CHAPTER 15

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

An Animist Critique of Neoliberalism's Ideology of 'Extremism'

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

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

This chapter presents an animist critique of contemporary neoliberal theories of 'extremism'. Loperfido (2022) conceives 'extremisms' to be produced as marginal spaces by a centre that defines this marginality as threatening to its very existence. The Nigerian state defines Boko Haram as a 'far-right' terrorist insurgency against the secular, sovereign nation-state. Yet, applying the Kapferers' (this volume) more general insights, it is conceivable that the jihadist group's fundamentalist war against the Nigerian 'infidel' state generates in quid pro quo mode the military's extreme violence towards all 'barbarian' combatants and unarmed civilians – and vice versa. Not only does Amnesty International (Thurston 2018) document how jihadists *and* the Nigerian state's armed forces commit crimes against humanity. Importantly, an

animist approach enables us to appreciate the extent to which these crimes kill human beings as bodies *and* as socio-spiritual persons, making them incomplete, spiritually dead, unable to enter into liminal transition from former pre-destruction personhood into becoming a different whilst somewhat similar person.

Various writers and researchers have documented how African and Euro-American military, financial and political interests have benefited from destructive civil and religious wars (Ellis 1995a,b, 2016; Reno 1998; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999). In my view, wars invoking the divine are especially effective in masking the postcolonial capitalist state's real agenda (Ifeka 2010). That is, the African ruling class belief that when 'brigands', 'bandits' and 'jihadists' threaten the state's control over its sovereign borders, elites are entitled to 'protect' people by seizing (lower class) 'illiterate' people's land, forests and pristine rivers as well as their cultural knowledge. Nigerian and other African elites seek out 'strong' medicines to protect themselves from feared underclass anger when they thieve state and citizen-owned resources (Ifeka 2004, 2010). Underclasses, too, seek mystical protection by resorting to Pentecostalist night prayer vigils and/or customary animist rituals. The latter may involve shrine priests and herbalists using body parts ground into powder, blood sacrifice, secret songs, and dancing by spirit mediums whose invocations draw down strong spirit beings. Sacred shrines and fetish objects are known to have terrifying powers of destruction when they 'eat' human and animal flesh and drink sacrificial blood (Pietz 1995). These magical powers – like those of the Hausa *iskoki* god of thunder and war, Ra, or the very popular Yoruba god of war and iron, Ogun – can shield peasant farmers, traders, warriors and lowly administrators from death and disease (Greenberg 1946; Besmer 1983; Bayart 1993; Roschenthaler 2011). However, African underclasses in towns and rural areas continue to be forcibly alienated by capital from their customary rights to forests, lands, shrines, diamonds, gold, and primary food producing resources held largely in common. Dispossession on account of natural disaster (famine) or violent conflict means millions of civilians in war-impacted northern Nigeria, Cameroon, southern Niger and Chad go hungry (World Food Programme 2020). But alienation is also a breakdown in relations between human and spirit beings. Alienation can kill survivors unless they engage in rituals intended to overcome socio-spiritual separation (death) by making human-spirit relations complete.

In heirarchizing modes, African state and enemy insurgents kill rightless immiserated civilians with extremist and violent impunity: state and jihadist groups enjoy their own protection from powerful patrons, some of whom are positioned in the state as well as in illegal trafficking syndicates. Some Nigerian politicians of Christian and Muslim orientation are known to covertly 'sponsor' Islamist jihadist entities *and* 'Christian' or, at times, animist armed

groups (secret societies) engaging in violence for profit. Protection rackets are backed secretly by influential officials in the state police, military and judiciary. Appalling crimes against humanity, especially women and girls, continue to be committed by armies of the West African state *and* jihadist militias. But jihadist amirs or warrior commanders justify war against the Nigerian nation-state as a holy deed ordered by the one God (Allah). Their sacred purpose is to remove nation-state corruption, an immoral Western education system, and the infidels' persisting attachment to pagan gods of the multiple. In 2015, Boko Haram in Nigeria's north-east adopted the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria's black standard. On it is written in Arabic the Shahada or declaration of faith: 'There is no god but Allah. Mohammad is the messenger of Allah'.

