

NO PEACE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS: SCANNING ‘OPERATION SAFE CORRIDOR’ IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

Mbombo, Jean Marie Kasonga,

Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin
mbombo.kas@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract

Since 2009, the Nigerian troops have been fighting the war against an insurgent group called Boko Haram in the northeast. Even though the use of force has technically reduced the power base of the jihadists, it is far from defeating them on the battlefield alone. This paper critically appraised the merits of ‘Operation Safe Corridor’ (OSC) which the Buhari-led administration launched in 2016 to receive voluntary defectors, de-radicalise and eventually re-insert them into the society. Based on secondary data, the paper adopted the content analysis method of inquiry in addressing the central question as to whether OSC responded to the popular demand for peace in the conflict zone or it was a way of buying in criminals with cheap amnesty. In the light of the theory of Restorative Justice, the study found that the success of OSC was undermined by the top-down and military-dominated approach to peace that not only alienated a lot of victims of violence but also kept liberated communities broken and insecure. To foster reparation and reconciliation between offenders and victims, the offer of forgiveness by the victims of Boko Haram must complement military efforts to rehabilitate ex-fighters with the involvement of community leaders while government and non-governmental organisations play the motivational role in the background.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Peace, Defectors, Victims, Forgiveness, Boko Haram

Introduction

For the past decade, the Federal Government of Nigeria has been fighting the war against an Islamist sect which calls itself ‘Group of the Sunni People for the Calling and Jihad’ and is popularly known as Boko Haram in Arabic language, *Western Education is Anathema*. The country's return to the democratic system of government in 1999 provoked a power shift to the south and brought a Christian at the helm. A flashback in the recent past brings to mind the general perception of Muslim-

dominated northern Nigeria as the home-based of most leaders that have occupied the helm of power since independence (Soyinka 2012). This historic transfer of power witnessed the proliferation of ethno-religious conflicts nationwide (Bekuma et al. 2017). In the south-south geopolitical zone, the claim of ownership of land produced inter-communal conflicts centred on resource control of the oil wealth by local communities. The movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and similar militant groups took up arms to fight the Federal government in an attempt to put an end to

what many activists described as a form of 'internal colonisation' (Okowa 2007; Obi 2011). In the north, this change of power was greeted with riots in Kaduna and its environs by disgruntled youth that attributed the developmental deficit to the secular character of the Nigerian state (Ukiwo 2003). Many northern governors quickly rallied around to impose the Sharia law as a tacit way of placating the angry mob in the early 2000s. Accordingly, this covert support of Islamic rule by Northern politicians was enough for a group of adepts to move a sect into a powerful terrorist group nicknamed 'Boko Haram'.

Using the Sambisa forest in Maiduguri (Borno State) as the base for terrorist attacks, Boko Haram perpetrators have claimed many lives and turned millions of victims into refugees and internally displaced persons (Lawal and Adam 2020). Initially, the Nigeria Police Force was expected to maintain law and order in the region but it was quickly overpowered by the sect that multiplied terrorist attacks on public infrastructures such as churches, mosques, police stations, markets and schools, military cantonments among others. According to Felbab-Brown (2018: 73), the Nigerian response to the Boko Haram menace until 2015 oscillated between neglect of the problem and counterproductive heavy-handed counterinsurgency measures that exhibit little distinction between jihadists and civilian populations who have had to put up with terrorist attacks daily. Following the bombing of the UN quarters in Abuja in 2011, the United States Department officially included Boko Haram on the list of terrorist organisations affiliated with Al Qaeda in West Africa in November 2013 and

promised assistance to Nigeria in fighting the war on terror (Animasawun 2013; Georges 2013).

