



Frontiers: Authority, Precarity, and Insurgency at the Edge of the State



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 5 May 2017

Key words:

frontiers
insurgency
precarity
Nigeria

SUMMARY

The focus of this article is two home-grown insurgencies which arose in Nigeria after the return to civilian rule in 1999: Boko Haram in the Muslim northeast, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the oil producing and Christian southeast. The two insurgencies arose, I argue, from frontier spaces in which the limits of state authority and legitimacy intersected with a profound crisis of authority and rule on the one hand, and the political economy of radical precarity on the other. Boko Haram and MEND share family resemblances—they are products of the same orderings of power—despite the obvious fact that one is draped in the language of religion and restoration (but as we shall see modernity) and the insistence that Nigeria should become transformed into a true Islamic state, while the other is secular and civic (and also modern) wishing to expand the boundaries of citizenship through a new sort of federalism. There are striking commonalities in the social composition of the armed groups and their internal dynamics; each is deposited at the nexus of the failure of local government, customary institutions, and the security forces (the police and the military task forces in particular). Each, nevertheless, is site specific; a cultural articulation of dispossession politics rooted in regional traditions of warfare, in particular systems of religiosity, and very different sorts of social structure and identity, and very different ecologies (the semi arid savannas of the north, and the creeks and forest of the Niger delta). In both cases state coercion and despotism and the ethico-moral decrepitude of the state figures centrally as does the politics of resentment that each condition generates among a large, alienated but geographically rooted group of precarious classes.

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Capitalism ... is a frontier process.

[Jason Moore, 2015, p. 107]

If we, rather broadly, see frontiers as regions at the limits of central power, then it seems likely that a great deal is happening there ... Frontiers ... are places where authority – neither secure nor non-existent is open to challenge and where polarities of order and chaos assume many guises

[John Markoff, 2006, p. 7]

Introduction

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999 Nigeria has produced two home-grown insurgencies. A Salafist rebellion originating in the northeast of the country which gained prominence and momentum after 2003, has laid waste to a vast swath of territory in the three states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, launching massive and deadly attacks across the north in major cities such as Maiduguri, Kano, and Katsina. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, during 2011–14 20,000 people were killed by Boko

Haram militants (with another 6,000 mortalities in 270 attacks during 2015). Large-scale abductions, female suicide bombers, assassinations, beheadings, and the brutal terrorizing of civilian communities have become the tools of their trade. By April 2015, 2.5 million people had been displaced across six northeastern states (<http://www.internal-displacement.org/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/figures-analysis>); over 1 million were barracked in refugee camps in and around Maiduguri. New estimates by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggest that 4.4 million people in the Lake Chad region of northeastern Nigeria are in need of urgent food aid. Countless hundreds of thousands are confronting the bitter reality of starvation and famine. One thousand kilometers to the south on the Niger delta oilfields, an armed non-state group—the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)—emerged from the western creeks in late 2005 and within four years brought the oil industry, accounting for over 80% of government revenues, to its knees. According to a report released in late 2008—prepared by a 43 person government commission and entitled *The Report of the Technical Committee of the Niger Delta* (RTCND)—in the first nine months of 2008 alone the Nigerian government lost a staggering \$23.7 billion in oil revenues

to militant attacks and sabotage. By May 2009 oil production had fallen by over a million barrels per day, a decline of roughly 40% from the average national output five years earlier. At least 300 individuals were abducted during 2006–09, 300 armed assaults were launched during 2007–10, and 13,000 pipeline attacks and vandalizations were reported during 2006–11. By some estimates, mortalities ran to 1500 per year and perhaps as many as 200,000 people were internally displaced. A government amnesty, signed in October 2009 in the wake of a state-sponsored counter-insurgency program, brought peace to the delta by 2010. But it proved to be fragile, punctuated by periodic bouts of violence during 2010–15. Ominously, in early 2016 a new militant group—the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)¹—occupied the space vacated by MEND. By May 2016, NDA's 'Operation Red Economy' had shut-in over 800,000 barrels of oil (producing a thirty-year low in output). Clearly both insurgencies represent a major crisis of legitimacy for the Nigerian post-colonial state, a fact stunningly underscored by the combatants' capability to strike at the heart of government power by launching devastating attacks in 2010 and 2011 in the very center of the country's high modernist capital, Abuja.

At first glance the insurgencies are a study in sharp contrasts. One is draped in the language of a return to a republic of virtue and the ideals of *dar al-Islam*, of 'true Islam' and the restoration of the Caliphate; the other is secular and self-consciously modern invoking a renovated civic nationalism, a new federalism, community rights and 'resource control'. One is located in a remote semi-arid and drought prone border region marked by agrarian recession and the collapse of its traditional industrial base (textiles); the other is housed in a huge deltaic zone of swamp rainforests and riverine creeks awash in federal oil revenues and populated by some of the largest transnational corporations in the world. Not least, the two regions exhibit, in general terms at least, quite different poverty profiles: in aggregate terms the northeast is the poorest region in the federation (the region has the highest multi-dimensional poverty in the federation and a poverty incidence of 86% [see Lewis & Watts, 2015]); the South-South (the nine delta states) posts a poverty rate of 34% and significantly higher human development indices. Along many axes of comparison—ecology, ethnic composition, forms of livelihood, political histories, and cultural formations—Boko Haram and MEND suggest little in the way of family resemblance.

On the other hand, they share a number of paradoxical qualities. Each was the offspring of the return to democratic rule and the birth of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999 (Kendhammer, 2016; Pierce, 2016). Both insurgencies surfaced at a moment in history when each region might plausibly claim to have achieved what one could call political victories—both in relation to other regions in the federation and with respect to a powerful federal center. In the north, sharia law had been adopted across the twelve northern states in 2000, and the overwhelming victory in 1999 by a powerful and dominant party machine, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), reaffirmed northern hegemony in national politics. In the delta, the dark picture of economic and political marginalization painted by leader of the Ogoni struggle Ken Saro-Wiwa in the first half of the 1990 had brightened, at least in fiscal terms. A raft of powerful new youth movements had arisen among the so-called ethnic 'oil minorities' propelling a radical change in 1999 in the principles by which state oil revenues were allocated within the system of fiscal federalism. The so-called derivation principle by which states within the federation retain a proportion of the income of resources located within their jurisdiction—injected a

huge quanta of petro-revenues into the oil-producing states and contributed to the ascension of a powerful, and nationally influential class of regional political 'Godfathers'. How, then, can we account for the somewhat paradoxical emergence of two apparently dissimilar insurgencies under these sets of conditions?

Despite their surficial differences and their counter-intuitive emergence, the two insurgencies were shaped by a common set of structural forces—a set of conditions of possibility—which have arisen from the political settlements and the ordering of power (Slater, 2011) associated with the dominance of oil and gas in Nigeria's political economy. In particular, the ordering of power within Nigeria's petro-state engendered particular sorts of spaces—frontiers—which can only be understood in relationship to the changing capabilities of the state on the one hand,² and a crisis of social reproduction of youth marked by the decay of systems of authority on the other. I seek to given analytical priority to a trio of forces which constitute the insurgencies' conditions of possibility: space, the state and systems of authority³. MEND and Boko Haram were forged in the different frontier spaces of the northeast and southeast of the country, each constituted in their specificity by unique economic, cultural, and ecological conditions yet sharing common properties in regard to state capacity, the deepening illegitimacy of forms of political, civic and religious authority, and the radical precariousness by what Joe Trapido (2015, p. 31) in describing the Congo, has called a class of young, masterless men.

