

Nigeria, Blood and Crucifixion on the Plateau

By Mathew Hassan Kukah

Those invisible men came to the Plateau again, bearing their gifts of death and destruction. They came from the deepest pit of hell, the habitat of the devils that they are. They are children of darkness, sons of Satan. They opted to extinguish and snatch the light of the joy of Christmas from thousands of people on the Plateau. They imagined they would ignite an orgy of blood, seduce the ordinary peace-loving people of the Plateau and set them on a mission of mindless murder of fellow citizens in the name of retaliation. The world would then say that this is was a war of religion, Christians killing Muslims to ignite a larger war. So far, over two hundred lives are gone and we are still counting, but what next, where next and who next?

Over the years, these murderers have left their footprints of blood and tears across the length and breathe of the entire northern states, indiscriminately wrecking destruction across large swaths of land and communities. In all this, the Nigerian state and its security agencies are blind-sided, seemingly incapable of cleaning up this Augean stable of sorrow and pain in our land. These killers have turned the Nigerian state and its security agencies into objects of cynicism, mockery and mere lachrymal spectators' daily accompanying funeral processions. Across the country, these funerals and the coffins are now part of our landscape. We are gradually taking eerie solace in the fact that these killers do not respect the boundaries of religion, region or ethnicity. We seem to be consoled that they are destroying Churches as well as mosques, killing Christians as well as Muslims. We seem to be lulled into a feeling of collective consolation and we all believe that we are all victims of an endless orgy of violence that has taken over our land. There is a method to this madness. The choice of location, communities, timings, the seeming hooded identities of the killers mask a fact: we may not know who they are, but someone wants something from the Middle Belt. Stretch your imagination from the emergence of the modern Nigerian state and connect the dots.

Sadly, with time, Nigerians are gradually losing hope in the ability of their government to protect and secure them. While we religious leaders have continued to use



our moral authority to encourage our people not to take the laws into their hands, we risk being swept away by the anger and frustration of our people. We even risk being seen as accomplices to an erring state. The Nigerian state itself risks becoming an undertaker in the eyes of its citizens. Our cups of sorrow are overflowing. We have cried enough tears. We may pretend that we are not at war, but truly, a war is being waged against the Nigerian state and its people. God forbid, but we could snap anytime, anywhere and for any reason.

By the banks of the Niger River, on the hills of the Plateau, across the lush savannah of the middle belt, we have sat down and wept. We have questions crying for answers: Who are these killers? Where are they coming from? Who is sponsoring them? What are their grouses and against whom? What do they want? Whom do they want? Who are they working for? When will it all end? Why are they invincible and invisible? Who is offering them cover? Are we condemned to live with this and hand this broken nation to our children? Should we all just become inoculated and sedated to make all this bearable? Who will supply the opium to dull our pain? Are we sleeping walking to self-destruction?

Why has the north become the birthplace of so much bloodletting? Why have these killings seen as tools of negotiation with the Nigerian state by the protectors of the north? Why has our north become the incubator of all that is destructive? Boko Haram, Banditry and shades of terrorism all live in our region. Why is this so? These killers are not ordinary murderers. They are killers for a purpose. It is the task of the Intelligence community to tell us who they are, where they live and what their goals are. These killers are professionals and are they Nigerians or they have just Nigerian sponsors? Their sponsors are among us. They must be in high places. They are now embedded in the architecture of state. President Tinubu must know that the legitimacy of his government hangs on resolving this and giving us our country back.

We are tired of the confusing, inexcusable. Monosyllabic excuses saying, this is an asymmetrical war, we are on top of the situation, you cannot kill an idea, it is not about religion or ethnicity, we will bring them to justice. We, citizens of Nigeria feel collectively humiliated and betrayed by those who are

collaborating with these murderers and a government that seems helpless. Can we continue to believe that there is no long-term plan to take over the reins of power of the Nigerian state? These people want power. They want it on their own terms. They want their own kind of Nigeria according to their ideology. These killings are just a preface. These killings are no longer acts by herders and farmers over grazing fields. No, there is more and we as a nation will do well to face this threat before it is sunset. No evil lasts forever. The world defeated Slavery, Apartheid, Nazism, Racism, and forms of extremism.

So far, I commend the government in its responses to these tragedies. Unlike before when no one bothered to visit the scenes, we are seeing very rapid responses from the top. This is necessary but not sufficient as a strategy. Rebuilding these communities requires more than mere physical infrastructure. There is need for clearer, more imagined strategies for rebuilding community cohesion and resilience. Rebuilding hearts is more urgent than rebuilding houses. Merely awarding contracts for building of houses is not as important as building markets, rebuilding roads, providing agricultural inputs for farmers and so on. There are growing concerns as to the sophistication, professionalism and capacity of the security agencies. Years of military involvement has led to the mistaken notion that issues of security are military. This guns and bullets approach has seen the growth of corruption, lack of cohesion, collaboration and co-ordination, infighting within the Security Agencies. We civilians hear stories of orders from the top at the last minute, about credible intelligence provided but not used by those at the top. People are dying and no one's job is threatened. There is an urgent need to reset the national Security architecture. Enough is

enough.

This culture of investigation as excuses must end. The media and we the people must continue to remind the government of its obligations to be accountable. If investigations are made public and rewards or punishment are carried out, then it builds confidence. It will enable people to become involved in their own security. Only by pursuing, apprehending and bringing these evil men to justice can we begin to speak of a genuine reconciliation among our people. Bringing criminals to justice is justice to the criminal and justice to the victim too. Fixing our economy is desirable, but it must hang on a rigid security scaffolding to protect citizens and nation. The youth are fleeing their own country. The elites are fleeing their own communities. The poor are becoming refugees outside their own communities. Mr. President, give us back our communities. Give us back our country.

Finally, national security is a function of robust, deep intellectual analysis and mapping of the goals and even ambitions of country, its local, regional or global place in the world. It thrives on creating scenarios based on a proper understanding and reading of geo-politics and locating where a country wants to be. So far, we have thrived on ad hoc and arbitrary options.

On the Plateau and elsewhere, so much academic research has been done. All the President needs to do is to order a review of all the options and find the political will to get our nation back on track. The current crucifixion of the Middle belt is merely a metaphor. However, for us as Christians, in the cross, there is salvation. May this New Year begin the healing of our dear nation? Happy New Year and God bless our dear country.



•Mass burial of victims