Abiding by the US doctrine that proscribes any negotiation with terrorists, President Goodluck Jonathan declared on May 14, 2013, the state of emergency in the northeast for eighteen months, covering the states of Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno. He also launched the National Security Corridor, an intervention programme designed to starve Boko Haram of recruits while fostering mass defection. Four years later, his successor, Muhammad Buhari revived the moribund programme and re-baptised it Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) with the ultimate goal of de-radicalising repentant fighters before resettling them back into the society (Breckenmacher 2018). Many analysts observe that this small-scale rehabilitation program for low-level fighters, as well as women and children previously affiliated with Boko Haram, is dispensing cheap amnesty to criminals while leaving terrorised communities devastated (Bukarti 2019).

This paper reviews the fieldwork accounts of various organisations that have had direct contacts with the military personnel in charge of the operation, graduates as well as community leaders involved in the rehabilitation and reinsertion of repentant fighters in northeast Nigeria. It adopts the restorative justice theory propounded by McCold and Wachtel (2003), which highlights the premises of peace through forgiveness as being initiated by the victims and experimented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (South Africa). Central to the study is the question as to whether OSC brings victims and offenders together in a

symbolic gesture of restoring broken relations and by extension sustainable peace. The argument is divided into four sections as follows. The paper opens a brief background of the problem revolving around the limits of retributive justice in the era of state-haunted terrorism. It then makes use of restorative justice as theoretical framework. This is followed by a critique of the Operation Safe Corridor stemming from fieldwork reports of the International Crisis Group (2018) and the United Nations University-sponsored case study by Vanda Felbab-Brown (2018). The last section of the paper offers a brief discussion around key issues (amnesty, fear of the other, and mistrust) before drawing some concluding remarks.

Statement of the problem

Since the terrorist attack that brought down the twin tower of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, in New York (USA), the war on terror has occupied the top priority on the list of government spending in many nations of the world, both rich and poor. It is worth mentioning that the US government fought the war on terror outside of American soil in the aftermath of an aerial attack that lasted a few minutes. As earlier as November 30, 2001, the Americans had started bombing the caves in Afghanistan and dismantled the *Al-Qaeda* training camps and facilities which they once funded in supporting the Taliban fighters against the Soviets in the 1980s (Burke, 2004). The illegitimate invasion of Iraq by the coalition of the willing in 2003 laid the foundation for the hard power strategy which eschews both causations of terrorism and negotiation

with the enemy (Toros 2008). Going by this hard-power approach, the military response was believed to rid the world of terrorism and any attempt to negotiate with terrorists was interpreted as a sign of weakness. In compliance with criminal justice, the American government created special detention centres in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba) and Abu Graib (Iraq) to deal with Al Qaida terrorists who were mostly foreign nationals. Accounts of human rights abuses in both prisons are well documented (AI 2020).

In colonial times, the image of jail in Africa was associated with a place of torture beyond measure for a few individuals who stood against the engine of exploitation to produce submissive individuals that could easily cooperate with the system of extraction. According to Sarkin (2008), “Africa’s earliest experience with formal prisons was not with an eye toward the rehabilitation or reintegration of criminals but rather the economic, political, and social subjugation of indigenous peoples.” Unfortunately, that ugly image of dehumanisation continues to dominate most detention centres in post-independent Africa to date. Even though criminal justice dispenses justice *a la carte*, offenders end up in overcrowded locales. It is a fact that many national prisons hold more than the double of required capacities in many parts of the world. Overcrowding remains one of the characteristics of detention centres in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, about 70 % of inmates have never been convicted of any crime but they have little or no hope of gaining freedom as they share the cramped facilities with long-serving inmates (Onyeji and Udegbumam 2020). They either sleep on top of each other in

shift or tie themselves to the window bars to gain access to the air before they could close their eyes while standing up. The poor condition of detention for women and minors in such crowded facilities cannot be overemphasised (Sarkin 2008).