The frontier for my purposes is understood as a form of social space (Lefebvre, 1991) and stands in sharp contrast to the manner in which the term was deployed by George Frederick Turner (1893) in his famous account of the opening and closing of the American frontier. For Turner the frontier was defined by its remoteness, the defining qualities of which are abundant land, under-exploited resources, and gradual settlement by commercially oriented settlers and state authorities expanding their territorial jurisdiction. His account both underplays the importance and dynamics of the accumulation process—its violence and disorder—and has little of substance to say about the frontiers' relation to state power. Rather, in frontier spaces what is and is not legitimate authority, and who authorizes such legitimate power, is often an open question and an object of deep contention. The disorderly and often violent forms of rule associated with unreliable and partisan legal orders, unaccountable forms of state governance and ineffective forms of public authority, typically co-exist with the questionable legitimacy of most other forms of authority—civic, customary, corporate, and religious (Lund, 2006). As Markoff (2006, p. 78) puts it, "places where authority—neither secure nor non-existent—is open to challenge and where polarities of order and chaos assume many guises". To use Korf, Hagmann, and Dovenspeck's (2013) language, the social spaces which incubated Nigeria's insurgencies are 'political frontiers'. These frontier spaces emerge from, and are the products of, what Porter and I (2017) call "asymmetrical state capabilities". In a complex federal system like Nigeria, changing state capabilities and practices can create and recreate frontier-like spaces, exhibiting the generic qualities of all political frontiers. In this sense frontiers are spaces formed before the arrival of law and order (and systems of authority) but they may also arise after legal and authority systems collapse or wither.

If frontiers are defined in relation to state powers and forms of authority, they are also populated by specific classes and social groups who live in what Lorey (2015) calls "states of insecurity". Here the accumulation process—capitalism's making and unmaking

¹ Between mid-February and mid-June 2016, the NDA claimed responsibility for fourteen attacks on pipelines and other infrastructure; at least one other militant group - Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM)—has emerged over the last six months.

² See Porter and Watts (2017) where we discuss at length the idea of "asymmetrical state capabilities" of Nigeria in the oil-period.

³ Frontiers in this sense is part of a wider literature on territory, identity and politics (see Lund, 2011; Moore, 2005; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Vandergest & Peluso, 1995).

ing of frontiers through the accumulation or the dis-accumulation process—is central to the configuration of social classes who struggle to make a living and make profit in and around and through these polarities of order and chaos. Capital accumulation is a frontier process because competition drives the search for what Moore calls “cheap Natures”—the opening up new commodity frontiers and new rounds of profitability by exploiting use-values (labor, energy, food, resources) produced with a below average value composition (Moore, 2015, p. 53–54). My argument is that these resource and commodity frontiers in Nigeria were constituted socially (a point made by Moore when he talks of “abstract social nature”). The social in Nigeria turns out to be a youth question—the ‘restive youth problem’ in popular parlance—that is to say, a form of generational politics (Mannheim, 1952/1972). A generation of young men were excluded (indeed alienated) from most forms of political, civil, social, customary, and religious authority at the same time that they stood at the outer margins of the market order. Youth is an important social category in Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa and key to the both inter-generational and national political conflicts (see Hoffman, 2011; McGovern, 2012; Peters, 2011; Richards, 1996). Gore and Patten (2003) point out that: “Youth is a complex, fluid and permeable category which is historically and socially situated. As such it is a site for particular and localized framings of human agency constituted by various intersecting and contested discourses”. Youth and their organizations have been embedded historically within the vertical politics of patrimonialism but also refigured especially since the late 1980s and early 1990s by the reduction in public sector employment opportunities and the contraction of personal networks and patronage. The experience of youth has crystallized into, in temporal terms, an “extended social category” (Gore & Patten, 2003). Youth has come to refer less to a specific age cohort located within patrimonial politics than to a set of precarious circumstances marked by decaying and moribund institutions and the prospect of a future without hope of advancement. It was not simply that a generation of young men were poor and dispossessed (they were); it is that the inhabited frontier spaces are characterized by a radical, systemic insecurity or what has also been called precarity (Butler, 2009, 2015; Standing, 2010).

2. The social space of the frontier

Frontier is a complex term, a keyword whose relation to other implicitly spatial concepts (borders, hinterlands, enclaves, diasporas) is unstable and often porous. In the 15th and 16th century the term *frontiere* (a word of Latin and Frankish ancestry) referred, in France, to both the facades of buildings and military frontlines; it entered English (through Middle French) with reference to the human body (*frons* or forehead) as a flat horizontal view in contradistinction to a border (from the *bord* meaning the sides of a ship) which connotes a vertical or bird’s eye view⁴. The terms border and frontier now are often used interchangeably—Kopytoff (2000, p. 39) says that the frontier is “unambiguously . . . the border between [modern] states”—though in two respects there is significant slippage. First, the border is often taken to mean an international border separating modern nation-states (an echo of the vertical and panoptic definition); Wendle and Rosler’s review (2000), for example, concludes by noting that the frontier is mostly used for “historical and present day colonial encroachments” (Wendle and Rosler, p. 8) while the border is an international boundary on a map. And second British and American usage emphasizes (in the former) the remote and uncivilized and (in the latter) the sense of pioneerism and advancement (the chauvinism of Turner’s so-called

‘tidal’ thesis in which frontier “sections” were serial moments of annexation). All of these sets of meanings invoke both a sense of structured inequality—settlers versus indigenous communities, “savagery and barbarism”, contrasting forms of petty and not so petty sovereigns—and a “zone of interpenetration” (Lamar & Thompson, 1981) in which there is “opening” as allochthonous populations intrude upon native territory and native communities and “closure” when a provisional form of authority has been established (typically through violence and extermination in the case of the “native”).

For some scholars maintaining a bright distinction between border and frontier is key to understanding what is distinctive about the global cartography of contemporary capitalism (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). The frontier is a “space open to expansion, a mobile front in continuous formation” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 15) while the border is less a blockage or impenetrable membrane that a Janus-faced space in which “global passages of people and money and things” are managed and calibrated, all the while being places within which transformation of sovereign power and violence are present. *Borderlands* in this sense—unlike the boundary line—is not readily demarcated because they are exposed to transborder influences, movements and social processes. They are constructed, shifting, unstable, and incomplete (Agiers, 2016)—polysemic and heterogeneous as Balibar (2002) has it. All of this, however, makes for considerable confusion and wildly different deployments for the same term—and not least ever proliferating typologies of these spaces (colonial and non-colonial, internal and external frontiers, alienated, integrated and ‘figurative multi-sited’ borders (see Wendl and Rosler, 2000, p. 10). The confusion between the terms is strikingly clear in Mezzadra and Neilson’s (2013) important book *Border as Method*: while needing to make a “clear” cut distinction between frontier and border (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 14), two pages later they say the distinction “dissolves” (16).

Rather than parsing such distinctions I am deploying frontier in a deliberately abstract way that does not turn exclusively or definitively upon international lines of demarcation, settlers and natives, colonial encroachment, remoteness or pioneering identities. Frontiers are defined by quite specific sorts of properties and qualities. They are particular sorts of social space associated with definitive sets of spatial practices, forms of representation and lived experiences (Lefebvre, 1991)⁵. The defining quality of the frontier is the space’s relation to “institutions and processes” (Anderson, 2013, p. 1), most crucially of the state. In frontier settings state policy and state control, markers of identity and forms of discourse (Anderson, 2013, p. 2–3) intersect in a way that express the limits of permissible behavior (Anderson, 2013, p. 7). Given a certain sort of state, says Febvre (1973, p. 213), we get certain sorts of limits and certain types of frontier. Frontiers and borders invoke limits in relation to state capacity (Migdal, 2004, p. 7); infrastructural powers are circumscribed, despotic powers challenged. In this sense frontiers necessarily suggest fluidity and blurring, tending to be marginal or liminal spaces, fluid and unfixed spaces (see De Boeck, 2013). They are what Tsing (1994, p. 279) calls “zones of unpredictability” and “discrepant kinds of meaning-making” in which there is a coexistence of cultural and other forms of exclusion and domination with creativity and resistance. These qualities lead Matt Sparke to see frontiers as “hybrid sites where reciprocal ties between the social and the cultural definition of belonging to a nation and the bureaucratic regulation of belonging to a state . . . are worked out and written out in space” (2004, p. 258 emphasis mine).

⁵ The work on frontiers is vast; for a sampling of more recent work see Rosler and Wendl (2000), Agiers (2016), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), Van Wolputte (2013), Ferguson and Raffestin (1986), Hogan (1985), Chalfin (2010), Reeves (2014), Korf and Raemaekers (2013), Balve (2015).

