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The Boko Haram Franchise and the War on Terror in Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The so-called “Boko Haram” terrorist group undoubtedly stands out as the most notorious offspring of the Islamic revivalism movement in Nigeria. Nonetheless, it seems to have lost whatever was linking the group to the unspecified form of Salafism which its founder – the late Muhammad Yusuf – claimed as a basis for his action. Nowadays, the organization worldwide known through its Hausa sarcastic nickname – roughly translated as “state education is a sin” – no longer appears the religious-political creature conceived at its very first stage. The religious appeal that was able to legitimate its outbreak more than five years ago, and to gather a certain degree of public acknowledgment, has yielded to more materialistic attitudes. The somehow risky definition of “franchise”, instead, applies very well to describe the evolving nature of Boko Haram’s structure. The group’s economic ramification into the realm of the rewarding kidnappings-business (as well as other criminality-related activities) has allowed a rapid integration in informal economic processes of the greater Lake Chad region, leading to the diffusion of several inter-related cells. The success of the insurgency collectively operated under the “Boko Haram” designation against, mainly, Nigeria and Cameroon, has eventually worked to unite regional and Western actors to inaugurate a new War on Terror front in Central Africa. The pledge of allegiance to Iraq and Syria’s Islamic State (IS) has further strengthened Boko Haram’s position inside the terrorist archipelago as a global threat and procured the justification for another militarization of one of the most sensitive areas in the world. But by what measure are military anti-terrorists operations contributing to re-establish a safe-space and promote good governance and civil as well human rights?

KEYWORDS

Religious terrorism, Lake Chad, post-modern conflict, War on Terror.

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1. *The religious label in Boko Haram*

When addressing the issue of “religious violence” in terrorism, the Western academic debate often assumes that violence and fanaticism are the direct consequence of the uncritical acceptance of religious dogmas by the actors. Political assessments of religious-inspired terror are by far less common. The religion-violence nexus in the field of terrorism studies already appeared in an early analysis by Rapoport (1984) on the use of terror in the three monotheistic religions. Drawing from this work, a series of studies have followed (RANSTORP 1996, BYMAN 2003, COOK 2003, SAGEMAN 2004, HOFFMAN 1998). All these studies tend to conceptualize religious terror as a separate category from other known forms of terrorism. In a study by Bruce Hoffman (HOFFMAN 1998), terrorism of religious origin was defined as bearer of such moral systems, values and conceptions of the world capable to make it far more lethal than other forms of political violence previously observed. The recognition of a sort of “special” character in religious terrorism appears as an attempt to differentiate – through the use of a “religious” label – this kind of terrorism from other, seemingly more political, strategic, or “secular” forms. The assumption that often goes along with such analyses is that members of religious terrorist organizations are inflexible, irrational, unrealistic and authoritarian, driven only by the desire to wage a cosmic war against evil (JUERGENSEMAYER 2003). Another important aspect of these studies is the focus on the supposed “sanctity” of the actions of violent religious actors: religious terrorist actions, unlike “secular” ones, are thus seen as symbolic sacrifices and devotional acts inspired by God(s). Presuming that the only reason that pushes religious terrorists to action is some sort of theological automatism, rather than a strategy to pursue practical political goals, these studies automatically exclude “religiously-labeled” contestants from the category of rational actors and to rule out the possibility of peace deals and negotiations.

Empirical evidence, however, has contradicted these assumptions. The origins of the most powerful organizations of Islamic religious terrorism are strictly connected to purely political and geo-strategic events that have nothing to do with other-worldly considerations. The final breaths of the Cold War in Afghanistan bred the ideology of Al-Qaeda (COOLEY 1999, MAMDANI 2004, GERGES 2005), while the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in particular, the rise to power of Likud in Israel, created the conditions for the creation of Hamas (MISHAL, SELA 2006). Many of the foundational texts of the so-called “Jihadi” ideology, whose religious and apocalyptic references are often quoted in order to provide evidence to support the “irrationality” of religious violence, contain indications of important strategic and tactic concerns. The association between the American-Soviet military confrontation and

