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THE END OF POLITICS? RECLAIMING HUMANITY IN AN AGE OF BIOPOWER AND NECROPOLITICS

Peyi Soyinka-Airewele

Covenant University
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OF BIOPOWER AND NECROPOLITICS**

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The Chancellor, Covenant University, Dr. David Oyedepo, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Charles Ayo, senior management, faculty, staff and students of Covenant University and our distinguished guests: Good afternoon.

I recently heard a foreign diplomat in Nigeria submit quite ruefully that the most popular phrase in the country must be “all protocols observed”¹. So I hope I will be in good company if I respectfully submit to the impeccable authority of all other preceding and duly observed protocols. I thank you all very much for the invitation and opportunity to share a few thoughts with you today and for your willingness to be here.

They have already killed my body. They are now killing my soul.
Mayat, young captive of ISIS, Syria

Introduction:

Despite our avid enthrallment with issues of governance in Nigeria, we must acknowledge the unsettling fact that the persistent systemic failures in the country are tragically shared in common with numerous other countries. How do we explain and prevent the recurrent debacle and liminality of ventures designed to shift the postcolony to a utopic existence where rights are protected, poverty vanquished, social services provided, voices respected, resources effectively mobilized and where human life is deemed inviolable?

Unfortunately, notwithstanding the passion with which most Nigerians debate the virtues and failings of our *fourteen* (not two) presidential candidates, the nation hangs suspended in the spaces of a transitional electoral rite of passage, waiting without confidence for a future that seems hampered by the flaws of both the incumbent and dominant oppositional leaders. Beyond the failures of these individuals, however, we must grapple with the universal inherent structural dysfunctionality of the various political systems we inhabit. Whether in Washington DC, Beijing or Abuja, power tends to mutate toward decay, abuse and violence.

If political scientists ever thought we understood the murkiness of politics and the uncertain trajectories of democracy and development, surely the people of Nigeria's Ekiti State have singlehandedly demolished our self-esteem by adding "stomach infrastructure" to theory and praxis. So this paper, "The End of Politics?" does not claim the certainty of divinatory knowledge, but neither is it a futile and wishful hope for an end to politics, tempting as that might be in the Nigerian context. Without ignoring the urgency of Nigeria's looming elections, I approach it through a reconceptualization of a universal crisis of power, subjectivity and governance, exposed in the compelling constructs of necropolitics and biopower. Some of the narratives we will share are emotionally difficult to hear, as are the images you will see, but we must remember Jenny Edkins' caution that when we use terms like "unimaginable and unspeakable horrors"- it is not because they are in fact unimaginable or unspeakable, but because we refuse to imagine or speak about such difficult matters (2003: 3).

From the 'End of History' to the 'End of Politics'

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama caused a whirlwind in the scholarly community when he triumphantly and misguidedly hailed the slow implosion of the Soviet Union as heralding "...the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." (1989:1). In his paper, "the End of History?"² Fukuyama exulted that the 20th "century "seemed at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to ... a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" (ibid.).

Not surprisingly, critics rightly cited the analytical, conceptual and factual flaws in Fukuyama's thesis, including the elision of meaningful analysis of an age he simplistically celebrates as a victorious age of western "liberalism" – a so-called liberalism that Africans experienced as a period of rampant colonial imperialism and globalizing violence. Fukuyama's thesis also suffered from an entrenched Eurocentric and racialized framing; misshapen historicism;

inadequate problematization of globalization; flawed conflation of liberal democracy and the uncontrolled market; and premature suppositions about the trajectory of transnational culture and market shifts.

However, perhaps its most incendiary dimension was his belief (driven by Hegel who foregrounded Fukuyama's use of the language "the end of history"), that with the so-called "triumph ...of the Western *idea*," we have arrived at an ideal that cannot be improved upon philosophically and thus face a "total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives ..." (1989:1).

Very few Nigerians observing the 2015 electoral processes will be amused by this notion that we have arrived at the quintessential ideology, the epitome of our socio-philosophical and political search for earthly paradise. Not when the country is beset by tides of civil unrest, deeply rooted frustration, violence, impoverishment and social inequities. So we should ask, what really is the vision of this triumphal liberal democratic estate? Fukuyama is clear on his vision:

We might summarize the content of the universal homogenous state as liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic (1989:11).

Is this then the impoverished end vision of politics on which Nigerians should base their emergent system? The justification for the billions thrust into the 2015 electoral competition? Lest we be carried away by visions of freedoms and prosperity, with VCR's and permanent voter cards for all, Fukuyama quickly laments that "the end of history will be a very sad time" as the thrill of a worldwide ideological struggle is replaced by economic calculation and consumer demands.

Confessing to a powerful nostalgia for the past, he rues, "perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again". (1989:19)

What Fukuyama describes, in the manner of pampered nobility, as the boredom of an era without "exciting" super power (read superhero) battles could only be uttered by a Eurocentric scholar sheltered from the intense horrors of the ideological contestations between the super

powers, conflicts devastatingly played out on the battlefields of Somalia, South Africa, Namibia, Cuba and Nicaragua, etc. Ironically, the same Euro-American world that created such havoc in Africa still embodies the peak of neocolonial self-actualization for so many African leaders and citizens—a sad commentary on our limited sociopolitical visions.

Our human existence is clearly marked by contradictions: systems that produce wealth have an endless capacity to generate poverty and misery. This is why as Nigeria is poised at the cusp of another electoral process, public passion is tamed by a widespread politics of cynicism that is actually not unique to Nigeria. In contrast to Fukuyama, Boggs offered a rather austere proposition of contemporary democracy in the United States. He maintains that broad-based civic participation in the United States has declined over time, victim of a menacing corporatized culture that has left the public disempowered, cynical, pessimistic and increasingly disgusted and alienated "from a political system that is commonly viewed as corrupt, authoritarian, and simply irrelevant to the most important challenges of our time" (Boggs, 2001:14, 9).

NECROPOLITICS AND BIOPOWER

In this case, sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.³

Politics is therefore death that lives a human life

(Mbembe, 2003: 27)

In May 2004, the international media published images of members of the American military engaged in the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. The digital photos showed detainees being forced to pile on top of one another naked, simulate sexual acts, cower naked facing guard dogs straining on their leashes, and, perhaps most infamously, stand hooded with wires connected to fingertips and genitals ... more images and allegations of torture have continued to leak

out from U.S. prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. It is now known that some detainees in these war prisons died during interrogation and, further, that the CIA has been engaged in the “extraordinary rendering” of detainees to countries whose security services are known to have engaged in torture (Shrader, 2005, cited in Hannah, 2006: 622).

These are disturbing credentials for the nation that claimed a moral high ground and stood watch over Nigerian politicians as they signed an electoral peace pact. It is in this context of global violations that Michel Foucault, “one of the world’s most influential postmodern thinkers” reminds us of the omnipresence of power (Kelly, 2010: 1). Foucault’s ideas on “biopower” and “governmentality” (2007: 118), which were further developed by Agamben (1998, 2005), and transmuted into a compelling discourse on necropolitics by Achille Mbembe are valuable for understanding and transforming the systemic decay in our societies.

Foucault’s original studies of power in the early 1970s had focused on the emergence of what he described as “discipline societies” in the eighteenth century that used “disciplinary” power relations to regulate bodies in prisons, schools, asylums, and other institutions (Foucault, 1979; Hannah, 2006). Their goal was “to fit or refit citizens to participate in an orderly and productive way in modern industrial societies” through institutionalized forms of regulation that coupled “carefully calibrated and impartial systems of reward and punishment” (Hannah, 2006).

Later, Foucault shifted his focus to a related species of modern power that he termed “biopower” and in this shift, as Renault observes, “instead of being conceived of as a disciplinary technique turned upon the population, *biopolitics* was reconceived as a technique of power defined by the regulation of the state’s natural and artificial environment” (Renault, 2006: 159-160). Therefore, in the mid- to late 1970s, he argued that previous disciplinary techniques had emerged because the methods associated with traditional sovereignty (olden **“power over death”**) were “inadequate in governing the political

economies of a society undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization” (Foucault 2003 : 249; Hannah 2006:627).

