Peace after the Security Storm in North Eastern Nigeria
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Abstract
North East experiences a serious armed violence through which ordinary innocent people are killed, injured and have their lives disrupted by the dreaded Boko Haram and their activities. This paper examines the process through which peace can be maintained and ensured its persistence. It is purely a documentary and/or content analysis where relevant texts and historical antecedents were appraised. The findings indicated that, communities in the region require a total symbiotic cooperation amongst the military, police, other security personnel and the general public. It is therefore recommended that community partnership, operational strategies and confidence building are keys to the realization of unconditional peace and its persistence in the region.

Introduction
This paper discusses the subject of peace in such a way that it will contribute to our recognizing that peace is not an issue that we can take for granted. Being the human beings that we are, we have a tendency to take moments when there is no war, riot, strike, demonstration, fight, etc. as time when we relax and forget about the fact that there are factors that make this possible. It is in times of peace that many of us will become carefree in the way we handle our individual affairs. When there is peace, many of us forget or fail to take steps that will ensure our collective safety and security, ensure the maintenance of law and order and sustain peace in our communities.
We have a tendency to be highly individualistic: we do not care who our neighbor is; we do not care what their children do; at times, when we summon the courage to talk to our neighbour’s about the conduct of their children, they threaten to fight us or report us to the police. Some of us will never bother to accord respect to the police or any other uniformed personnel, yet when we get into trouble we run to them for protection. There are uniformed personnel who use their uniform to bully civilians, hurting them and wrongfully detaining them to show them the power of the uniform, not minding that this is an abuse of the both the law and the profession they belong. Some of us, at times, resort to unguarded remarks, speaking hurtful words to other people because of feelings of superiority. So we are left on our own to face our problems because we have failed to cultivate a culture of community action for peace to endure. It is our failure to act as a community that led us into the security difficulties that we largely experienced in the North East. We ran into a security storm that we are forced to confront and ensure a peaceful future (Felix and Olofu, 2014)

The Concept of Peace
It is necessary to dwell on the word peace because it may mean different things to different people. Peace is regarded as a state of calm or harmony, where there is no war, riot, strike or demonstration. Peace has several meanings: it is considered a state of tranquility, quiet and harmony (no disturbance of any kind); absence of violence; free from oppressive and unpleasant thoughts and emotions (peaceful state of mind); or a state
free of war (Mu’azu and Ibrahim, 2016). Our society needs peace – of individual minds, of the community, of the state, of the nation and of the region – for our collective progress. We want to live in a state of mutual harmony with one another, among our various ethnic groups, between our religious groups, among and with our neighbours (Republics of Cameroon, Chad and Niger) and in our country. As part of the need for peace, we need to bring to an end the activities of insurgents and the need to live with one another with respect and accommodation of our differences – ethnic, religious, communal, national and regional. It is important to note that difference is the most a natural feature of human society. Difference exists even in the most homogeneous of groups. Take Somalia, for example, these are people that are culturally the same, but are locked in a war based on clan loyalties. Yet after many years of warring against each other, they are stridently looking for peace. It is instructive that the world is also interested in cessation of hostilities for stability to be restored and for peace to reign. Somalia may be far away from Nigeria, but the ravaging effects of insurgency have brought to the realization that instability in distant places could also impact on us. Consider the revelation by one Mallam Tishau that Boko Haram received its training from Al-Shebab in Ethiopia and in Mauritania. Again consider the instability in Libya which has freed weapons that are reportedly accessed by non-state actors to unleash violence on a given population. Peace involves recognizing that among any group of individuals, there are likely to be competing interests, different capabilities and will. Failure to recognize this could result in conflict, not just disagreement, it could become violent. When violence ensures, it becomes very difficult to predict how far it will go especially when it affects people of different ethnic, religious, political or ideological persuasions. At the heart of the conflict, there could be desire to access and control a resource (such as land or position of authority); desire for self-respect or recognition as a cultural group or even as a respectable human being (psychological approval) or respect, recognition and tolerance of one’s belief (value). In the north east several conflicts have occurred: inert-ethnic conflicts (Tiv versus Jukun in Taraba; Billiri versus Kaltungo in Gombe State; with Boko Haram operating) (Ibrahim, 1997).

