

BOKO HARAM

Ja'far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and *Al-Muntada* Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria

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Over the last four years northern Nigeria has been plagued by the activities of an Islamic insurgent group known to the Nigerian and international press by its Hausa nickname, *Boko Haram*.¹ This group attracted international attention for the first time in late July 2009, when deadly clashes between the police and members of the organization broke out in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State — formerly known in the country as ‘the abode of peace’ for the conspicuous absence of communal or religious riots — leaving over 700 people (some sources say nearly 1,000) dead. The incident was caused by an investigation started by the police after reports had suggested that the group was amassing arms in the premises of its mosque. Numerous, though small-scale incidents of attacks on police stations carried out by members of the group had also occurred in previous years. During the July 2009 crack-down, the group’s leader Mohammed Yusuf was arrested, interrogated and finally killed while in police custody. Earlier, during

the same operation, the man who had been the most prominent political protector of Yusuf, former Borno State Commissioner of Religious Affairs Buji Foi, was also killed in cold blood.² The murder of the two men can be partially attributed to the recklessness of the Nigerian police — which is well-known in the country for its ‘unconventional’ methods and which, in this case, had reason enough to have it in for a movement known for targeting small police patrols in gun attacks.³ It has been also speculated, however, that the two killings might have been the result of an order to silence the two men who, more than anybody else, could provide first-hand information about the genesis of the group and its (local and international) protectors.

After the 2009 crisis, Boko Haram suddenly reappeared on the scene in late 2010, this time under the more shadowy leadership of former Mohammed Yusuf’s deputy Abubakar Shekau. This time, Boko Haram appeared not as a small-scale religiously



Mohammed Yusuf in police custody, just before being killed.

militant 'sect' suspected of illegal activities, but a well-organized underground cartel engaged in terrorist activities, the first of its kind and magnitude in the history of northern Nigeria, and the first to systematically employ the tactic of suicide bombers. The sequence of Boko Haram actions from 2011 to date is a bulletin of war: bombings in Abuja, Bauchi and Zaria, May 2011; the bombing of the Abuja police headquarters, June 2011; the bombing of the UN headquarters in Abuja, August 2011; the bombing of four Christian churches on Christmas day, 2011; the simultaneous bombing of seven police and immigration headquarters in Kano, January 2012; the bombing of three churches in Kaduna State, June 2012. All of this while Boko Haram militants also continued to be active in frequent firearm attacks on police stations and army barracks; in occasional attacks on beer parlors throughout several northern states; in attacks on civilians in the area of Plateau State, already plagued by an ongoing, localized ethnic conflict between the Fulani Muslims and the Christian Berom. In all of this, Abubakar Shekau repeatedly appeared in video messages sent from his hideout (allegedly located somewhere in northern Cameroon) and often posted on the internet in the most typical technique of modern-style terror cartels. In 2012 the movement (apparently in collaboration with

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a related, shadowy Islamist organization known as Ansaru) also made its ingress into the business of kidnapping. To date, a German, a British and an Italian hostage have lost their lives during attempts to rescue them from the kidnappers, while a French family kidnapped in neighboring Cameroon was released for ransom last April.

Observers have often questioned whether there is an actual continuity between Mohammed Yusuf's pre-2009 'guerrilla Boko Haram' and Abubakar Shekau's post-2009 'terrorist Boko Haram.' Although the destruction of the group's mosque and its attached structures in July 2009, along with the killing of Mohammed Yusuf and Buji Foi, can certainly be considered as a sort of ground-zero that turns Boko Haram into a new, more enigmatic creature, the present author also believes that the foundations for the terrorist insurgency of Boko Haram had already been laid during Mohammed Yusuf's earlier career. To this end I will try to draw attention to the activities of Mohammed Yusuf before the 2009 crisis, and in particular, to the ambiguous triangle between three actors: 1) *Al-Muntada* Islamic Trust, a London-based NGO; 2) Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud Adam (d. 2007), an important referent of *Al-Muntada* in Nigeria and the charismatic leader of the major Nigerian Salafi organization *Ahlus Sunna*; 3) Mohammed Yusuf, who was a student the latter but also — as will be discussed in this article — the probable instigator of his murder. The murder of Ja'far Mahmoud, I will conclude, should be considered as critical an event for the genesis of the Boko Haram phenomenon as

the 2009 Maiduguri crisis. His silencing by murder, like the one of Mohammed Yusuf two years later, is one of the reasons why the full extent and nature of the international network that generated Boko Haram will never be fully known. The last speech of Ja'far Mahmoud, delivered on the 12th of April 2007, less than

twenty-four hours before his murder suggests that well before 2009, Boko Haram was already something more than an uncanny crowd of native zealots.