Disciplinary power techniques gave rise to a new biopolitical **“power over life.”** Thus biopower, for Foucault, specifically references the technologies and systems of ‘security societies’ that enable the control of populations, determining their lives, bodies, behavior and wellbeing through the use of techniques as diverse as censuses, ballots, biotechnology and insurance policies, encompassing what he calls *governmentality*. This is the institutionalized exercise of the power “‘to ‘make live’ and ‘let die’” (Foucault, 2009; Kelly, 2010:4)

As we will see, biopower is terrifyingly relevant to our contemporary struggles for change because of its capacity to create death beneath a surface of normality.

Biopower and China’s ‘great leap forward’

“The police log is chilling.

Date: March 1960,’

Name of culprit: Zhu Shuangxi.

Victims: Husband and elder son.

Manner of crime: Corpses exhumed and eaten.”⁴

Frank Dikötter, the first historian to conduct a full research using China’s recently opened state archives, uncovered incontestable evidence that during the time that Mao Tse Tung was enforcing China’s industrializing Great Leap Forward’ in 1958, in his determination to catch up with western industrialized economies, at least 45 million people (and possibly 60 million) were systematically tortured, overworked, starved, killed or beaten to death in China over these four years. The Party saw members of the rural farming communities merely as “digits” or a faceless workforce.⁵ In his award winning book, *The Great Famine*, Dikötter, concludes that this genocide by edict “ranks alongside the gulags and the Holocaust as one of the three greatest events of the 20th century.”⁶ We hardly need a contestable ranking of the world’s so-called “greatest” or most horrific events to acknowledge their inconceivable devastation.

One cannot but recoil with horror at the evidence that state punishment for minor thefts, such as stealing a potato or a few grains, even by a child, could include being tied up and drowned in a pond, doused in excrement and urine, set alight, branded with hot metal or having a nose or ear cut off. The documentation reveals poignant accounts of parents forced to bury their children alive and people compelled to work naked in the middle of winter. In one region of a quarter of a million Chinese, eighty per cent of all the villagers were banned from the official canteen because they were too old or ill to be effective workers, and so were deliberately starved to death; in another region, 13,000 opponents of the new regime were killed in just three weeks; and it is estimated that over 3 million simply took their own lives. So Zhu Shuangxi's act of cannibalism, eating the flesh of her dead husband and son was not exceptional⁷.

However, in typical complicity with biopolitical systems, local party bosses curried political favor by inflating the harvest figures and hiking production target goals to the most absurd fictitious level and then lying that they had exceeded those goals. So on paper, Rennell notes, "China was bursting with food", while in reality, the greatest famine had ensued. Dikötter reveals that while peasants were eating the straw roofs of their houses, the leather of chairs, and plaster from the walls, the Chinese government exported millions of tons of food to East Germany, Albania and Cuba, to "show off the superior productivity of communism" (Rennell, 2011).

Agamben argued that in fact the modern political "power over life" (as in Foucault's theorization of *biopower*) is predicated on a more fundamental "power over death" belonging to sovereignty (1998: 83). Since sovereign power encapsulates the power to ...suspend law and the protections it confers on subjects (Hannah, 2006: 633), Agamben urges that individuals are "biological beings ultimately vulnerable to death at the hands of the sovereign, that is, as *homo sacer* or "bare life." (Tyner, 2013: 706)

This is tragically apparent in the hundreds of thousands of enforced citizen disappearances and other human rights atrocities committed during the cold war under military regimes across Latin

America; and in the absence of investigations or justice for those subjected to enforced disappearance in CIA custody under former President George W. Bush in the context of the “War on Terror”. Similarly, under Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir’s policy of Arabization and Islamization, a vicious scorched earth ethnocidal policy designed to subjugate the southern racial and religious opposition led to a cumulative death toll of well over 2 million pointing to a reality in which citizens are “bare life”.

Unfortunately, as in the case of China, we tend to initially negate and normalize the tragedies of everyday biopower, absorbing everyday violence and violations without reflecting on their corrosive impact on our communities, trusting in elections to move us from the jungle of death to the administration of life. But has the old form of sovereign power, embodied in "the right of seizure of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself," truly gradually yielded to the biopolitical "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life?"(Kordela, 2015:1). Agamben insists that Foucault’s construct of biopower as those everyday “normalized” forms of biopolitical control actually share common roots with the extreme programs of violence we associate with totalitarianism (Agamben, 1998: 5–6; Hannah, 2006: 633).

One of the most brutal applications can be found in the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps, in which Jews and others "were exterminated not in a mad and giant [sacrificial] holocaust but, exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice,' which is to say, as bare life" (Agamben, 1998:127-29, 114 cited in Kordela, 2015: 1-2). Of course, we do not have to go far back into history for proof. We live in a world currently dominated by news of ISIS and Boko Haram who regularly upload gleeful videos of their extermination of human beings as reminders of the capacity of the ‘sovereign to imagine and eradicate humans as ‘bare life.’

However, Foucault did not suggest that a “biopolitical regime effectively protects all life.” On the contrary, he admitted that the “destruction of life remains an integral part of biopolitics” in all modern states, but also submitted that quite unlike life under the reign of the

sovereign, biopolitical management of life in liberal states “now requires a recodification of any assault on life in terms that justify it from a biopolitical point of view” (Kordela, 2006:7, 8).

Perhaps the difference between exercising “power over death” and the “power over life” is negligible. Tyner puts it succinctly, “Whether characterized as ‘bare life’ (Agamben, 1998), ‘wasted lives’ (Bauman, 2004; Neocleous, 2011), ‘humans-as-waste’ (Yates, 2011), ‘abandoned lives’ (Pratt, 2005), ‘disposable lives’ (Chang, 2000; Wright, 1999, 2004, 2006), ‘precarious lives’ (Butler, 2004), or any of the other myriad terms currently being introduced, the commonality is that some populations are legally relegated to the realm of surplus and thus rendered expendable”(Tyner, 2013: 708).

No wonder Edkins insists that “to be called traumatic- to produce symptoms of trauma, an event has to involve more than mere helplessness. It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well, there is an extreme menace, but what is special is where the violence comes from. It takes place when the “very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we consider ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger”(Edkins, 2003 : 4).

Utopia and Bio-economics

The tragedy of biopower can be found in domains of global power and margins alike, especially in bio-economic strategies that relegate the poor to the layer of disposable and invisible peoples. Therefore, Tyner asks us to consider that two-thirds of America’s total income gains from 2002 to 2007 went to the top 1% of US households, while the median wealth of white households was 20 times that of African-American households. These figures speak directly to life and death as poverty marks out disposable classes in terms of age, gender, race and sociopolitical representation.

One in seven Americans or 46.5 million people were living in poverty in 2012 and 20.4 million in deep poverty, with children disproportionately representing more than a third of those in poverty

and deep poverty. The poverty rate for women aged 65 and older (11%) is almost double that of men aged 65 and older (6.6%), while Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites to be poor or live in deep poverty in the US. In 2012, 9.7% of non-Hispanic whites (18.9 million) were living in poverty, while over a quarter of Hispanics (13.6 million), and 27.2% of blacks (10.9 million) were living in poverty.