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the emergence of the future founding cells of the first nucleus of Al-Qaeda clearly appears in the pamphlet *Defense of the Muslims Lands*, written by Abdullah Azzam and published – not accidentally – in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The 1982 pamphlet *Al-Farida al-gha'iba* (“The neglected duty”) by the Egyptian Abdussalam Faraj, outlines one of the chief tactics of contemporary jihad, that is the distinction between “near enemy” and “far enemy”. Probably the best military exposition in Jihadi literature so far is *The Quranic Concept of War* (1979) by Pakistani Brigadier-General S. K. Malik, which is supplied with a preface by the then President of Pakistan, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq¹. The text combines Western-styled military strategy with elements of Islamic theology aiming to buttress a jihad that is at the same time physical and metaphysical. In recent times, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (IS) has captured international attention thanks to its high degree of strategic planning and for the accuracy in choosing sensible targets. This is largely due to the fact that its core leadership is composed of former Iraqi army officials, forced out of the army after the fall of Saddam. The group of the self-styled “Caliph” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has evolved successfully from being just one in a multitude of actors operating in war-torn Syria and Iraq up to a highly sophisticated organization. IS operates as an enterprise that administrates broad territories, engages in military actions against national armies, controls vast financial resources and in particular, stands out for its communication system, which has nothing to envy to the Western film and communication industry. The Islamic State seems to operate like a private venture accustomed to the newest trends in global market. What is left of the original religious organization? Terroristic acts are staged with careful planning, in order to fully exploit the Western media backlash and thus generate a global cultural impact. The group exploits global brand awareness and mainstream business marketing techniques. The most cutting-edge element of IS’s strategy consists in the successful blend of conventional military practices, *guerrilla* warfare and economic exploitation of conquered areas, which enables it to continuously generate new real political capital.

During the last two years, Boko Haram has attempted to shape its organization along the same lines of IS. Its field of operation, which encompasses an inherently fluid border area in the far north-east of Nigeria, has offered the ideal ground for a fast and cost-effective process of emulation of IS. This was politically achieved with the capture of a territory roughly the size of Belgium and with the declaration, during July 2014, of a state of its own, with the Borno town of Gwoza as capital. Thanks to its highly decentralized organization, Boko Haram has since been able to achieve a number of short-term goals, indirectly aided by the failure of the Nigerian army counter-insurgency response. However, the lack of a

¹ Zia-ul-Haq assumed office in 1977 through a *coup d'état* in which he deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The bloodless overthrowing was called “Operation Fair Play”: it was preceded by months of social unrest and escalating tensions between the ruling leftist Pakistan Peoples’ Party and the right-wing opposition Pakistan National Alliance, which accused Bhutto of rigging the 1977 elections. Zia-ul-Haq and Admiral Mohammed Sharif, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, were convinced by sectors of the opposition to stage the *coup*; they then imposed martial law and promised free elections within ninety days. Elections finally took place only in 1985. Operation Fair Play can be seen as a watershed in the history of Pakistan and, generally, of the Cold War: with the tacit consent of the United States, Zia-ul-Haq dismantled Bhutto’s socialist influence in the public spheres and institutions, gradually inserting high-profile military officers, cracking down on pro-Soviet elements in the country and on any leftist party operating in Pakistan (such as the one led by Bhutto’s wife, Benazir). Zia-ul-Haq’s regime also pursued the so-called “shariaization” of the country, making Islam the “centerpiece” of its administration and became a prominent actor in the so-called “Operation Cyclone”. The latter was the CIA code name for the program planned in association with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence. Operation Cyclone aimed at arming selected groups of the Afghan *mujahideen* prior to, during and after the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Zia-ul-Haq’s intelligence services served as intermediary, channelling funds and passing weapons, military training and financial support to Afghan resistance groups. Among the many Afghan factions, the one most closely associated with the Pakistani intelligence is the Taliban. For further readings: URBAN 1988, BRADSHER 1999, KEPPEL 2002, MEHER 2004, HAQQANI 2005, HUSSAIN 2005.