Boko Haram: What's in a name?

Often translated as 'Western education is forbidden' and suggestive of an atavistic, irrational, religiously based anti-modernism, the name Boko Haram

has contributed to muddle the waters around the movement and to mystify its origins. Officially rejected by the leadership of the organization, Boko Haram is a nickname that originates in an unusual religious edict of Mohammed Yusuf, who declared attending government schools (in Hausa *boko*) and working for the Nigerian government to be forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims. Although an attitude of contempt, scorn or mistrust towards Western culture and education had been common in Muslim northern Nigerian society since the colonial time, the pronouncement of Mohammed Yusuf was virtually unheard of in such a form. It is for this reason that, when the name of Mohammed Yusuf and his group started to circulate in the wider Nigerian public, they involuntarily elicited this semi-sarcastic sobriquet. More than a cultural rejection of 'Western-style modernity,' however, Mohammed Yusuf's pronouncement implied a rejection of the Nigerian government and its institutions, which had immediate political import. Although the two things (Western-style culture and Nigerian political institutions) are often associated in northern Nigerian popular Islamic discourses, the political implications of the move of declaring all government institutions (including, but not limited to, schools) forbidden, were more essential to Mohammed Yusuf's project than a cultural rejection of modernity emanating from a supposedly atavistic anti-modernism. The leadership of the movement, it must be stressed, was not rooted in the traditional networks of Qur'anic learning associated with the leaders of the Sufi *turuq*, but in the milieu of the Salafi reformist activism of *Izala* and of its close associate, the more recent group *Ahlus Sunna*, which have often been associated with an urban middle class.⁴

The origin of the movement as an offshoot of Ahlus Sunna is directly hinted at by Boko Haram's official designation, *Ahl al-Sunna li'l-Da'wa wa'l-Jihad 'ala Minhaj al-Salaf* (Association of the People of the Sunna for the Missionary Call and the Armed Struggle, according to the method of Salaf). The group broke away from Ahlus Sunna, a Nigerian group established by graduates of the Islamic University in Medina and principally devoted to teaching and implementing the Wahhabi *da'wa*

(missionary call) against the traditional scholars and the Sufi orders, as well as lobbying political elites for the implementation of Sharia in public life. Mohammed Yusuf was considered for some time as a promising student of one of the most influential scholars of the Ahlus Sunna network, Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud. The relationship between the two had been growing since the latter had started preaching regularly in Maiduguri. As the last remaining stronghold of the traditional '*ulama*' of Sufi affiliation the city of Maiduguri, ancient center of scholarship in northeastern Nigeria, was considered in the early 2000s as the frontline of the Wahhabi *da'wa* in the country. Mohammed Yusuf, who hailed from neighboring Yobe state and apparently had a brief history of activism within the ranks of Ibrahim Zakzaky's Muslim Brothers,⁵ emerged as a representative of Ahlus Sunna in Maiduguri, often preaching and giving lectures on local television and radio stations. By naming his new breakaway group '*Ahlus Sunna for the missionary call and the armed struggle*,' Mohammed Yusuf signaled both its genesis in Ahlus Sunna and the reasons for its break from its mainstream leadership, i.e. his advocacy of Jihad, in addition to *da'wa*, as a legitimate strategy to adopt in Nigeria. Among the possible origins of Mohammed Yusuf's pronouncements against government education and working for the government, an interesting one has been advanced

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by the Ahlus Sunna scholar Muhammad Auwal Albani, who knew Mohammed Yusuf quite well. According to Albani, Yusuf had been in contact with Algerian militant organizations who had given him military training in a camp in the Sahara. Here, Yusuf had listened to some leaders of

the Algerian Islamist insurgency pronounce a *fatwa* that prohibited the militants to attend schools and to work for the government. Besides having been rejected by the vast majority of Algerian scholars, the *fatwa* was rooted in the specific experience of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s between the military government and armed Islamist cells operating from the mountains. Mohammed Yusuf — concludes Albani — had blindly absorbed it and applied it to a different context like Nigeria.⁶

