

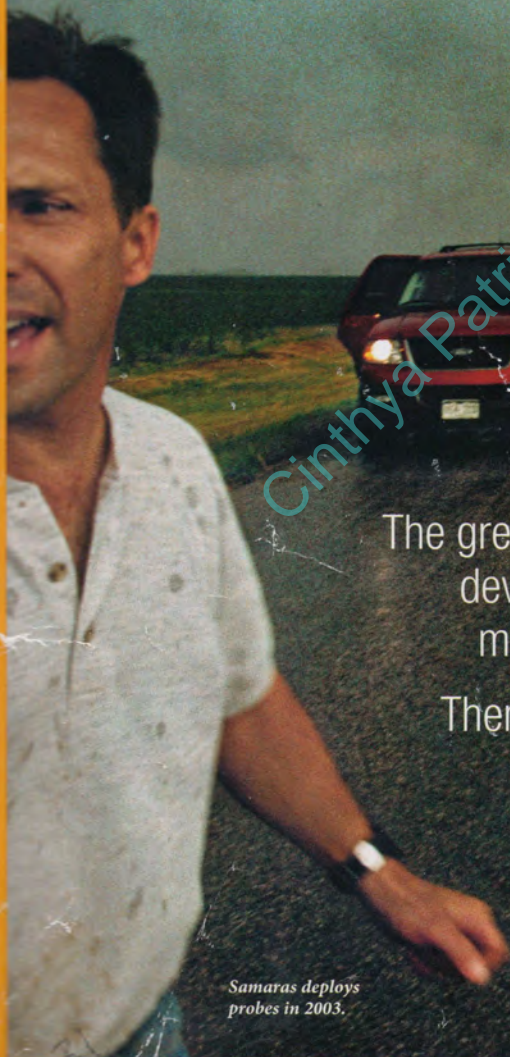
CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF EXPLORATION

NORWAY'S RUGGED COAST | MAPPING A NEW AMERICA

NGM.COM NOVEMBER 2013

# NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

## THE MONSTER STORM



The greatest storm chaser, Tim Samaras devoted his life to unlocking the mysteries of extreme weather.

Then came the tornado of May 31.