⁴ For an excellent linguistic and etymological analysis see Febvre (1973).

Historically frontiers are usually seen to be written out in relation to nation-building and the modern state (imperial or otherwise): the reference point is imperial and commercial advance typically into geographical border zones in which populations are presumed (or constructed) to be scant or “primitive”, property rights are unformed, and resources (land, minerals, forests) unexploited: in short, a zone of contact between “barbarism” and “civilization”. As Christian Lund puts it, the frontier denotes “an influx and presence of non-native private actors in pursuit of the newly discovered resources offers a reconfiguration of the conditions of possibility” (Lund, 2016, p. 511). Frontiers stand at the peripheries of expanding states or empires, exemplars of what Carl Schmitt (1963/2007) called *Landnahme*, the land appropriating state (see Korf *et al.*'s (2013). Not surprisingly, much of the work on frontiers (and this remains the case today) is centrally concerned with land: with property rights and land law, forms of access to and control over land, to the processes of land possession and dispossession, to corporate land grabs, state allocation, and so on (for a recent example see Campbell, 2015).

But land is only one part of the story. The frontier is primarily a social space within which forms of rule and authority, and multiple sovereignties, are in question. Banner's (2005) powerful analysis of how American Indians lost their land on the US frontier properly emphasizes the intersection of law, power, and accumulation shaped by uneven and incomplete centralized authority. Ron (2005) usefully distinguishes frontiers from ghettos, the latter are “ethnic or national enclaves securely trapped within the dominant state” (Ron, 2005, p. 192) whereas frontiers are weakly institutionalized, spaces “not tightly integrated into adjacent core states” (Ron, 2005, p. 16). Weizman (2007, p. 7) in describing Israel and the West Bank, refers to frontiers as a territorial ecosystem in which “various other zones . . . of political piracy . . . barbaric violence . . . weak citizenship . . . exist adjacent to, within or over each other”. The frontier can resemble an archipelago of splintered and fragmented spaces. Above all, frontiers must be defined precisely in relation to the presence, capabilities and interests of the state. Frontiers are places where no one has an enduring monopoly on violence (Lane, 1966), where infrastructural and despotic powers (power over and power through [Mann, 1988]) are uneven and often fragmentary. Whatever the specificity of frontier dynamics—cattle or soy frontiers in Amazonia, oil frontiers in Angola—questions of law, order, rule, authority, profit and property, were all subject to intense forms of contestation and opposition (Foweraker, 1981). The much-vaunted “wildness” or “disorder” of the frontier is, in fact an expression of forms of economic and social organization that created “classes specialized in expediency whose only commitment was to preserve the order that made possible the profitable utilization of such expediency” (Beretta & Markoff, 2006, p. 51).

Not surprisingly it is the international border or the “unsettled region” which constitutes the territorial ground on which much frontier analysis often hinges; and this indeed represents one important form of the frontier. Michael Eilenberg's (2014) fine account of the palm oil colonization along the Indonesia-Malaysian borderlands shows how much of the discursive framing of what he calls the “frontier constellation” is redolent with the imagery of Turner (uncivilized, wild, insecure and so on). But such qualities—and, to return to Lefebvre, specific sorts of practices and representations—may arise in all manner of non-border situations. But frontiers can and do arise, and be socially reproduced, in circumstances in which the capabilities of states, for a raft of quite different reasons (economic shocks, external intervention such as structural adjustment, fiscal crises, struggles and conflicts in the political settlement), may contract or wither. Their “frontierness”, then, turns on dynamic and shifting state capabilities, what Barker and van Klinken (2009) describe as “institutional patch-

ness”. As such frontiers need not be held hostage to early state-building but can be defined in relation to the constantly shifting state capacities of all modern and post-colonial states.

Jessop (2015) is useful here because his relational view of the state shows how the formal dimensions of “stateness” are combined in various contradictory configurations each of which has, as it were, built-in defects and crisis tendencies. Three formal dimensions of the state (*modes of representation* i.e., access to the state by social forces, *modes of articulation* i.e., institutional architecture, and *modes of intervention* i.e., state sites and mechanism) combine with what Jessop calls three substantive dimensions: the social basis or political settlement, the state project (its operational unity) and the state's hegemonic vision. All of this means in practice that territorial control, operational unity and political authority of the state is always a practical and contingent achievement (Jessop, 2015, p. 40). Various crises—of state capacity, or control over space, of *staatsvolk*—are indices of varying degrees of asymmetrical state capability: that is, restrictions, reductions and constraints to infrastructural and despotic powers, and limits to central authority. If the reach of the state is an achievement, two conclusions follow. First, these limits and constraints—and occasionally state involutions and collapse—are always multi-scalar and hence provide the conditions for frontier formations at various subnational levels. And second, state or public authorities are part of a larger field of civic, religious and other forms of authorized power which may wax and wane in relation to the state's legitimacy and reach. Under some circumstances, as I show in parts of Nigeria, other forms of authority (customary institutions, religion, civic) may also be both weakened and contested, and indeed these crises are the products of the same processes which have compromised and constrained centralized state authority.

The frontiers I describe in Nigeria are both are in some respects “at the border”: in the northeast surrounded by Chad, Cameroon, and Niger and in the Niger delta broadly adjacent to the Cameroonian border. But proximity to international borders is not key to the rise of the insurgencies or to their frontierness. Rather it is the shifting fortunes of state capacity in relation to other forms of public, private, and civic authority and the shifting forms of frontier accumulation, dispossession and recession which are key to the shape of these internal frontiers.⁶

3. The ordering of power and state capabilities in Nigeria

Nigeria is customarily seen as a worst case of the resource-curse, an exemplar of petro-affliction *in extremis*.⁷ Systemic “governance failures”—a euphemism for the chronic crises of legitimacy confronting predatory and extractive public authorities largely unresponsive to the demands of full citizenship and incapable of fulfilling the most basic human and developmental needs—are endemic and debilitating, and economic performance is undistinguished at best (falling victim usually to the Dutch Disease). US\$1 trillion in oil and gas earnings over the past half century, have not translated into either significant increases in employment or widespread improvements in the well-being and life chances of the majority of its citizens (World Bank, 2014). Wage employment is low and falling (only 12% of the labor force), unemployment rates increased over the decade to 2009 and more than 40% of the country's young people are unemployed (this is almost certainly a serious underestimate). During 1980–2000, the share of the population subsisting on less than one dollar a day grew from 36% to more than 70% (from 19 million to a staggering 90 million people). In the phrasing of one IMF

⁶ The way I am using internal frontier here is quite different from Kopytoff's important work (see Kopytoff, 1987, 2000) on African frontiers.

⁷ There is a large literature of this sort on the ‘resource curse’; see for example Ross (2012), and Humphreys, Sachs, and Stiglitz (2007). For Nigeria see Collier (2005).

report, Nigeria's oil revenues have “not significantly added to the standard of living of the average Nigerian” (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003, p. 4).

Since the end of the civil war in 1970, oil has seeped indelibly into the country's political, economic, and social lifeblood and has become an essential part of the conflicted national political space (Soares De Oliveira, 2007). In 2013 over 80% of government revenues, 90% of foreign exchange earnings, 96% of export revenues, and 15% of gross domestic product (GDP) accounted for by oil and gas revenues (World Bank, 2014). It is this dependency that is often seen to have over-determined Nigeria's litany of developmental failures and its political dynamics (and by implication the portfolio of appropriate policy options). The Dutch Disease, the costs of volatility and poor governance produce a well-cataloged litany of state deficits and public sector dysfunctions (Lewis & Watts, 2015). The capture of substantial oil rents by the state contributed to the rapid growth of centralized power, even as the political settlement and the ferocious elite struggle over and capture of oil rents drove societal fragmentation, splintering, and dispersion. The main beneficiaries of a political economy constructed around oil rents are a diverse and fractious class of politicians, civil servants, high-ranking military officers, and business interests, who constitute a form of elite cartel.⁸ The logic of the political settlement entails buying off powerful groups and individuals so that they do not become a threat (co-optation); permitting some benefits to trickle down to purchase consent and legitimacy; and building powerful despotic apparatuses to ensure compliance (coercion) (Humphreys et al., 2007, p. 264).