Thus, even when the United States ranked first in the world both in gross domestic product and in health expenditures, the country was 18th in the world in the percentage of children in poverty, 22nd in the world in low birth weight rates, and 25th in the world in infant mortality. Poverty thus translates directly into prospects for life and death (Tyner, 2013: 702-3). Tan argues that at the global level, biopower is also in evidence in structural adjustment programs for instance and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that were introduced in 1999 as preconditions for World Bank and IMF concessional financing and for debt relief. She suggests that the new global regulatory regimes relies less on ‘disciplinary power’ and the ‘technologies of domination’—than on ‘bio-political power’ and the ‘technologies of self’, in which objects of power reproduce the dominant norms and seek to insert themselves into the very relationships of power. (Tan, 2011: 1039, 1051)

Similarly, in examining transnational modernity and how it has accelerated mobility between unevenly constituted zones of finance, technology, culture, race, geography, and gender, Chakravorty and Neti insightfully observe that the “character of these new mobilities produces a structured difference between lives considered invaluable and those deemed disposable” in the global marketplace (2009: 195-6). A particularly troubling example of how our lives are affected by global biopower and bio-economics is the infamous Lawrence ‘Larry’ Summers Memo. On Dec 12, 1991, Summers, then chief economist and Vice-President for the World Bank, wrote an internal memo that was leaked to the environmental community. Summers initially claimed the memo was written by an aide in his name and later, that his statements were misunderstood and that he had intended them as “an effort to

sharpen the analysis” (Weisskopf, 1992 cited in Johnson et al, 2007:403). Excerpts are reproduced below:

The Memo

DATE: December 12, 1991

TO: Distribution

FR: Lawrence H. Summers

Subject: GEP

'Dirty' Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

1) The measurements of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City ...

3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostrate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to

get prostrate cancer than in a country where under 5 mortality is 200 per thousand...

Vallette states that after the memo became public in February 1992, Brazil's then-Secretary of the Environment, Jose Lutzenburger wrote to Summers:

Your thoughts [provide] a concrete example of the unbelievable alienation, reductionist thinking, social ruthlessness and the arrogant ignorance of many conventional 'economists' concerning the nature of the world we live in ... If the World Bank keeps you as vice president it will lose all credibility. To me it would confirm what I often said... the best thing that could happen would be for the Bank to disappear (1999).

Mr. Lutzenburger was fired shortly after writing this letter, but Mr. Summers, on the other hand, was appointed the U.S. Treasury Secretary in 1999, by the Clinton Administration, and later named 27th president of Harvard University. He resigned in the wake of a no-confidence vote by Harvard faculty in 2006, and then served as the Director of the White House National Economic Council for President Barack Obama from January 2009 until November 2010. Meanwhile, as Vallette rues, while regulations tighten around dangerous waste in the global North, banned pesticides, CFCs, asbestos, and other restricted harmful products are sold to the global South in defiance of the Bamako Resolution (ibid.) If Summer's memo was not sufficiently problematic, three American Economists, Johnson, Pequot and Taylor published an article, "Potential Gains from Trade in Dirty Industries," laden with inaccuracies and Eurocentric assumptions to validate Summers' proposition:

Although Summers' memo has been widely misinterpreted, his premise is valid and yet virtually undefended before the public by economists ... Deaths due to pollution, malignancies, and other maladies associated with old age are nearly nonexistent, primarily because people in developing nations typically do not live long

enough to be significantly exposed to such chronic risks ... One might conclude that people in developing countries would rationally accept increased exposure to hazardous pollutants in exchange for opportunities to increase their productivity. (Johnson et al, 2007:400-401)

In speaking of epistemic violence, and Husain describe “Epistemic violence: the construction of a violent knowledge of the *Other* that erases them as *subjects in national or global politics*.” Such a problematic global context explains Achille Mbembe’s decision to reimagine biopower in terms of the way it targets specific areas and peoples designated as global wastelands.

Necropolitics and the African Postcolony

Let me start by briefly borrowing from the field of medicine. Necrosis, as many know, is a form of damage to living cells from agents such as chemicals, toxins, traumatic burns, or infections that results in the premature and irreversible death of those cells. The term is derived from the Greek νέκρωσις "death, the stage of dying, the act of killing" and where there is an underlying pathogenic abnormality such as in chronic wounds, necrotic tissue tends to continually accumulate, promoting colonization by bacteria, preventing repair of the wound, generating a necrotic burden, prolonging an inflammatory response to the decomposing flesh and ultimately threatening the life of the patient (see Enoch and Harding, 2003).

Achille Mbembe, prominent African postcolonial theorist, famed African philosopher, political scientist, historian and public intellectual has argued that for the (post)colony, the concepts of “Necropolitics” and Necropower serve as a more viable analytical concept than Biopower/Biopolitics as the power of sovereignty is increasingly exercised through the creation of zones of death, where mass destruction and living death become the dominant logics and not through disciplinary technologies.

Deathworlds, Mbembe suggests: experience a permanent

condition of “being in pain”: fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes every night from dusk to day break; soldiers patrolling unlit streets, frightened by their own shadows . . . bones broken; shootings and fatalities _ a certain kind of madness (2003: 39; Osuri, 2009: 32)

Mbembe employs Foucault’s conceptualization of biopower (“the exercise of the power “to ‘make live’ and ‘let die’”) to redefine necropower as a specific form of biopower residing in the colony and postcolony, which represents the sites “where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of power outside the law, *ab legibus solutus* (2003:23). (Foucault, 2003:241),

But what is special about the colony? Is the form of biopower spawned of colonialism so different that it demands its own appellation, *necropolitics*, *necropower*? Mbembe argues that “... colonial sovereignty ... could be said to be constituted on the construct of distinction between the recognition of the sovereignty of other European states, and those “parts of the globe” perceived to be available for European appropriation (2003: 23, 24). Cecil Rhodes, British peer, made plain this difference when he declaimed on the floor of parliament:

I was in the East end of London yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry for “bread,” “bread,” and on my way home, I pondered over the scene and I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism, “... i.e., in order to save the 40, 000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands for settling the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid

civil war, you must become imperialists. (Robbins,2013, 2001:83)

These parts of the globe, Mbembe suggests, are “locations par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’”(24). Thus necropower is one where the sovereign right to kill or disallow life is not even “subject to legal and institutional rules” (Mbembe 2003, 25); (Osuri, 2009: 34). I would argue that African postcolonies exhibit uneasy combinations of necropower, the use of disciplinary techniques and institutionalized biopower.

Necropolitics: the Colonial Legacy in the Postcolony

To fully grapple with this analysis, we must journey into the past. In Thomas Gieger’s documentary, *Assassination Colonial Style: The Execution of Patrice Lumumba*, (2000), Belgian officers chortle gleefully as they proudly regale the world with reminiscences of their role in the torture, murder, and dismemberment of the Congolese prime minister.

Like complicit representatives of the United Nations, the U.S. CIA, and Congolese conspirators, they face the cameras, secure in their service to western empire and protected by a nation whose reluctant apology is nullified by the absence of punishment and the open flaunting of the prurient conscience of its agents. “For us”, they proudly explain:

the business began after his execution. We cut the bodies [of prime minister Lumumba and two of his ministers] up into pieces, we burned them and we also had huge quantities of acid, like you have in car batteries, so most of each body was dissolved, and then the rest, we burned them, but we had to do all this without the blacks seeing, in the middle of the forest—that was a problem too” (Geiger, 2000).

Adam Hochschild’s acclaimed text, *King Leopold’s Ghost* brings alive this disturbing colonial of the conversion of the Congo into a massive rubber plantation. He makes a compelling explanation of how

the violent colonial system that engineered the assassination of the Congo's radical nationalist postcolonial leader Patrice Lumumba and his substitution with the ruthless President Mobutu Sese Sekou, all culminated in the contemporary crisis in the Congo and the death of millions.⁸

The Belgian King Leopold's enslavement of citizen-subjects in colonial rubber territories he named the "Congo Free State" relied on a commitment to necropolitical physical and structural violence, such as severing the hands of men, women and children in order to force terrorized compliance in meeting colonial rubber harvesting quotas.

In the East of Africa, similar violent necropolitics underlay the thin façade of gentile civilization of British colonial administration in Kenya. Mamdani reminds us that "a battery of laws underwrote settler privilege at the expense of native lives ..." (Mamdani, 2005). By 1940, one in every eight Kikuyu had been forced to become a squatter and as the nationalist resistance began, the British declared a state of emergency on October 9, 1952. Within six months, they had isolated and detained some 50,000 without trial, set entire villages on fire, and forced **more than a million Kikuyu** into some 800 barbed-wire villages between June 1954 and October 1955 (ibid.).