Foucault (2003) reminds intellectuals that we have a duty to interrogate ideologies and practices of bio-power in order to establish power's real agenda for controlling a population. This chapter takes up the challenge. I expose differences between the state and extremist Islamists for the chimera they are. The state's ideological opposition between its political-military system and that of 'far-right' Islamist warriors hides from view manifold ways in which, in the chaos of destruction wrought by war, dispossessed survivors may experience multiple potencies encompassing and, in certain contexts, intermediating newly constructed-in-violence, emergently egalitarian relations with state foot soldiers and jihadist warriors. I will describe ways in which survivors of deadly attacks by jihadist groups, militias and, at times, soldiers of the state are thrown together in war's aftermath, identities and modes of being are forcibly jettisoned and broken apart, their once familiar selves and social statuses annihilated. Yet, in destruction's aftermath, universal, open to all, life-giving forces throw the more receptive into new socio-spiritual relations of being, while experiencing liminal mystical conditions of 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1979). As Kapferer (this volume) argues, dynamic processes in contexts of destruction propel people into liminal relations with other beings as they transition into becoming.

In what follows, I define violence as 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses' (Riches 1986). As noted by Bowman (2001), the act of violation breaks apart recipients' integrity as human beings, whether in contexts of war or peace. In the past decade, jihadist warfare has forcibly dispossessed millions of rural subaltern (underclass) family households in transborder war zones of the Lake Chad Basin ('Chadic') states – NE Nigeria, SE Niger Republic, SW Chad and NW Cameroon. Survivors have been brutally alienated from customary (non-capitalist) lands and natural resources held in common. Terrorist attacks uproot refugees forcibly from their village herbalist, shrine priest, protecting rituals and socially recognized positions in society. Clansfolk

thus experience forcible separation not only from their local church's pastor – and sometimes mosque imam – but also from their homelands where ancestral ghosts and spirit beings manifest when approached correctly in the customary ritual manner (Isichei 1982). In post-attack wastelands, army enclosed camps or charitable Christian/Muslim relief centres, survivors of all faiths and ethnicities seek out shrine priests, spirit mediums and herbalists (Debos 2012). Animist practitioners may provide mystical protection through blood sacrifices empowering medicated objects (fetishes) and spirit beings. Ritual relations convey divine sanctions authorizing respected social statuses, roles and identities. Priests of the Bori-Zar spirit possession cults, largely driven underground in urban and peri-urban areas of the Lake Chad Basin since the 1980s by fundamentalist agents of Salafism/Pentecostalism, are reportedly still active in some borderlands and beyond (cf. Masquelier 1994; MacEachern 2019).

Socio-political, Economic and Cultural Contexts

In the late nineteenth century, on the eve of European colonization, complex rituals in centralized black kingdoms and segmentary lineage societies centred on blood sacrifice to sacralizing spirits of earth, rivers and sky. Political power was enveloped by, and embedded in, the greater mystical powers of divinities, spirit beings and fertility gods, both male and female. Production on lands held in common by the clan or lineage was not in general for money. Meillassoux (1972) argued relations of production under the mystical protection of priests of the earth and lineage sustained the kingdom and smaller community's bio-spiritual reproduction of reciprocal, and thus potentially dangerous, relations between spirits and human beings. Energizing life forces could manifest in human, animal and spiritual forms, each one of which demonstrated their incompleteness (death) without the other. Law-making by family and clan heads, ancestral priests and chiefs always entailed consideration of what the ancestors, nature spirits and animals might require. At the time of Nigeria's colonization (1901), violent mystical sanctions requiring human or animal sacrifice enforced fear of, and respect for, the spirits of the earth and the ancestors in the patriarchal Muslim north and Christianizing south. As recorded by ethnographers (Talbot 1912; Frobenius 1913; Greenberg 1949; Smith Bowen 1954; Achebe 1958; Monfouga-Nicholas 1972) fear of 'spirits of the law' upheld social cohesion and ensured theft was rare indeed.

