ has always favoured ‘a return to basics, or simply call it – fundamentalism. The geography of catchment for that tendency in Nigeria appears to have centred among the Kanuri in northern Nigeria, largely through the preaching of a Sheik Ismaila Idris bin Zakariya, a sympathizer – if not exactly a formal disciple - of Sheik Gumi. Gumi’s influence was at its peak in the years that followed Nigerian Independence, fostered by his title of Grand Vizier of Northern Nigeria. Opinion has it that this influence waned after that title was abolished in 1967 – but by then, he had his own following, and his gospel had been carried into neighbouring countries – Chad, Niger, and Cameroons – wherever the Kanuri were to be found.

It is generally accepted within Nigeria that Mohammed Yusuf, founder of Boko Haram, came under the influence of a Sheik Jaf’ar Mahmoud Adam, whose base was the Indimi mosque, a Wahabi stronghold. The control of mosques has proved a perennial trigger for violent internal wars within islam, since leadership at Friday prayers offered enormous control over the moslem populace in any zone of contention. One feature was common to all: the need to engage in islamic renewal wherever islam spread its wings and to engage not only in conversion, but ensure that local impurities did not penetrate islam through the cultural and religious retentions of the autochthones, or through foreign intruders such as the christians. Perhaps this explains the ferocity with which even minor differences in rituals – or their omission - in islamic practice took on such dimensions. Those who wish to

place the internal dynamics of islam in an easily digested capsule, especially insofar as it impacted on followers, can do worse than regard that religion as shaped – especially in its impact on overall society - by a perennial tussle between the two major tendencies of the *tajdid* or - renewal. For one side, it meant going back to basics – or fundamentalism (conservatism), and the other, a progression that takes into account the dynamic effects of a changing world. Sheik Gumi's international recognition in 1987 – as laureate of the King Faisal's Foundation - belonged to the former category of Islamic Renewal – the conservative tendency. Mohammed Yusuf's eventual rupture with his mentor, Sheik Jafaar was based on his dissatisfaction with the tempo and limitations of Jafaar's approach to the mission of renewal. For Yusuf, renewal implied a commitment to overturning the state completely and subjecting its governance to his brand of islam in all ramifications. For that purpose, the instrumentality of violence, including the killing of unbelievers, was a divinely sanctioned imperative. He began to forge local alliances with political figures for that single-minded cause: to turn the nation into an islamic state that was governed by the laws of the shar'ia

Who sought out whom, offering his services, we do not know exactly, and let me mention that the following account is vigorously denied by the survivor of that unholy alliance, even as recently as two weeks ago, when I joined other voices in demanding his arrest and trial. That principal accused is one Ali Modu Sheriff, the former governor of Borno State, who was seeking re-election in the 2007 governorship elections. He came together with Yusuf - who by then had begun to earn a reputation for violence - to launch a programme of intimidation and religion motivated harassment. Yusuf's mentor, Jafaar, tried to rein him in, to get him to sever his involvement in partisan politics. He failed, and the two parted company. In the end, Ja'afar also paid with his life, assassinated in his mosque as he prepared to denounce Yusuf during his Friday sermon. It was too late. Creating a state within the state had already become an obsession with Yusuf as he moved to attack and take over police stations. Within civic society, attacks on non-islamic institutions had commenced – Boko Haram began to live up to its designation – Western education is anathema, the book is profanity.

The targeting of learning institutions became more and more ruthless and systematic. First, it was tertiary institutions. The Christian chapels in universities were attacked during worship. Then threats, followed by arson, to the institutions themselves. The University of Maiduguri in Borno state was attacked, and eventually closed down. There was no shortage of public warnings, demands for urgent action. Boko Haram was still weak, sporadic and disorganized, its arsenal largely home-made, its targets random. In a lecture at the University of Calabar in 2007, I drew the attention of the government to the example of President Lyndon Johnson who mobilized the National Guard to escort one black girl to school – if such “affirmative action” could be taken in a country that was still largely racist, I urged, there was no reason why a nation like Nigeria, survivor of a civil war, a nation that won plaudits in several United Nations peacekeeping missions, could not pick up the gauntlet and protect its institutions – especially at that stage.

The reign of impunity had begun however, eye on elections, the reluctance to offend a religious section of the populace, some of whose influential leaders were clearly – at the very least, and at the outset – sympathetic to the Boko Haram, even in its now undeniable infliction of violence on society. Escalation of atrocities had become routine. Boko Haram was no longer settled in the peripheries of society but was infiltrating, settling in villages and towns. It was developing a network of spies. Safe houses were being established in the heart of the cities and the tactics of hostage taking – easy targets such as foreign construction workers etc.- had been embarked upon. Learning institutions remained primary targets however – from kindergaten to tertiary institutions. A boarding house in a College of Technology was invaded at night. The attackers came armed with a list from which they began to call out names – clearly supplied from within. In ones, twos and threes, those listed – all non-moslems - were called out, shot, knifed, clobbered to death. Throats were routinely slit.