military-trained leadership (as opposed to IS) and the fact of being in control of a relatively limited geographic area, have made the sustainability of Boko Haram's "state" nearly impossible in the long term. Between 2014 and 2015, the *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah li'd-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* ("Group of the People of the Sunna for Preaching and Jihad"; this was Boko Haram's official designation up to March 2015) has overtly turned to IS' communication methods. The group has moved to a similar strategic vision, has tried to mirror the same organizational structure and, more importantly, has established an operational coordination which has progressively tightened up. The degree of operative, tactical and material hybridization of organizations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State demonstrates the strong permeability and the substantial process of mutation taking place among contemporary Jihadi terrorist organizations. Such a process ultimately dismantles many of the prevalent notions of "terrorism" and "war" as they are theorized in the field of International Relations. But this is not all: the ongoing process of tactical and material hybridization also reveals the gradual regression of ideological, or religious, components in the insurrectionist narratives of global Jihadi terrorism. Nigeria's Boko Haram probably represents the best example. Although originating from a faction of the extremely fragmented Nigerian Salafī universe, the group faced harsh discredit and strong opposition from most of the country's religious figures since its very beginning, within the same Salafī circles that had originally nurtured it. Such compact criticism, often directed personally at the leader of the new group, ustaz Muhammad Yusuf, often earned death-sentences to its promoters². Virtually every exponent of Nigeria's Islam – spanning from the leaders of historical Sunni Sufi orders like the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya to a Salafī hardliner like shaykh Albani Zaria – has consistently hurled abuse against Boko Haram's controversial preaching, accusing the movement of being manipulated to create an atmosphere of religious tension in the country³. At this point, one starts to wonder whether Boko Haram can still be considered as a "religious" terrorist organization. Are the religious claims that originally laid the ideological foundations for waging a jihad against the Nigerian state still a determinant factor for recruiting? Although it might still be possible to argue that Boko Haram's vision can be traced back to a literal and uncompromising interpretation of the sacred texts, it appears incongruous to use the "religious" label for a group that has been unconditionally rejected by the whole theological spectrum of the Nigerian Muslim religious establishment. By reinforcing the equivalence between Islam and fanaticism, insisting on the "religious" label obfuscates the political and social contexts that provide the foundation for the emergence of phenomena of conflict and terrorism. The narrative of the "clash of civilizations" (HUNTINGTON 1993) is the political offspring of a historically-rooted prejudice which, ultimately, fulfills the need of an "indispensable enemy" for the present global political system. As it is brilliantly asserted by Hippler and Lueg (HIPPLER, LUEG 1995, 24):

«We invent an Islam that suits us, that best fulfills our politico-psychological needs. This is exactly how we arrive at a clean separation between 'us' and 'them' (the Other), between inside and outside that are never supposed to meet and we thus succeed in fencing off and fortifying our own Western identity».

² Here we refer to the circumstances surrounding the death of the notorious shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam, himself a leading figure in a Salafī association called *Ahlussunnah*. As Brigaglia points out (BRIGAGLIA 2012, 37), Yusuf's choice to name its own organization *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah li'd-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* was a way to signal at the same time its derivation from Ja'far's group, and its break from it. Indeed, Ja'far's teachings had played a prominent role in shaping Muhammad Yusuf's attitude. The two, however, had later become estranged due to the way the former criticized certain key doctrinal positions asserted by the latter. The fierce resistance which shaykh Ja'far opposed to Yusuf during the genesis of Boko Haram were the main reason behind the brutal murder of Ja'far, in April 2007 at the hands of unidentified killers. See BRIGAGLIA 2012.

³ Shaykh Muhammad Auwal Adam from Zaria used to know very well the late Muhammad Yusuf and his circle of students and he was one of the latter's most vocal critics until his murder in February 2014. See BALA 2014.

Media representations show a simplistic image of the variety of factors, at times extremely heterogeneous, which originate the various movements of radical Islam. The image that is thus produced is monolithic and free of shades, responding to a stereotyped and Eurocentric depiction which, ultimately, is only instrumental to reinforce the West's imperial "mission".

The *modus operandi* and the partial success of Jihadist terrorist movements depend on their political and geo-strategic, rather than on their religious positioning. The failure to dissolve the strategic-military device built by Western powers in the period before the end of the Cold War, as well as the refusal to bear responsibility for the process of militarization in the areas of confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, are the main reasons for the continuing outburst of conflicts along the fault-lines of the two former blocks.

2. Sanctity of borders and multiple sovereignties

From the end of World War II, the territorial preservation of existing boundaries has been the pillar of International Law, as sanctioned in the charters of every major international organizations, United Nations *in primis*.