After colonization, and the formal abolition of slavery, individuals were forced to pay head tax. At times they were compelled by chiefs on the white man's payroll to perform forced labour on plantations or on road- and

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

Contemporary bourgeois ideology evinces one-track mentalities: rather than egalitarian and multiple, it constructs state power in verticalizing, mono-dimensional terms as secular – though authorized by the colonial/postcolonial Western state – non-partisan, and singular. This African model reflects the monocentric theological authority of the Christian god. Elected presidents, church bishops, even 'extremist' commanders to the political centre's far-left or far-right exercise heirarchizing power in the singular. This, however, is not true of non-capitalist cosmologies or subsistence economies exploited by and connected to capitalism, but not yet completely integrated everywhere. Customary egalitarian values of reciprocity, sharing and equality before sacred law are waning before the heirarchizing forces of competitive for-profit individualism. But there are still many subaltern communities and family households in some north Nigerian rural states (e.g. Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Yobe, Bornu, Zamfara, Plateau) where social relationships are variably influenced by norms inculcating in the young respect for clan rituals of communication and sacrifice to the multiple powers recognized as ancestors, gods of the land and sky (Isichei 1982; Echard 1992; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). These original ('indigenes') owners of the landed commons – many of whom in times of crisis are devotees of the One God's church or mosque as well as of multiple spirit beings – still uphold customary sanctions whose mystical attacks on wrongdoers are feared.

Verticalization of power and capital is a contemporary feature of both the Nigerian/Chadic state and the religious fundamentalist organizations the sovereign state defines as 'extremist'. Boko Haram is much discussed as a terrorist entity on the basis of barely credible and repeatedly recycled data. First, the group has not been analysed in regard to the civil war's impacts on reordering social relations and class divisions in Nigerian and Lake Chad Basin war zone populations. Little or no attention, other than that of Prieri and Zenn (2018) and a few francophone scholars (Debos 2012; Lombard 2016) is given to ways in which jihadist mujahideen warriors and Nigerian soldiers

(Muslim, Christian) are interpreting extreme violence. These men include those who draw on capitalist (the one God) and non-capitalist (multiple, animist) cosmologies. In doing so they are constructing a common culture of hybrid (intra-tribal) beliefs in multiple spirit beings, some of whom manifest in malevolent attacks by adult and child witches. Millions of Chadic state subalterns dispossessed by 'bandits', 'brigands', 'criminal gangs' and jihadists experience themselves enduring unending 'spiritual attack' erupting in mass poverty, extreme hunger, disease and death (Ellis 1995a, 1995b; Lombard 2016; MacEachern 2019). Most Western observers deny African people's very common belief that mystical assaults create spiritual insecurity causing disease, despair and death. Others insist, rather, that in north-east Nigeria all non-armed populations, especially women and children, live in a state of generalized 'civilian insecurity' on account of Islamist terrorism (Dowd and Drury 2017; Oriola 2017). Second, there are few explorations of similarities and differences in how the jihadist group's rhetoric of its sacred duty to kill the 'infidels' might or might not differ compared to the Nigerian or Cameroonian state's ideologies of righteous killing of (jihadist) 'barbarians' (Barkindo 2018). Finally, most scholars fail to situate Boko Haram analytically in relation to the civil war's restructuring of society in the north-east and further afield into two classes: that is, ruling and ruled groups intermediated by an insecure, shrinking bourgeoisie. These topics are discussed further below.

Until 2015, Boko Haram's full name was *Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad* (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad) (Thurston 2018). After giving allegiance (*bayat*) to Islamic State in 2015, the group was known for a couple of years as 'Islamic State in West Africa Province'. But the latter operates today as a separate entity from Boko Haram. I use the group's Hausa nickname 'Boko Haram' (Western education is sin), by which it continues to be known in northern Nigeria and neighbouring states. Scholarly writing on religious warfare in Nigeria's north-east, especially Borno state in the Lake Chad region, focuses on Boko Haram's organization, its 'mad' leader Amir Abubakar Shekau, and the Nigerian state's struggle to contain the perceived chaotic violence of jihadi warriors in Nigeria and across the West African Sahel (Zenn, Barkindo and Heras 2013; Barkindo 2016; Debos 2016).

Boko Haram certainly does not see its conception and practice of political power under the one God as similar to the Nigerian state's ideology and practice of political power. Viewed from Boko Haram's perspective, the Nigerian state – 'the tyrant' – and its security forces carry out acts of unparalleled illegitimate ferocity against the group's 'brothers in the Lord'. That is, commanders, mujahideen, wives, children, and other Salafist Muslims. But whether Christian or Muslim, subalterns do not call these massa-

cres violent religious extremism. They are not 'exposed', as Nigerians say, to the international and national political elite's concept of legitimate power and the illegitimacy of groups deemed to be 'far-right' or 'far-left' of the bourgeois state's political centre. Rural and peri-urban underclass and petit bourgeois subalterns include petty traders, farmers, fisherfolk, graziers, artisans, *mallams* (Qur'anic teachers), butchers and petty clerks. They are mostly unfamiliar with the manners and thinking of Western and Nigerian political elites. Subalterns' underclass position in the social formation is evident in their exclusion from positions in government from where they can struggle to carve out remunerative gatekeeper roles in state ministries. The latter hope to receive bountiful bribes from multinational corporations in exchange for securing lucrative state contracts. Unlike most subalterns, elite contacts mean gatekeeper notables may be familiar with English idioms used in international organizations' reports that Salafist 'religious extremists' forcibly violate people's basic human rights.

For Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, and several Malian Salafist groups, the West African postcolonial ('crusader') state is sinful and utterly illegitimate (Thurston 2016). All these groups invert the state's ideology of their 'criminality' so jihadists assume the righteous position of controllers of legitimate One God-sanctioned violence. In their view, it is the state and its armies who demonstrate their 'wildness' when massacring Muslims with illegitimate killing force. On the other hand, the Nigerian and Chadian armies slaughtered up to four thousand innocent civilians, including babies and small children, when, in 2015, they recaptured Gwoza, the capital of Boko Haram's caliphate (Amnesty International 2020).

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

A Boko Haram mujahideen leader explained to the world in January 2015 why they massacred at least two thousand men, women and children in the town of Baga (Borno state, north-east Nigeria). The jihadist group slaughtered Baga folk because 'they are infidels . . . We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood . . . killing, slaughtering, destruction and bombings will be our religious duty anywhere we invade' (Adekunle 2015; McCoy 2015). Boko Haram declared via video link that the massacre was in God's name. Therefore, as Allah commands, the blood of the dead will cleanse and purify society of the sin of unbelief. Refusal to convert to Salafism is a symptom of society's and the state's collective sin. In their view, democracy, the state's constitution and Western education must be erased

because they represent and reproduce unbelief and social disorder. These polluting 'diseases' of a faithless society are synonymous with the chaotic polytheism of the multiple. In Allah's reported words, 'Disorder is worse than killing . . . kill them wherever you find them' (Qur'an 2:191).

Animist Practices of the Multiple

Political and military elites of both monotheistic religions are reluctant to admit they consult animist ('pagan') priestesses/priests and diviners for magical protection against jealous rivals' witchcraft. Many soldiers of the Nigerian state as well as Boko Haram's mujahideen buy magical charms that claim to protect the wearer from enemy bullets, witchcraft and sterility. Amulets placed under clothing directly against the skin give the believer the power of invisibility on the battlefield (Prieri and Zenn 2018: 651–60).

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

West Africa offers another perspective on the cleansing powers of the blood of sacrifice by mujahideen martyrs in Allah's name. Monotheist and polytheist foot soldiers and jihadists, as well as subaltern civilians and ruling elites, identify Boko Haram with mystical powers. These energies rush like the wind (*iskoki*) (Greenberg 1946; Masquelier 1994, 2001). In war zones they are even wilder, endangering but creating potencies from the blood of (human) sacrifice and wild slaughtering of 'enemy devils' (Kramer 1993; Ellis 1995a, 1995b; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004; McCoy 2015). Animist sensibilities are indicated in popular discourses about Boko Haram's proclaimed sovereignty of Nigeria's Sambisa Forest. This is a vast 'black' (spiritually dangerous) bushy space in the Adamawa mountain range, which divides Nigeria and Cameroon. Until recently, the group's long-term operational headquarters were located in Sambisa, as were some senior commanders and their families. Women and children cultivated small farms and livestock (Matfess 2017). Sambisa is physically and mystically on society's margins, long feared for its dangerous spirits and sorcerers. These are commonly symbolized as demons in snake form, as well as in the late Amir Shekau's bloody executions

of rebellious commanders. Their heads are impaled on posts in more populous, less bushy locations to deter others.

Liminal Zones, Child Witches and Child Soldiers

Victor Turner (1969, 1979) demonstrated in his classic analyses of Ndembu rituals how 'anti-structural' drives are produced in liminal marginal contexts. There, relational processes in practice oppose *and* support a political centre's reproduction as structurally dominant. In his Introduction to this volume, Kapferer's brilliant re-evaluation of Turner's conception of liminal and liminoid demonstrates how at a societal level 'anti-structural' and structuring drives simultaneously generate conflicting and dynamic processes of destruction and renewal. More locally and specifically, individuals dispossessed in civil wars of their homes, lands, livelihoods and families are no longer what they were as social persons; they are 'neither here nor there . . . betwixt and between', in socio-spiritual transition from having been someone (else) and towards the becoming (Turner 1969: 95; Turner 1979: 234).