The popularity of the nickname Boko Haram in the national and international press might

be explained by two different reasons. For the northern Muslims, especially those ideologically close to Izala and Ahlus Sunna, the label transforms the radical group into an exotic eccentricity and hides its embarrassing connection to the leadership of a well-established Salafi organization in the country. For the southern Nigerian Christian press, on the contrary, as well as for the global Western media, the nickname Boko Haram magically captures all the stereotypes that have daily currency in islamophobic discourses: at the same time obscurantist, primitive and ferocious, Boko Haram embodies all the prejudices associated with the supposed 'essence' of Islam. As the main aim of this paper is to inscribe Boko Haram in its original ideological context, it will from now on be referred to by its official designation, Ahl al-Sunna li'l-Da'wa wa'l-Jihad, abbreviated as AS-DJ.

Salafi dissidents: From the 'Nigerian Talebans' to AS-DJ

It is important to note that in the northern Nigerian context, an overall rejection of the country's political institutions such as the one advocated by Mohammed Yusuf also implies a rejection of the legitimacy of the government Sharia courts which, after the reforms of the penal codes of Muslim-majority states started in 1999, had significantly increased the sphere of application of Islamic law in the judiciary of most northern States. As an activist of Ahlus Sunna, in the period between 1999 and 2002 Mohammed Yusuf had participated in the delegations that had traveled to the different northern governments to call for the implementation of the new codes. After the implementation of Sharia-inspired penal codes in most northern states, Mohammed Yusuf had developed a 'rejectionist' position according to which the present, government-run Sharia courts are illegitimate because they operate under a non-Islamic, secular government. Some form of disillusionment with the Sharia reforms was certainly circulating within the Ahlus Sunna leadership. Ja'far Mahmoud himself had resigned from his position in the Hisba board — a body entrusted with the implementation of Islamic morality in public life — of Kano State.

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Mohammed Yusuf's uncompromising disavowal of 'official' Sharia, however, must have certainly seemed too extreme to many in the movement, who believed that Sharia needed to be implemented from within the legitimate government. Be that as it may, Mohammed Yusuf certainly attracted many of the disillusioned within the wider Islamist public who considered the Sharia reforms enacted by the northern states incomplete or insincere. Already in 2002 a group of youth from the Alhaji Ndimi mosque, the main religious center of Ahlus Sunna in Maiduguri, had withdrawn from the city in order to establish a self-governed community, combining Salafi puritanism with some sort of utopian idealism. It is not clear whether at this stage the group received some support from the Ahlus Sunna leadership, or if it was independent from it. Known by the local media with the nickname of 'Nigerian Taleban,' this group was involved in occasional clashes with the Nigerian police. After reports that the group had started gathering weapons, a siege took place between the 31st of December 2003 and the 1st of January 2004, and most of its seventy members were killed by the security forces, including the purported leader of the movement Mohammed Ali. Coupled with increasing dissatisfaction with the Sharia reforms, this dramatic event propelled

a radicalization of a sector of the Salafi network that had been growing around the Alhaji Ndimi mosque in Maiduguri, pushing more to join the remnants of the dismembered group. It was at this time that a new center, the Ibn Taimiyya mosque, was built under the new leadership of Mohammed Yusuf. And it

is at this time, in 2004, that AS-DJ was officially established as a militant offshoot of Ahlus Sunna. The roots of AS-DJ in the previous experience of the 'Nigerian Talebans,' which ended dramatically in a shootout with the police, partially explain the animosity that the new movement will display towards the Nigerian security forces: the memory of the repression of the movement's forerunner serves to authenticate and reinforce an ideology that already sees the police as the appendage of a government identified as corrupt and un-Islamic. The daily reality of police corruption and brutality, experienced in their ordinary lives by many Nigerian

citizens, might have contributed to increasing the pool of sympathizers from which the movement will later draw its supporters, but it does not explain, by itself, the uncompromising hostility between AS-DJ and the police forces.