Yes, at that early stage, the victims were virtually all non-moslems. That stage was soon by-passed. The mission of “renewal” required that even moslems should be seen to conform to Yusuf’s vision of a pure islam, thus earlier immunity through religious attestation dissipated in the frenzy of killings. Among those who rejoiced at

those increasing bouts of religious cleansing are those who later became casualties, as the mesh of impurity became narrower, and narrower, and the politics of terror assumed supremacy over any catechisms of attestation. Many erstwhile collaborators, young and old, of whatever religious persuasion, have today become victims of terror. Indeed their ranks have leap-frogged those of 'infidels' in the statistics of casualties. Their leaders, those who unleashed the monstrosity on society today seek protection of that same state whose very existence that they once professed to despise, since the state was infidel. Some of them, notable names, have become card-carrying members of the ruling party both for self-protection and to earn immunity from prosecution. However, Boko Haram still claim to have followership – and so they are considered assets for coming elections. A desperate state, with an eye on election time, welcomes them with open arms, no matter how elbow deep their arms in the sump of innocent blood. Such are the wages of impunity.

General Buhari, a controversial former Head of State whose earlier stint as a military Head of State, together with his deputy, Tunde Idiagbon, is sometimes referred to as the reign of the Iron Duo, has lately, and unbelievably, become a passionate and active advocate for, and participant in the democratic process. Yet at the inception of the Boko Haram's campaign of selective murders, under the rule of President Goodluck Jonathan, that retired general and aspiring civilian president announced that "any attack on Boko Haram would be regarded as an attack on the North", thus providing that lackadaisical ruler, Jonathan, the perfect justification for doing nothing, and for doing even that with the utmost nonchalance. It took a narrow escape from an assassination attempt on Buhari, an attempt in which he was covered in the blood of his security detail – who lost his life in the attempt – that he belatedly came to accept the comprehensiveness of Shekau in his mission of "renewal". The palace of the Emir of Kano, perhaps the most prominent custodian of the tenets of islam, had also undergone its baptism of fire. The Emir – who is one of the most progressive northern islamic leaders – was away from the country at the time, but his palace guards resisted and suffered casualties. Yusuf was taking no prisoners – for him, renewal meant no less than the crucible of fire and blood. And yet another

northern radical, a former governor of Kaduna state and even self-styled Marxist, also fell prey to a superficial reading of the enemy as he once approvingly declared: “if Boko Haram means fighting for justice, we are all Boko Haram”.

The conversion of Buhari, was however of the most significance– obviously, as a former head of state, and later as a democratically elected leader, a moslem, and not only from the beleaguered North, but a Fulani, Buhari was also the dictator who set an unsavory precedent in Nigeria for executing three Nigerians under a retroactive decree, about which he remained largely unrepentant. They were convicted of drug trafficking, but the law that made this a capital offence did not exist at the time that the offence was committed. Buhari had also acquired – unfairly perhaps, in my estimation – the reputation of being on the fanatic side, a reputation earned perhaps from some ambiguous statements and actions while in power.

Against such however must be weighed his refusal to drag Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Councils despite the negotiations that had taken place behind his back by some dedicated agents of the islamization agenda within the Foreign Service – unquestionably insiders for the Gumi agenda. Buhari simply pushed the papers aside, declaring that he was not about to plunge the nation into a needless crisis. I have been a steady critic of Buhari on many counts, including the earlier mentioned act of judicial murders but, that refusal to formally islamize the nation through membership of an islamic organization has to count in his favour. The protocols of Nigeria’s dubious membership would eventually be signed by his successor, Ibrahim Babangida, an urbane, seemingly “detrified” politician, and kept secret from the nation. When the news broke, his explanation was that the nation did not have full membership but had only accepted given observer status. The difference between six and half a dozen remains one that the nation is still trying to resolve, as various aspects of collaboration, horse trading for committee positions and joint ventures emerge periodically, almost as if in measured trickles.

Back to Buhari however, who has stood election for the presidency four times already and is apparently gearing up for another bout. In one of his recent interviews, he was asked the question that is paramount on the minds of all Nigerians and certainly preoccupies many external observers: What are your plans

for dealing with Boko Haram if you succeed in being elected? His reply has become consistent of late, unsparing in condemnation. Boko Haram was a creation of the culture of impunity, he asserted. If severe and instant action had been taken against the perpetrators of those crimes, it would not have become the problem it is today. Reinforcing that position our dour, born-again democrat stressed:

“When this question of Boko Haram started, I’m sure it was on record that the first statement I made about 18 months ago; I said no religion advocates what is happening. So, basically, it is no case of religion; it is neither ethnic, when they kill children in schools in the Northeast, they kill teachers, they burn churches, they burn mosques, they burn motor parks, they burn markets. Where is religion there? Where is ethnicity there? This is terrorism and I hope the government will come to grip with it.

Impunity of course takes many more forms than is often considered. It is also not exclusively engendered from within. What primarily appalls one’s humane sensibilities has been naturally, the thirst for slaughter, often of the most sadistic nature, but the excusing that follows atrocities evokes a special kind of rage. It is useful to recall, in this connection, the butchery that followed the attempted visit of a German evangelist, one Dr. Bonke, to Northern Nigeria, three decades at least before the appearance of Boko Haram, but within the time orbit of Sheik Gumi’s magisterial pronouncement – Christianity is Nothing. The intensity of one’s rage at the killings, including of children in kindergarten schools, becomes subdued under the construction of an enabling environment of impunity through the pronouncements of a school of external liberal observers, ever ready to excuse the inexcusable. “Rev. Bonke had been provocative” such voices commented, *“why did he take his christian mission to the North, knowing that this was a predominantly moslem region. Only an insensitive person would do that. It was all part of western insensitivity and arrogance.* And a lot more in that vein. Nigeria was, and still is, a multi-religious nation, whose constitution not merely enshrines the rights of her citizens to believe or not believe, to practice or not practice their religion. And of course, I asked the question – in the land of the Vatican, the seat of the Supreme Pontiff of Christendom,

do you, or do you not safeguard other religions – such as Islam – the right of existence? Does the largest mosque in Europe not dominate the Roman landscape?