The ordering of power wrought in some way by oil in Nigeria is a counterpoint to the states that Slater (2011) describes in south-east Asia. He argues that the growth and development trajectories in Southeast Asia after the Second World War were shaped by the rise of what he calls durable “Authoritarian Leviathans.” These regimes arose because contentious class politics were seen by powerful classes as endemic and unmanageable—that is to say their security and class positions are threatened by urban insurrection, radical redistributive demands, and communal tensions. These threats, in short, sustained state-centered coalitions and “protection pacts” which facilitated state-building, in the first instance this was through the state's coercive apparatuses, but more generally through building durable state institutions. But nothing of this sort existed in late colonial Nigeria and the threat of unmanageable conflict (the Biafran War) was undercut by the simultaneous emergence of oil as the determinant of state revenues and political stability. What emerged was not a protection pact but an ordering of power through a “provisioning pact”, a resource-dependent patrimonial system resting on oil rents. The provisioning pact, as Slater (2011) says, has built-in “birth defects”.

Two logics underwrote the provisioning pact and the state's capabilities. The first was the capture of oil rents by the state through a series of laws and statutory monopolies (the 1969 Petroleum Law being the foundation stone). In effect the conversion of oil into a national resource had two profound state effects. It became the basis of claims making (citizens could, in virtue of its national character, plausibly claim their share of this national cake as a citizenship right) and statutory control over minerals ran up against longstanding and robust traditions of customary rule and land rights. The logic of indigeneity and the legitimacy of community forms of rule enshrined in the constitution, in effect institutionalized a parallel system of governance associated with chieftaincy in the south and emirate rule in the north. In a multi-ethnic polity indigenes looked to customary institutions as a

source of legitimacy and authority and nowhere more so than around question of access to and control over land. Oil nationalization trampled on local property systems and land rights and complicated the already tense relations between first settlers (indigenes) and newcomers. The raft of oil laws inevitably was construed locally as expropriation and dispossession—the loss of “our oil”. These claims were inevitably expressed in ethnic terms (our land, our oil) and marked the emergence of so-called oil minorities (a post-colonial invention) not only as a political category but as an entity with strong territorial claims. In the north, far from the oil fields, Muslim populations stood in a more attenuated relation to oil wealth and oil politics turned on the calculi by which northern communities—states, local governments, Muslim *umma*—received their share of the national cake. Resentments turned on the extent to which the delta was perceived to be capturing disproportionate shares of oil wealth on the one hand, and to the effects of elite capture of oil rents on many aspects of political, social and cultural life on the other. Oil-based modernization to the Muslim community appeared as though society had lost its moral compass.

The second logic refers to the political-institutional mechanisms of revenue allocation, so-called fiscal federalism. Sources of public revenue in Nigeria are proceeds from the sale of crude oil, taxes, levies, fines, tolls, penalties and they accrue in general to the Federation Account. The Federation Account excludes the derivation account by which a percentage (currently 13%) of revenues from resources flow directly to their states of origin (enhanced derivation necessarily benefits the oil-producing states). In the period 2001–10, oil revenues averaged 27% of GDP while tax revenues averaged 6.4%. In 1992 the vertical allocation system—the proportion of revenues allocated to differing tiers of government—was changed to 48.5%, 24%, and 20% for federal, state, and local government respectively. With a pot of gold sitting at the heart of the petrostate, the federal center became a hunting ground for contracts and rents of various kinds. Nobody believes the full complement of statutory allocations are received in their entirety by the states but the regularity with which massive amounts of money disappears (or is unaccountable) at all levels of government is simply staggering, especially at the local level. Murray Last (2007, p. 609) noted that the “huge sums are disbursed each month from the federal oil-revenue account in Abuja has made access to LGA's funds of the utmost significance: any individual who can share in the control of his LGA has potentially untold riches coming to him personally.” Derivation politics (and the budgetary and revenue mobilization in process in general) inevitably became an axis of contention between the Niger delta and the federal center and laid the basis for what became in the 1990s the Niger delta's clamor for ‘resource control’. In the zero sum logic of provisioning, a Niger delta rich in oil money implies loss of revenues to the north.

The logics of provisioning of the post-1999 period (see Kraft, 2013; Watts, 2011), may seem to endorse the “resource curse” analysis (Collier, 2005). Yet enduring institutional failure must not blind us to the fact that the combination of oil and nation-building has produced a durable and expanded federal system (including the national rebuilding after the Biafran war), a multi-party *partial democratization* (albeit retaining an authoritarian cast) and important forms of *institution building* (increasing separation of powers, more autonomy of the judiciary, a gradual improvement in electoral processes and a proliferation of civil society organizations). In a complex multi-ethnic federal system held together by a contentious system of revenue allocation to federal, state, and local levels, it is inevitable that a resource curse analysis covers over all manner of *sub-national* institutional variation and marked different forms of state capability. Some states—Lagos, Edo—exhibit greater state capability and perform much better than others (say Bayelsa and Yobe); some states experience crushing levels of poverty, for example the northeast, are disproportionately higher

⁸ Nearly three-quarters (72%) of the government budget consists of recurrent costs (Business Day, September 25, 2012:1).

than in the southwest. The ordering of power, and the operations of the provisioning system, produced a state with uneven powers and capacities, and the spatial consequences of asymmetrical powers created quite different frontier spaces in the northeast and the Niger delta states.

The operations of the provisioning pact not only implied massive rent seeking and corruption but a crisis of state institutions. If government in practice meant outright theft, or at best the worst sort of patrimonial politics, then to the same degree public institutions came to be seen as largely illegitimate. Government was synonymous, to use the Nigerian vernacular, with “carry go” and “chop fine”. The judiciary, the police, the military, the senate, and local assemblies were all tainted. But the same can be said for other less secular forms of authority (whether the mega churches or the brotherhoods). In the wake of the return to civilian rule what is and is not legitimate authority, and the extent to which institutions of authority exclude certain social classes and appear for the popular classes as unruly, disorderly or violent, are central to the ways in which the failure of the post-colonial secular national project was experienced.

State deficits and dysfunction across virtually all of the institutions with which most Nigerians had some modicum of direct contact (namely local governments, elections, public service providers, the national power authority, and the judiciary) represented a profound crisis of secular development and systems of legitimate authority. The post-colonial landscape in the north and south is littered with the wreckage of state repression, extra-judicial killings, human rights violations, and undisciplined security forces. But the authority crisis extended beyond the state narrowly construed. The institutions of customary authority were no longer legitimate systems either, and most youth felt excluded from their gerontocratic orders. Niger delta chiefs were not unusually summarily, and often violently, ejected from office by rebellious youth groups angry at their pocketing of monies paid to them by oil companies for purportedly community development. The emirs and their retinues continued to function but were increasingly marginal to the lives of many Muslims in the north and in any case were seen to part of a ruling *sarauta* class that had abandoned them, like their political representatives in the National Assembly. In addition, religion itself as a system of authority was in question. Some northern clerics were tainted by their connection to state actors and agents; equally, the ferocious debate within the Muslim community—and the harsh debates between the Sufi brotherhoods and Muslim organizations like Yan Izala, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN)—revealed that what constituted legitimate Muslim practice and authority, in spite of the adoption of Shari’a law, was in question. The massive growth of Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity across the delta certainly commanded enormous power and allegiances among communities for whom the ideology of self-improvement and material gain had much appeal. But it too was tainted by big politics and in any case played no role whatsoever in the politics of resource control.