*Samaras deploys probes in 2003.*

\$5.99US \$6.99CAN



0 70989 36824 8

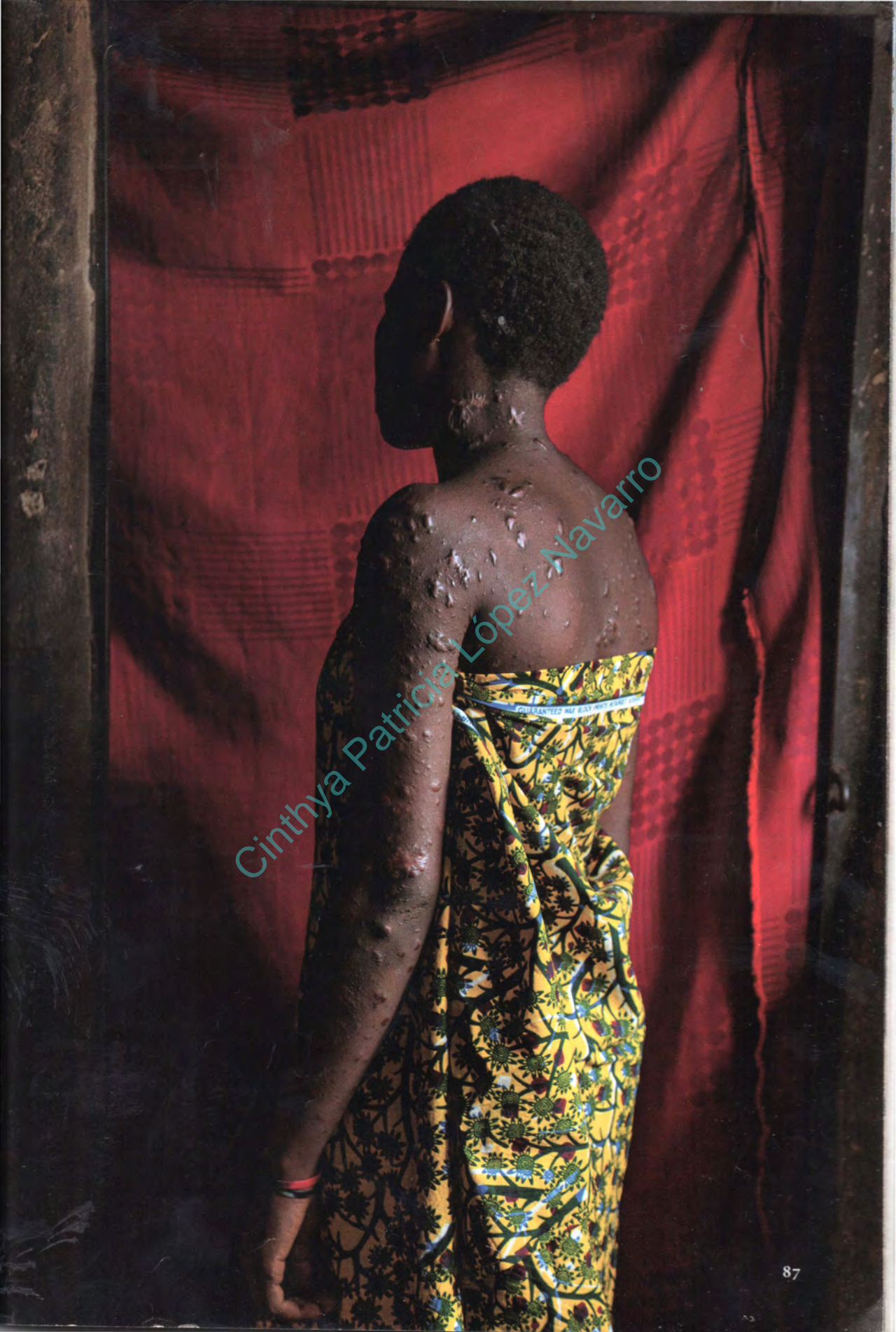
Cinthy Patricia López Navarro

# The War for Nigeria

Cynthia Patricia López Navarro

A bloody  
insurgency  
tears at the  
fabric of  
Africa's most  
populous  
nation.

*Janet Daniang, 15, bears scars from a 2012 church bombing by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram.*



Cynthia Patricia López-Navarro

BY JAMES VERINI  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED KASHI

**T**HE TICKET TAKER, who worked at Kano's bus station, had his back to the blast. Before he heard it, it knocked him to the ground, and flame licked his head. He lay face-down, dazed, his ears ringing, blood streaming from a shrapnel wound in his leg, but still he knew instinctively what had happened: There was a bomb in the car.

The driver of the Volkswagen had acted strangely. After pulling into the dirt lot of the station, he and the man in the passenger seat had been approached by touts—ticket salesmen who compete for fares—and had told them, “We don’t know where we’re going.” But when the ticket taker went up to the car, the driver said, “We already bought tickets.” Not thinking much of it, the ticket taker walked away.

And then—boom.

As his ears stopped ringing, the screaming grew louder. He got up, and through the thickening black smoke he saw people staggering away from the buses. Burning bodies hung from what had been their windows. Moments before, they had been sleek, new 60-seaters waiting to head to points south. Now they were a pyre, like some awful ancient ritual offering. On the ground around him the ticket taker saw the corpses and remains of passengers, of the touts, his colleagues, the women who sold boiled cassava and roasted fish from plastic tubs carried on their heads. Friends he saw every day were now “separate people parts,” as he put it to me.

He looked down at his leg and saw that he too was on fire. Frantically, he pulled off his clothing. Then he made his way out of the lot, one in a crowd of unclothed people stumbling out of the clouds of black smoke billowing from the station. “I walked naked to the hospital,” he said. He lost consciousness along the way. Someone, he doesn’t know who, carried him on.



The ticket taker came to in a nearby hospital. Then he was transferred to Kano's National Orthopaedic Hospital, where, the following week, I met him. (The hospital's director would not allow me to ask his name.) His ward and two more were filled with victims of the bombing, and their wounds were eerily repetitive. For those lucky enough to have escaped the worst, faces were singed, and skin was missing from arms and waists, stripped off with burning clothing. Those not as lucky were no longer visibly African; the outer layer of flesh had been burned from their bodies, leaving them looking—as some joked to each other, when it wasn't too painful to move their mouths—like *beke*, the



*Soldiers force men to the ground at a checkpoint in the city of Sokoto. As feared as Boko Haram in the north, security forces harass and detain people on scant evidence and likely have killed as many Nigerians as the rebel group has.*

Igbo word for a white man. It was as though their identities had been taken.

One such man sat on his bed staring at the wall in an effort to withstand the pain, while nurses wrapped him in gauze. He turned and looked at me with an expression of such kindness that I smiled. I asked—the stupidity of my question apparent immediately—“Are you OK?”