«All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations» (Article 2, Paragraph 4).

This praxis has reinforced the combination between notions of territorial integrity and sovereignty – the latter to be understood not as a mere administrative task but also as a preservation of geographical partitions. Nevertheless, the competition taking place during the Cold War has encouraged a dynamic whereby both "democratic" and "Communist" regimes have supported armed opposition groups in neighboring countries as a strategy to keep their counterparts under pressure, while still formally abiding to the principle of preserving territorial boundaries. Notions of sovereignty and of political and military alliance were often surreptitiously interpreted by both Eastern and Western blocs, especially in those territories in Africa, Asia and the Middle East united by the experience of European colonialism. In the long run, thus, the two blocs altered the social and political landscape of those regions. From the collapse of the Berlin wall, the erosive action of globalizing forces and the evolution of global military and industrial complexes have gradually challenged the sanctity of national borders, leading to ever-increasing direct military interventions in the global South, mainly by Western countries. Especially since 9/11, there has been an outburst of voices calling for dispensations in the application of the principle of national sovereignty. One of these voices was that of Richard Haass, once United States Director of Policy Planning and close advisor of the Secretary of State during the first Bush Jr. administration. Haass has affirmed that the exercise of the right to sovereignty was conditioned to the respect of human treatment for citizens and non-citizens and to not-supporting terrorism in any form (HAASS 2002). Haass also included the inability by a state to control terrorist activities inside its boundaries, as well as an uncooperative attitude in contrasting them, as possible justifications for dispensations to the principle of national sovereignty. Later, this resulted in the development of a school of thought that has asserted the notion of a "contingent sovereignty", that is a sovereignty restricted to the observance of certain essential state obligations⁴. This has basically

⁴ We chiefly refer here to the lecture held by Haass as Director of Policy Planning of United States State Department during the 43rd Annual International Affairs Symposium which took place in Portland (Oregon), 5 April

provided the theoretical pretext to the United States-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. A purely humanitarian corollary to this kind of discourse was subsequently constructed within the United Nations. The Secretary-General of the UN, in fact, with the use of evidence collected around the world, argued that it was necessary to limit national sovereignty (ANNAN 2005) by affirming the concept of sovereignty as “responsibility,” i.e. the responsibility held by a country towards its citizens and towards the international community through the United Nations. It was clear that the notion of responsibility sanctioned the possibility of a “righteous interference” in the internal affairs of other nations. Today, in the context of the Global War on Terror, the systematic violations of national borders for the sake of protecting human rights (principle of “humanitarian intervention”) seems to have become the rule.

The sanctity of the *uti possidetis* principle, from which the African Union used to derive its rule of maintaining unaltered the borders of African states inherited from the colonial past⁵, has in recent years been challenged by the proliferation of secessionist movements and by the practical inability to stop the expansion of conflicts beyond a state’s borders. The insurgency prompted by the militiamen of Boko Haram is a typical example. Starting from the end of 2014, this conflict has progressively expanded from Nigeria to neighboring Cameroon and Chad, providing a reason to the Chadian Army for joining its Nigerian counterpart in the fight across Borno state, more or less as, in 2012, the Chadian forces had intervened in northern Mali with the agreement of France. The issue of territorial integrity in African countries has always gone hand in hand with the acknowledgement that in the continent sovereignty ultimately depends on the financial and military assistance of former colonial powers (such as France) or of global hegemonic powers (United States, Soviet Union). In order to deploy troops in the former colonial areas of Africa, Asia, the Middle East or South America, during the Cold War it was not necessary to elaborate a justification on juridical basis: the conflict with the countries of the Warsaw Pact sufficed as a moral justification to circumvent International Law. The United Nations have been among the early promoters of direct interventions in the global South, as shown by the deployment of international troops right in the aftermath of former Belgian Congo’s independence in 1960. In former Portuguese Africa (Angola, Mozambique) the competition went as far as to include Cuba and South Africa. The scenario of militarization which one observed in Africa during the Cold War, rather than disappearing, seems to have been rejuvenated by the pressures of the current political and economic global order, with its changes and hybridizations⁶. The concept of “conventional war” needs to be rethought, as violent phenomena are increasingly hybridized, making it impossible to distinguish between war, *guerrilla*, terrorism and racketeering (KALDOR 1999). We assist to a progressive broadening of the range of actors participating in processes of violent confrontation, against states or non-state actors, as well as to an increased diversification in terms of short and medium-term goals of the groups engaging in violent actions. Contextually, facts on the

2002. The title is: “The Role of the U.S. Government in Humanitarian Intervention”, available from: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/p/rem/9632.htm>.

