Doctoral Dissertation

« Moral Questions Regarding Amnesty Program for Terrorists »

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This dissertation appears to be a very profound and very useful study about moral and ethical questions raised by terrorist acts, their consequences, the reactions of the Nigerian State authorities and the situation of victims of these events in relation with amnesty policies introduced in Nigeria to deal with former Boko Haram militants ready to leave their organisation and asking for rehabilitation. This work is for sure very helpful to make us understand these issues and analyse how more generally State powers can try to resolve such situations as the one experienced by Nigeria in the North-Easten Borno region of the country. A region we should add not really linked with Nigerian regions but rather historically and culturally linked with Kanem-Borno empire and regions belonging now to Chad, Niger and Western Sudan. This post-colonial contradictory situation is another element the author could not take into account in this disseratation but he opens new field of research which are promising for the future of the scientific researches in philosophy, history, sociology, social anthropoligy, political science and even economics.

It is also a very helpful work to understand the situation and the points of views of victims of -terror acts and their reactions to the decisions made by Nigerian authorities. And this can help any researcher studying the question of violence, « terrorism », oppression, repression, etc to compare Nigerian experience dealing with victims and offenders with other similar to a certain extent situations. Since we have to deal here basically with a philosophical work, it seems then logical also that this dissertation does not need to make an in-depth analysis of the reasons why Nigerian « raison d'Etat » did not fit exactly to the demands of the victims of terrorist acts, even if this work allows us to understand in a very detailed way the profound contradictions Nigerian society and State had to deal with.

The logical structuration of the dissertation

Begining with the formal aspect of this dissertation, we can observe that the general structuration of this work is very logical, very progressive and then very clear. The author begins with analysis of the general context, its historical perspective and what can be more or less consistantly called terrorism so to finally reflect on the different methods used to promote counterterrorism so to lead societies such as the Nigerian ones towards a « post-conflict » situation putting then the reader to be ready to « jump » into the reality of the Boko Haram movement and its

violent activities. First by confronting this general context and the Boko Haram concrete activities and horrors to the political methods and answers used by Nigerian authorities, especially utilitarianism in relation or most often in confrontation with the deep social feelings of the victims tending rather towards « justice » and « fairness » rather than peace at every cost.

This reflection leads quite logically to an analysis about the Methodology Agbanero used in his dissertation aimed on ethical considerations and the reactions of victims of Boko Haram. The author clearly targets victims as the focus point of his inquiries. This can looks biased and politically or socially unbalanced but, as soon as this target is clearly assumed by Agbanero, we can consider it is scientifically justified. Later then, this dissertation treats the author's philosophical position considering the points of views of victims oscillating between desires of punishments, revenge and most rarely forgiveness. Agbanero can then conclude his work by moral and ethical considerations confronting them with his very realistic reflection about the risks of retaliatory actions that could challenge in the future the officially adopted by Nigerian authorities peace-building and education process. It seems political powers are mostly committed to short and middle term results when a philosopher must ask long-term questions. At the end agbanero includes the not very well developped religious beliefs question as a possible tool towards reconciliation. We can then sum up the very logical frame of this dissertation with some questions that are not taken into account such as the social, class based, and the economically based roots of terrorist acts and we would like the author showing a better understanding of religious beliefs and theological aspects, especially islamic ones since he did not obviously know them in its main nuances and historical depths.

The usefullness of the dissertation

The benefits this work brings to the community of researchers can be noticed since already a quite large scientific public could read it because Agbanero published already some parts of it, what is basically a very good initiative helping the scientific community to understand the importance of the analysed subject and to take into account in their inquiry the Nigerian situation from its ethical point of view. But we should also then ask if it did not make researchers discovering already some kee elements of the researcher's work that they should rather have discovered at once, in a more suden, innovative and cumulative form at the moment of the diffusion of this acurate and creative dissertation that should be published.