Popular western myths of the Mau Mau armed resistance continues to conjure false images of the wholesale slaughter of British settlers. In Anderson's account only about thirty-two British settlers lost their lives in a struggle that left tens of thousands of Kenyans dead, brutalized hundreds of thousands in concentration camps, and transformed much of the colony into a prison governed by racial violence (2005). Elkins, a respected scholar of Kenyan colonial history, also somberly testified, "I now believe there was in late colonial Kenya a murderous campaign to eliminate Kikuyu people..." (ibid., xvi).

During a brief stop in Nairobi in the spring of 1954, journalist Anthony Sampson likewise observed what he later called the "dehumanization of the enemy" reduced to 'bare life' by local settlers and colonial officials. "I heard it everywhere I went," he said. "How many Kukes had to be gotten rid of ... [It was] almost like they were talking about big game hunting." (cited in Elkins, 2005: 49). Elkins

reports that one settler, known as Dr. Bunny by the locals, earned the notorious nickname, Joseph Mengele of Kenya for his torture methods. A member of the Kenya colonial Regiment boasted of Dr. Bunny's exploits, which included burning the skin off live Mau suspects and forcing them to eat their own testicles (*ibid.*, 67). Margaret Nyaruai, a young woman at the time of Mau Mau, recalls:

I was badly whipped, while naked. They didn't care that I had just given birth. In fact, I think my baby was lucky it was not killed like the rest ... Apart from the beatings, women used to have ... their breasts squeezed with a pair of pliers; after which, a woman would say everything because of the pain... (Elkins, 2005:67–68).

A settler reminisced, "Special Branch there had a way of slowly electrocuting a Kuke—they'd rough up one for days. Once I went personally to drop off one gang member who needed special treatment. I stayed for a few hours to help the boys out, softening him up. Things got a little out of hand. By the time I cut his balls off he had no ears, and his eyeball, the right one, I think, was hanging out of its socket. Too bad, he died before we got much out of him (cited in Edkins, 2003: 87).

Mbembe argues that in the colony, biopower is unique in its authorization to operate without reference to law or institution, but other scholars have suggested that "it is perhaps more accurate to say that the violence of the state of colonial exception operates both through law as well as its suspension". As an example, Osuri points out that while the Blackwater private military operative was contracted to defend US State Department officials in Iraq, they were immune from the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (which appears to apply to US soldiers). The US Congress passed a bill on 4 October 2007 making all private contractors subject to prosecution in US courts (CBS News 2007), however, they are immune to prosecution in Iraqi courts (CBS News 2007), and the US State Department also granted Blackwater employees immunity so that statements given by the employees to the State Department could not be used in a US court of law. Thus, they successfully created a state of exception within the imperial judicial terrain. (Scahill, 2008 cited in Osuri, 2009: 34). A similar law of exception was created for US soldiers who, in contrast to the rest of the

world's militaries are exempted from prosecution by the International Criminal Court for any crimes committed in the course of their duties. Thus, necropolitical systems can appear to operate through law but actually function through a suspension of law, as Mbembe theorizes it. (Osuri, 2009: 35)

In northern Nigeria, the realms of the disposable have also become spaces where laws are suspended, and terror and death operate in tandem to generate and reify power. No wonder Mbembe “present[s] a reading of politics as the work of death,” concluding in a startling engagement with Hegel’s account of death, that “Politics is therefore death that lives a human life.” (2003:12; Wright, 2011: 707, 709)

On the Exercise of Biopower

Necropolitics operates in at least four critical dimensions that we can easily see manifest in Nigeria. First, it constructs the terrain of its power and resource base, using legalistic, religious or other forms of constituted authority to define and secure the economic base of its controlled spaces. In the Nigerian context, the entire framework of the centralized revenue allocation system is invariably primed to be corrupted irrespective of who occupies Aso Rock since the center feeds in a parasitic and destructive manner on its subjects. The only lasting structural cure might well be adopting a framework of true federalism for which many states in the south had long agitated through calls for a sovereign national conference. Unfortunately, Nigeria’s northern states and northern elite are extremely unlikely to support the implementation of such a meaningful structure or the moderate recommendations in the report of the commission.

Next, necropolitical agents configure the terrain in a manner that defines the ranks of the disposable and of beneficiaries of the system on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, religion or a mixture of those calculations. That structuration can initially appear so benign that few people imagine their society is primed to explode into the kind of genocidal violence that left half a million dead in Rwanda in just a few weeks (Soyinka-Airewele, 2010).

Next, the militarized wings, police or insurgent militias, are engaged to force subjects into compliance; and finally, the corporate or business world steps in to normalize the consummation of the necropolitical process, fueling and channeling profits to those who will sustain the violence. The global system is littered with evidence of the avid participation of powerful corporations in the most abhorrent contexts: transatlantic slavery, colonialism, apartheid, the holocaust, the opium wars, the Niger Delta, the Congo crisis, etc.

Nigeria, OIC, Sharia and the Designation of Exterminable Populations

To fully understand the invisible construction of a terrain of the disposable, I briefly examine Nigeria's debates on the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and expansion of Sharia Law. To reiterate, biopower, in Foucauldian terms, refers to the sovereign exercise of the power to determine who may live and who must die. "It separates ...people into categories and subcategories, establishing boundaries between *Some* and *Others* – the condition for the acceptability of putting to death" (Mbembe,2003:17).

In the 1980s, Nigeria exploded into acrimonious debates and divides over the discovery that the military Government of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida had made the decision, unbeknownst to the nation, to become a full-fledged member state of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), now known as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which claims to be the second largest interstate organization after the United Nations. When the dust settled, many Nigerians who hitherto had understood the nation to be a secular multi-religious state (lacking a majority religion) believed that the government had bowed to opposition and would only maintain Observer status in the OIC in acknowledgment of Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution, which expressly stipulates "**the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion**" (Federal Military Government 1999).

However, the Nigerian government never rescinded its status as a full member of the organization. It has been and remains a full member

state from 1986 to the present. OIC **Membership status** is particularly significant in that the requisites are that the government must stipulate that its essential identity is that of a Muslim majority country as on membership, it is admitted into the Muslim Ummah (community or nation of believers).

(Chapter 2, Article 3:2): Any State, member of the United Nations, **having Muslim majority** and abiding by the Charter, which submits an application for membership may join the Organisation if approved by consensus only by the Council of Foreign Ministers on the basis of the agreed criteria adopted by the Council of Foreign Ministers. (OIC)

General Babangida is not the only African leader to fraudulently lay claim to a Muslim majority nation, such fabrications the OIC welcomes. Uganda, for instance, with a Christian population reportedly over 85% has been a member since 1974, willfully made signatory under President Idi Amin Dada, himself a Muslim. In Africa, sovereigns have arrogated to themselves the right to define the soul of the nation, as with Benin's membership under President Kérékou's alleged conversion during a visit to Libya, followed years later by a reversion to Christianity.

General Babangida justified arbitrarily making Nigeria an OIC member state because a few other non-Muslim nations have membership, as though the shenanigans of an Idi Amin in Uganda provides permission to ignore both the Nigerian and OIC statutes in his bid to gratify his political supporters and narcissistic ethno-religious sentiments⁹. Could General Babangida have assumed that Nigeria's supreme office would devolve consistently to an elected Muslim leader since the supreme authority of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, revealingly called *The Islamic Summit*, naturally anticipates that Muslims will be in leadership of the purportedly Muslim majority nations comprising OIC membership?

Against such a backdrop of religio-political impunity, it is not surprising that fears have arisen about a religious agenda, whether or not such is true. Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi and more recently,

APC vice-presidential candidate Rev. Osinbajo, have devoted some time to challenging such rumours. In Governor Amaechi's words:

Don't be perturbed by what our detractors are saying. I am an ardent Catholic Christian and I converse with God a lot. It is not true that the APC will Islamise Nigeria. The National Chairman of APC, Mr. John Oyegun, is a Christian. Bola Tinubu's wife is also a Christian, Buhari's cook is a Christian from Igboland, his driver is also a Christian. As a father to all of those Christians, he gives Sunday as a free day to his domestic staff to go to church and worship God¹⁰.