⁵ In 1964 the African Union (under the previous designation of Organization of African Unity) passed a resolution stating that the principle of integrity of borders would be applied across Africa. Most of Africa was already independent by that time, so the resolution was principally a political directive to settle disputes by treaties based on pre-existing borders rather than by resorting to force.

⁶ Some remarkable observations about this can be found in SCHMIDT 2013. The author identifies the *fil rouge* linking uninterruptedly the Cold War and the present War on Terror: despite the decrease of Western contingents operating in Africa starting from the collapse of Berlin’s wall, situations of internal conflict have not yet declined. The new global economic order has made it possible to outsource conflicts to local countries, therefore rationalising at a bare minimum the expenses, both financially and in terms of human resources. Hence, today, it can be asserted that African armies are called to solve African problems – as the African Union’s motto recites.

grounds have made it inadequate to refer to war in terms of Clausewitzian confrontation, due to the frequency of “no war no peace” situations (RICHARDS 2005). Today, the coercive element is a habitual condition of social relationships (SCHEPER-HUGHES 1997), therefore the outbreak of a war is not to be considered as an event which suspends an otherwise pacific state of affairs. The trajectories of conflicts shift according to patterns of human mobility: trans-boundary movements have been analyzed as practices of repossession, reinterpretation and exploitation aimed to re-forge the distortions produced by the arbitrary drawing of borders in colonial times (BENNAFLA 2002).

In this context, applying the concept of responsibility in sovereignty to states that host multiple sovereignties appears as devoid of any real sense. Political power is subject to an increasing dynamism: the increased mobility of capital; the multiplicity of mechanisms of disciplines and regulative authorities; the central role played by global financial institutions; the overcoming of barriers brought on by new technological media; the extension of diasporas (national, regional, ethnic) as proper geographical entities – all these phenomena are at the same time products and producers of destabilization in the territorial project of the nation-state (APPADURAI 1996). The Boko Haram phenomenon needs to be understood in the context of a long-term phenomenon of emergence of sub- and trans-national regimes of authority in the Lake Chad Basin region, which sustain themselves through processes of economic accumulation and authority regulation. This phenomenon is affecting the border areas of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Central African Republic, that is exactly where Boko Haram operates. The management of economic activities as well as the need to control certain trade routes and to regulate authority in precise geographical areas brings about a condition of competition between these regimes and the state. Boko Haram’s terrorist operations have found a great opportunity to flourish thanks to the integration in the unregulated political and economic context of the Lake Chad Basin. They have simultaneously benefitted from the expansion of multiple local political crises in other bordering areas of the Sahel (northern Mali), Central Africa (Central African Republic) and North Africa (Libya), which favored the formation of a thick network of interactions with other non-state actors operating in the political and economic “grey zone”. Key players in insurrections inspired by religious or nationalist reasons know how to reduce risks and exploit the cleavages of so-called “weak states”. Through the staging of semi-political organizations and the managing of commodity and capital exchanges in trans-boundary areas, Boko Haram has become the center of a network which transcends political barriers and works at the intersection of the local and global.

3. *A networked conflict*

The analysis of the military and economic activities in which Boko Haram is involved depicts a picture of the dimension and functioning of contemporary terrorist complexes⁷. Studies about the organization of Al-Qaeda (OULD MOHAMEDOU 2007; 2011) and the Algerian GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé; LIA, KJØK 2001) in their early stage, show how the notion of network enterprise has been adjusted and reshaped by these organizations. My designation of Boko Haram as a “franchise” follows this trend. This label, in fact, successfully applies to the decentralized nature of the organization’s leadership as well as to the similarities it shares with other network enterprises. The term “franchise” was first used in February 2014 by Marilyn Ogar, spokesperson of the Nigerian Department of State

⁷ The “diagonal”, ever-evolving *modus operandi* of international terrorism has been brought to light by the traditional trend in terrorism studies: LAQUEUR 1996; HOFFMAN 1998; REEVE 1999. Some of the observations formulated by CASTELLS 1998 pave the way for interesting reflections concerning the progressive convergence of organizational models between multinational businesses, criminal cartels and terrorist complexes.