The author of this dissertation introduces and analyses a lot of very important concepts like « atonement », « coranic deradicalisation », « diya », « utilitarians », « retributivists », justice, fairness, revenge, retaliation, etc. This dissertation is then very creative in handling with these and a lot of other concepts needing to be reinterpreted as Agbanero exactly does it. But some of these

concepts would need to be defined more precisely. Among others, the difference between the words « societal » and « social » does not seem very clear, since the « societal happiness » for example Agbanero is formulating can be considered irrelevant and basically impossible to be realised as long as there is no real social and economical progress for all and individual perspectives opened by the social system functionning in Nigeria, Africa and the globalised capitalist world. In this context, the question of poverty in the Maiduguri region seems to be one of the basic elements that should have helped the readers to understand one of the main roots of the Boko Haram armed struggle or even insurgency. This is not a political science or a sociological work but the author should have mention this is in a clearer way because both the victims like the perpetrators of terrorist acts are the results of a concrete social, economical, ideological and political crisis situation no one of them could cope with. Another very important topic would have been to get from the author his own definition of the concept of « terrorism » since no lawyers and especially no UN lawyers were up to know, in spite of a lot of work carried on for this purpose, able to give a consensual definition of this very vague and even contested concept. Nobody in the world does not really knows in fact what the word « terrorism » means at a scientific or legal level. Some lawyers managed only to give a rather accepted definition of what they call « terrorist acts » which does not mean the same than « terrorism » and « terrorists ». In fact these last two words are used at the media and then at the political level but they cannot be used at the legal level, not to talk about the philosophical level.

We know very well that history is a long human process dealing with causes and effects, what explains that often what is called « terrorism » by some is called « armed resistance » by others, and this last concept is even officially considered by the United Nations as a basic right for oppressed or colonised nations to resist. Most of the time then the use of concepts like « terrorism » or « resistance » has to deal with propaganda and political choices, they depend mostly on the moment we choose to begin the analyses of violence. Since violence is not only an obvious and direct violent act but history teaches us that marginalisation, exploitation, inequality, oppression, lack of perspetives, etc can be considered as a form of indirect violence generating direct acts of violence. It is obvious in the case of Boko Haram that its actions created a huge amount of horrors, pains and victims needing to be taken into account on both human and philosophical level, what Agbanero does in a very serious, rational, scientific and precise way. And very rare if at all are people trying to present Boko Haram as a resistance movement, out of its own leaders and eventually some of its sponsors, but this does not solve the problem we mention here about the use of the unclear concept of terrorism. Since we have still to take into account the social conditions where an organisation promoting terrorist acts not linked with a justified resistance movement developed on the ground of indusputable feeling of social frustration and marginalisation.

The analyses made here by Agbanero makes that his dissertation will be very much useful for the international community of scientific researchers dealing with matters such as violence, victims, agressions, ethics, oppression, wars, terror acts, fanatism, mercenaries, volunteers, etc. But we need also to understand the objective roots of all the different reasons why some people joined Boko Haram. Did they joined for basically ideological reasons, religious reasons, economical reasons, social reasons, tribal reasons, regional reasons, individual or local reasons ? It is logical that such a work needs first to concentrate on one particular issue, and Agbanero choosed in a very convincing way to begin his analysis from the point of view of the victims of terror acts. He then opens the way for further researches linked with the above mentionned issues. Did Boko Haram militants felt offended by the social structures they were living in before they join the organisation or were they just agressive for some individual, psychological, or fanatical reasons, at least for the ones who joined voluntarily the organisation promoting terror acts ?

Author should also describe the differences between « islamic militants » and « islamist militants », and better would have been if he knew the concept of « takfirism » which is prefered in the Muslim world by islamic thinkers denouncing « terrorist acts » carried on under the pretext of islam. We consider Agbanero used a very large and useful amount of litterature from different disciplines and he should be hailed for this huge amount of work, readings and creative analysis and reflections. We can only regret he concentrated his work only on Western and African subsaharian litterature not taking into account researches on terrorist acts carried on in Arab countries, in Iran, in Turkey, in China, in Russia and other countries that had to deal with terrorist acts. But we have here to take into account the objective fact that, in spite od decolonisation process, world science is still very Western-centric for most of researchers all over the world so they most often study then the scientific litterature of their own region and the Western litterature, leaving aside the « rest of the world ». This habits have to be overcome but we cannot criticise Agbanero for this situation, we only want to help him to take it into account for future researches he will be able, according to us, to carry on. We have to report then than if all over the world some of therse researches were written in English or eventually some other Western langages like French, Spanish or Portuguese, when they are available on internet in non Western languages they can now be easily translated by automatic translators so they can be reached by all. Agbanero should have been particularly interested by the same moral questions he deals with that were raised for example in a quite similar way in Algeria, in Syria, in Russian Caucasus. This comparison would have been much more related to the one carried on in his dissertation than the one made with South African case since in this country, as agree almost all observers, we had not to deal with terrorism but with a national liberation war and the reconciliaton process was carried on so to save the ruling propertied (white) elites from responsability of terror acts carried on by the former apartheid State police. Concerning Boko