Not least, the dominant presence and visibility of transnational oil companies (and related construction and engineering companies) added another dimension of illegitimacy. The so-called ‘slick alliance’ between Big Oil and the state, the militarization of oil installations, the corrupt practices of companies buying off local chiefs and politicians, an appalling record in regard to the environment, and the rank failure of community development, collectively contributed to a the popular sense of oil corporations as rogue entities operating with impunity, of companies having lost their social license to operate. Corporate social responsibility and corporate community development—corporations were widely seen by communities as a form of local government substituting for the absence of actual local government—fared no better, and were little more than sumps, pumping money through hierarchical and

non-democratic chiefly institutions in turn producing a venal struggle among elders and local notables for grants and development funds (WAC Global Services, 2003; Watts, 2007).

The illegitimacy, indeed the ethical and moral bankruptcy, of these multiple and overlapping networks of customary and modern governance created a vast space of alienation and exclusion, a world in which the armies of impoverished youth were neither citizens nor subjects, a social landscape in which the politics of resentment could fester (McGovern, 2012). Rural and urban, federal and local, religious and secular, customary and modern, the crises of authority were instrumental in the creation of a rural and urban underclass, alienated and excluded from the worlds of legitimate authority, and from the market order. Contempt was the ruling ideology and precarity the ruling condition. These floating populations—the lumpenproletariat, *Qu’ranic* students and land-poor peasants in the north, the unemployed youth in the delta detached from the old gerontocratic order, each unable to fulfill the norms of personal advancement through marriage, patronage and work—occupied a social moratorium (Vigh, 2006). Youth occupied a social space of massively constricted possibility, a world in which economic recession and the dreadful logic of provisioning and self-interest reduced millions to the level of a vast underclass. Youth became a permanent way of life. Young men in particular of differing education statuses and prospects are shed from customary institutions like clan, lineage, village, and chieftaincy, by religious authorities and by the state. A photograph taken by Ed Kashi (see Kashi & Watts, 2005) in the Niger Delta captures this ethos perfectly; hand painted on the side of a corrugated shack are the words: TRUST NOBODY.

Of course, in some places legitimacy crises were more profound than others. And for the most part these tensions and contradictions—and the politics of dissent and resentment which illegitimate institutions engendered—were containable within a durable provisioning system which effectively the twin capabilities of coercion and patrimonialism (Porter & Watts, 2017). But in some places and under some conditions tensions exploded into the open and came represent a challenge to the stability and legitimacy of the entire provisioning system and the ordering of power.

4. MEND and Boko Haram compared: frontiers, precarious life, and crises of authority

Nigeria’s two insurgencies arose from frontier spaces characterized by systemic crises of social reproduction and of institutional legitimacy across nested systems of authority. In each case however the frontier differed in its local form shaped by regional traditions of warfare, systems of religiosity and spirituality, and very different social structure, identities, and ecologies (see McGovern, 2012). The northeast was a sort of *recessional frontier*: extremely porous in cultural and social terms with respect to surrounding countries, it was marked by the abandonment of the popular classes by ruling elites, the capture of the local state by non-state actors, by a splintering of the ideological landscape of Islam, and by a deep economic recession (de-industrialization in the face of Chinese textile imports and agrarian stagnation) compounded by a demographic boom. It was in the northeast that these indices of abjection reached their apogee. Overall the picture is one of economic descent and declining per capita income coupled with radically declining health and education standards for millions of *talakawa* (commoners).

The Niger delta was an archetypical *oil boom frontier* (see Watts, 2014) propelled forward by transnational capital (working in conjunction with the federal state) operating with relative impunity, and by the rise of new elite coalitions of customary rulers and local politicians all the while generating precious few backward linkages

in the economy capable of providing forms of livelihood for a demographically expanding class of rural and urban youth. The region had been in decline throughout the colonial period as palm oil—its primary export and industrial resource—had ossified and in commercial terms disappeared. The region was a backwater until the commercialization of oil, weakly integrated into the federation and institutionally undeveloped. The oil frontier unleashed grievances over fiscal allocation principles, community rights, the need for accountability among local governments, and how redress might be sought from the violations perpetrated by the security forces. Ironically the huge influx of oil revenues after 1999 simply reinforced the serial failures of revenue management, corporate governance, customary rule, environmental regulation with little palpable improvements in well-being. By the early 2000s, conflicts of many sorts—between government security forces and communities, between oil producing communities, between youth groups and chiefs—were endemic (Watts, 2011). If the dynamics of each frontier differed in their details, the relation of young men in particular to institutions of authority, to the market order, and to the possibility of social and material advancement was strikingly similar.

*The Rise of MEND on the Oil Frontier*⁹: MEND emerged, quite dramatically, in late 2005 in the western delta in the creeks south of Warri, a major oil-city on the oilfields. The political agenda of MEND was not clear at the outset, except that it self-identified as a ‘guerilla movement’ whose ‘decisions, like its fighters, are fluid’. In fact, in a press release by email PR man Jomo claimed that MEND was apolitical and its fighters “were not communists... or revolutionaries. [They] are just very bitter men” (Bergen Risk Solutions, 2007). But a clear political platform emerged. In a signed statement by field commander Tamuno Godswill in early February 2006, MEND’s demands were clearly outlined: the release of three key Ijaw prisoners (so-called Ijaw patriots arrested by the federal government in late 2005), the immediate and unconditional demilitarization of the Niger delta, immediate payment of \$1.5 billion environmental compensation from Shell approved by the Nigerian National Assembly, and local resource control (meaning states and communities would ‘directly manage’ oil). In an interview with Karl Maier on February 21st 2006 (Vanguard February 4th 2006), Jomo made it clear that MEND had ‘no intention of breaking up Nigeria’ but also had no intention of dealing directly with government which ‘knows nothing about rights or justice’.

MEND threatened to lock-in (i.e., block) one third of national oil production, and to cause untold havoc with oil operations on and offshore. In a short period, it accomplished these goals effortlessly with astonishing tactical and military sophistication. Over three years the costs inflicted by MEND on the oil and gas sector were enormous. Between 2006 and 2009, the costs in lost oil revenues (due to attacks on infrastructure and oil theft) was staggering, amounting to over \$70 billion. But the situation deteriorated still further undercutting the federal government’s economic lifeline. On May 13th 2009, federal troops launched a full-scale counter-insurgency against what the government saw as violent organized criminals. In response, militants opened ferocious reprisal attacks, gutting Chevron’s Okan manifold which controls 80% of company shipments of oil. Over a two-month period from mid-May to mid-July 2009, twelve attacks were launched against Nigeria’s \$120 billion oil infrastructure: 124 of Nigeria’s 300 operating oil fields were shut by mid-July 2009. Then, late in the night of July 12th 2009, 15 MEND gunboats launched a devastating assault on Atlas Cove, a major oil facility in Lagos, the economic heart of the country, three hundred miles from the Niger delta oilfields. By

May 2009 oil production had fallen by over a million barrels per day.

MEND was bathed in the ether of oilfield community conflicts dating back to the 1980s. The rapid expansion of the oil frontier after 1970—exploration, well drilling, oil installations, infrastructural construction, dredging—had deeply affected thousands of small communities especially in the core oil producing states (Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom). A watershed moment was realized in the struggle of delta peoples with the Ogoni movement of the early 1990s, but its demise provided a shot of energy for more ambitious organizing among larger ethnic groups, especially the Ijaw, across the delta. In 1998 the Kaiama declaration founded the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC)—an Ijaw youth group that grew out of their frustrations with more conservative Ijaw elders and their organizations (most especially the Ijaw National Congress)—and marked a growing frustration with peaceful non-violent mobilization. Kaiama marked a massive cross-delta (and cross-ethnic) mobilization through mobile parliaments and youth organizing, and an explicit strategy to diversify tactics associated with the struggle in the wake of the military hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa.