In the absence of a sound justice system, too many people are simply put in prisons to waste away their talents and skills that can be better utilised elsewhere. According to Penal Reform International, the overpopulation in prisons is not about the rise in crimes but the immediate consequence of the criminal justice process which in turn undermines the ability of the detention centre to play their noble role of rehabilitating lawbreakers (Crowley 2018). In the era of state-haunted terrorism, the creation of more penitentiary centres and the continuous deployment of more security agents in every street to fish out bad eggs expose a kind of justice system that is concerned with the identification and isolation of offenders in overcrowding prisons while leaving behind wounded victims and divided communities. The assumed purpose of prisons as correctional centres gives way to radicalisation when inmates spend a longer period learning from one another how to confidently survive a prison sentence. In this context, a few who may gain freedom after being subjected to inhuman treatment over many years will find it difficult to abide by the law afterward. They constitute a permanent pool of criminals unleashed amid law-abiding citizens and their respective communities are not prepared to welcome them back for fear of relapse.

Unlike the US that transported the war on terror in foreign lands, Nigeria has been fighting Boko Haram terrorists on its soil since 2009. Banking on their

experience overseas, the troops had thought of ending insurgency within a short time but more than a decade later, the balance sheet is not satisfactory. As far as the rule of engagement is concerned, the military personnel has the trouble of knowing who the enemy amid civilian populations is. Consequently, they have to deal with allegations of human rights violations against civilian populations (Olukolade, 2015). Many a time, the gallant troops are ambushed and disarmed by jihadists who would retake control of liberated towns and local government areas. Moreover, disturbing allegations have surfaced, claiming that some high-profile politicians and government officials as well as non-governmental organisations and banking institutions are among the financiers of the sect (Jega, 2014, Kangdim et al. 2020). Similar revelations about corruption within the military establishment, lack of adequate weaponry, and funding make headlines (Munshi 2018). However, as the troops are combing up communities and towns in the northeast, mass arrests of suspect jihadists have witnessed a sharp increase of inmates in the affected zones. This lingering image of overcrowded detention centres under criminal justice is accompanied by sub-human conditions in which suspected Boko Haram terrorists are kept whether at Giwa Barrack in Maiduguri (Borno State), Kainji (Niger State), or Kuje prison in Abuja (CG 2021). Over the years, efforts to address dissatisfaction with retributive justice have been captured in the 2000 Vienna Declaration on Crime that encouraged "the development of restorative justice policies, procedures, and programmes that are respectful of the rights, needs,

and interests of victims, offenders, communities and all other parties" (UNODC 2000: 1). The next section deals with the theory of restorative justice to guide the remainder of the paper.

Theoretical framework

The concept of restorative justice was first introduced in the criminal justice literature in the 1970s, led by Albert Eglash (Gavrielides 2007). It is a new way of looking at justice as a means to repair the harm done to people and their relationships instead of just punishing the offenders at the end of a court case (Zehr 1990). Marshall (1992) contends that RJ is a problem-solving approach to a crime involving both offenders and victims in an active relationship with legal agencies. According to Wright (1977), the offender is expected to help the victim and the larger community in the process of healing by making amends. Because a crime is not just an infraction but also an injury, the corresponding justice consists of repairing the harm caused to people and restoring the social relationship. Guided by the idea of 'hating the sin and loving the sinner,' Braithwaite (1997) introduces the notion of shame to deal with crime. He argues that bad shame (stigmatisation) ostracises the offender and destroys the moral bonds between the latter and the community while reintegrative shame stems the tide of criminality by way of giving the offender a second chance (a fresh start) as a law-abiding member of the community provided that he or she expresses remorse over past misdeeds, apologises to the victims and repairs the harm caused by his actions. Conceptualising a theory of restorative justice is still in its infant stage

even though its practice is alive in traditional systems of justice all over the world. McCold et al. (2003) lay the foundations for the restorative justice paradigm, using three distinct structures, namely the Social Discipline Window, Stakeholder Roles, and Restorative Practices Typology. Each structure is designed to address the key questions as to who is harmed, what are their needs, and how much needs can be met.