Points where centres of political and religious power clash violently constitute liminal thresholds at which 'violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence' (Agamben 1998: 31). For Agamben, such thresholds constitute states of exception beyond the sovereign state's law. Terrified citizens are forcibly dispossessed of their social being, their roles, relations with others, and statuses as social persons in processes of dislocation from their families and loved ones. In transition from what was to what lies ahead, forced into becoming beings whom state and society stigmatize as refugees, homeless vagrants, beggars, petty criminals and 'bandits', these up-rooted/up-ended victims of war reject their transformation from persons of standing within society into liminal dehumanized beings commonly labelled 'outlaws' who live outside society with 'bad' spirits in 'bad' bush.

The Nigerian state's armies and jihadist militias violate daily the population's basic human rights. Both armed parties to the war have forced apart families, orphaned children, and burnt many alive. Mothers have lost children, husbands, and supporting aunts and uncles. These desperate and despairing women struggle to survive rape, enforced prostitution, severe hunger, loss of family members, accusations of witchcraft and death (Oriola 2017). Children who lose a surviving parent are forced to fend for themselves in war-zone wastelands; others are recruited or volunteer (for cash and food) to fight with small arms for Boko Haram. Some are used for their small size to go undercover where they can identify Nigerian army hideouts, roads along which convoys of food and military equipment will pass, and plan ambushes. Children are sent on highly risky journeys because they are

expendable and too numerous to be fed. However, soldiers and refugees may fear stranger children's potential malevolence and trickster tactics. Children emaciated and stunted from hunger look younger than their years. They may be perceived as still attached to spirit worlds where children await birth and rebirth; such children, however small, are mystically dangerous to the living and may be accused of witchcraft (Monfouga-Nicholas 1972).

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

Child witches and child soldiers carry different kinds of messages. The latter may convey messages along physical roads to army officers, big men in government offices, or wealthy traders asked to lend cash to customers or clients working for Boko Haram or Islamic State in West Africa Province. Child witches can help these child soldiers to complete their assignments. Child witches enlist the assistance of spirit beings tasked with deploying their divine violence against the Nigerian army. Child soldiers and witches are not necessarily exclusive (De Boeck 2004: 155; Geschiere 2013: 192–97; Falen 2018: 41–45).

Children are represented in animist thought as lacking strong socio-spiritual boundaries between human society and spirit worlds. A child witch may morph into the form of a child soldier, and vice versa. Their presence among humans is fluid and flexible, they come and go. Souls and spirit elements are popularly known among the southern Nigerian Igbo as *ogbanje*, and among the Yoruba as *abiku* (Ifeka 1962; Henderson 1972). Northern Nigerian Hausa people call such children *kurwa*, or *iskoki*. These soul substances are widely thought to be connected to spirits of the pre-born, the born, the dead and the yet to be born (Kramer 1993).

As Robert Brain (1970) reported in his classic study of child witches among the very rural and bushy Bangwa of the late 1960s, children may die in order to revive their relations with spirit children or they may transform into dangerous animals. Young boys and girls are therefore endowed, latently or manifestly, with occult ambiguous powers. In northern Nigerian war zones, child witches and soldiers mediate through their occult liminality. Thus endowed, they are thought to shape relations between human beings (state

armies/jihadi warriors) and the spirit world's fierce projection of divine, life-giving and destroying violence. It purifies and cleanses society of malevolent or polluting substances. The child's ambiguous nature is veiled from family and community until a mother's death or disappearance. If kidnapped or sighted as having been slaughtered on a killing field, messages may reach a family member warning them of that child's uncontrollable malevolence.