An Equivocal Triangle: Al-Muntada al-Islami, Ahlus-Sunna and AS-DJ

Since the late 1990s, the London-based NGO Al-Muntada Trust has been an important sponsor of Salafi preaching in Nigeria. The Al-Muntada Trust was established in London in connection with the activities of Muhammad Surur b. Nayif Zayn al-'Abidin and his followers. Surur is a Syrian whose name is often associated with those of the Salafi activists and intellectuals who animated the *Sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980, such as, among others, Salman al-'Awda (who had been his pupil) and Safar al-Hawali. Muhammad Surur had taught mathematics in secondary institutions in Saudi Arabia before being expelled in 1974, when he settled in Kuwait. He then left Kuwait in 1984 and traveled to the United Kingdom, where he animated Islamic organizations and contributed to Salafi publications for twenty years, before moving to Jordan in 2004.⁷ The *Sahwa* trend of Salafi activism was characterized by its espousal of an outspoken criticism of the Saudi Arabian political authorities and by its opposition to the established Salafi/Wahhabi clerical hierarchy of the country, who consider the political authorities of the Kingdom as the protectors of the Faith.⁸ Surur was one of the activists who tended to be particularly vocal in their criticism of the 'establishment clerics' of Saudi Arabia, so much so that the Salafis who contest the legitimacy of the Saudi government are still called in the country *Sururis*. The rhetoric of today's polemics in Nigeria between the supporters of Mohammed Yusuf and those of the mainstream Salafi organizations like Izala and Ahlus Sunna closely replicates the polemical literature between 'rejectionist' and 'legitimist' Salafi trends in Saudi Arabia: Mohammed Yusuf and his successor Abubakar Shekau accuse the Izala leadership of being government's agents or the '*ulamas* of America,' while the latter accuses AS-DJ of being 'Kharijites.' Though not necessarily proving a direct influence of Sururi ideas on AS-DJ, these discourses suggest that a similar dynamic has been at play in the two instances.

After the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca by the apocalyptic sect led by Juhayman

al-'Utaybi,⁹ which had grown out of the Salafi circles, the government of Saudi Arabia became increasingly wary of the potential internal threat of Salafi extremism, and tried to isolate the *Sururis* by promoting the views of an opposing trend which became known as the *Madkhalis* from the name Shaykh Rabi' b. Hadi al-Madkhali. Al-Madkhali was another influential Salafi scholar who, after initially supporting al-'Utaybi's rebellion, had developed a legitimist position vis-à-vis the Saudi state.¹⁰ Increasingly marginalized in Saudi Arabia, the voices of the *Sururis* remained influential outside the Kingdom. The cosmopolitan environment of London, in particular after the 1990s, became a receptive ground for the *Sururis* of the Gulf to re-organize and to amalgamate with disparate trends of dissident Islamists from various countries.¹¹ It is in this context that Al-Muntada Trust was established in London as a charity involved in numerous projects in developing countries, as well in missionary work for the propagation of the global Salafi/Wahhabi theological *da'wa* globally — at times with explicit Sururi political shades.

The rise of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud Adam in the late 1990s as the most popular face of the Salafi *da'wa* in Nigeria was helped not only by his personal charisma, but also by his double position as an important spokesman of the Ahlus Sunna movement and as the imam of a mosque built and sustained by the Al-Muntada Trust in the populous Dorayi quarter of Kano. While most of the activities of Al-Muntada were in the field of health and education, the organization also repeatedly came under the spotlight for other reasons. The accusation that Al-Muntada was using its structures in the country not only as a base to promote the Salafi *da'wa*, but also to train local and foreign militants, was raised for the first time in September 2002, when a delegation of representatives of the two main Sufi orders of Kano (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya) presented an official letter of complaint to the state governor against the "foreign connection" running "a camp called Al-Muntada," warning that the activities of the group in the city might "lead to such a serious crisis that the Maitatsine violence would be a child's play."¹² Considering the bitter doctrinal and theological rivalry that opposes the two Sufi orders to Al-Muntada and Ahlus Sunna, this accusation must not be taken at face-value. It seemed, however, to be confirmed in February 2004 when, in the