To begin with, the Social Discipline Window focuses on the way social discipline is maintained with the combination of two continuums: control and support. Such a combination produces four behavioural approaches: punitive, permissive, neglectful, and restorative. The punitive (retributive) approach says *no* to the offender by applying a higher level of control (punishment). In contrast, the authority is *for* the offender when it exhibits a higher degree of support and low control by doing everything for him (the offender) while making excuses for the wrongdoing. Whereas neglectful approach is associated with low control and low support on the part of the authority who will *not* do anything, a restorative approach translates a combination of higher control and higher support that engages *with* the offender and all others involved in the conflict. Concerning the structure of Stakeholder Roles, a distinction is made between primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are the victims, offenders and to large extent parents, siblings and friends. Because they are directly affected by the harm committed, they constitute a community in need of care to enable them to express their feelings and participate in the process of

reparation. The rest of the society belongs to the category of secondary stakeholders because they are indirectly affected by the harm (civil society organization, government, and non-governmental organization). As long as they are not emotionally connected to the victims and offenders, they don't need to come in-between by way of interfering with the process of healing and reconciliation. Finally, Restorative Practices Typology reflects the level of interaction between three primary stakeholders: victims, offenders, and their communities of care (family members and friends). Viewed from the perspective of restorative practices typology, the process is deemed partly restorative if the intervening authority singles out one group out of three for support and rehabilitation. It is mostly restorative when victims and offenders meet face-to-face in a mediation setting without involving their respective communities of care.

A process is fully restorative only when the three sets of primary stakeholders interface actively. As we move beyond retributive justice, reconciliation stands out as a long-term strategy of conflict transformation anchored on three pillars, namely truth, justice, and mercy. As Lederach (2001: 200) puts it, truth sets her eyes on the past (what to remember and how to remember it) while justice focuses on the present (what can make wrong right and what can restore broken relationships), and mercy deals with the future (how will start anew and coexist). Peace is made possible and sustained when stakeholders jointly acknowledge the evils of the past, accept their responsibility and commit themselves to move on as a community. The foregoing spells out the restorative

justice theory from three different angles combined. The social discipline window stresses that restorative justice disapproves of wrongdoing while affirming the intrinsic worth of the offender. From the point of view of stakeholders, only primary stakeholders are expected to determine for themselves the outcome of the case while secondary stakeholders are assigned the role of supporters and facilitators of the process. Thinking of sustainable peace implies the interplay of primary stakeholders, namely offenders, victims, and their respective communities. What kind of justice does Operation Safe Corridor dispense in northeast Nigeria?

Operation Safe Corridor: rehabilitating repentant offenders

Under the military rule that spanned over many decades, Nigeria was credited for bringing peace and facilitating the return to democracy in West Africa particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. The world's most populous Black nation is also rated high as a participating force in the UN Mission in many conflict zones. Back home, the gallant troops have to wage war against Boko Haram following the government's declaration of a state of emergency in May 2013. Since then, this internalised war against jihadists has been responsible for the mass killing of peasants estimated at around 30,000 and the destruction of villages, causing massive displacements of 2.5 million people internally (Felbab-Brown 2018; Lawal and Adam 2020). While large populations seek asylum in neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, many more internally displaced persons

have turned temporary camps into permanent abodes after losing their homes and means of livelihood in their respective local government areas. Still, others tried to escape the zones under Boko Haram's control but bumped into the Nigerian army. Only a few disillusioned fighters that paid attention to the Safe corridor voluntarily began the long journey from detention centres into rehabilitation camp.