The governor might be well intentioned but his language of defence is most unfortunate. It is reminiscent of the rationale of a white elite who felt so assured of their paternalistic generosity toward the racial Other who served their meals and cleaned their homes so devotedly, that they could not imagine those folks wishing any change in the status quo. General Buhari's relationships with his Christian or Igbo domestics do not silence larger questions about the incessant pogroms and uprisings against the Southern or Christian other in the North. It would have been more productive to hear the Governor speak to how General Buhari had served to temper the rise of fundamentalism and ethnocentric chauvinism that has made the northern region the religious killing fields of Nigeria over the past 50 years of his long involvement in Nigerian politics.

Very few of those who debate Nigeria's membership in the OIC have actually read the OIC goals, so below are a **few** articles excerpted from the preamble to the organization's Charter. The Preamble starts thus:

In the name of Allah, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful We, the Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, [Nigeria inclusive]¹¹ determined:

- to be guided by the noble Islamic values of unity and fraternity ... in securing their common interests at the international arena;
- to preserve and promote the lofty Islamic values of peace, compassion ...;
- to endeavour to work for revitalizing Islam's pioneering role in the world ...;

- to ... strengthen the bond of unity and solidarity among the Muslim peoples and Member States;
- to foster noble Islamic values concerning moderation ... preservation of Islamic symbols and common heritage and to defend the universality of Islamic religion;
- to advance the acquisition and popularization of knowledge in consonance with the lofty ideals of Islam ... ;
- to support the struggle of the Palestinian people, ...and to establish their sovereign state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, while safeguarding its historic and Islamic character, and the holy places therein;
- to create conducive conditions for sound upbringing of Muslim children and youth, and to inculcate in them Islamic values through education ...¹²

Furthermore, under Chapter 1, “Objectives and Principles”, Article 1, 9 one of the OIC Objectives aims “To strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation; in order to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an Islamic Common Market.”

Like ECOWAS, a “Common Market” is one of the higher points of economic integration and at the end of that integrative spectrum is an economic union aimed at a fusion of monetary and institutional units, common currency, free movement of peoples and goods etc. The process of creating an Islamic common market is a major commitment, costly in political will, resources, and expertise. It binds citizens into an emergent community, while simultaneously excluding non-members. If the basis of the OIC common market is religious in nature, specifically Islamic- then who and what is excluded or marginalized in its commonwealth?

The OIC also adopted a Ten-year Programme of Action for immediate implementation at a December 2005 Extraordinary Conference designed to accelerate solidarity and Joint Islamic Action, as initiated by King Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz¹³. Among other plans, it calls on member states, (IV. 1.) “To underline the need to strengthen

dialogue among Islamic Schools, affirm the true faith of their followers and **the inadmissibility of accusing them of heresy, as well as the inviolability of their blood, honor and property, as long as they believe in Allah Almighty**, in the Prophet (PBUH) and in the other pillars of the Islamic faith, respect the pillars of Islam and do not deny any self-evident tenet of religion”. Is the OIC suggesting that even among its followers, the inviolability of their blood, honor and property is assured only as long as they believe in Allah, the Prophet and other pillars of Islam? How then do we assure the inviolability of the blood and property of non-Muslims?

In reality, there can be no religious co-existence in Nigeria without painful acceptance of some loss of space, collective comfort, affirmation and place on the part of all religious communities. However, it is impossible to cultivate a culture of even-handedness on a flawed systemic/ structural foundation. The political impunity and deceit that midwifed Nigeria’s OIC membership has served to corrode national trust and inter-communal relations, while encouraging a perception that a combination of audacity, impunity and militarized belligerence will accomplish any desired objective. In a recent interview on Kadaria, former leader Babangida insisted he has absolutely no regrets regarding his decision to force the nation into the OIC. In that context, one can only be surprised that it took so long for a Boko Haram insurgency to take up the same tools of compulsion and self-righteous conviction with which he propelled Nigeria into OIC membership.

Religious Politics and the Necropolitical State

Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom reminds us that “In fact, what the Islamic State, also called ISIS or ISIL, is undertaking in Iraq, as part of its effort to establish an Islamic caliphate, is a religious cleansing intended to eradicate the entire presence of the country’s non-Muslim citizens” (Shea, 2014: 34) “Behind the daily reporting about bombs”, Shea explains, the two-thousand-year-old Christian communities in Iraq and Syria, are facing a

wave of religious persecution so severe that Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana of the Assyrian Church of the East described it as an “ethno-religious cleansing” that could empty Syria of its Christians. (Shea, 2014: 35) In an exodus reminiscent of the Armenian genocide by Turkish authorities in the early 20th century, leaders of the Iraqi church reported that between one-half and two-thirds of their community had to flee the country in the preceding decade, even before the horrific 2013 attack by the Islamic State on the Christian centers of Mosul, Qaraqosh, and all other Nineveh towns (Shea, 2014: 35).

The varied modes of persecution experienced by Christians today in parts of Northern Nigeria, are also commonplace in a growing list of other countries as Islamic extremism spreads. The list compiled by Nina Shea is eerily representative of Nigeria’s necropolitical reality.

- The use of legal and extralegal means to hinder or disrupt the building of churches, the demolition of churches or attacks on churches—sometimes while full of worshippers. In just two years, Boko Haram deliberately destroyed more than a hundred churches, and four mosques. (Shea, 2014: 43)
- The looting, confiscation, or destruction of private Christian homes, businesses, and lands and the legal and extra legal curtailment of Christians’ right to property and thus the paralysis of their means to earn a livelihood.
- Legalized and extralegal murder of Christians including clergy, as well as moderates of other religions, who after being “identified as such by their names, identity cards, or some other means, are beheaded, shot execution-style, or otherwise brutally murdered”. In Somalia, in 2003, Sheikh Nur Barud, Vice-chairman of an influential Somali Islamist group, declared, “All Somali Christians must be killed according to the Islamic law” (Shea, 2014: 37).
- The abduction of Christians, including bishops, priests, pastors, and nuns, who are held for ransom used in facilitating the growth of the militant Islamic movements.
- The abduction of young women who are forced to convert to Islam and marry their captors or are forced into sexual service at the disposal of entire camps of militants.

Mayat, (not her real name), a 17 year old Yazidi girl captured by ISIS has spoken recently of her extreme abuse at the hands of Islamic State (IS) extremists. She was kidnapped in August 2014 and remains a captive although allowed to talk to journalists because, “to hurt us even more, they told us to describe in detail to our parents what they are doing.” Asking that her name be concealed, Mayat said: “I am ashamed of what they have done to me. “Part of me would like to die immediately, to sink beneath the ground and stay there. But another part that still hopes to be saved, and to be able to hug my parents once more ... I don’t even know how to describe my torture.” There are, she explained, three “rooms of horror” where the women are raped, often by different men and throughout the day. “They treat us like slaves. We are always ‘given’ to different men. Some arrive straight from Syria,” she says. Mayat spoke of the extreme traumatization of the youngest girls, and of attempted suicides: “Sometimes I feel as though it will never end ... Even if I survive, I don’t think I’ll be able to remove this horror from my mind.” Mayat finished by saying: “They have already killed my body. They are now killing my soul” (Shea, 2014: 37). Her testimony echoes that of many women who escaped Boko Haram.