wake of the Maiduguri 'Talebans' crisis Muyhiddin Abdullah, the Sudanese director of the Al-Muntada Trust branch in Nigeria, was arrested under the charge of channeling funds to the militant group and inciting inter-religious riots. That same year, Al-Muntada also came into the spotlight elsewhere in Africa when the national director of the Kenyan branch of Al-Muntada — also a Sudanese — was deported under the accusation of alleged terrorist links.¹³ In the following years, the governments of Chad and Mozambique have taken even more drastic measures, banning the NGO from the two countries.¹⁴ The hypothesis of a link between Al-Muntada and AS-DJ, often rumored in Nigeria since the earliest onset of the crisis, has openly surfaced in the local media for the first time only in February 2012, when the revelations of an arrested member of AS-DJ indicted the British NGO as the main sponsor of the insurgency.¹⁵ In July 2012, these allegations have led to a call being made in the UK parliament to proscribe the organization.¹⁶ The NGO, however, has publicly denied all claims against it in a communiqué published on its official website.¹⁷

Whether the London-based direction of the organization has been, at any time, directly or indirectly involved in sponsoring AS-DJ alias 'Boko Haram,' is not our concern here. The records above suggest that at least *some* of its operatives in Nigeria have provided support for the group. But what was the position of Ahlus Sunna and in particular, of Ja'far Mahmoud on this issue? It is difficult to conceive that Ja'far was unaware of the channeling of support from operatives of the NGO to the militant network, first in the form of the 'Talebans,' then of Mohammed Yusuf's AS-DJ. Not only had Ja'far been for several years one of the main referents of Al-Muntada in Nigeria, but the two militant groups originated from amongst his students at the Ndimi mosque, the very place which hosted his preaching and teaching whenever he visited Maiduguri. While it is impossible to give a definitive answer to this question, the present author's conjecture is that Ja'far Mahmoud and the Ahlus Sunna leadership initially endorsed the creation of a training camp for militants, believing it would be used to support organizations involved in conflicts

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outside the country, and without foreseeing that it would be used to fuel an insurrectionist/terrorist organization in Nigeria. This would explain why Ja'far Mahmoud worked for years to intercede with the authorities for arrested members of the group, as detailed by Ja'far himself in at least one of his speeches.¹⁸ One also wonders how Shaykh Ja'far was for years able to cultivate a close link with the 'official' scholarly establishment of Saudi Arabia, while at the same time working closely for an organization like Al-Muntada, which represented trends of Salafi dissidence outlawed or at least, suspect in the Kingdom since the 1980s. The answer to this probably lies in what Madawi Al-Rasheed, in her important study of Saudi Arabian Islamism, has described as the strategy of 'cooptation' of the Salafi dissidence started by the Saudi government after 9/11 in order to counter a new, more radical generation represented by the global network of al-Qaeda.¹⁹ Ja'far Mahmoud emerged as a public Salafi scholar in Nigeria in the years before and after 9/11 and — knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly — had to navigate an uneasy compromise between existing conflicting Salafi trends. His numerous, contradictory speeches over the years 2002-2007 show that he had not developed a clear standpoint on international politics: his views, in fact,

oscillated from a seeming support (especially in the years 2002-2003) to the 'heroes' (*gwarzaye*) Osama Bin Laden and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi to frequent criticism (especially in later years) of terrorism and the chaos (*fitina*) caused by the reckless violence of self-appointed *mujahidin*; from mentions of Sayyid Qutb as a martyr and a model of political

action, to commendations of the Saudi Kingdom as the only model Islamic state.

Two things, however, are certain. The first is that in issues of internal Nigerian politics, Ja'far Mahmoud never endorsed an insurrectionist program against the government as the one advocated by Mohammed Yusuf, at least publicly. Though very critical of (local and federal) policies, and in principle opposed to a secular dispensation, in his speeches he consistently expressed loyalty to the government of the country. The second is that, at some point after the 'Talebans' crisis of 2004, a clear break developed between, from

one side, Ja'far Mahmoud and the core leadership of Ahlus Sunna and, from the other side, the splinter group represented by Mohammed Yusuf. Initially, Ahlus Sunna tried to resolve the matter with discretion and Ja'far was involved in attempts to convince his former student-turned-rival, to renounce his militant attitudes. When he finally decided to speak out, it was already too late.

Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud: The Last Speech

Mohammed Yusuf was not the only apprehension for Ja'far Mahmoud and the Ahlus Sunna leadership.

In 2006, Ja'far had to push his vice-imam at the Al-Muntada mosque to step down after being investigated for allegedly acting as a recruiter for an unspecified international 'terrorist' network.²⁰

That same year, during the demonstrations in response to the cartoons of the Prophet published in Denmark, a close associate of Ja'far Mahmoud, Muhammad Auwal Albani, was approached by an Algerian visitor who tried (unsuccessfully) to convince him to join a shadowy network to launch a global Jihad.²¹ It was more or less at the same time that Mohammed Yusuf's controversial preaching started to spread from Maiduguri to other northern Nigerian cities, and it was then that Ja'far Mahmoud decided to engage Yusuf directly and publicly. We do not know whether this was only his personal initiative, or if there were some directives from his religious contacts in Saudi Arabia encouraging him to do so. Both Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud and Malam Muhammad Auwal Albani have referred in public speeches to unspecified meetings being held in Saudi Arabia between them and leaders of Mohammed Yusuf's group during the Muslim Pilgrimage, at the presence of unnamed Saudi scholars, trying to persuade the group to renounce their militancy. The occasion to speak out openly

against Mohammed Yusuf in front of a Nigerian audience came on the 12th April 2007 when, after a speech given at a mosque in Bauchi, a questioner asked Ja'far whether attending government schools and working for the government was Islamically lawful (*halal*). The long response (about 48 minutes) to this question, given between the *zuhr* (midday) and the *asr* (early afternoon) prayers of that day, will also be the last speech of the imam. In the evening, the car that would carry the Shaykh back to Kano was surrounded by a small mob shouting intimidating threats.²² At the birth of the following day, while leading the dawn (*fajr*) prayer in the Al-Muntada



The funerary procession of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud.

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mosque of Dorayi in Kano, Ja'far was murdered by a commando armed with machine-guns.

Initially shrouded in mystery, it is now widely accepted that the murder of Ja'far Mahmoud was ordered by Mohammed Yusuf.²³ The close circle of Ahlus Sunna leaders seemingly knew who was responsible for the murder. At the memorial sitting (*zaman makoki*) after the burial, when Mohammed Yusuf came in to offer condolences, Malam Abdulwahhab, a close friend and collaborator of Ja'far Mahmoud, is reported to have stood up in rage

to chase him out of the place.²⁴

There is no conclusive proof that the murder was directly linked to the speech that the victim had delivered the day before. However, considering the proximity between the two events (less than twenty-four hours), and the fact that this was the

first high profile action by Boko Haram, accomplished two years before the organization became notorious outside the country, it is important to look at the content of the speech. The following summary is based on a recording of the speech which, as always happened with the speeches of the popular imam, was widely circulated in audio files among his extensive following.

The speech starts by addressing the content of Mohammed Yusuf's controversial pronouncement (*fatwa*) on government education from the point of view of the Islamic Law (*sharia*), and describing it as baseless. While agreeing that there are certain aspects of the present educational system which are clearly wrong, like the mixing of boys and girls of post-pubertal age in the same classrooms — argues Ja'far Mahmoud — the benefits of education are clearly bigger than its disadvantages. One should therefore try to improve the educational system by influencing the political sphere in the country, rather than withdrawing from schools and from politics. Moving to the more explicitly political aspect of Yusuf's pronouncement, Ja'far Mahmoud's speech highlights the contradictions of a scholar who refuses to recognize the Nigerian government, but travels around the country with a car displaying a Nigerian registration number; who travels in and out of Saudi Arabia with a passport printed in the name of the 'Federal Republic of Nigeria'; who teaches his students to reject education at public schools but drives his wives to the government's hospital when they have to deliver, in one case being even forced to see his semi-naked wife delivering a baby into the hands of a doctor who's a male stranger, due to the absence of female staff on duty on that day. But it is less the content of the teaching that seemed to worry Ja'far Mahmoud, than the motives behind the activities of the group itself, and the undercover support that they seem to be receiving. After all, he continues, he has personally sat on many occasions with members of the group, convincing them to repudiate their false doctrines in private; yet, they still continued to preach the same doctrines in public without shame. It is for this reason — he then concludes in the most emotional part of his speech — that he has finally come to question the good faith of Mohammed Yusuf and his associates.