However, before the process of rehabilitation starts, all rescued individuals including those captured in combat and repentant fighters are subject to indiscriminate screening in the detention centres. Using their discretion, officers in charge of the operation divide all suspects into three categories, namely diehards, repentant fighters, and civilian captive commoners. Accordingly, all captive civilians are expected to regain their freedom after ruling out any connection with the jihadists. They are assisted by the military personnel to either settle in a refugee camp or return home. Whereas diehards (unrepentant combatants) are disarmed and taken into prison where they would await trial, repentant fighters (defectors) are sent into rehabilitation centres where another classification is made between *awam* and *rijal*, Arabic words for commoners and men respectively. The former category claims to represent innocent civilians escaping Boko Haram den while the latter is made of voluntary defectors (Felbab-Brown 2018).

When it comes to rehabilitation they are all treated as low-level men who defected from Boko Haram. Along with some senior jihadists that have negotiated freedom in exchange for intelligence cooperation, these internees are moved

out of Maiduguri detention camp to begin six months of de-radicalisation in Malam Sidi camp in Gombe, a neighbouring state to Bornu, the hotbed of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria (CG 2020). Suspected women and children fighters found wanting under the violent rule of Boko Haram are rounded up at gunpoint and detained in abusive camps before reaching the Bulunkutu Centre in Maiduguri. Putting together low-level defectors and fugitives in rehabilitation centres to undergo the process of de-radicalisation seems to be the result of Operation Safe Corridor. As International Crisis Group points out,

Once they have escaped from Boko Haram territory, both *rijal* and *awam* run into security forces or pro-government militias, who take them into custody and introduce them into a circuit of detention sites. They are finally brought together at the notorious Giwa Barracks military detention centre in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. At Giwa the inductees are screened by a Joint Investigation Committee consisting of intelligence officers from various security services. Based on its determination of the risk each inductee poses, the Committee recommends one of three resolutions to his case: release, de-radicalisation in Safe Corridor, or referral to the judicial system (CG 2021).

So far, much attention goes to dangerous elements of Boko Haram that must be brought down, jailed, or simply rehabilitated before returning them to

their respective communities. As reported in *Premium Times*, the Buhari government is ready to accept “unconditional laying down of arms by any member of the Boko Haram group who shows strong commitment in that regard” (Tukur 2018). But many residents of communities destroyed by Boko Haram are not prepared to welcome back the so-called repentant fighters even after undergoing successfully Operation Safe Corridor.

It is on record that some 1,800 women and children have returned to their respective communities but none of the 96 men that graduated from OSC has left the rehabilitation camp in Gombe (Felbab-Brown 2018: 74). Ibrahim Dubji, a graduate of OSC, was thrown out of his community and denied the joy of witnessing the wedding of his daughter: “They told me I won’t enter even though I provided evidence that I have been cleared” (Lawal and Adam 2020). Similar cases of graduates being denied access to their communities are well documented, forcing the authorities to rather resettle them in the camps for internally displaced persons. As reported by the International Crisis Group, even the military at the gates is reluctant to accept them for fear of camouflage (CG 2020:11). A Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Democracy and Development believes that ex-combatants have been fully rehabilitated by the military and makes a special appeal to Boko Haram-terrorised communities to forgive repentant jihadists: “If we do not accept them, there is every tendency that they may go back to join the rank of Boko Haram and that will clearly show that the perpetrators will now become the victims of the conflict” (Mustapha 2020). Speaking the

mind of many Nigerians, Senator Ali Ndume for Borno South and Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Army associates the rejection of graduates with the failure of OSC to take affected communities along: “The current arrangement where the repentant insurgents are granted amnesty without apologising to the victims and the state cannot bring about the required peace” (Ndume 2020). From the above narrative, observers associate amnesty with the government's efforts to rehabilitate repentant Boko Haram, which does not take into account the needs of victims. It begs the question as to whether amnesty and forgiveness mean the same thing. What makes it difficult for repentant fighters to be accepted back home? How come many civilians prefer staying in the IDP camps to returning to their respective communities? The discussion revolves around these questions and begins with a brief allusion to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa as a case study of restorative justice.