The consequence of oil companies, backed by the violent Nigerian security forces, operating with total impunity, and cutting deals with powerful chiefs and political godfathers was to convert so-called oil producing “host communities” into theaters of violence. Communities (sometimes of differing ethnic, clan or political affiliation) fought among themselves over rights to oil-bearing lands; youth groups fought and sometimes overthrew ruling chiefs who were seen to be appropriating community funding from the companies; mafia-like youth groups offered protection to (and extorted from) oil companies and fought with companies over compensation from spills; self-proclaimed militant groups functioned as local operatives in the excessively violent oil-bunkering (theft) trade; chiefs, using local armed groups, fought among themselves to contest chiefly appointment to royal houses and paramount positions in the traditional hierarchy which conferred direct access to the companies operating on their territories and to oil rents in the form of community development and land-rent funds; ethnic groups in cities fought for the establishment of local governments to gain access to the revenue allocation process; criminal groups were drawn into serving as political thugs in the 1999, and 2003 elections; and oil producing communities everywhere fought with the state security forces who were deployed as parts of a dedicated Niger Delta Military Task Force to keep the oil flowing at all costs. Over two decades the delta had become a zone of insurrection, awash in dispersed and fragmented conflicts. By 2005 there were purportedly 150 “hotspots” (armed conflicts) in the delta and the region was populated by almost fifty “militant groups”, many armed and most addressing local grievances. The frontier space was fragmented and parcellized, splintered by a welter of local conflicts. All of this was compounded by the huge influx of oil monies to state and local governments after 1999 which were marked by staggering degrees of corruption even by Nigerian standards.

MEND’s genesis reflected the spatial fragmentation within the oil frontier. The insurgency shifted the struggle dramatically to the western Delta—the so-called Warri axis. Here a similar set of grievances and struggles were playing out within the complex ethnic politics of Warri city and the failures of the companies to provide meaningful benefits to host communities. As Ukiwo (2007) has shown, Ijaw mobilization in the region stemmed from a long history of struggle over trade during the nineteenth century in which Itsekeri peoples emerged as a comprador class to the European trading houses (and thereby marginalizing the Ijaw from trade opportunities). The Western Ijaw built up a reputation as ‘truculent’ and ‘pirates’ and actively resisted colonial rule until

⁹ This section draws from Watts (2007, 2011), Nwajiaku (2012), Ikelegbe (2006), Ukiwo (2007), Courson (2015), Obi and Rustaad (2011), Adunbi (2015).

the 1920s when they were located into a new Western Ijaw Division cut out of the Warri Division. It was from this mix of multi-ethnic competition and corporate exploitation that MEND emerged so dramatically. MEND was preceded by militant youth groups whose origins lay in the 1980s and 1990s—the Egbesu Boys of Africa, the Meinbutu Boys, Feibagha Ogbo, Dolphin Obo, Torudigha Ogbo (Courson, 2015). These Ijaw fighters were war-hardened during the inter-ethnic violence of the Warri crises in the late 1990s (inter-ethnic struggles over the delimitation of wards and local government areas in the city and environs), but in contrast to the east, Ijaw militants were not co-opted by a state government dominated by non-Ijaw ethnicities. In the eastern region around Port Harcourt in Rivers State, militant groups were co-opted by powerful regional politicians and often deployed for electoral violence. Here the militants were funded, armed, and shaped by political Godfathers anxious to both dampen the youthful energy of the IYC and to redirect it to political ends during the election cycle. When these groups began to fall out with the political class and fought among themselves often over payment—this was the heart of the violent battles between Asari Dokubo's Niger Delta Volunteer Force and Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante in 2003–04—insurgent sentiments were channeled into criminal enterprises like oil theft. As a consequence the horizons of militant groups talking resource control were in practice often local and pecuniary.

The militants were not in any obvious sense—as some have argued for Sierra Leone—an urban lumpen-class raised on a diet of drugs, rap and alienation, without intellectuals and without ideology. As survey data shows, many were of rural and small town backgrounds who were the casualties of exclusions from the chieftainship and lineage systems of the Ijaw, as much as from local government and the labor market, many of whom were hounded and attacked by the military task forces for their trouble. The challenge for MEND and the western Ijaw was whether it could provide a Delta-wide centralized leadership within the frontier space among militant groups fractured by generation, clan, lineage, and ethnicity, compounded by the lure of oil as a constellation of groups competed for access to oil rents among companies that dispensed vast cash payments to chiefs, youth groups and vigilantes in an attempt to secure the flow of oil (WAC, 2003; Watts, 2007, 2011). Solidarity and leadership was provided by charismatic leaders like Chief Government Ekpemupolo, alias Tomopolo, but equally important was the ideological function of indigenous religious practices, not the dominant Pentecostalism but the local indigenous spirit world and the Egbesu cult. Egbesu (in a manner strikingly similar to the complex meanings of the word *jihad* for northern Muslims) invoked an indigenous sense of warriorhood but also of truth and moral purity in a disordered world (Golden, 2012). Since the 1980s the Egbesu (the powerful Ijaw god of war and justice) and its cosmological order was revived and re-purposed; the shrines were rehabilitated and the priests recovered the seven oracles from sacred places where they had been hidden since the collapse of Boro's rebellion in the mid 1960s (Maier, 2002, p. 126). The revival of Egbesu and the appearance of the oracles were signals of a consensus across clans, villages and communities that the future of Ijaw society was at stake. In the period up to the counter-insurgency launched in May 2009, meetings among commanders across the delta under Tomopolo's direction—himself a powerful figure within Egbesu—offered, if largely ethnic, vision.

The MEND insurgency, quite unlike Boko Haram which has gained strength and momentum, came to a close with an amnesty signed in 2009. By the summer of 2009 with the on-shore oil production affectively locked in, the federal government launched a counter-insurgency campaign, which in turn ended with an amnesty. Over 26,000 militants signed up for a multiple year program of training and re-education (the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program). The amnesty reflected a

stalemate between state security forces and the militants and the need to revive the oil sector (at a moment when prices were exceptionally high). But the amnesty turned out to be business as usual (Alapki, Emekwe, & Joab-Peterside, 2015). DDR simply became an instrument of the provisioning pact, shunting massive amounts of money to state officials and to militant commanders, drawing angry young men into new patronage networks. Purchasing consent in this way worked—it produced a fragile peace—particularly since the sudden death of the President resulted in the ascension to the presidency of a delta man Goodluck Jonathan. The program cost a staggering \$1.4 billion over five years. As it turned out the Amnesty Program was “business as usual” in Nigeria, an attempt by President Yar'Adua to return oil production to pre-crisis levels without addressing the grievances that incited the militants to interrupt oil production in the first place. But there was a twist. The politics of the provisioning system empowered new actors and new signals. A number of the commanders (Tompolo among them) were figures of considerable wealth and influence. But the cherry-picking of commanders and the allocation of contracts to them helped strengthen the environment for certain sorts of crime and equipped a powerful set of actors who have created a new space for themselves in national politics. Ex-militants are now an organized political lobby. Because the amnesty was not part of any larger Niger delta peace and development plan, the delta remains “largely as it was when the insurgency ended in 2009” (ICG, 2015:9). It is no surprise then that after the defeat of Goodluck Jonathan in 2015, and the prospect of a northern dominated government facing austerity, declining oil prices and Boko Haram, militancy has returned to the creeks.

*Boko Haram and the Recessional Frontier*¹⁰: Boko Haram (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad)¹¹ arose as, and until the late 2000s remained, a largely local frontier phenomena located in Bornu, part of the former Kanem-Bornu empire. The group's origins seem to be traceable to an Islamist study group in Maiduguri the mid-1990s. When its founder, Abubakar Lawan, left to pursue further studies at the University of Medina, a committee of shaykhs appointed Mohammad Yusuf as the new leader. The thirty-two-year-old Yusuf established a religious complex with a mosque and an Islamic boarding school in the city. A popular preacher and a student of Jafar Adam—an influential leader of a radical Shiite group in Kano, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN)—Yusuf was part of the shifting landscape of Nigerian Islam. In Maiduguri he established the Islamic Youth Vanguard which by 2000 had morphed into Yusufiyya, also known as the Yobe Taliban, rooted in a largely rural, impoverished Kanuri region of Yobe State. Modeled on al-Qa'ida and the Taliban, and self-consciously imitating their dress and affect, followers believed that the adoption of shari'a in the twelve northern states since 2000 was not just incomplete but reflected a weakness and abandonment of Muslim principle by the state. As conflicts between members of the movement and local villagers escalated, the Yobe State Council compelled the sect to move, and they decamped to a remote location near the border with Niger; the new base was named 'Afghanistan' and the group adopted the moniker 'Taliban' of Yobe.