Haram we should in fact also ask if the only terror acts commited were the ones commited by Boko Haram militants and organisation, and not also some that were commited by the Nigerian State security against people linked or supposed to be linked with Boko Haram, including civilians, even women and children.

Concerning countries like Mozambique or Syria, the foreign interventions in terror acts has now became obvious for every observer and this could (or not?) differentiate these situations with the one experienced by Nigeria. We notice in this context of comparison studies the very interesting comparison Agbanero makes between Boko Haram activities, Niger Delta insurgency and Biafran/Nigeria « civil » war. It opens an interesting field of researches for ethical questions and for socio-political ones.

Another issue which is important dealing with ethical questions between offenders and victims is the question still not raised by Agbanero of who is the « main » offender, the basic militant who joined Boko Haram, voluntarily or not, the organisers of the political or criminal group, or maybe also some foreign sponsors who financed it and which could be linked with private interests or with foreign States interests. The creativity of this work appears clearly since it opens for further researches new issues like these ones.

We have also then to ask the question, since the Nigerian authorities decided a policy of amnesty as a counterterrorism strategy, why they did not manage to win the war on the military field ? Did this means Boko Haram had such a strong social and political base, at least in the Borno region (and if so why less elsewhere in the « muslim » regions of Nigeria?), and why did they managed to conquer or maintain a certain degree of approval ? Especially when we take into account the fact that we have to deal in all the Northern and Western Nigeria with a very ancient islam which did never lead earlier with such extreme tendencies like Boko Haram. The author makes on this field interesting observations dating back to British colonial time that need to be developed in further studies. This is particularly important since we can observe that British and all Anglo-saxon imperialisms used and left behind them very frequently a lot of tribal, ethnical, religious conflicts all over the world. We have also in this context to observe the social base but also the historical roots of Boko Haram movement. Were they tribal ? Religious ? Class based ? Regionally based ? Etc. All these questions are raised or at least mentionned in a rather detailed manner in this work mainly and logically concentrated on ethical issues and their links with victims of these events.

Another country that should have been mentionned, since the author mentions the 9/11 New York City terror attack, is Afghanistan where we must ask if « terrorism » there began in 2001 due to Al qaida or rather in 1979 due to the CIA trained future members of Al Qaida, as Zbigniew Brzezinski recognised it in 1998 in an interview for the French magazine « Le nouvel Observateur ».

Concerning philosophical issues linked with violence, the amount of philosophers the author worked on is impressive and very creative but we can regret the absence of such important thinkerslike Weber, Gandhi, Marx, Fanon, Shariati, Iqbal, Rousseau, etc. who worked on the social but also the philosophical aspect of violence, social violence and colonial or post-colonial violence. Since Agbanero courageously mentions the fact that his Christian background can play a role in his approach of the victims, he should have tell us more about the origins (religious, tribal, regional) of the studied victims and also what he knows about islam and the « rebranded » by Boko Haram « new » form of islam. And what are then the exact links of Boko Haram « philosophy » with other terror oriented takfiri groups.

All the above observations we made are based on the constatation that the philosophical dissertation made by Agbanero is very fruitful for ethical reflexions concentrated on notions of violence, offenses and victimisation. And, as we already noticed, his worl opens a large amount of new issues that will have to be treated in the future by him and by other researchers of social sciences. This dissertation seems then to be a very innovative research for the community of researchers specialised in particular in the field of studying the point of view of the ones who experienced passively violence without taking clearly earlier any political, ideological, religious position in face of a movement recruiting, at least officially, militants for political-religious reasons. This work raises the basic question of unsolved « ignored pains » and their potential effects for the future. Isidore Agbanero has then in a very creative way used methodology to accomplish his in-depth inquiries and he seems well prepared to carry on further researches on the same or similar fields.

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