- The ongoing necropolitics in northern Nigeria is part of a larger global web involving the forceful conversion of Christians to Islam. Many are only provided the option of being killed or paying prohibitive protection money. In February 2014, reports stated that in ISIS-controlled Raqqa, Syria, “a detailed, written “dhimmi contract” was signed by some twenty Christian leaders. They agreed to abide by Caliph Umar’s purported seventh-century rules for “People of the Book,” including: bans on renovating and rebuilding churches and monasteries, the public display of crosses and Christian symbols, and the ringing of bells. They are forbidden from reading scripture indoors loudly enough for Muslims outside to hear, and practicing their faith publicly, at funerals or wedding processions, for example. They are prohibited from offending Muslims or Islam. The women must be enshrouded ... They must also pay a specified jizya in golden dinars. If these rules are kept, the document states, they have the dhimma, or protection, of the Prophet Muhammad and won’t be harmed. If they don’t, they will be

considered combatants and put to “the sword.” (Shea, 2014: 40)

- Despite denouncements of terrorist violence by many Muslims, the enforcement of Islamic laws on apostasy and blasphemy and codes and standards for dress, occupation, and social behavior is increasingly affecting non-Muslims. (Shea, 2014: 36-37). Thus, the use of the law as a tool of governing territories of the disposable is also a part of a necrotizing religious biopolitical sphere. No wonder Tyner suggests that we conceive of biopolitics, “as the political negotiation of life; how life, its existence and vitality, is linked to the regulation and contestation of who has priority to live and flourish, and who might be left to wither and die. ... within any given place, who lives, who dies, and who decides?” (Tyner, 2013 :702).

Beyond the question of OIC membership, Nigeria’s 1977 to 1978 Sharia debate in the Constituent Assembly was one of the first major religious conflicts that polarized the nation and laid the basis for the emergence of a group like Boko Haram. At the heart of the conflict, Adesoji clarifies, was the struggle for and against the provision for a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in the proposed 1979 Constitution because of its implications for the secularity of the Nigerian state (Laitan cited in Adesoji, 2011:100). Led by Muhammadu Marwa, a Cameroonian resident in Kano, the violent uprising that began in 1980 in Kano was harbinger to a succession of Maitatsine riots purportedly seeking the purification of Islam from external corrupting influences. The Kano riots were followed by Kaduna and Bulumkutu in 1982; Yola in 1984, and Bauchi in 1985, etc. (Ibrahim, 1997 and Isichei, 1987, cited in Adesoji, 2011:101).

There is, of course, a tendency to dismiss these violent religious mobilizations as spontaneous incidents and expressions of faith, ethnicity and other grievances unconnected to law, political systems or structures of *commandement*. But in fact, the growth of Boko Haram militancy has been dependent on enabling systems of law, partisan politics and political patronage, which have directly and indirectly scripted the permissible space for the emergence and validation of the group. General Buhari is cited as enthusiastically stating in an address at a 2001 Islamic seminar in Kaduna, that given the options of Nigeria’s

secularism or the expansion of Sharia Law; “I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria ... God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country.”¹⁴

Adesoji argues convincingly regarding the connection between the introduction of Sharia in some northern states beginning in 1999 and the growth of Boko Haram. The arbitrary pronouncement of the expansion of Sharia law as part of the Zamfara State legal corpus was done with disregard for appropriate judicial, legislative and civil processes and protests locally and nationally. Thus, the sense of impunity contained in that approach to political licensing certainly spawned a rapport and suggested mutuality of goals and interests between Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram and some of the regional politicians. Since many northern elite have utilized religious mobilizations and interpretations of Islam to carve out their political niche and career, including General Yar’Adua, who while a governor chose to impose Sharia Law in his home state and ultimately deployed the surge in standing to push his way to national presidency (see Ilesanmi 2001:529–554; and Omipidan 2009b:5–6, cited in Adesoji, 2011:107).

With the adoption of expanded provisions of Sharia law now operating with jurisprudence over criminal matters in twelve of Nigeria’s nineteen northern states, it might well be argued that through membership of the OIC and the expansion of Sharia law as state law responsive to the identity of select populations, Nigeria has formally elected to operate with a state religion, despite the stipulation in the 1999 Constitution. Drawing from the struggle with religious politics in the United States, Greene asks “What sort of harm from religious practice should be sufficient to outweigh legal infringements on the free exercise of religion?” (Greene, 2009:964). Nigeria is yet to answer that question. Roger Williams traced persecution to a desire “...to create security by lording it over others” whether through intentional discrimination against minorities, or simply the “failure to recognize harm to minorities within one's midst from the differential impact of otherwise valid laws...” (Greene, 2009: 975)¹⁵,

It is for this reason that the United States in its seemingly extreme navigation of religious secularity establishes a clear case law on this: Government may not even sponsor religious symbols “if doing so would either endorse the majority's favored religion or reflect a predominant religious purpose” (Greene, 2009: 980 – 981).

Negotiating Biopolitics in the Contemporary Polity

Edkins concludes that “the modern state, then, is a contradictory institution: a promise of safety, security and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control and coercion” (2003: 6). However, as citizens, we pretend to exist in a wholeness of relationship with the state, a boundedness that is broken occasionally by trauma and can be repaired by activism or other goals, that is, “we hide the traumatic real, and stick with the fantasy of what we call social reality” (ibid).

It would be difficult for either of Nigeria's dominant parties to hope to convince any discerning observer that they have a meaningful ‘anticorruption’ platform. It was indeed quite intriguing to read an enthused declaration that “corruption would disappear from Nigeria” if General Muhammadu Buhari emerged as President¹⁶. Unfortunately, quite like the incumbent president, General Buhari is also complicit in the web of corruption within his own party that he has willingly utilized to bring him closer to fulfilling his deep-rooted ambitions that have spanned five decades of Nigeria's political history. Speaking from the viewpoint of the study of the politics of memory and violence, the obsessive, possibly pathological need for political office that has led General Buhari to participate in two military coups d'état, and four elections would be considered quite disturbing, competing in fact with our deep angst regarding the patent failures of the current administration. As we struggle to deal with the consequences of mass violence in Africa, I am disquieted by General Buhari's revealing outburst at a defining moment in the post 2011 elections period. On May 14, 2012, speaking in Hausa while addressing visiting members of his erstwhile party, the Congress for Progressive Change in Kaduna, General Buhari is said to have declared:

God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way ... If what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood.”¹⁷

Irrespective of efforts by his team to explain this as a mere symbol of speech, it is scandalous that a candidate who hopes to serve in the nation’s highest office could publicly reference any portion of the citizenry as “dogs and baboons” and invoke divine sanction on a pledge of bloodshed if his political ambitions are thwarted. Such an outlook reeks of a malignant internal corrosion of personal integrity, the fecund corruptive power of ambition and a dangerous embrace of necropolitics that permits the sovereign to exercise flagrant power over life and death. It is reminiscent of the malevolent language of “lice” used in the holocaust against the Jews and other minorities and of the pernicious discourse of ‘cockroaches’ applied against the Tutsi in the Rwandan genocide. The tragedy of course is that the necropolitical culture of Nigeria has so deeply coarsened the collective expectations of the public that such language is assimilated without a demand for a penitent apology or serious questioning of the credentials of its author. Perhaps this is understandable; after all, threats and acts of violence are rife across the political spectrum.

Furthermore, many citizens have wearied of a government incapable or unwilling to do enough to protect from the terror of militarized assaults and abductions by a vicious religious terrorist movement in a deeply corrupted system, even if the president declares, “I have said it before and I will continue to say ... that my ambition, and indeed the ambition of anybody, is not worth the blood of any Nigerian.”¹⁸ Such words lose some of their efficacy in the face of a reality of terror and loss. So those citizens hail with fervor the proclamations of a contender who, like a sovereign, diminishes their humanity to ‘bare life’, offering a bloodletting if he loses ‘unfairly’ in his sixth venture for national office and a dubious security if he wins.