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

Similarities and Differences

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

Important indicators of similar organizational and ideological tendencies between the jihadist group and the Nigerian state are summarized in the paragraphs below. Such likenesses should not be surprising. Kapferer (2004) has argued, following Gluckman (1963), that war and conflict are dynamic processes that reorder and reinterpret social relations. Nigeria's long war is exposing how the bourgeoisie's lower-income households are descending into an underclass of subalterns homogenized by violence. A relatively egalitarian and socially redistributive, horizontal stratification system is being reconstituted vertically. Killing violence, enclosure and dispossession is splitting society in Nigeria and neighbouring states into two basic strata: a small but dominant ruling elite, and an expanding underclass of rural and peri-urban households increasingly dependent for survival on non-capitalist relations and powers. Capital's addiction to war for easy accumulation by

dispossession is further verticalizing power. Capital loves war, because in destroying others' lands and assets it opens up fabulous opportunities for criminal elements. In the Lake Chad Basin these include state politicians, corporate company executives, men of the One God and lowly carpet-bagger entrepreneurs whose de facto patrons in state institutions are busy behind the scenes engaging forcibly in illegal varieties of resource grabbing (Ellis 2016). People who get in the way must be exterminated. As Agamben (1998) argues, human beings dispossessed substantially by the state's extreme violence are reduced to the lowest common denominator of rightless 'bare life' (Maclean and Hilaire 2018).

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

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

On its part, the jihadist group claims it exercises the divine violence of Allah, whose prophet enabled true believers to live purely under Sharia law. Yet after more than thirteen years of on-off warfare, Boko Haram's ruling commanders resemble somewhat the Nigerian state's 'elected' political class. The latter proclaim their commitment to the country's coat of arms motto 'faith, unity, peace, progress', but rely in practice on the nation-state's monopoly of sovereign force to repress subversive religious or political movements on the centre's far-right. Likewise, jihadism conceives of its mythic violence as a singularizing force that destroys infidel resistance. In the early years of jihad (2009–15), Boko Haram's young martyrs were passionate about wielding God's divine, purifying violence. But in 2015, after several years of struggle, Islamic State (Iraq) recognized Boko Haram as a 'brother' state of the

Islamic State caliphate. At that time, Boko Haram occupied and taxed large areas of north-east Nigeria; its caliphate was based at Gwoza (Borno). Boko Haram also began reinterpreting its violence more theocratically as the God-given, purifying power of a caliphal state enforcing one system of taxation, forced labour, Qur'anic education, conversion to Islam and obedience to Sharia law. In Salafist thought, adulterers, witches and prostitutes should be, and were, executed (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). Women accused of witchcraft continue to be killed. In November 2023, Boko Haram kidnapped over forty women in Gwoza, and subsequently slit the throats of twenty women accused of using their evil powers to kill the children of a Boko Haram commander (Sahara Reporters 2022).

(iii) Subject in theory to the supreme authority of the Islamic State caliph (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), Boko Haram is ruled in practice by its caliphal-approved ruler or amir. Until his death in 2021, the group's late Abubakar Shekau governed in concert with his cabal of close associates and Shura (council). The latter intermediate fund-raising operations. Money is needed to cover salaries; in 2013–16, about $100 per month was paid to new recruits. Food, logistics, ammunition and other costs encouraged the group to adopt certain strategies, such as kidnapping wealthy individuals – and possibly killing them if sufficient ransom is not offered. Trafficking deals with regional and overseas (Indian) narcotics dealers, and arms sellers, are another popular option. Invoking Sharia law and jihadist power's mythic violence, Amir Shekau executed commanders accused of appropriating money for themselves (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). However, the president of the Nigerian state also calls mythic violence 'lawful' when he approves the death penalty for people the state's courts designate as criminal 'bandits', 'brigands' or 'saboteurs'.

Equally, supreme power is concentrated in the office of the commander in chief of the armed forces based in Abuja, the Nigerian capital, and Maiduguri, Borno state's capital city. Yet vertically organized military power is cross-cut by customary officer–foot soldier patronage relations. The Nigerian army offers ample opportunities for senior officers in the role of patrons, and clients drawn from junior ranks and warrant officers, to 'share the dividends of war' in amounts proportionate to their status. Serious investment by senior officers in 'stomach infrastructure' takes place. Documented ventures include selling guns from the army's armouries, exchanging out-of-date weapons for narcotics, selling young girls and boys through intermediaries in safe houses, turning a blind eye (for cash or guns) to the buying and selling of young girls for marriage to Nigerian army foot soldiers and jihadist warriors (Matfess 2017).

(iv) The state and Boko Haram engage in extreme violence, at times in the form of tit-for-tat revenge raids. For example, in 2014–15 the Nigerian army

slaughtered thousands of civilians in Gwoza, while Boko Haram slaughtered thousands in Baga. Are these instances of deep brutality and crimes against humanity also instances of divine violence at work? Can divine violence like that of the god Ogun (see the head of this chapter) replace state myths of national heroes who died fighting for peace? In reality, though, does not the war mask the jihadist state's deployment of extreme violence to achieve capital accumulation by dispossession? The Nigerian state's armed forces have also engaged in crimes against humanity for profit. Historically, then, both sides are guilty of similar offences.