At the birth of the following day, while leading the dawn (*fajr*) prayer in the Al-Muntada mosque of Dorayi in Kano, Ja'far was murdered by a commando armed with machine-guns.

One of them has come to tell me: "All religious scholars are government's lackeys, they work for the government." I told him: "*Jamil jiddan*. But now, what about this man [Mohammed Yusuf] whom you follow? I know he has three wives and a number of children. He has gathered a considerable following of students in his property and he regularly feeds them. He does not work for the government, nor does he have a business. Who is sponsoring him? He's not from the family of our Lady Mary ... if we ask him *anna laka hadha?* ("from where is this food coming to you?"), he certainly can't say *huwa min 'indi 'Llahi inna Allaha yarzuqu man yasha'u bi-ghayri hisabin* ("this is from God, for He gives to whomever he wants").²⁵ So he must tell us from where his money comes. Let him explain where his money comes from." There are certain things it's not time to disclose yet, but their time will come. When you still have hope that somebody will correct himself, you must give him time to correct his behavior, for the essence of preaching is to correct the behavior of people. But when the evil of a man starts clearly overriding his good, you must say publicly everything that you know about him. But I swear: I have no doubt that most of the youth who have been dragged into this matter are, for the most part, in good faith, and are only acting according to their own understanding of religion. But as for the very people who are dragging them into this matter, they have a hidden agenda of their own. And there are intelligence services which are collaborating with them, and which are not from our country (*wanda ba namu ba*). For you know, when America wants to find an excuse to put her nose into the business of a country, she creates some enemies from among your ranks who did not exist before; then she

makes them known through the media, until she gets control of your lives, your business, your blood, your everything. It's part of their politics: to create something that did not exist before, to establish it well in a country. They take somebody on their payroll to do the dirty job and then use it as an excuse to get control of your affairs. Therefore, I advise you to be extremely careful. Maybe this is the only thing I can say for now.

[...] According to my understanding, it is clear that there is a plot that has been designed by some of the enemies of Islam, who are using these kinds of people, whether the latter are conscious of this or not. Why am I saying this? I know that once, one of them traveled to Saudi Arabia [when he was wanted by the police], and stayed out of the country for a long time, refusing to come back. He traveled for *umra* and didn't return until after *haji*. I know that we had a discussion [in Saudi Arabia] with him and with some representatives of the government of Borno state. We tried to convince him to write down a formal declaration in which he would repudiate all the doctrines that were being attributed to him. He accepted to write that declaration. I told him not to write that declaration on his own, but to find a lawyer who would help him to write it in a formal way, to avoid inadvertently saying things that would compromise his position and give [the government] an excuse to arrest him. He searched for a lawyer among the group of [Nigerian] pilgrims. By the way, wasn't the lawyer [according to his beliefs] a profession of unbelievers...? [*laughter*]. The lawyer wrote the letter, which was duly submitted [to the authorities]. So why am I saying that there is something strange going on in this country, which

Was Ja'far Mahmoud killed because of what he could reveal about the genesis of AS-DJ, alias 'Boko Haram' and its shadowy international chain of support? The possibility should not be discarded.

might surface in the future — only God knows when? Because at that time, every single airplane that would land [in Nigeria] was being searched; but when he landed, no action was taken. That's why I'm saying that there is something strange going on in this country. Yes, there is something strange going on in this country. I know it well. There are things that might not be time to reveal now, but the time to reveal them will come soon."²⁶

Was Ja'far Mahmoud killed because of what he could reveal about the genesis of AS-DJ, alias 'Boko Haram' and its shadowy international chain of support? The possibility should not be discarded. Few in Nigeria had known Mohammed Yusuf, and followed his rise as an independent preacher, as closely as Ja'far Mahmoud. Obviously, his words need not be taken at face-value, and the indictment of the American secret services is too predictable to be given serious credit. What is certain, in any case, is that Ja'far Mahmoud had begun to sense some dubious movements within the networks of the very international connection that had contributed to his rise as a scholar, or at least in its close proximity. The murdered imam did not live long enough to say all the things he wanted to say, nor, maybe, to fully recognize all the nuances of the intricate web of interests that was going to explode, two years later, in the 'Boko Haram' phenomenon. But on one thing he was certainly right: something strange was going on in the country ...