Yusuf was far from a lowly and obscure cleric. He was sufficiently influential that he was appointed 'emir' of the Movement for the Revival of Islam in 1994—a group critical of both the tradi-

¹⁰ This section is drawn from the pathbreaking work of Lubeck (2010) on the changing face of Islam in northern Nigeria, and by Forest (2012), Amnesty (2015), ICG, Alkali, Monguo, and Mustafa (2012), Pantucci and Jespersen (2015), Loimeier (2010) Commoli (2015), Smith (2015) and Cook (2011) on the Boko Haram.

¹¹ Boko Haram is not the term by which its adherents self-identify. Boko Haram (roughly “Western education is a sin”) is a term deployed by residents who objected to their religious practice. Boko Haram certainly stand in opposition to the *yan boko* (the social class of what one might call young moderns) but their full name is The People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad.

tional Muslim leadership and the Sultan of Sokoto and new modernizing groups such as the Yan Izala founded in 1978 and associated with Abubakar Gumi. By 1999 he had been appointed to the Bornu State Sharia Implementation Committee but was deeply critical of their operations and their unwillingness to adopt ‘true Islam’. Furthermore, Yusuf had been drawn into electoral politics during a contentious gubernatorial election in 2003 and promised political support for his vision of full sharia implementation. In the early he established the Adherents to the Sunnah and the Community marking his break from Jafar and local shaykhs—charging them with corruption and failure to preach “pure Islam” (*Vanguard* [Lagos], August 4, 2009)—and in 2003 founded the People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad. His supporters were a mix of the rural and urban poor—often q’uranic students parts of longstanding Muslim networks—but also secondary school and university graduates confronting a non-existent labor markets, failing development institutions and forms of Islam perceived as complicit with the moral and ethical failings of the petro-state.

The drift toward a more literalist and conservative Islam was increasingly shaped by national and global processes even if Yusuf was primarily focused on his local Maiduguri mosque. On the one hand, the return to civilian rule saw the egregious use of religion for purposes of political mobilization and the consolidation of political power among the northern elites of the provisioning pact. The adoption of sharia law—its meanings and institutionalization—fomented reformist (*tajdid*) tendencies and increasing fragmentation within the northern umma. On the other, the Iranian revolution, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Wahabbism, and the two Gulf Wars all contributed ideas and forces pushing northern Nigerian Islam away from the historical power and influence of the Sufi orders. Lubeck (2010) has shown how radical Islam in the north must be seen in relation to how state and developmental failures are read through the cultural lens of *tajdid* (renewal) in order to fully implement shari’a as a means for Muslim self-realization. The dominant Sufi brotherhoods associated with the ruling emirate classes came into conflict with a conservative modernizing movement emerging in the 1960s led by Abubakar Gumi (himself supported by radical Muslim populists critical of the ascriptive and reactionary system of the Sufi Brotherhood and relics of the old emirate social structure and systems of authority). Gumi’s formation was linked to his exposure to Saudi patronage and to Salafist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, adopting the doctrines of Sayyid Qutb and the willingness to condemn Muslims as *takfir* (unbelievers) for adopting un-Islamic practices (*bidah*). The movement drew sustenance during the economic recession of the 1980s because the call for shari’a law invoked a sense of economic and political justice for the poor, and a type of open egalitarianism, as Lubeck says, that appealed to youth.

If so-called Islamic reformism and restoration was propelled forward by the politicization of religion after the return of electoral politics, the reformist movements fractured and fragmented in regard to differing radical assessments of what sort of Islamic restoration was required. Splits within Yan Izala, and the rise of a new Shi’ite group, *Yan Brothers*, drawing inspiration from the Iranian Revolution, coupled with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the War on Terror, contributed to a maelstrom of competing Islamist ideas and practices. A charismatic leader could recruit impoverished youth and qu’ranic students locally and within a transnational space—the Chad Basin—wracked by poverty, conflict, and violent accumulation, while also able to gain adherents and support in high political places within the state itself. The evolution of Boko Haram emerged from the shifting institutional and political networks of a globally linked northern Nigerian Islam while propelled by a Nigerian state offering support (from certain constituencies) while simultaneously wielding the big stick of its

violent and often undisciplined security forces—a striking parallel to MEND.

Yusuf broke from many of the Muslim organizations of which he was part during the 1990s and was critical of much of what passed as Islamic practice and authority. But splits occurred within his own leadership too as one of his students Abubakar Shekau founded his own more radical group (People of the way of the Prophet and Community According to the Approach of the Salaf). While in Yobe, Yusuf was attacked by the military and fled to Saudi Arabia. After his return from Saudi Arabia he began to aggressively recruit university students but in 2008 he was arrested again for his religious activity in what was to become increasing contentious relations with state security forces, politicians and local communities. All of this transpired in a frontier region in which Yusuf and his recruits were drawn from impoverished rural and small town settings and where often part of cross-border networks reaching into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

On 11 June 2009 an encounter with the police turned violent—the conflict being triggered by the seemingly trivial issue of a local helmet law that Boko Haram flouted during a funeral procession to bury some of their members who died in a car accident. Anger at what were perceived to be heavy-handed police tactics—the security forces were widely seen as ‘dogs’ - subsequently triggered an armed uprising in the northern state of Bauchi and spread quickly into the states of Borno, Yobe, and Kano. All of this suggested a far larger regional network of recruits and leaders. On July 30, 2009, in a violent confrontation in Maiduguri, security forces captured and killed Boko Haram’s leader, in what human rights groups have deemed an extrajudicial killing. His murder marked a radical turning point for the Boko Haram. Driven underground and across the border to neighboring countries, the group adopted a new and more radical leadership in Abubakar Shekau (considered a spiritual leader and operational commander), Kabiru Sokoto (the alleged mastermind of the devastating Christmas 2011 attacks in Kano) and in Shaikh Abu Muhammed. For many members of the sect, the unjust circumstances surrounding the death of Yusuf served to amplify pre-existing animosities toward a secular state seen to have abandoned Islam and the protection of Muslims. By 2010, Boko Haram re-emerged, re-organized and re-armed, determined to seek vengeance against the Nigerian state deploying violent operations against government targets including an astounding prison breaks, assassinations of senior politicians and traditional rulers and clerics, and the suicide attack against the Abuja U.N. headquarters.

Boko Haram’s roots reside in a sort of utopian community consistent with certain tenets of Salifism. But conflicts with state and religious institutions—both of which it saw as corrupt and illegitimate—pushed Boko Haram to a fuller sense of its vision of true Islam. Local issues remained—compensation for destruction of building, the release of prisoners, the ability to rebuild its mosque and community—but the full implementation of sharia began to assume a jihadist cast (shaped by networked connections to Malian, Algerian, and Somalia Islamists) and a desire to restore ‘the Caliphate’. One Boko Haram announcement referred to the goal of destabilizing Nigeria and taking Nigeria “back to the pre-colonial period when sharia law was practiced”; they could also claim that “we do not believe in any system of government”, and that “Nigeria is illegal”. In language quite similar to MEND pronouncements, a Boko Haram leader claimed: “we are fighting against, democracy, capitalism, socialism and the rest” but their relation to the Nigerian state in normative terms was quite different.