(v) Reportedly, by 2014–15, Amir Shekau had become cynical. He had lost his original passion for holy war. Possibly he had been corrupted by needing money obtained by whatever means to pay his mujahideen about $100 per month. Boko Haram was, and is, chronically 'hungry' for cash with which to purchase weapons, ammunition, food, and fuel for tanks captured from the Nigerian army. The group's leaders were corrupted by their resort to organized crime to raise funds for the holy struggle. However, the Nigerian state is no different. Senior politicians and high-ranking army officers are known to have sponsored activities of Boko Haram and other jihadist groups. They raise some of their illicit funds from investment in illegal syndicates profiting from transborder narcotics, guns, and people trafficking networks.

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

(vii) Both sides to the war are impacted by the dislocated population's collapse into hungry destitution, living a rightless 'bare life' in army-enclosed garrison centres, camps, remote 'bad' bush and peri-urban shanty towns. Salafist jihadist/ethno-nationalist militias and Muslim/Christian Nigerian soldiers alike share a general belief in the multiple powers of gods, spirit beings and witches. Many folk believe in child witches. But, uniquely in the annals of West and East African postcolonial warfare, only Boko Haram has

regularly deployed child suicide bombers, some of whom are promised martyrdom and a new life in paradise.

(viii) Liminal zones connect both sides to the war as personages (child witches/soldiers, ghosts of murdered clansfolk, spirits of grieving ancestors) who simultaneously disappear and reappear as living (complete) mystical presences indirectly mediating relations between conqueror and conquered. Some dispossessed people pray for help to the One God and, resorting to magical charms and blood sacrifice for help, experience flows of spiritual sociality enveloping them in bullet-proof shields. Humanity's sociocultural and economic differences diminish as masses of fleeing people are caught in zones of death, diffusing animist beliefs in magical talismans among state soldiers, jihadist warriors and civilians. These liminal zones of danger and spirit presences connect territories and populations fought over and contested by Boko Haram, other terrorist groups and the Nigerian army. At times of renewed crisis in Borno state (north-east Nigeria), a few closely guarded roads connect the army's fortified capital city, Maiduguri, its barracks and militarized settlements (garrisons) to small allotments for cultivation by frail elderly men, women and children. These are destitute remnants of formerly large extended family-households. Boko Haram mujahideen in remote ('bad') bush, and silent jihadi cells in the city also signify liminal thresholds where small groups of jihadists hang out uncertainly, contiguous with state institutions and army barracks but below the military's radar. Small boys or child soldiers may carry message to and from, enabling jihadi cells to relate and communicate safely. This way they avoid being overheard by state intelligence officers monitoring enemy mobile phones.

Does animism's divine violence interact with secular and Sharia legal codes in these nebulous zones, these spaces where violence shatters hierarchies of power relations into fragments – *iskoki* gods of war, wind and thunder throwing bolts of iron that blow apart former identities of being into new becomings? Do these simultaneously destructive and creative flows of violence intermediate on the one hand state law reflecting individualizing Western (Christian) values, and on the other Islam's more collectivist Sharia law? Are liminal child witches and soldiers figures who signify in mystically powerful terms struggles between the state's ideology of singularizing power and the population's customary animist values of the multiple? Do these small people of ambiguous childlike malevolence signal in topsy-turvy fashion the seemingly greater technological violence of the Nigerian state versus the apparently lesser but (in dispossessed people's experience) strong multiply powered mystical and human violence of Salafist child suicide bombers?

Seemingly these children's interconnecting forms and changing shapes demonstrate the liminal qualities of ambiguous and highly dangerous multiple powers.

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

Conclusion

Kapferer (this volume) conceptualizes processes whereby the chaos and destruction of extreme violence can upend victims' lives, shifting people from how they were *being* before disaster to what they are *becoming* in disaster's aftermath. In the case of Boko Haram's war against the Nigerian and neighbouring Chadic states, survivors of deathly attacks experience their familiar other-recognized selves and statuses annihilated. In war's aftermath, people are literally thrown into new relations with others of being in a liminal, emergent condition of 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1979).