Impunity is not limited to discrimination in structures, alas. it represents a state of mind, often carefully inculcated. It involves an overt softening up the terrain, capturing territory and advancing even further, cultivating an artificial hyper-sensitivity in which any act can be made an instant offence that results in deadly, instigated riots. My mind goes , for instance, to a wasted journey between Los Angeles and Kano to deliver a lecture at the invitation of a governor of Kano State and later presidential candidate, Sheharau, now a Minister in President Jonathan's cabinet. I landed in Lagos only to find that the event had been canceled. Reason? A teacher had set his pupils the task of writing an essay on the life of the Prophet Mohammed. One of those pupils had gone further and accompanied his essay with a portrait, envisioning what the Prophet must have looked like. Impressed, the teacher passed it round the class. On returning home another pupil reported the 'sacrilege' to his parents – as you probably know, creating a likeness of the prophet is forbidden in islam. The following day that parent gathered a mob and went after the teacher.

I returned to Los Angeles without ever delivering that lecture. The governor, of a progressive cast of mind, had immediately canceled all his engagements, visited the scene and quelled a riot that had already claimed several non-moslem lives and saw the destruction of public buildings, including the police station where the teacher had taken refuge. To consolidate his intervention, Shekarau set a leadership example by joining christians to worship in their church. His was indeed a rare example. By contrast, you may wish to look out for the name Akaluka under the dictator Sanni Abacha. Akaluka was beheaded and the severed head was paraded through the streets of Kaduna in broad daylight. He was not even the one alleged to have desecrated the pages of the Koran but his brother. Look out for numerous other names, such as Oluwatosin, an invigilator in national exams, whose candidates accused her also of desecrating the Koran. How did she do this? She confiscated copies from cheating students in a Religious Knowledge examination. She had similarly seized bibles from other delinquent candidates. Beaten, stripped naked,

'necklaced' with a vehicle tyre, she was set ablaze. Of these and hundreds of other cases, rarely was an arrest made, and even in those exceptions, the cases simply petered off.

However, as the Yoruba proverb goes: *melo melo la nka l'eying adepele* – it means, how many teeth does one count in the multiple layers of dental deformity? The sad fact is the failure to make a connection, to understand that one pronouncement in the encouragement of impunity is all it takes to create a ripple that separates communities and designates one side as permanent victim and the other aggressor with or without a cause. Just as few minds succeed in making a connection between the Ayatollah Khomeini's annunciation of a death *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for allegedly insulting islam through his work *Satanic Verses*, even so, in a smaller pond does a declaration such as *Christianity is Nothing* by a muslim scholar constitute a call to mayhem, trigger off sanguinary ripples in normally placid backwaters where grievances, even where genuine, were formerly settled through recourse to law or through traditional methods of conflict resolution. *Empowerment* is the word that answers the phenomenon, empowerment of a negative coloration, which eventually becomes structured and predatory, constantly on the lookout for victims. Sooner or later it is no longer satisfied with identification of the enemy as external – that is, outside the privileged community - but most especially as internal. Already armed by the acquired authority of an open, unpunished language of provocation, it assigns itself the role of purifier. Into this conglomeration of eager hands steps the neat, calculating manipulator in whose hands the "unwashed masses" become putty – but putty not as a children's plaything but as in Semtex. They are featureless as is putty, mentally washed clean of individuation, fearless because they envisage no consequence, no one to hold to account since their mentors themselves walk the streets, free. And so the foot soldiers are ready to be used. They are the ones who are gathered together in a trice, placed in a bus and transported to commence slaughter and mayhem even a hundred miles away.,

The figures are numbing, the statistics of organized death simply addle the mind until it seizes up. Just one more instance - a reminder of perhaps the most grotesque assault on society which, on account of its international context, attained



global notoriety. The international beauty contest was brought to Nigeria, a Grand Spectacular that – just as a footnote – had the wife of the then Head of State as one of the business sponsors on some level or the other. It did not save this intended show that was billed to confer an international entertainment status to Abuja, Nigeria’s own Brasilia that was conceived – or misconceived - and built as a national symbol of unity, to underline the nation’s commitment to the principle of “unity in diversity”, the diversity especially of ethnicities, cultures and faiths. Some moslem leaders raised their voices in protest, swore that the contest would not take place. It did not. The extremist shock squads saw to that. It was too good an opportunity to soften up the ground a bit more in the overall vision of placing a nation under religious submission.

The raiders came from outside, organized by the fanatical leaders. Over four hundred people lost their lives in the capital city of Abuja, the seat of government. The most popular markets in Garki, the commercial sector, was gutted and goods destroyed in millions on millions. The nation’s capital was placed under siege. No one, to the best of my knowledge was ever placed on trial. As usual, the event was not without rationalization by the cultural guardians of Africa’s pristine existence: *aping of decadent western life-styles, that is where it all leads*. I was obliged to educate such voices on the existence of beauty parades in African pre-colonial societies, including even what I refer to as the male ‘peacock rituals’ where men parade themselves and dance in courtship rituals, with an audience of marriageable females.