Security (DSS) in the aftermath of the Chibok girls' abduction. By using this term, Ogar was referring to the fact that many different actors (criminal gangs, political groups) can use the Boko Haram label today in Nigeria in order to commit acts of violence with different aims. My use of the term, however, wants to point more towards an intrinsic characteristic of Boko Haram's organizational structure, and to the ways in which the movement represents a global "trademark" in a local context, replicating its strategies and style. This is particularly evident since Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to IS in March 2015. By renaming the organization *Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyya* (West Africa Province), the organization controlled by Boko Haram militiamen is now joining the wider Al-Baghdadi's terrorist archipelago, or global enterprise⁸. Though the group operates on a relatively small scale if compared to IS, structural affinities have emerged among the two, culminating in Boko Haram's allegiance and in the establishment of a formal coordination within the Jihadi network. Castells' (CASTELLS 1996) description of *network enterprises* portrays them as the effect of the reprocessing of global economy, urged by the transformations of work and employment. Horizontal networks are groups of interconnected units with a high degree of autonomy, which compete in the marketplace while keeping up a shared strategy: an enduring architecture and a variable geometry. In terms of general organization, network enterprises have crossed beyond the conventional borders of economy, spreading to every aspect of social morphology. Postmodern conflicts (DUFFIELD 1998) often emerge in landscapes that are already affected by the persistence of social inequalities and underlying political tensions, which on their turn, are frequently an offspring of previous, unresolved conflicts. Insightful analyses have shown how a lasting exposure to asymmetric violence becomes contagious for both the factions involved in the fight, producing a gradual merging in the methods used by insurgent groups and counter-insurgent state actors (VAN CREVELD 1991). Reports by international humanitarian associations (such as AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 2014)⁹ show how the operative methods, frequently brutal, employed by Nigeria's Army, the military Joint Task Force and the Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states in order to counter Boko Haram are often similar to the latter's, sometimes even worse¹⁰. This is another reminder of how inappropriate is the binary labeling of "Us" and "Them" constantly evoked by the rhetoric of the War on Terror (KELLNER 2007), which has ultimately developed upon civilizing, behaviourist and cultural patterns. At a narrative level barbarism, extremism and social backwardness are the features that invoked to characterize "their" war – in opposition to the humanitarian and democratizing security offered by the violence of "our" armies (REDFIELD 2009). But from the point of view of organization and strategies, such oppositional rhetoric collapses. In particular, behaviourist and cultural narratives overlook the political space, and fail to take into account what the insurgency movement and the military intervention share. Nigeria's postcolonial political space, although relatively free from excessive Western interference during the Cold War, has been characterized by an extreme regional fragmentation. Today, such a fragmentation is only apparently balanced by an ephemeral rule of regional rotation (or zoning) of key political posts between the thirty-six states of the Federation and the six "geopolitical zones" in which they are divided. Nigeria was forced to implement such a policy of zoning in order to keep up with the increasingly complex needs of neo-liberalism (post Washington consensus). The gradual shrinking of the state's role as an income-generator within its borders, however, has become clear starting from the

⁸ See the official IS magazine *Dabiq*, no. 7, January-February 2015.

⁹ In its 2015 annual report about the respect of human rights around the world, the NGO has equally expressed its concern in regard to the extrajudicial executions, disappearances, abuses toward civilians, refugees and migrants, arbitrary arrests and detentions operated by Cameroon's Brigade Rapide d'Intervention (BIR).