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- Albani knew Mohammed Yusuf quite well, he might not be entirely objective here. Because of the ongoing conflict that opposes him to El-Zakzaky and his Shiite movement, in fact, Albani might have an interest in delegitimizing the latter by claiming that Mohammed Yusuf's extremist movement is, in reality, a progeny of El-Zakzaky's.
- 6 Albani 2009.
 - 7 For a short biography of Muhammad Surur, see Meijer 2011a: 435-36.
 - 8 On the Sahwa, see Al-Rasheed 2007: 59-101. Another important study of Islamism in Saudi Arabia is Hegghammer 2010.
 - 9 Hegghammer & Lacroix 2011.
 - 10 On Rabi' al-Madkhali, see Meijer 2011b. The divide between Sururis and Madkhalis has also impacted the global Salafi arena. On the debate between the two trends in Indonesia, see Hasan 2011.
 - 11 Al-Rasheed 2007: 120-126.
 - 12 Yakubu Musa, "Nigeria: Religious Upheaval Looms in Kano," *This Day*, 3 September 2002. Available online at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200209050235.html>; last visited 11 May 2013. Maitatsine is a reference to a crisis sparked by the government's attempt to crush an Islamic sect in Kano in the early 1980s. Thousands died in the ensuing violence.
 - 13 The case of Muyhiddin Abdallah was mentioned in all the Nigerian media of the time. For the Kenyan case, see the March 2004 article published by The Standard and reproduced by AllAfrica.com: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200403080651.html>, last checked January 2012.
 - 14 On Chad: author's fieldwork, July 2009; on Mozambique: personal information, Liazzat Bonate (University of Seoul), 2010.
 - 15 The Nigerian Tribune was one of the first to cover this allegation in the news. See the article at the following link: <http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/front-page-news/35888-boko-harams-funding-traced-to-uk-sarabia-sect-planned-to-turn-nigeria-into-afghanistan-arrested-kingpin-opens-up>.
 - 16 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/09/uk-charity-boko-haram>.
 - 17 <http://www.almuntadatrust.org/response-to-observer/>.
 - 18 Adam 2007.
 - 19 See Al-Rasheed 2007: 81-101.
 - 20 This information is from a source in Kano that prefers to remain anonymous.
 - 21 The encounter is detailed by Muhammad Auwal Albani Zaria (Albani 2009).
 - 22 This detail is also reported in Albani 2009. The speech provides several details about Mohammed Yusuf's biography.
 - 23 For a biography of Shaykh Ja'far and an overview of the investigations on his murder, see Brigaglia 2012.
 - 24 Also from Albani 2009.
 - 25 Reference is being made here, sarcastically, to one of the miracles narrated in the Qur'an, according to which the young Mary was divinely fed during her retreats in the temple (Qur. 3: 37).
 - 26 Adam 2007. I thank M. I. for kindly providing me with a copy of the recording. The translation from Hausa is mine.

Notes

- 1 A recent overview of the Boko Haram crisis is given in Walker 2012. See also Last 2011), as well as his earlier (now somewhat out-dated but thoughtful) reflections in Last 2008-2009. None of the two authors, however, mentions the link between Boko Haram and Al-Muntada, which I consider an important aspect of the genesis of the organization.
- 2 The video of the interrogation of Mohammed Yusuf by the police, as well as that of the killing of Buji Foi after his arrest in the streets of Maiduguri, have been widely circulated in the internet (respectively: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePpUvFTXY7w>, last checked 11 May 2013; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_m4PBSzU7Y, last checked 11 May 2013). A video made public by Aljazeera also dramatically showed how extra-judicial killings of the movement's members, but also of seemingly unarmed civilians (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/02/2010298114949112.html>, last checked 11 May 2013), took place during the July 2009 crisis.
- 3 For a sarcastic Hausa song on the Nigerian police, see Brigaglia & Fiji 2008-2009.
- 4 Kane 2003.
- 5 This information is provided by the Nigerian Salafi scholar Muhammad Auwal Albani Zaria in a speech recorded and distributed with the title *Karambana* (Albani 2009). Although