Discussion around key issues

Forgiveness and amnesty are keywords in restorative justice but they are not interchangeable. On the one hand, amnesty is a political means used by a legitimate authority (government) to address certain issues of national importance by way of granting absolution to a large number of suspected individuals who have not been tried in court and convicted. It is different from a pardon which is granted to convicted persons on an individual basis. As such, pardon and forgiveness mean the same thing: an expression of pity towards a

convict who does not wipe out his criminal record. Amnesty evokes a vertical dimension of pardon that reaches suspect criminals by surprise whereas forgiveness establishes an interpersonal (horizontal) connection between offenders and victims. Forgiveness does not entail shaming an offender with its attendant stigmatisation and exclusion. Neither does it make room for restitution and compensation in monetary terms. It rather seeks to restore broken relations between offenders and victims for a more peaceful society. How did it play out in post-apartheid South Africa?

On Dec. 15, 1995, President Nelson Mandela established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to deal with the wounds of racial discrimination and foster the unity of the country. The Commission's Chairman, Archbishop Tutu who gave a lucid account of the proceedings in the book, *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999) argues that a victim who is bound to the past and without the grace of forgiveness knows neither the present nor the future but only vengeance. Between a blank check of general amnesia that would have victimised the victims of apartheid for the second time and retributive justice involving a lot of time and resources, the Commission opted for a third way of rehabilitating the humanity of both victims and perpetrators. Put differently, the TRC gave individual South Africans an opportunity to drop the veil of anonymity and move out of the sad past which feeds on vengeance and retaliation. According to Tutu (1999: 32), "Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they would be empowered to tell their stories, allowed to remember and in this public recounting their

individuality and inalienable humanity would be acknowledged."

Accordingly, the central concern of the Commission was not to dispense retributive justice but to facilitate the healing of process among wounded South Africans and the restoration of broken relationships. As Tutu (1999: 51) contends, restorative justice seeks "to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be allowed to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence." This restoration implies an expression of forgiveness granted on request by individuals involved in atrocities on the condition that he or she would commit to tell the whole truth with remorse and redeem his freedom which only the victim can grant with the support of the government. However, the system of apartheid in South Africa was the highest expression of physical, cultural, and structural violence combined (Galtung 1967). As such not many victims were able to come face to face with their invisible perpetrators who acted on instruction from the government. Neither was truth-telling hard to come by nor forgiveness difficult to grant. Though unique, the violent context of apartheid is apparent in most intrastate conflicts. As Lederach (2001: 200) contends, "communities, whether local or seen in a broader national term, are the contexts in which divisions and violence are played out in contemporary conflicts." What lessons do we draw from the South-African experiment of restorative justice concerning the Operation Safe Corridor?

Given that the same methods usually produce more of the same results, the pacification of the troubled region remains elusive for many reasons. The

prevailing climate of mistrust between the military in collaboration with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and residents of occupied communities in the northeast is such that many de-radicalised jihadists are not accepted back into their respective communities while internally displaced persons prefer to live in temporary settlements instead of risking their lives for the second time in unsecured environments. A study conducted by Felbab-Brown (2018) of the United Nations University in Northeast Nigeria reveals that “none of the 96 men who had completed the de-radicalisation and rehabilitation process entailed in Operation Safe Corridor have left its Gombe camp facility. This is because of reasonable fears that they may face violent retribution from militias and communities upon re-insertion.” Only diehard prisoners of war that are awaiting trials in crowded detention centres at Giwa Barrack in Maiduguri, Kainji (Niger State) or Kuje prison in Abuja are potential beneficiaries of Presidential amnesty. These detention centres are manned by military personnel that use their discretion to decide which inmate must face harsh treatment in penitentiary centres or undergo a process of rehabilitation before returning to the community. As a result, thousands of suspects are held without charge in overcrowded detentions. Army spokesperson Brig. Gen. Onyema Nwachuku remarks: “Those captured in combat are prosecuted but the ones that have not been ideologically indoctrinated because they were conscripted are the ones being rehabilitated...these repentant members have been assisting the military by providing intelligence on Boko Haram” (Lawal and Adam 2020).