Nevertheless, in Salafist eyes, society only becomes moral when doctrine and practice erase liminal social relations. Rather, singularizing divine violence establishes the theocratic state by righteous killing of infidels and Muslim heretics in accordance with Sharia law. The law institutes society's purification by the one and only God, Allah. He demands the erasure by death of infidels (e.g. Christian Pentecostalists) and Muslim heretics (e.g. 'lapsed' or non-Salafist apostate Muslims not living under Sharia).

Walter Benjamin (1996), however, concludes his classic 1921 essay on divine violence with the statement that it is released in response to the pent-up sufferings of millions. This violence, therefore, is that which is in abundant excess of bare lawful life, lashing out at those forces and beings that seek to restrain its enormous energies, tearing down hierarchies of power, opening up spaces for egalitarian values and social identities. From the neoliberal state's 'reasonable man's' perspective, we need to ask what kind of purpose is served by divine violence. After all, argues Benjamin, if this kind of violence were to express itself in a revolution that resulted in political, social or cultural change, it would be law-making violence instead. Logically, law is unjust. Legality only serves the ruling capitalist class's means and ends of preserving its political and ideological monopoly of state power. Neoliberalism, though, persistently represents perceived, and actual, threats to the

(bourgeois) 'mainstream' to originate from groups the state deems to be 'extremist', situated to the far-left and far-right of the One God state's centrist ideologies.

This chapter has taken up Foucault's challenge to engage critically and radically with state bio-power. My animist perspective has exposed differences between the Nigerian state, which claims that its armed forces operate in compliance with the law, and 'far-right' groups like Boko Haram, whose 'criminal' warriors deploy illegal extreme violence against the state and its physically unarmed population. The militarized state and Salafist terrorist groups commit crimes against humanity. However, this chapter has revealed the state's law-abiding righteousness and power hierarchies to be a chimera. In practice, both the secular state and its jihadist 'enemy' engage in extremism and severe subordination. According to African state law, both state militaries and jihadist warriors abuse human rights and commit crimes against humanity.

My animist analysis of Boko Haram's war against the Nigerian and neighbouring Chadic states has shown that, in reality, the contemporary African state is not singularly but is multiply structured: its legal and illegal economies under Muslim/Christian/animist leadership are evermore closely integrated at the highest levels of these power systems. Its institutional administrators, elected politicians, appointed judges, and military officers are usually not of singular but of multiple faiths, ethnicities and ideologies. Regardless of tribe, clan or religion, they engage in legal as well as illegal (criminal) thieving for capital accumulation by profitable investment. Elite (political class) thieves consider they are merely doing what their predecessors have done. Theft of public funds is 'normal', the most desired prize of office. A multi-faith, de-tribalizing ruling class of thieves, in times of peace and war, may unintentionally reproduce ideologically singular state power in multiple hybrid (criminalizing) modes. Nonetheless, linked by expanding ties and 'deals' to illegal as well as legal global finance capital, the Nigerian state continues to be recognized by other capitalist world powers as a unitary and democratic polity instituting equality for all before the law (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999).

Caroline Ifeka, an anthropologist educated at SOAS, London, is currently attached to the Australian National University and advises NGOs specializing in conflict resolution. She has lived and worked in Nigeria and Cameroon for many years, carrying out community development and conflict resolution programmes as well as socio-economic field research. Her animist approach to insecurity and jihadist terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin draws on her grass-roots knowledge of Muslim and Christian restive youth's cultures of

resistance and magical protection against the bullets and IEDs of jihadist wars. She is preparing a book on the predatory African state, the gods and enslavement through capitalism's violent articulation with impoverished populations struggling to survive on clan resources owned in common.

NOTE

My research area is Nigeria and West and Central Africa. But the war zone and impacted populations in the borderlands of Lake Chad (Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon) is still off-limits to 'non-essential' workers such as journalists and fieldworkers. This analysis, therefore, is based on field interviews and experience over many years of sociality, cultural violence and predatory ruling-class exploitation for personal and familial profit in West African contexts. An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Extremism, Society and the State*, edited by Giacomo Loperfido (Berghahn Books, 2022, pp. 52–86). I thank Bruce Kapferer for his intellectually challenging, radically inspirational theorizations for an activist anthropology better equipped to analyse, with urgency, evermore confronting challenges of a capitalist-driven world in existential and ecological collapse.

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