“No,” he said calmly, and returned to staring.

WHEN THE CAR EXPLODED, the same two words occurred to him, and to the ticket taker, and to every other person who saw or heard the blast, which could be heard on the other side of Kano, Nigeria’s second largest city: Boko Haram. That

neither they, nor practically anyone else in Nigeria, knew what Boko Haram was exactly or why it would want to bomb a bus station was beside the point.

Officially, according to the Nigerian government, Boko Haram is a terrorist group. It began life as a separatist movement led by a northern Nigerian Muslim preacher, Mohammed Yusuf, who decried the country’s misrule. “Boko Haram” is a combination of the Hausa language and Arabic, understood to mean that Western,

---

*James Verini wrote about Gaza’s tunnels in December 2012. Longtime contributor Ed Kashi has spent years documenting Nigeria’s oil industry.*

or un-Islamic, learning is forbidden. In 2009, after Yusuf was killed—executed, it's all but certain, by Nigerian police—his followers vowed revenge.

The world is coming to the unwelcome realization that, 12 years after 9/11, violent Islamist extremism and the conflicts it ignites aren't going away. Accompanying that is the equally unwelcome realization that these conflicts afflict, more than ever, Africa, a continent still unequal to the challenges of the 20th century, never mind this one. In the Sahel, home to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and to the jihadists who until recently controlled northern Mali, Boko Haram has emerged as the nastiest of a nasty new breed. Calling for, among other things, an Islamic government, a war on Christians, and the death of Muslims it sees as traitors, the group has been connected with upwards of 4,700 deaths in Nigeria since 2009. And although Nigeria, with 170 million inhabitants, is the continent's most populous country (one in six Africans is Nigerian) and has sub-Saharan Africa's second largest economy, even by its immense standards the carnage attributed to Boko Haram is immense.

So much so that unofficially, in the national collective consciousness, Boko Haram has become something more than a terrorist group, more even than a movement. Its name has taken on an incantatory power. Fearing they will be heard and then killed by Boko Haram, Nigerians refuse to say the group's name aloud, referring instead to "the crisis" or "the insecurity." "People don't trust their neighbors anymore," a civil society activist in Kano told me. "Anybody can be Boko Haram." The president, Goodluck Jonathan, an evangelical Christian, wonders openly if the insurgency is a sign of the end times.

AFTER THE BUS STATION bombing I twice traveled to Atakar, a hilly area in Kaduna state, where mass killings had been reported. Before the first visit I consulted officials. They hadn't gone to Atakar and wouldn't, because they believed Boko Haram was behind the killings. Everyone killed had been Christians, they assured me. "It's not unconnected with the quest for the Islamization of the north," one official

## Nigeria's Insurgent North

Boko Haram rebels aim to make northern Nigeria an Islamic state. More than 4,700 people have died in violence that first erupted in 2009 in the northeast city of Maiduguri. Half have been killed in Boko Haram attacks on government institutions, churches, and secular schools. An equal number, many with no ties to the terrorists, have died in government counterattacks.

The Boko Haram insurgency adds new anxiety in a country already saddled with violence.