However, for months and years in some cases, both repentant defectors and runaway civilians have to undergo a series of questioning at gunpoint before starting the rehabilitation programme in Gombe state. Using coercion, the military has had the daunting task of grouping low, medium, and high-risk defectors out of a general population held hostage by the enemies of the state. How voluntary is the defection if security officers beat and intimidate many into saying that they are Boko Haram followers? As reported by International Crisis Group,

Both *rijal* and *awan* testified to a long journey through a network of often gruesome detention facilities. Their ordeal began once they left Boko Haram-controlled areas to turn themselves in. They were first taken to detention centres, often prisons within the nearest local military barracks, for screening. There, almost all of them were subjected to threats, beatings, and torture while being interrogated by security officials or members of pro-government militia groups, notably the Civilian Joint Task Force (CG 2020: 7).

Another difficult task before the officers in charge of OSC is to determine the duration of de-radicalisation tailored to each category of defectors. Even the latter category was promised some measure of leniency though they were subject to court trials.

OSC can be best defined as a programme of de-radicalisation of low-level repentant fighters before returning to their respective communities that include religious education, skill

acquisition, and civic education. The Nigerian Army claims that 893 repentant Boko Haram members have graduated from OSC but an online poll conducted by Premium Times shows that more than 90% of participants have voted against the idea of amnesty for ex-jihadists (Nextier 2020). Observers have decried the lack of transparency that characterises the OSC from the beginning to the end and it is little wonder that not all respondents understand fully what is done behind the curtain of opacity. At the heart of such a process of healing is the power of forgiveness which liberates the victim from the monster of retaliation. According to Tutu (2010: 279), “forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim.” It is therefore misleading to think of de-radicalisation in terms of forgiveness when graduates were never tried in a court of law, convicted, and eventually pardoned. There is a growing gap of mistrust between de-radicalised ex-fighters and traumatised victims and so far the government intervention seems to be biased against the latter. That is why any attempt to forcefully bring the two together is popularly rejected and so far, the notion of forgiveness is being delayed, making restorative justice impossible in the northeast.

Conclusion

The military personnel is trained to overpower the enemy on the battlefield but fighting a terrorist within national boundaries has proved to be an endless operation that is more than silencing the guns. For the Nigerian government to organise the process of demobilisation

and re-insertion without waiting for the end of the violent conflict is commendable. This study has focused on the last stage of ‘Operation Safe Corridor’ that consists of rehabilitating and re-inserting low-level repentant Boko Haram into society. Several reasons justify a general resistance to the idea of granting Presidential amnesty to Boko Haram fighters for the sake of peace. Regular raids of communities under the control of Boko Haram have caused mass exodus and turned residents into suspect jihadists that have lost trust in the laudable intervention of the gallant troops and their associates (CJTf). The military-driven operation is shrouded in total secrecy whereby criteria for the screening are opaque. Great deals of suspects are held in overcrowded military detentions without charge. As a result, most graduates are reluctant to leave the camps and return to their respective communities while residents of the said localities oppose every attempt of the military to enforce reconciliation with the jihadists. In the end, the growing gap between stigmatised ex-fighters and living victims paralyses the stability of recovered communities and compromises peaceful living. The olive branches extended to Boko Haram fighters through OSC have downgraded the insurgency to a large extent but they cannot help rebuild broken relationships that guarantee peace and security. In the light of the theory of restorative justice, the study has also found that forgiveness is the missing piece of the puzzle that cements social cohesion and it should not be mistaken for amnesty. The study recommends that OSC be guided by the division of labour principle whereby security agents strive to silence the guns while community

leaders occupy the driver' seat in such a way that only survivors are in a better position to forgive perpetrators of violence if the latter show a certain degree of remorse.

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