And then – could we have forgotten so soon perhaps? - just when the nation was licking its wounds, the mayhem dying down, a female journalist expressed her disgust at the wanton killings in the unlucky words: “What is all the fuss about? Why the hypocrisy? If Prophet Mohammed were alive, he would have taken one of more of those beauties to wife”. That commentary took the imbroglio to a different level altogether, and introduces us to an individual I have conveniently elected as our prime embodiment and calculating beneficiary of impunity of the Nigerian culture of impunity - and one with a long hidden history in the trajectory of the extremist agenda.

That comment by the journalist, declared the governor of a Northern state, Zamfara, - his deputy, if we must be punctilious, the substantive governor being then absent - was a capital offence. The girl has insulted the revered prophet and she deserved the ultimate sanction - death. He promptly issued a killing fatwa - Death to the journalist! The journal's offices were burnt to the ground, the staff considering themselves to have escaped with their lives. The substantive governor could not wait to reinforce the sentence the moment he touched ground after his - presumably - devotional rounds of the pubescent flesh-pots of Europe and Asia. It was the duty of all true moslems everywhere to kill this young journalist, he elaborated. Of course this was accompanied by a number of sympathy bonfires and casual to organized slaughters in various parts of the islamic north.

This criminal incitement to murder was followed by a visit of appeasement to the moslem stronghold institutions and leaders in the North by the then Nigerian Head of State. Not even one word of rebuke of the incendiary and homicidal statements of that governor by the central government nor a reminder that, as the custodian of Nigerian laws and constitution, he could not stand aside and let the crime of incitement to murder of a citizen under his mandatory protection pass unchallenged.

Now, Nigerian state governors enjoy a constitutional immunity while in office, but not once outside office, as some have learnt to their cost, including one - a governor of Delta State who, after giving the law enforcement agencies the run around for months immediately after leaving office, including a physical standoff with security agencies that lasted days, plus a stint under the protection of the Dubai government, finally succumbed to the dogged pursuit of an organization known as the EFCC - the Economic Fraud and something Commission. First of all, that immunity clause was a blot on the Nigerian constitution, and its deletion was one of the recommendations of the recently concluded sittings of the National Conference - one can only hope that it will be adopted by the National Assembly. I have no doubt in my mind that if those recommendations are subjected to a National referendum for a constitutional amendment, or for a virtually new and authentic people's constitution, they will be overwhelmingly adopted. This leads to the relevant

question: why, after leaving office, was the governor not prosecuted? Under Nigerian laws, incitement to murder – as was abundantly pointed out at the time, is a criminal offence. Now, suppose that young woman had not been successfully whisked out of the country and had indeed been assassinated by a faithful dacoit of Governor Ahmed Yerimah and his deputy, would the murderer remain covered also by the immunity clause extended to his instigator?

Perhaps such processes are fraught with complications? Then there is an even simpler, less contentious, supercilious and law disdainful episode. If you wish to capture, in one single event, the comprehensive face of impunity in recent Nigerian experience, all you have to do is re-visit the early days of Boko Haram when killings were still limited to the occasional ambush of teachers and pupils, probing attacks on educational institutions, and the tossing of home-made explosive devises into homes and hotel bars, with terrorist locomotion limited to commercial motor-cycles – in short, long before the Hilux vans captured from police patrols and armoured vehicles from the army became the daunting trade marks of Boko Haram. Security forces made early strides, were able to pin-point the highly placed sponsors and promoters of what was still at a rudimentary stage of insurrection - by global standards of proficiency and organization. Two of those apprehended were placed on trial – one a legislator, the other his low-echelon henchman. Every effort was made by some Northern elders, individually and collectively, to end the trial and have the legislator released. The police adamantly refused. Several statements emerged from the worthies, urging the government to terminate the trial in the interest of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘reduction of tensions.’ The Justice department persisted in the cause of justice.

Just as was the case of Yusuf Mohammed where even the nation – and the world – is still fed a reductionist version of the extra judicial killing, turning Yusuf into a saint “more sinned against than sinning”, the elders put it about that it was the stubborn response of the government towards the trial that caused the escalation in terrorist pin-pricks. Their gleeful arrogance taunted the nation, mocked the dead and mutilated. When the President appealed to civic society for help in curtailing the campaign of violence, one of them, a former presidential aspirant, smugly declared:

“Well, we told you to terminate the criminal proceedings against so-and so, but you preferred to listen to other views. All right, go and solve the problem on your own.

It was a clear, derisive statement, implicit in self-indictment as accessories before and/or after the crime, a declaration of approval of actions that had destroyed lives and was strangulating society. It extended their own charter of immunity to the terrorizing agents, extended their licence to all comers to join and partake in the chalice of secret power. It would take a while yet, and the decimation of their ranks by the same Boko Haram, before a number of them realized that their cloak of impunity was not recognized by their erstwhile allies. They began to seek protection under the state against their protégés over whom they had lost control.

There are always bits and pieces of events lost in the quilt work of a peoples' history, fragments that seem insignificant but contribute to obtaining a full and clear picture of how a people come to be where they are. It is a pity that they are often lost for ever. However, here is one, for whatever value it may have for grasping the morphology of a trend, a pattern, a cumulative process that leads to disaster. Among the various viable dates that are often touted as the birthdate of Boko Haram in Nigeria, is the date on which one of the Nigerian states unilaterally declared itself an islamic theocracy within what is constitutionally a secular nation.