It is important to recognize that the composition of the people of the North East is the most complex in Nigeria. There are more ethnic groups than any other part of Nigeria. Of the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, more than 100 are in this part of the country. It is in this part of the country that you have more families having within their fold people who practice the two dominant religions: Islam and Christianity. Whenever there is such a mélange factored into one territory, the likelihood of conflict is great. Although conflicts need not degenerate into violence leading to death, destruction of property, suspicion, distrust and fear. When this occurs, there is a tendency to live in a condition that Galtung describes as negative peace. For peace to prevail in society everyone and every group need to be assured that everyone will respect the pact of peaceful living; a condition of tolerance, respect, accommodation, recognition and upholding trust (Kukah, 1993). But human beings can be unpredictable as at times, peace has to be enforced through the use of force or violence. The current insurgency illustrates the point of the use of force and violence to restore peace. In the first instance, we are dealing with a breakdown of law and order, which makes life difficult for many of us. We live, individually and collectively, in a state of uncertainty and fear. Our minds are not at peace. We had a moment when the commonest predictable sound around us was that of guns fired at different rates of fire. Targeted shooting became common and in the process...
many people were killed. We can recall the killing of Alhaji Awana Ngala, Engineer Gubio and Zakaria Isa, the NTA journalist, among many that were targeted. It became evident that for peace to prevail then there must be an authority for restoring law and order to create the condition for peace. Individual effort on a one-off basis was not going to help us. We were put on notice that the situation we were used to had changed. We expected the Police to respond to the situation, using their expertise and force to restore order, to help keep our minds at rest. However, the situation became bad as the Police themselves became targets of attack making it impossible for them to wear their uniforms talk less of acting to protect us. It was in that situation that we had the military coming with more advanced weapons of violence to restore law and order. Peace is not just a result of cooperative existence among people, it had to be enforced and real threats of violence against breaching the peace put in place. That is why we have the security forces and allied service working to keep us safe (Alemika, 1993).

To forestall violent conflicts and ensure peace whenever there is dispute between an individual and another or a group or government, the courts exist as one place for adjudication. The courts will settle disputes using the laws as enshrined in the statute books. People expect to get justice from the courts: the guilty are sanctioned as appropriate. This serves to deter against breaching the peace. One of the conditions for peace is the trust and expectation that the courts will dispense justice. However, when the process of justice is made unpredictable and unjust the likelihood of sustaining peace will remain uncertain. The handling of cases and the investigations conducted by the Kaduna Journal of Sociology (KJS) Vol. 5 No. 5 July, 2017

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Police is important in getting just outcomes in the law courts. If the process of justice is compromised, this could lead to a breach of the peace. Part of the reason the north east and beyond suffered the activities of insurgents was the alleged extra-judicial killing of their leader, Muhammad Yusuf, while in Police custody. He never had the benefit of making it to the courts. This incident was one of the reasons that the insurgents are using as an excuse to unleash terror on state and society since 2009. It is important that institutions that are charged with the responsibility of guaranteeing peaceful co-existence ensure that they do not compromise the process of justice. For accumulated cases of injustice is a sure recipe for future breach of peace in society. Access to justice is important for maintaining peace (Mu’azu, and Ibrahim, 2016)

Societies make efforts to preserve peace because they realize that without it they cannot develop. The effects of violence resulting in destruction of life and property divert societal resources toward reclaiming peace and make it difficult to provide services to the people. What little infrastructure exists for provision of services, they will come under pressure and may not cope with demand. This in itself can trigger violent conflicts exerting more hardship on the people. Given that our population is still growing and the available resources we have are under pressure, then there is every reason to work to maintain peace. The population of the youths in Nigeria has been put at 65% by the National Population Commission. This is the most active population that needs our support and guidance towards building a better society; youths are an important resource and should continue to be seen as a resource and not a liability. They may face challenges, but society must help them to overcome these challenges.

The Security Storm

The North East has been featuring in the news around the world for the terrorist activities of Boko Haram since 2009. It is now seven years down the road and it was only in 2015, with the change in both the political and military leadership that the Nigerian Armed Forces effectively took control of lost territory and set the ground for the return of displaced people to their towns and villages. The security situation has become similar to
the terrible dust storms that precede the fall of rain in the early days of the rainy season. But unlike the storm, the insurgency being experienced would have been better contained if proper action had been taken. But this did not happen; hence the security storm that wrecked multiple havoc on the north east and beyond. It is important to note that while the storm we are used to is seasonal, the insurgency became a daily affair with no one able to know which area or who would become a victim. We could only predict the consequences: gun attacks, bomb blasts, kidnappings, attacks on schools, motor parks, barracks, towns and villages, security personnel, religious leaders and traditional rulers (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012).