Reclaiming our Humanity and Resisting Necrotizing Decay

In their examination of Fukuyama's essay, twenty-five years after its original publication, Stanley and Lee declare that away from the excitement of the late 1980s: the imminent collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, and the "orgy of free-market excitement," "today, it's hard to imagine Fukuyama being more wrong. History isn't over and neither liberalism nor democracy is ascendant" (Stanley & Lee, 2014). Thus, they offer us a modified conceptualization of a liberalism that might be relevant for the future, made perhaps more powerful by its very simplicity, "liberalism is defined by a commitment to liberty ... a concept grounded in the individual. It is the freedom to be all that one is, to actualize the fullness of one's potential as a human being endowed with the capacity for creativity and the ability to make autonomous value judgments for ourselves." Stanley and Lee also expose two compelling realities that could frame a resurrected politics of life and human dignity:

The first is that we all share the same degree of dignity: No one has any less potential than any other, and no one's humanity is any less pronounced than anyone else's. The second is that our humanity imposes upon us the same basic needs. By virtue of our nature, we all require food, shelter, clothing, security, and a range of other basic goods necessary for sufficiency and survival. Though deceptively simple, these implications have profound meaning when we consider how individual liberty is to be translated into a social and political construct ... the principles of equity and the common good must be embedded in the structure of society (Stanley and Lee, 2014).

No wonder several liberation scholars and theologians, including Gustavo Gutierrez for instance, insist that the social and economic rights of the poor can only be achieved by acknowledging that "the poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible ... hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order"

(cited in Farmer, 2004). Stanley and Lee caution that it is only if everyone recognizes the dignity of the human person that they will recognize, and strive to defend and preserve not only their own liberty, but also that of all others in their society using law. If we lose our commitment as a polity to seek and defend human dignity, “society becomes a jungle in which it is everyone for himself; self-interest dominates, law becomes partial, and tyranny supplants liberty” (2014).

In a compelling reminder, Edkins explains that while those events we experience as individual or collective trauma (such as the kidnapping of hundreds of young men and women by Boko Haram), are overwhelming, they are also revelatory; “They reveal the contingency of the social order and in some cases how it conceals its own impossibility” (Edkins, 2003:5)¹⁹. Therefore, we must return again to Mbembe’s definition of Politics as “death living a human life”. If Politics is ‘death living a human life’- perhaps there is nothing more optimistic than to speak about the end of politics—that is, the *“end of death living a human life.”*

But what would emerge in its place? Still politics, but hopefully a reformed politics that can travel into the future. The word ‘reform’ sounds tame besides our preferred terms of revolution and transformation but I use it advisedly in the context of Foucault’s caution against constructing utopias that degenerate into biopower. The dilemma with necropolitics is that even as we protest its putrid formations, we often lose sight of how much it has entwined itself around our lives, swamped and overwhelmed our vision, language, relationships, communities and lives. We ignore how deeply we are invested in and complicit with its norms and enticements. So perhaps seeking reform or transformation is a first step to recognizing, unlike the local party bosses of China, our own complicity in corruption and in systems of power and fear.

Although the medical field utilizes surgical debridement to save lives threatened by necrotic trauma, the only assured mode the human species has of defeating death is ensuring that life is constantly birthed. So at various levels of the polity, we must continue to mobilize, debate and seek to elect ethical, visionary and responsive leaders; demand a

national political structure rooted in true federalism; and hold leaders in all societal sectors accountable for their discourses and actions or lack thereof.

However, at an individual and collective level, we must also be prepared to birth new modes of life. This is the ultimate challenge to necropolitics. In practical and basic terms, it translates to our genuine personal and sustained commitment to protect human dignity, to fulfill our personal determination to eradicate and alleviate poverty, provide just employment, support those who are marginalized and in need, respond to those rendered vulnerable in the mounting humanitarian crisis, protect the environment in trust, deal with honesty and integrity and generate progressive social relations rooted in the desire for justice, equity and peace. Despite our global and national context of violence, we are surrounded by numerous examples of those who deploy a politics of life to challenge systemic necrotic decay.

To highlight one example, the Stephen's Children's Home in Abeokuta is an initiative birthed by a Nigerian committed to children who lost one or both parents in the various eruptions of religious violence in northern Nigeria. The residential center cares for over four hundred displaced children who all have heartbreaking narratives of trauma, rape and loss—they have experienced necropolitics in a manner that is irreversible, but the courageous determination of their Nigerian caregiving team and supporters challenges necropower in the lives of the children more effectively than some more popular modes of engagement that left them exposed and vulnerable to continued violence and suffering. This is not about mere acts of charity. It is about taking committed steps to self-transformation and actualization, breaking free of the paralyzing legacies of biopower and necropolitics, creating models and sustaining visions of the future, and re-establishing a national framework for lasting voice and change within the citizenry and political leadership.

There is no simple set of rules for reforming the nation, but among other things we do need:

1. Acceptance of the fact that Biopower and Necropolitics will not vanish in the near future.

2. Readiness to be discomfited and challenged, to occasionally lose faith in the system and its promises, to find oneself intellectually and socio-politically afloat.
3. New visions and the capacity to live as practical visionaries, reimagining and reconstructing alternative and progressive spaces at every level. We must re-examine each space we inhabit—home, work, community and nation—and conceive of how to transform that space to enhance human dignity and equity, to establish microsystems that meet critical needs in a manner that is principled, collaborative, effective and sustained.
4. A focus on critical mass transformation that recognizes the limitations of one individual and the capacity of the state to co-opt and constrain solo idealists. As democratic activists, human rights workers, environmentalists, socio-politicians and progressive institutions, we must seize on innovative ways to create collaborative networks that will achieve and sustain our struggles for socio-political change without being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task
5. Ethical courage and integrity: Necropolitics generates decay throughout a system and the most difficult battle is the individual struggle to sustain personal integrity and voice in a framework that entices us to do otherwise.

Africa has no lack of visionaries, some of whom can now be described as part of a global heritage. In closing, I want to once again recall former President Patrice Lumumba of the Congo whose ideological vision and “effrontery” ended in a haunting outrage of brutal torture and assassination. Like Lumumba, we must determine if we are actually prepared to handle the consequences of our attempt to rethink the world and our place in it, critiquing power and in the words of Shohat and Stam, “...‘imagining’ from the margins...as active, generative participants at the very core of a shared, conflictual history²⁰”.

Lumumba’s last testament was penned to his wife shortly before his brutal murder in January 1961: a victim of a chilling web of global intrigues and complicities involving the Belgian government, CIA and

local conspirators. His final photographs taken by journalists and by his assassins confirm that he still had his head held high, audacious to the end²¹.

Yet even from his death cell, Lumumba left us a defiant memoir:

My beloved companion,

I write you these words without knowing whether you will receive them, when you will receive them, or whether I will still be alive when you read them. Throughout my struggle for the independence of my country, I have never doubted for a single instance that the sacred cause to which my comrades and I have dedicated our lives would triumph in the end. But what we wanted for our country—its right to an honorable life, to perfect dignity, to independence with no restrictions—was never wanted by Belgian colonialism and its Western allies—who found direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional support among certain high officials of the United Nations, that body in which we placed all our trust when we called on it for help.

They have corrupted certain of our countrymen; they have bought others; they have done their part to distort the truth and defile our independence. What else can I say? That whether dead or alive, free or in prison by orders of the colonialists, it is not my person that is important. What is important is the Congo, our people whose independence has been turned into a cage, with people looking at us from outside the bars, sometimes with charitable compassion, sometimes with glee and delight. But my faith will remain unshakeable...

I want my children, whom I leave behind and perhaps will never see again, to be told that the future of the Congo is beautiful and that their country expects them, as it expects every Congolese, to fulfill the sacred task of rebuilding our independence, our sovereignty; for without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men.

Neither brutal assaults, nor cruel mistreatment, nor torture have ever led me to beg for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head held high, unshakeable faith and the greatest confidence in the destiny of my country, rather than live in slavery and contempt for sacred principles. History will one day have its say; it will not be the history taught in the United Nations, Washington, Paris or Brussels, however, but the history taught in the countries that have rid themselves of colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history, and both north and south of the Sahara it will be a history full of glory and dignity. Long live the Congo! Long Live Africa!