In making that declaration, shortly to be followed by eight others, that governor, on the surface of it, was merely fulfilling an electoral pledge. What, however, was the genesis of that promise? We all recall the destructive rule of one General Sanni Abacha. After his demise, and the return to democratic rule, there were, naturally, the coming together of diverse groupings in the search for a new political order. Meetings took place both within and outside the nation, many of them unpublicized. One such meeting took place between a sympathizer of our own opposition movement - the National Liberation Council of Nigeria and a hitherto unknown politician who claimed to be a disciple of the late Aminu Kano, a reputed moslem radical politician. His name - yes - that same Ahmed Yerimah, author of the killing fatwa against the young journalist.

That meeting, held at Yerimah's own instigation, held in Washington DC. Now he had already made it known that, on taking power in his state, Zamfara, he would institute governance by shari'a. Our sympathizer asked him why on earth he had chosen such a retrograde step – his reply was that the front-runner party was so deeply entrenched that he had to find something that appealed to the people's emotions. Unlike the rival party, he had no money to splash on the campaign, no 'bags of rice' to distribute, yet he had to match the war-chest of the other party in some way. Sharia was the only option. Sure enough, the ruling party, both in the federal unit and at the centre, already weakened by a reputation of corruption and resentment at its strong-arm tactics, lost to the dark horse in that election. Yerimah wasted no time in fulfilling his campaign promise.

What was baffling however was the pace and enthusiasm that he brought into the exercise, backing them up with rigorous steps to enforce even the trimmings of sharia laws. For instance, he ordered a whole fleet of buses to enforce the separation of the sexes in public transportation, created the notorious Hisbollah, a parallel police force, to ensure public morality, personally led the charge in raids on hotels and the exhibitionist destruction of alcoholic drinks etc. etc. Men were ordered to grow beards – or else! While the public was distracted with the show of religious enthusiasm, Yerimah proceeded to loot the treasury with such abandon that his became the first case-file to be presented to the president by the newly formed anti-corruption agency, the EFCC. That president shunted it aside, with the same calculated indifference as he had treated the even graver issue of the rampaging theocratic governance of a state.

And the presidential response? Complicity. A permissive inertia. But why? I leave the choice to you. Some insist that that president, Olusegun Obasanjo, was merely acting true to type, that he had always harboured a timidity towards the moslem north even during his first coming as a military ruler. An even more widely held view was that, even at that early stage, he was already planning to change the constitution to allow himself a third term in office and needed the complaisant support of a sufficient number of governors. What was undeniable was that the files on Yerimah's career of corruption are still gathering mould in the EFCC's office while

this governor grew bolder and bolder, raced up the rungs of impunity one after the other, until his final magnum opus when he breached the laws of both Nigeria, and a moslem state, Egypt, by importing an underage girl, still in school, for marriage. It was a repeat performance – his earlier wife being equally underage. The marriage was defiantly solemnized under the watchful eyes of the Grand Council of Imams and in spite of public and media outcry in the media. Condemnation came from a cross section of society - islamic jurists of both genders, versed in the laws of both islam and the Christian west. That outcry was provoked especially by the defiant attitude of the governor who took shelter under his recourse to islamic adhesion.

“I am a moslem and follow only the dictates of the Koran. What the Koran mandates me to do, I do. What it does not, I do not. Nowhere does the Koran forbid me to marry an eleven-year old girl.” And he added, for good measure a reminder that the Prophet Mohammed espoused the nine-year old Aisha, thus, he was only following the example of the holy prophet. The opposition – moslem leaders included – pointed out that the prophet only espoused the underage girl but did not consummate the marriage, whereas Yerimah, from all that could be deduced, did so. Yerimah, now a paid senator - that is, lawmaker in the senate of a supposedly religion neutral body, the Senate, added what he considers till today the last word, that final pronouncement being the credo now emblazoned in fire and blood on the banner of Boko Haram: “The Koran is superior to any man-made constitution”. And that includes whatever opportunist interpretations of its provisions are presented for self-exoneration.

The story is not ended – very much the contrary and may I earnestly stress that we are not really speaking here of any one individual in his own minuscule might of being but of a subterranean current that erodes the very foundations of society, trying to puzzle out not merely for how long, but how such subversive streams have coursed, undetected, merged into a powerful torrent only to erupt at a designated spot and sweep aside all lofty presumptions under a forcefulness that beggars the most dire anticipation. It is important that a people know what they are up against even if only to gauge, with reasonable accuracy, both the nature and the dimensions of a potentially destructive eruption for a nation, to know if they are

dealing with a singular phenomenon, of a mixture of several – narrow dogmatism, a psycho-pathology of hatred for those who are classified “other”, sheer political opportunism, material corruption that seeks cover under the permissiveness, the cupidity of others, or indeed simply of that understated, permanent dynamics of power and freedom. It would be pointless, indeed suicidal for any society if, for instance, such a society permitted itself the delusion of believing that a violent movement is born because of one single event – such as the much repeated injustice of the extra-judicial killing of one individual, which then turns his followers into slaving hounds of vengeance, blind to reason, blind even to the entitlement of others to their own fundamental modicum of justice – such as living to the fullness of life expectation without interruption by others in pursuit of *their* justice.