All causes, including Boko Haram  
**16,317**

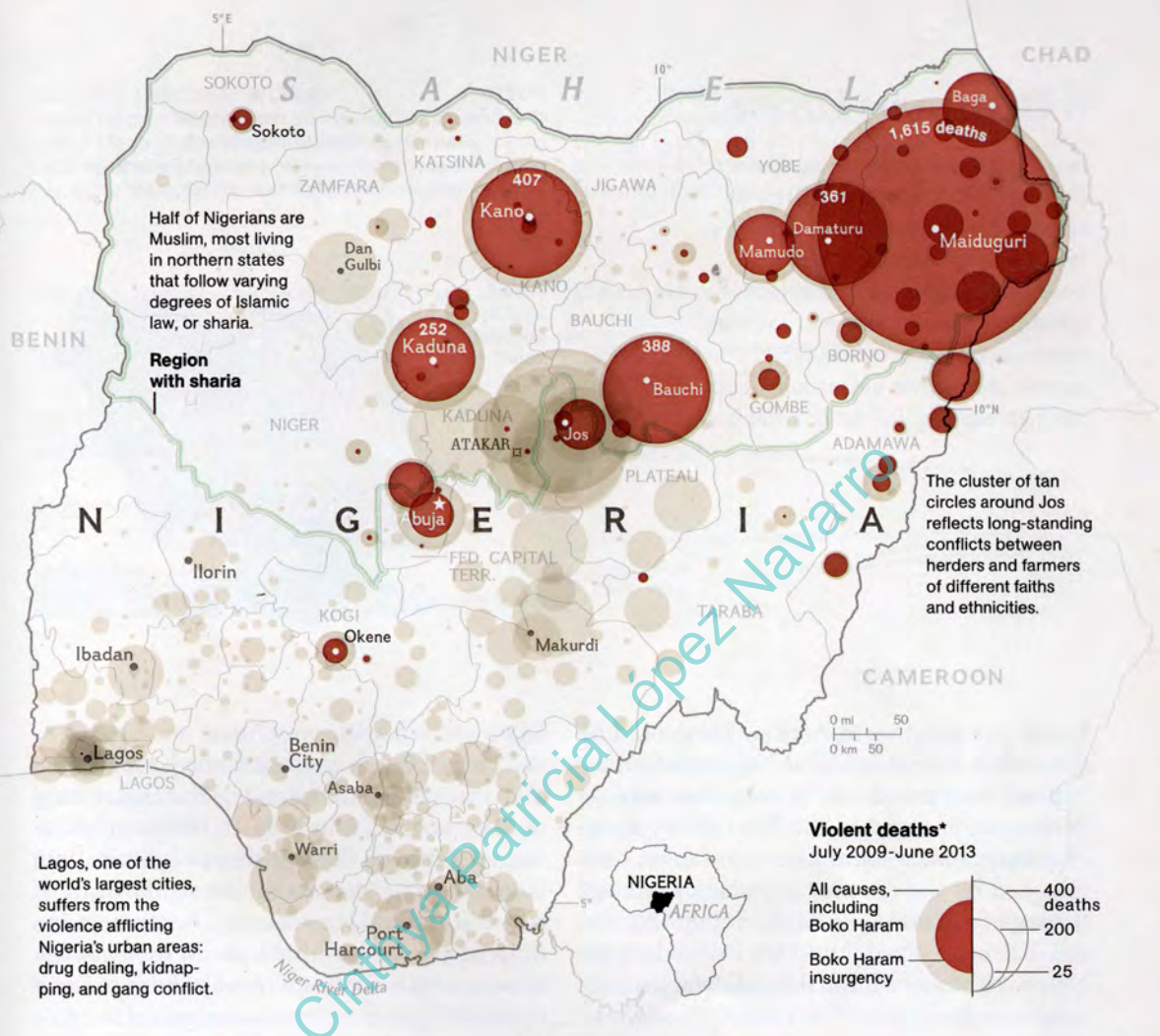
**Violent deaths\***  
July 2009-June 2013,  
cumulative

Boko Haram insurgency  
**4,713**

| 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013

said. "They want as much as possible to annihilate the Christians."

In the first village I visited, I met a family huddled by their roofless, charred homes. They were, in fact, Fulani Muslims, and they claimed they'd been attacked by marauders from the other side of Atakar—Christians, they presumed. Some of them said the attack had been ethnically motivated, others religiously. A young man told me that the original incitement had to do with a poisoned cow. "We were attacked because we are Fulani—and because of the cow that died," he said. He wasn't being facetious: Northern Nigeria has endured decades of ethno-religious slaughter, often enough touched off by peccadilloes.



In 2002, after a journalist remarked that the Prophet Muhammad would have approved of a beauty contest, riots left hundreds dead.

Later I traveled to the other side of Atakar and found that villagers there, Christians from the indigenous Ataka tribe, had also been attacked. They'd assembled in a refugee camp in a schoolyard. One man told me that he was in his home when he heard gunfire. He went outside and saw men dressed in black shooting "powerful guns." He barely escaped with his life, he said. He was certain the attackers were Fulani, as was a neighbor who joined our conversation. When I asked the neighbor why, he said, "My people don't wear black." Both suspected the attackers were also

Boko Haram, though why that group would want to assail this remote place they couldn't say.

"We want to believe it's Boko Haram," a local aid worker told me, in such a way as to denote that life had become so incomprehensibly frightful in northern Nigeria that wanting to believe Boko Haram was involved was enough to make it so. "We don't have any other information," he said, expanding on the thought, "so we want to believe it's Boko Haram."

IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY Ken Saro-Wiwa, the son of the Nigerian activist of the same name who was executed by the state on trumped-up charges in 1995, writes that "Nigeria should be