*Patrice*²²

Acknowledgments

At this stage, I should probably ask whether those to whom I am indebted actually wish to be named in association with this paper. So let me start with the express disclaimer that I am solely to blame for the opinions or errors expressed therein. Having said that, I do wish to convey my gratitude to the Chancellor, Dr. David Oyedepo, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Charles Ayo, and the senior management of Covenant University for inviting me to speak at this significant moment in Nigeria's political odyssey. I thank the Carnegie Foundation's African Diaspora Fellowship for supporting my three months visit to Covenant University and greatly appreciate you all for honoring this invitation and gathering to consider the struggle for our humanity.

My profound thanks also go to the following: my colleagues, the HOD and students of the Department of Political Science and International Relations (PSI) at Covenant University; my collaborator, Dr. Sheriff Folarin; former Covenant University Dean, Professor Kayode Soremekun (who 30 years ago, calmly informed the first set of International Relations students at the University of Ife, that he expected all female students in his class to top the charts); and the Dean of the College of Leadership Studies and former Vice-Chancellor of Covenant University, Professor Aize Obayan who originally laid the framework for a sustained collaboration with my home university that was consummated in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2013 by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Charles Ayo. Listening to PSI colleagues and

students express their passion for Nigeria and anguish over its conditions through sizzling debates in classrooms, hallways, parking lots and offices across campus helped to drive my search for answers to our ongoing struggles for change. I treasure every area of our collegial accord and dissensions and thank you all for contributing to this work.

I was blessed to work through these issues, directly and indirectly, with some of the most wonderful, opinionated and insightful individuals in my life: my husband, Aloja Airewele; parents, Wole Soyinka and Olayide Soyinka; and sister, Moremi Soyinka-Onijala were the first forbearing readers of this paper. My reflections were also impacted by conversations with my brothers, Dr. Olaokun and Ilemakin Soyinka, and brother-in-law, Ambassador Tola Onijala; my late sister, Iyetade Soyinka; my friends and colleagues, Profs. Ladega and Abimbola Soriyan, Funke and Gbenga Ayanleke, the ‘Jayeobas’, and former lecturer and presidential candidate, Professor Oluremi Sonaiya, whose impassioned writings, teachings and dedicated lifestyle assure us that this nation can be great again. My thanks to Prof. Leslie Lewis, IC Dean of Humanities and Sciences, and my colleagues and students at Ithaca College, NY, for energizing the arguments in this paper through their empathetic collaboration in ethical struggles against power.

My husband Dr. Aloja Airewele and children, Olutale, Oseoba and Yolore served as my treasured reviewers and models for the arguments in this lecture. Aloja is that rare and perfect companion for a shared life’s journey on ‘the road less traveled.’ Joined now by my niece Oreofe, they demonstrate diverse journeys of resistance to necropolitics through strategic mobilizations and material advocacy; partnering to support marginalized school children in South Africa; fighting to build communities free of police brutality in the United States; helping to raise and ship critical materials to those fighting Ebola in Sierra Leone and Liberia; and helping to equip a children’s library for the Stephens children’s home in Nigeria. Atop and beyond all else, I thank the Almighty, the giver of life for making possible this voyage of hope in a world of pain.

The lecture is dedicated in salute to the courage, beauty and future of the children of the Stephen’s Children’s Home, Abeokuta, and the directors of the home, Rev Isaac and Mrs. Wusu who together demonstrate how we can produce life in spaces of death and terror.

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END NOTES

¹ United States Ambassador to Nigeria, James F. Entwistle speaking at the screening of the award winning film, *Selma* on Sunday, February 8, 2015 hosted by the Lagos based church ministry "House on the Rock".

² At the time of writing, Francis Fukuyama was deputy director of the State Department's policy planning staff and former analyst at the RAND Corporation. His article was based on a lecture presented at the University of Chicago's John M. Olin Center.

³ Mbembe references here the apartheid system in South Africa.

⁴ Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine; The Story of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe*, cited in "Mao's Great Leap Forward 'killed 45 million in four years', *The*

Independent, Friday 13 February 2015. The Great Famine won the 2011 Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction.

⁵ Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine; The Story of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe*, ibid.

url: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/maos-great-leap-forward-killed-45-million-in-four-yes-2081630.html>

downloaded, February 13, 2015.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ibid.

⁸ Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo provides an informative reading of the Belgian-Zaire ties in his article "Zaire's Ties to Belgium: Persistence and Future Prospects in Political Economy," *Africa Today* 39, no. 3 (1992).

⁹ In an interview with General Ibrahim Babangida, Feb 1, 2015, anchored by Nigerian journalist Kadaria Ahmed "Straght talk with Kadaria", Channels Television, Kadaria pushes him hard for regrets regarding his decision to join the OIC especially in view of the expanding fundamentalist violence in the region. Babangida justifies and stand behind his decision, blames it all on lack of public understanding and unfounded rumors and argues that the OIC is not just for Muslim countries. He is however unable to answer her question about the substantive benefits that have accrued to Nigeria from membership.

¹⁰ Rivers State Governor Amaechi along with General Buhari addressing delegates in Port Harcourt Nigeria, "Nobody Can Turn Nigeria Into A Christain Or An Islamic State-Buhari" November 27, 2014. Daily Times, Nigeria. <http://www.dailytimes.com.ng/article/nobody-can-turn-nigeria-christain-or-islamic-state-buhari> accessed November 31, 2014.

¹¹ The words [Nigeria inclusive] are my insertion.

¹² Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2008. Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Signed, Dakar, Republic of Senegal, the Seventh day of Rabi Al-Awal, One

Thousand Four Hundred and Twenty-nine Hijra, corresponding to Fourteenth day of March Two Thousand and Eight. http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en
Accessed December 1, 2014.

¹³ Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2005. "OIC Ten-year Program of Action, , (To Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah In The 21st Century)". Accessed, Dec 1, 2014.

http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/page/?p_id=228&p_ref=73&lan=en

¹⁴ Babatunde Oyewole, "Insurgency and Buhari's call for full Sharia". *vanguardngr.com*. Viewpoint. December 24, 2014.

¹⁵ In negotiating US legal provisions for a secular state, Nussbaum turns

to an exegesis of the writings of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and "seminal writer about the persecuted conscience. "She highlights two strands of Williams's thought: "finding a way to live on terms of mutual respect with people whom one believes to be in error" and "the preciousness and vulnerability of each individual person's conscience.'" (cited in Greene, 2009: 966)

¹⁶ Mr Rotimi Amaechi, Rivers State Governor, Chairman of the APC Nigeria Governors Forum and Director-General of the Muhammadu Buhari Campaign Organization was speaking during the "swearing in" ceremony for nine new Permanent Secretaries in Port Harcourt, Nigeria on Wednesday February 4, 2015. See Chukwudi Akasike, "Corruption'll disappear if Buhari wins, says Amaechi", The Punch, Thursday, February 5, 2015: 19.

¹⁷ General Mohammadu Buhari cited in numerous Nigerian news reports. See for example, Luka Binniyat, Vanguard Nigeria, "2015 'll be bloody if...- Buhari", May 15, 2012.

¹⁸ Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan launches his Lagos campaign appealing on facebook to his long abandoned fans. See Ameh Comrade Godwin, "2015: My second term ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian – Jonathan," *Daily Post*, January 8, 2015. <http://dailypost.ng/2015/01/08/2015-second-term-ambition-not-worth-blood-nigerian-jonathan/>

¹⁹ Edkins also observes that "the testimony of survivors can challenge structures of power and authority. Moreover, this challenge can in some regards transcend boundaries of culture and social group. It is what Michel Foucault referred to as 'the solidarity of the shaken'. "2003: 5

²⁰ Shohat and Stam, op.cit, p 48

²¹ See also Soyinka-Airewele, Peyi, "Emergent Discourses of Audacity and the Revocation of Marginality"

Journal of Third World Studies, Spring 2010

²² "Letter to Pauline Lumumba", in Ludo de Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, trans. Ann Wright and Renee Fenby. London and New York, Verso, 2001. Cited in Peyi Soyinka-Airewele, "Emergent Discourses of Audacity and the Revocation of Marginality" *Journal of Third World Studies*, Spring 2010



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