THE WORD OF THE GUEST EDITOR

Until very recently, knowledge of conflicts induced and instigated by local militant groups such as Boko Haram, and their involvement within the phenomenon of global Jihad, has been largely limited to anecdotal and sensational evidence provided by media, government and non-governmental agencies, and arm-chair scholarship. The provenance, motivations and internal/external dynamics of these groups and their activities remain enigmatic, contested in public and academic discourses on the global war on terror. While some commentators on this interface have mostly focussed on 'western' understandings of the provenance of these conflicts and violence, others have almost completely internalised the crisis, explaining them off as local in origin and texture.

These unprecedented developments deserve more critical scholarly attention and quest for comprehending the remote and immediate causes for conflict and violence on the one hand, but also mitigating the exogenous/endogenous factors on conflicts/violence on the other hand. The upsurge and proliferation of conflicts/violence pose crucial security threats and challenges to the global society. The ceaseless 'war on terror', the seemingly intractable civil, political and religio-ethnic conflicts globally have contributed to a dramatic reappraisal of conflict, violence and peacebuilding. The provenance, genealogies and raison d'être of Boko Haram have continued to occupy a visible space in academic and public discourse. Added to the scholarly debate is the nexus between Boko Haram and global Jihadi actors. How do we understand local actions such as that of Boko Haram within the context of global influences or as one instance of the growing globalization of conflict and the internationalization of terror?

This Special Issue *"Between a Phenomenon and Movement: Boko Haram, Jihadist Insurgencies in Twenty-first century Nigeria"*, comprise three illuminating essays that draw upon ethnographies, critical explorations of chronicles and hagiographies of actors, and of religious philosophies and ideologies exemplified in homilies (sermons) thereby opening new, fresh vignettes for understanding the complex histories, epistemologies and agency of such groups in local-global contexts.

The first essay by Andrea Brigaglia provides excellent exegetical exploration and analysis of "Slicing off the Tumour," a 120-page treatise written by two sons of Muhammad Yusuf (the Shaykh Abī Yūsuf al-Barnāwī), the founder of the Nigerian Jihadi movement known as "Boko Haram," and recently published by the Islamic State. Although a hagiographical text, the book provides a rich aetiology and critical insights into the history of Jihad in Nigeria as seen through the purview of a global Jihadi group. "Slicing off the Tumour" is framed as representing the point of view of an orthodox stream in Salafi-Jihadi thought and as rejecting the "extremism" (*ghuluww*) and the "deviation" *(inḥirāf)* of the misled (*ḍāll*) com-

munity of "Kharijites" led by Shekau. Brigaglia questions the utility and heuristic usefulness of the term "Boko Haram" in the literature on local and global manifestations of Jihad in contemporary Nigeria. The relevance of this argument was against the backdrop of appropriating it as a *phenomenon* rather than a *movement* or a *sect*. As he contends, this was considering the presence of three organisations operating in Nigeria in the name of Jihad (one, temporarily declined and almost inactive, linked to Al-Qaeda; one, undergoing a phase of reorganisation, linked to the Islamic State; and one, operating in isolation from, and in opposition to Global Jihad, led by Shekau).

In raising the question "So, who is to blame for the onset of this "tumour"— the agency of global actors or the structure of local Nigerian (and, Bornuan) society?" the author probes whether the emergence of Boko Haram should be seen primarily as the result of structural problems inherent in the local Nigerian context, or of the agency of global Jihadi actors. He argues that "the immune system of Nigeria was obviously weak due to the systemic and structural problems - endemic corruption; regionally unequal development; massive urbanisation; and unaddressed local religious crises; and a dysfunctional, ethnic-based federalism which provides the rationale for low-scale ethnic cleansing of "non-indigene minorities" (especially in the Middle Belt) and inhibits the capacity of the Federal Government (of any political colour) to take repressive action in states controlled by the opposition (of any political colour). But the carcinogenic radiations to which this body was exposed, generating the disease, were global in nature from the very onset." By locating his position in the recent debate around the nature of the global links entertained by Nigerian Jihadi actors and around the role of these links in the development, the author contends we can better understand the local and global dimension of the "Boko Haram phenomenon."

In the second essay, Edlyne Anugwom critically reflects on the Boko Haram insurgence within a continuum of Islamic fundamentalism and religious conflicts in Nigeria. He describes Boko Haram rather as 'a home-grown Islamic fundamentalist organization', both 'a quasi-religious movement and a radical socio-political organization which seeks to supplant the modern state in Nigeria.' Just like Brigaglia, he highlights the (non)usefulness of the name as a 'representation of the Other.' Anugwom provides a phenomenology of Boko Haram, its operations and driving force, mostly from the perspective of the group as representing an embodiment of both the frustration of ordinary citizens in the Northeast with their socio-economic situations and more crucially as the imagination of a desirable socio-political order in the larger Nigerian society. He argues that while portending Islamic fundamentalist credentials, Boko Haram is also representative of the socio-economic aspirations of most ordinary citizens in the Northeast of Nigeria who are excluded from the socio-economic spheres in modern Nigeria. Thus, while the origin and relevance of Boko Haram cannot be fully explained by socio-economic factors, extant structural and socio-economic conditions produce vul-

nerable youths who feed into their fundamentalist aspirations. The author notes that, "despite governments better coordinated and largely effective military offensive since 2015, the group still possesses the capacity to inflict mayhem. Even more telling is the fact that the main leader of the group, Shekau has eluded both death and capture by Nigeria's military." He suggests new approaches and strategies to tackling and pre-empting such conflicts which remain recurrent challenges to development and nation building in Nigeria.

Sayyid Qutb is one of the most influential political thinkers of modern Islamic fundamentalism and a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950's and 1960's whose ideas provide a framework and ideological foundation for many Islamic groups, like al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and the ISIS, around the world. Dodeye Williams sets out, in the final essay, to critically examine the macro features of Political Islam as cultural-ideological, political and socio-economic from the perspective of Sayyid Qutb's political thought and demonstrate how these impacts on the various dimensions of national integration in Nigeria. She attributes the inseparability of religion and politics as a recurrent challenge and shows how this incongruity contributes to making cultural, political, social and economic integration a herculean task considering political Islam. Any integration policy that fails to recognize this incongruity is an inappropriate and inadequate approach to national integration in Nigeria. Williams contends rather provocatively that Political Islam is incompatible with national integration and has the tendency to polarize more than promoting integration in Nigeria. She concludes that building shared values is always a challenge for pluralistic societies like Nigeria and any society without shared values has a minimal chance at national integration, as shared values can contribute to shaping national identity rather than having national identity shaped by ethnicity, religion or nationality.

The views expressed in these essays are those of the respective authors and not those of the Journal. Much appreciation to the Editor-in-Chief, *Politics and Religion*, Dr. Miroljub Jevtic, for inviting me to share insights from Nigeria on the growing globalization of conflict and the internationalization of terror.

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