We must not thereby underrate genuine grievances against society, of a very real, near quantifiable reality of alienation that stems from economic disparities, the lack of social opportunities, marginalization, the arrogance of wealth that tolerates – indeed creates abject poverty in order to indulge the crudeness of ostentatious living, of social elitism, an indifference that often qualifies as a crime against humanity – all these, and a lot more, cultivate fields for the recruitment of the discontented, the foot soldiers to whom existence becomes meaningless, and is ultimately dignified only by a terminal act of vengeance on society, blind and directionless, only that final gesture of defiance in self-willed oblivion, no different from the slower immersion in alcohol and drugs. The incantation of remedial action through social measures is obviously a necessity, a reminder, but it remains incomplete without a penetration through to some beginnings, and this requires that we differentiate between, on the one hand, Osama bin Laden’s “transcendental flash”, his “moment of truth” that eventually evolved into delusions of omnipotence on the one hand and, on the other, the corrupt, decadent members of the same world of religious attestation, whose sole aim is the creation and sustenance of an environment of impunity in which their innermost cravings can be indulged – from paedophilia to mass slaughter. Both converge, sooner or later at the same point – they need each other – that point of convergence is one which society has no choice

but to adopt as the primary zone of attention for its own survival, where the only banner in view is then - let us not be squeamish about it - "Destroy or be destroyed".

We are all endangered when, as in the case of Boko Haram, we encounter reductionist salves such as "Boko Haram commenced life when its leader was extra-judicially killed, graduating, as has been the case, to: "This was a peaceful religious body which only asked to be left alone to follow its own spiritual truths". Suddenly forgotten are the prior exploits of Yusuf, some including the seizures of Christian families and congregations with knives at their throats and their one choice - conversion or - the knife. But now, revisionism at all levels, right before our eyes! Suddenly it is no longer a psychopath who was - unquestionably - murdered by state agencies, it was a saint and martyr. and society is then held to be paying full retribution for an undeniable crime. It was this attitude that led a former Head of State to pay a condolence visit to the family of the murdered man, to plead with his family to "forgive and forget", the so-called revenge killings having then attained the level of two digits. It was the convenience of such amnesia that led the state to organize so swiftly the conclusion of the case for unlawful killings, mounted with the aid of civil rights organizations. The legal suit against the state for this action for claims was heard in record time, by a magistrate specially flown in for that purpose. Damages were awarded within days - two or three, I forget now. The cheque was ready and was personally delivered by high-placed government emissaries with profuse apologies. Not a word about the survivors of the last rampage of Mohammed Yusuf during which a priest and his following were slaughtered - he had refused to convert, but urged his followers to do so and thus save their own lives. He died, singing the praises of his Christian god.

The fostering of the culture of impunity, as have observed, is not always internal. It is not always malign, but it remains dangerous and lamentable wherever external intervention lacks the in-depth and holistic knowledge of the affected terrain, its history and the sociologies of the parties in conflict. Such interventionists witness only the geyser-like eruption, totally miss the steady undercurrents that never undergo attrition. Thus, such porters of good intentions only end up acting against the interest of the assailed community, protect the interests of the powerful



against the powerless, the exploiters against the exploited, the bullies against the helpless, the conniving against the naive. They forget that the state is not always the Goliath of internal conflicts, nor the assailants the Davids. In any case, it is the humanity that gets hammered to a pulp between the two. From glib assurances on what a people, already prone under the ruthlessness of tyranny can tolerate, such interventionists move to an unintended, indeed unconscious allegiance to the side of power – in various forms. The language changes, but the incorrigibility remains the same. All the way from the horror days of the Idi Amins, the Bokassas, the Mobutu Sese Sekos, and now to the entrenchment of the borderless forces of religion inspired terror, their position seems to be summed up as: don't touch the bullies, you may end up worsening the condition of the victims. This gives joy, predictably, to the aggressors, and of course starves the victims of that assistance which, given the sometimes critical factor of timing – may have stemmed the tide of anomie at a yet manageable stage. They hand over tactical victory to inhuman forces. Those forces, on the other hand, count on the timorousness of the potential sources of assistance. They collaborate in the blocking if possible aid.

Don't forget, we have been here before, and not necessarily on the religious terrain. It was the acute observation of this form of mind-set among his own African American colleagues that pushed the journalist - of Washington Post - Keith Richburg off the deep end to the abyss of self-hatred in his memoirs "Out of Africa". He lashed out against his own race, appalled that its leadership seemed programmed against its own people, on their own soil, reducing them yet again to a people enslaved, marginalized and brutalized but this time, by their own people. At a time when the nature of Boko Haram had become totally unambiguous among our people, a time when, given the histories of such movements all over the world, including the United States itself with its lacerating memory of September 11, any informed scholar should not require to be told of the cross-border mobility and solidarity of impunity as a weapon of extremist forces, a time when any neophyte of history should be able to accurately divine the inevitable expansionism of even locally brewed movements of terror and its flow into the international arena, it was most disheartening to be confronted by a declaration by supposed Africa experts

against even the basic symbolic aid that a people required in their own self defence, and survival. I refer here to the response of those American scholars to a move by the American state department to designate Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organisation.