Boko Haram’s goals to restore true Islam and wage war against unbelievers are directly related to the state in several fundamental respects. First, its critique of the state and its apparatuses—during the 2011 elections they assassinated politicians, and destroyed

public schools, military installations and police stations—was propelled by the violence meted out the army and police, and by what they took to be the moral, religious and ethical bankruptcy of the state. Second, Yusuf's own involvement with the sharia implementation process exposed the corruption and duplicity of the government in regard to Islam. Third, Yusuf and his movement was deployed (and in some respects empowered, and probably armed) by the state in the 2003 Bornu elections but were promptly abandoned and betrayed by the same political classes after the electoral victory. And not least, Boko Haram was clearly supported by powerful actors within the state apparatuses and the political classes, largely during the Presidency of Goodluck Jonathan, as a means to destabilize the administration. All of this fed into, and amplified the sorts of internal debates over organized Sunni Islam in the north and various revitalization movements seeking reform. Boko Haram's message pertaining to restoration, the critique of the *yan boko* and the state, and the bankruptcy of secular politics resonated deeply with youth of quite differing class and educational backgrounds. Across the northeastern states rates of poverty and structural youth unemployment were greater than in any other region in the federation. Secular national development had failed catastrophically. Like the Niger delta, the provisioning system had eviscerated other systems of authority whether local government, the security forces, emirate institutions, clerical networks and even extended family structures in the countryside. These multiple crisis of authority amidst the economic wasteland of the northeastern states provided a powerful recruiting ground for alienated and excluded youth.

5. Precarity at the edge of the state

At the heart of the Nigerian insurgencies is a frontier space populated by a generation of young men (of wildly different cultural identities and political outlook) expelled from, and deeply suspect of, institutions of authority most of which are perceived to lack credibility, functional adequacy and legitimacy. They are caught between the crumbling social and political orders of gerontocratic customary rule—what Lund (2006) calls twilight institutions - and the disorder of failing forms of secular post-colonial state authority. Frontier conditions provide a powerful thread linking youth militancy to a political order that, as Hoffman (2011, p. 67) says 'denies them recognized forms of authority'. Construed in this way, the crisis of youth can be expressed in a multiplicity of forms: a crisis of identity, of rights, of social exclusion, of masculinity, of the spirit, of employment and so on. The two insurgencies arose from the same conditions of possibility: profound and multiple crises of authority and rule on the one hand, and the radical precarity and insecurity of youth on the other. These two force fields produce frontiers arising from the same 'ordering of power' (Slater, 2011) in Nigeria and from the same exclusionary political settlements associated with the contentious politics of oil. But in each case the crisis of social reproduction experienced by young men is assembled and politicized in distinctive cultural and political ways even if both resort to a common language and practice of armed militancy (see Chauveau & Richards, 2008).

In seeing frontiers through the lens of generation on the one hand and an ordering of power in an African petro-state—which produces multiple, overlapping and nested crises of authority and radical insecurity on the other. My account dovetails with contemporary debates over the so-called precariat. Precarity has arisen as a concept speaking to the historical conditions of neoliberal dispossession in the trans-Atlantic capitalist economies (see Ettliger, 2007; Näsström & Kalm, 2015; Standing, 2010) but is a term which has been deployed in numerous ways: as a realist terms describing the changing compact between labor and capital;

as an affective term describing the ontology of the present; as an ideological term calling forth a new sense of the public good. Guy Standing's (2010) path-breaking book refers to precarity expressed through new forms of labor insecurity—income, representational, employment, work, skill—which represent an evisceration of a trans-Atlantic social democratic "industrial citizenship". Works lack a work based identity; there is a shadow over workers' future, a distinctive structure of "social income". Workers have become denizens (not citizens) deprived of entitlements and rights.

Of course, in post-colonial Nigeria many of these putative state-backed securities were never there in the first place. The populations I describe are perhaps better described in a different language: the informal proletariat of the mega-city slum world described by Mike Davis (2005), and the inhabitants of Africa's 'rural slums' described by Paul Richards (1996) marked by economic recession, demographic growth and collapsing customary social structures. These 'classes of labor' as Bernstein (2010) calls them resemble the relative surplus populations of Karl Marx (1963) (the floating, the latent, the stagnant, the figure of the pauper). They all share a profound sense of unfulfilled citizenship, constituting a vast "wageless class" (Denning, 2010), largely dispossessed of fungible labor power and with little access to a culture of collective labor (Davis, 2005). The classes of labor I focus on—young men who constitute the combatants and foot soldiers in the insurgencies—are condemned to permanently (rather than transitorily) reside in a suspended state of youth. Confronting a crisis of social reproduction, a generation of masterless men inhabit a social space of massively constricted possibility. Denied access to recognized forms of authority, expelled from systems of authority, they inhabit a sort of liminal world largely outside of what are understood as forms of legitimate authority. One might say they reside outside of society (Agiers, 2016).

Butler (2015) says precarity is to a large extent dependent upon "the presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions" (Butler, 2015, p. 119). Precarity can be, and often is, also a form of mobilization and a form assembly, as she puts it, acting in concert. But precarious classes experience massive ruptures between the realities of their lives and expectations deprived of any connection to an imagined past, a present or a meaningful future. A central thread here is the degree to which precarity—what Murray Last (2005) has called material and spiritual insecurity in the cities of northern Nigeria—compromises culturally defined expectations of gender identity and paths for upward social mobility and social reproduction within a gerontocratic order. It is striking how leaders in both insurgencies addressed the question of the material and social conditions for the advancement of young men providing the means and the possibility of social advancement and marriage within a gerontocratic system which was in fact crumbling around them.

If the precarious frontier provided a common ether for MEND and Boko Haram, the insurgencies diverge sharply in the nature of their tactics and strategy and relationship to civil society. After 2009 Boko Haram broke from its largely domestic crucible by deepening its connections with jihadist movements, establishing ties to AQIM, al-Shabaab and Malian Islamists, and deploying violence (beheadings, abductions, suicide bombings) against civilian populations. It had become, in a way that was not the case in 2003, a terrorist organization. MEND, despite its decentralized and often fragmented leadership and criminal businesses elements (whether hostage taking or oil theft as forms of business rather than politics) it rarely trained its military powers against communities and civilian populations (even if there were civilian casualties as transpired in the 2012 Abuja bomb explosions). MEND's primary target was security forces and oil infrastructure and was never linked into transnational political networks.

At the same time one cannot help but be struck by the striking affinities between the insurgencies. Most obviously, the insurgencies revealed the limits of state military capabilities (despotic powers). But there are other striking family resemblances: fragmented leadership and complex patterns of fissioning; a cross-class social composition embracing university graduates and rural and urban informal workers; close relations to the state political classes (both had been supported financially and militarily by politicians and high ranking military) belying any bright lines separating state and insurgents; charismatic and spiritual leadership; and a deep imbrication in the different martial and social structural traditions of their own cultural histories (nineteenth century jihad in the north and pre-colonial martial organizations in the delta). Not least, both Tompolo and Mohammed Yusuf saw and articulated the need to materially support young men unable to advance through conventional social and cultural channels such as marriage.

As forms of frontier politics, both insurgencies can be construed as instances of what Fraser (1997, 2003) calls the politics of (mis) recognition. In her account recognition is less about identity politics (deformation of group identity) than social subordination (the sense of being prevented from participating as a person in social life). Both are expressions, in quite different registers, of institutionalized social subordination associated with each frontier space. Boko Haram in this sense—irrespective of its turn to violence and terror—is a case of what Fraser (2003, p. 22) sees as recognition politics suffering from ‘displacement’ (lacking any sense of redistribution or addressing the relations of production) and ‘reification’ (chauvinism, intolerance). But MEND linked claims over ethnic marginalization and citizenship (social subordination) to a politics of redistribution (a new federalism, increased derivation and resource control). MEND combines what Fraser (1997) calls an affirmative sort of liberal welfarism [surface reallocation of existing goods] with a mainstream multiculturalism [surface reallocation of respect to existing identities of existing groups]. Boko Haram in its violent exclusivity, possessed, no clear mandate regarding redistribution as such, adopting instead what she calls a deconstructive form of recognition politics (a radical restructuring of the relations of recognition). Each movement was an armed non-state, of course, revealing some of the militant and violent forms—mafias and vigilante groups are others—that the “polarities of order and chaos” can assume in frontiers situations (Markoff, 2006, p. 78).

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the critical and constrictive suggestions of Christian Lund and Mattias Borg Rasmussen, and to the participants at a symposium on Governance and the Edge of the State hosted by The Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen in cooperation with the Conflict Research Group, Ghent University, and the Department of Geography, University of Zürich on September 9–11th 2015. Multiple (five) reviewers from *World Development* offered substantial criticisms and points of clarification.

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