¹⁰ In regards to this, the Obama administration has stated the will to limit the United States' contribution in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency in the form of shipping weapons and ammunitions. This is due to the concern with the poor human rights record shown by Nigeria's police and military forces.

late 90s. This was in sharp contrast to the outward image of the country as a military powerhouse, strengthened by several peace-keeping operations of the Nigerian army in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mali, framed within the legal context of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). The downfall in public expenditure has led to various kinds of adjustments in the social realm. The growing literature on “war economies”¹¹ and “new terrorisms”¹², as well as the interesting, unique case of the so-called “Wapa parallel currency” in northern Nigeria’s border areas¹³, demonstrate that the possibilities offered by the globalized economy have compensated many social and political actors for the decline of a prebendal political system¹⁴. The possibility to access new economic means originating in external marketplaces and the success in exploiting unregulated trade routes is thus combined with the large “mobility of surmodernity” (AUGÉ 2009): this allows new economic actors to draw from an ever-increasing human basin, frequently through coercive means. These transformations, rather than indicating a vanishing of violence, demonstrate its reshaping. The adoption of an organization based on a network of horizontal units has made social actors extremely receptive to changes in the socio-economic environment: the political identity of these essentially economic actors becomes “liquid”, as is the standard among members of a transnational franchise. The Boko Haram insurgency is a lasting conflict embedded in a problematic socio-cultural fabric, but nourished by a dynamic that is essentially an economic one. Boko Haram has successfully accessed the so-called “economy of the bush” (ROITMAN 2005), benefitting from its resources and becoming able to impose itself as a crucial actor in the unregulated trades of the Chad Basin. The group’s transnational networks require a high number of *passseurs*, guardians, informants, drivers, security personnel, labourers. By engaging the Boko Haram phenomenon in a mere security framework, the state response has reduced its own chances to address the set of problems that have allowed its growth. The deployment of a 8,700 troops strong contingent by the counter-insurgency working team set up by Nigeria’s government in coordination with its regional (Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Benin) and international (France, United States) allies, follows a well-tested path already drawn by supporters of the War on Terror. The same script already viewed, with disastrous effects, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria is currently taking place in the Chad Basin at the hands of local state actors. Just as during the Cold War, the Global War on Terror has established a global self-preserving system which includes regional allies of the United States, different political regimes and interest groups. Looking for economic rewards, many non-Western countries cooperate in reproducing the War on Terror system. The establishment in N’Djamena (Chad) of the military presence of France in the form of its Opération Barkhane represents an upgrade of War on Terror’s paradigm. Coordinated with the wider counter-terrorism programs of the United States Department of Defence (Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara and Africom), this presence responded to the need to broaden the security initiatives to the strategically sensitive territory of Nigeria. Although the IS-Boko Haram alliance has

¹¹ See KEEN 1998; DUFFIELD 1998; KALDOR 1999; BERDAL & MALONE 2000; CILLIERS 2000; LE BILLON 2000.

¹² See TISHKOV 1997; REEVE 1999; LAQUEUR 1999; BODANSKY 1999; LIA 2001.

¹³ This interesting phenomenon is efficaciously described in HASHIM, MEAGHER 1999. Wapa currency takes its name for the main market in which is employed, located in *unguwar* Fagge (Fagge district), in Kano city, northern Nigeria. It bears witness of how centuries-old practices and contemporary events have intertwined during the late Nineties to cope with a reality progressively transformed by political decisions, such as that to implement Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) or the reform of the Franc Zone; this has ultimately resulted in the exploitation of the cross-border commodity trade through an informal, domestic currency.

¹⁴ The “traditional” study of corruption in Nigerian politics is JOSEPH 1987. Although it frames its analysis in the activities taking place during the limited time of Nigeria’s Second Republic (1979-1983), it is an unavoidable contribution in order to understand the essential characteristics of the practice as well as a basic tool to read the behaviour of past and modern political regimes, such as the Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha (1993-1998) ones.

thus far seemingly been enacted in name only, the West's security complexes have already prepared the ground for the preemptive militarization of the Lake Chad territory.

4. *Conclusions*

The Global War on Terror is progressively expanding its intelligence network to Nigeria. The constellations of groups that compose the Boko Haram phenomenon have been engaged in an insurgency that has taken on different forms during the period spanning from 2002 to 2015. The socio-political and economic variables which underlie this process are extremely complicated and demand to be approached through fluid conceptual frameworks. Underestimating the political and environmental changes which contribute to the emergence of violent phenomena hampers the possibility of understanding violence as a vehicle of political expression and economic activity, which means as a vehicle of a precise political and economic rationality. The Boko Haram phenomenon should be understood as a terror franchise operating primarily as an economic actor in the "bush economy" of the key strategic region of the Lake Chad basin.

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