That document, the response of the scholars to the proposal, was a study in speciousness, and implicated outright permissiveness for the growth and expansion of Boko Haram, since the arguments proffered are ranged against crucial moves towards effective choices in its strategic containment. No one disputes that a number of the arguments espoused in that document are valid, nor denies the authors of the letter the fact that they do admit the viciousness of the enemy. My protest here is directed at the implicitly enabling summation of their position – enabling, that is, to the villains of the piece. Not surprisingly, they did succeed in restraining the hand of the State Department during a critical time that could only have profited the terrorists – it sounded the alarm, gave them time to re-group, vary and consolidate their own external alliances and resources, and exploit lines of recruitment and refurbishment which – arguably – sapped the morale of both governance and the immediate victims.

There is hardly any need to reiterate the following: the will of governance to resist a threat to its people should not depend on whether or not a toxic movement is declared a terrorist organization by a foreign government. My concern here is simply to track the tributaries, the contributions to the armory of impunity while the course of resistance is correspondingly enfeebled. Remember, we are not dealing here with just a rag-tag bunch of casual incendiaries and suicide bombers. We are dealing with the product of sophisticated minds, schooled not only in islamic disciplines but experienced in foreign diplomacy and the analysis of foreign policies. Here now are excerpts from their ‘special interest’ appeal:

As scholars with a special interest in Nigeria and broad expertise on African politics, we are writing to urge that you not designate Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). We are acutely aware of the horrific violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, including attacks on both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, whether government officials or civilian targets. We share your concerns about the impact of extremist violence on Nigeria’s democratic progress and security in general.

However an FTO designation would internationalize Boko Haram, legitimize abuses by Nigeria's security services, limit the State Department's latitude in shaping a long term strategy, and undermine the U.S. Government's ability to receive effective independent analysis from the region.

Permit me to observe that it is disingenuous to claim that an FTO designation "would internationalize Boko Haram", a terrorist movement that already had links with extremist movements all over the continent. By the time that the scholars' letter was written, Boko Haram operatives were already traveling to Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania, even Pakistan for training. Their mentors had links with the Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt. Our US scholars had clearly not done their home work. Or maybe it was the Boko Haram sponsors that had quietly, methodically cultivated a disinformation line. After all, containers of arms had already been seized by the Nigerian Customs and the arms smugglers put on trial. One of them holed up in the Iranian embassy until eventually extricated to stand trial through some convoluted arm-twisting. Recruitment was flowing in from Ghadaffi's stateless mercenaries, evicted since that dictator's ouster from power.

I also find this argument "abuse by Nigeria's security forces" not only speculative but ill invoked, given the notorious record of the United States police internally and military scandals wherever they have been stationed – Iraq most obviously. The argument is patronizing. It also dismisses the efforts of those very NGOs to expose the excesses and atrocities of the Nigerian security, reveals a one-sided pietism on behalf of Nigerian humanity. Finally, to claim that the designation of any organization impedes the collection of information by any external interest or organization is arrant nonsense. It places the Nigerian situation in a condition that simply does not, and cannot exist, betrays an *a priori* position into which non-existing and/or invalid arguments are then forced. As for preventing the State department, or any foreign desk from formulating a long-term strategy towards, or be rendered incapable of receiving reliable analysis from such zones of internal conflict, I think that the experts who man the desks for foreign affairs be provided a platform to confront these letter writers at an open debate. Again, the following:

The network's focus has been overwhelmingly domestic, despite an August 2011 attack on the United Nations office in Abuja.

Despite an attack on the United Nations office in Abuja? Just that? Like a minor harassment incident? This comment refers, not to an accident, not what is known as collateral damage but to a pre-planned attack on a carefully chosen target, timed to ensure maximum fatalities among workers – in which it succeeded! Such an attack was meant to send a message. Addressed to who? To a domestic audience? A village gathering? Curiously however, the academics go on to make a contradicting concession:

Boko Haram's recent tactics, including the use of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices, raise questions about their foreign links.

Strange. Very strange. So what is there left to “internationalize”? Here is another “argument”, in condemnation of the counter-productive activities of that entity repeatedly at its wit's end from being the “receiving end” – the formal state but, more importantly, the humanity trapped within the state:

There is already evidence that abuses by Nigeria's security services have facilitated radical recruitment. This was made unequivocally clear in 2009 following the extrajudicial murder of Mohammed Yusuf, which was broadcast across the internet. That incident was immediately followed by Boko Haram's radicalization, splintering, and increased propensity for large scale violence. Moreover, the routine use of the military for domestic law enforcement is a cause for alarm in a country with a deep history of military rule, and where formal declarations of states of emergency have historically led to broader political instability.

I have already dealt with the record of the killer Mohammed Yusuf, and the ramifications of his own killing, plus the trendy revisionism by such advocates in their efforts to turn Mr. Yusuf into a saint, more sinned against than sinning. Two further observations are called for here. One: in volatile situations, it is not unusual to involve the military in policing duties, including the protection of embassies. In Nigeria, the police have been outgunned, outnumbered and outwitted routinely – armed robbers, kidnappers, ritual killers etc. etc., thus the military have become part and parcel of Nigerian civic life. Of course, we are all agreed, this is not an ideal situation and that qualification “routinely” is well inserted. It acknowledges a

readiness to concede the intrusion of non-routine conditions. However one finds it curious that in a situation of entrenched terrorism, one that involves a brazen attack even of the nation's police headquarters, an impartial observer would decide that the police on their own are capable of stemming the ruthless forces of modern jihadism.

There is neither time nor space here to indulge that letter in the detailed analysis that its very emission – not even its arguments – deserves. I have evoked it because it should be understood that such documents develop a life of their own, guaranteed to gladden the hearts of the very enemies of humanity. Their leaders are not fools. Some of them actually *think*, believe it or not. They study trends, they gauge their next moves sometimes by their reading of tea leaves left behind after the pronouncement of foreign governments. No one quarrels, objectively, with the combination of dialogue and resistance, no one rejects the “carrot” strategy even on its own, as long as it does not entail abject appeasement, which is the prelude to the entrenchment of the culture of impunity. Quite a number of national leaders, in executive governance, legislatures and in the private sector, as well as external negotiators have sought to ‘dialogue’ with Boko Haram, right from the very earliest salvos of violent and arrogant intent, some even at the risk of their lives. The letter from US academe is obviously not without merit, and is without any taint of self-interest. Some of the signatories are even personal friends, respected, with whom I have interacted in the line of fire. The tenor of such letters however, is simply not in the interest of a beleaguered people. The Yoruba people have a proverb – *Orisa, bi o ko le gba mi, fi mi s’ile b’o ti ba mi* – Dear deity, if you cannot come to my aid, at least leave me stuck to our place of encounter:

Just one last, irresistible quote:

“ Less attention has been brought to the damage that this system does to academic inquiry more generally. An FTO designation would prevent independent scholarly inquiry about Boko Haram, and increase suspicion in the future about researchers with no governmental ties. Public policy benefits from dialogue with public scholars, and an FTO designation would effectively criminalize broad categories of research.

I am not given much to swearing, but when I encountered that last argument offered

in all seriousness to a situation such as we had already begun to endure in the season of Boko Haram.....well, let's just say that sometimes, it is a relief to be stricken speechless.

So finally, to that last piece in our jigsaw puzzle of our elected individual portrait of impunity, representative of the mould. No indeed, militant islam in Nigeria that gave rise to a singularly odious trend known as Boko Haram did not commence yesterday, or the year before. It preceded Mohammed Yusuf, predated his estranged mentor Sheik Jafa'ar, predated Sheik Gumi of the infamous "Christianity is Nothing" and its obvious complement – Islam is All. The violence of its extreme, unislamic agenda, increasingly barbaric and dehumanizing only followed a pattern that had become global legacy, nurtured by a complacent state of mind that, in the case of Nigeria, owed much to appeasement for short-term political gains, and opened wide the gates of impunity. So Here then is an excerpt from an interview with a recently retired Nigerian ambassador of some forty years service whose postings covered several islamic countries:

At that time also, Sanni Yerimah, former governor of Zamfara State was in Sudan for two weeks and underwent indoctrination. He was exposed to all the training camps of Osama Bin Laden, who was my neighbour. In fact, Osama Bin Laden's office in Sudan was just a few blocks away from our embassy. No report was made. Our embassy never reported Osama Bin Laden. In addition to having his headquarters in Sudan, Osama Bin Laden also had many firms and industries which he only used as a façade because he was actually using those firms as training camps for Al-Qaeda. Among his trainees were many Nigerians from the North. They would leave Nigeria as if they were going to study but were at the training camps of Osama Bin Laden. I got wind of all these things and told them, but my reports were dismissed. It was a policy of "see nothing, say nothing" because they were working for Muslims. They were not able to draw the line between Arabisation and Islamisation. What Sudan was practising was both Arabisation and Islamisation which led to the breakaway of the South from the North. That was the dangerous part of it, which was also my major concern. In fact, that was the main concern of Mo Ibrahim, the richest Sudanese. That's why it pained him seriously up till now that Sudan must not have divided just because of religion. And it's one of the reasons why he established the Mo Ibrahim prize. That is the motive behind the prize. Up till today, the man is still pained."

So is the nation called Nigeria – pained! So are its citizens. So are the families of the two hundred and fifty abducted children, brought together most conveniently

for mass enslavement. The stakes have risen as the ever present Boko Haram, sunken in Algeria, resurfaces in northern Nigeria. Dislodged in Somalia, erupts in Mali. Has anyone visited Niger lately? Does anyone read signs at all? Same agenda, only different vestments and names, under careful 'management' but with clear evidence of a creeping imperial Islamism.

The world appears to have awoken to the universal menace of a virulent fanatic disposition that merely hides under the cloak of a religious propagation, and even the true, islamic nations ultimately acknowledge the danger to their very existence of a Frankenstein that has run amock, has appropriated their identity in global recognition and daily violate their own Scriptures. It is a sad, belated awakening. However, somewhere among the hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed, I am sure there is a sura that reads: *Better late than never.*

Wole SOYINKA

They further argued-Professor Galadanci (w.52)- Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki (w.39) and Mr. Alhaji M. Gumi (W. 40)- that although the Constitution allows a man to practice whatever religion he chooses, this presupposes also an acceptance of the existence of certain universal but immutable tenets of religion practiced by the majority, particularly in the Islamic faith. That indeed the proponents of changes, innovations or variations must treat those principles with reverence and not desecrate them by either introducing wrong interpretations or additions 'nor by the creation of new "Prophets of their own." If they do any of these things which offend against the religious susceptibilities of the majority, Professor Galadanci stated bluntly that "they should be stopped by Government or the Law enforcement agencies."