The military had to be deployed and a Joint Task Force was formed to take charge of matters. People enthusiastically welcomed the deployment of military with the full hope that they could be secured and Maiduguri city, in particular, made safe being the theatre of the insurgency. Enthusiasm gave way to despair as the residents of Maiduguri came under attacks from two directions: the insurgents would attack and the security forces react by suspecting everyone, without exception. The JTF employed hard tactics to accomplish its assignment. For the residents, it was clear that the intensity of the security storm had increased and soon enough, the Borno Elders swung into action and called for the evacuation of the military. Residents felt unsafe from the insurgents and the JTF. It appeared that the wrong strategy was deployed and the restoration of law and order became difficult, if not intractable. The situation was so bad that human rights organizations issued statements accusing the insurgents and the JTF of gross human rights abuses (Adibe, 2012).

The JTF seemed to have arrived with the assumption that everyone in Maiduguri was either a member of Boko Haram or a sympathizer and for that reason establishing cooperation with the community became difficult. Unknown to the JTF and the world outside, the residents were boxed in and living in fear. At that point in time, many people could not really point out those who were members of Boko Haram or who were not. The situation was made worse by the fact that any adverse comment by any individual against Boko Haram resulted in the death of such persons. Islamic preachers that contradicted the perspective of Boko Haram ended up killed. Again, there were cases of those who volunteered information to the security agencies only to be confronted by people who claim to be members of Boko Haram revealing to them exactly what they divulged. They ended up killed. Fear took over and forced residents into silence and was not able to volunteer any information given their experiences. Terrorism had set deadly examples to enforce silence. Fear forced the silence.

However, young people who were bearing the brunt of the actions on both sides of the divide, decided to take matters into their hands for their self-preservation. This was when the youth in Hausari Ward decided to take action against the insurgents. The fear had gone. This was because they were targeted anyway, but fighting Boko Haram could be the difference between life and death. They organized themselves and started revealing to the security agencies the members of Boko Haram in their midst. They were also apprehending those who they discovered were members and were handing them over to the military. They were so successful that other wards also copied them. But it was a spontaneous response with even children taking up sticks to fight Boko Haram. The security forces recognizing the significance of this development decided to embrace the youth to help them in their task of restoring law and order. The Youth Volunteers are called ‘Yan Gora, but popularly named Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and their emergence changed the fight against Boko Haram. The Youth Volunteers partnered with the JTF and within a very short time, Boko Haram elements were driven out of
Maiduguri. Most of the Boko Haram elements escaped to the rural and other urban areas in Borno State. The CJTF decided to chase and arrest them from wherever they ran to hide and several of them were caught and handed over to the security (Adenrele, 2012). By the time Boko Haram was chased out of Maiduguri, the members had become emboldened to confront the Nigerian State. They mounted attacks not only against Police stations in Borno State, they did so in Yobe State, Kano State and the Prisons in Bauchi State. They launched two daring suicide attacks on the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters and the United Nations Building in Abuja at different times. They became so deadly and counted taking over territory in their bid to establish a Caliphate and introduce Shari’ah as the guiding principle of government. States in the North East became highly insecure with daily but unpredictable suicide attacks and bomb blasts. Schools were attacked in Yobe, Borno and Kano and students killed by the insurgents. They were over-running military positions and repatriating away arms left behind by the Nigerian military. The insurgents were so successful in their campaigns, issuing threats and granting interviews to the international media and daring the authorities. This was a security storm never experienced on this scale. It can be recalled that one of the major security challenges that confronted the North East was that robbery on the highways resulting in killings, but never on a scale unleashed by the insurgents. This was a period of lost hope and despair. Peace had eluded the North East. Several people were killed, millions displaced, the military was being disgraced, farmlands were abandoned and property destroyed (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012). Fortunately, there was a change in political and military leadership and the military not only re-asserted itself, but also re-strategized and approached the campaign against insurgency with a higher sense of purpose. The territories were recovered and Boko Haram positions pounded by the military. In less than a year the story of the rampaging raids of Boko Haram became the story of the gallantry and professionalism of the Nigerian military. The CJTF continued to work with the military to ensure the defeat of Boko Haram. The change was a result of two things: for peace to prevail, a society needs a leader with a higher sense of understanding and commitment to protect every territory of his country and the nation’s security forces need to be properly equipped and motivate to achieve their objectives. This happened in 2015 and explains the return of displaced persons to their various places, towns and villages, even though they suffered large scale destruction. But peace has not yet returned even though the insurgents have been defeated (Alemika, 1993).

**Peace after the Security Storm**

The North East has suffered the intensity of the insurgency and has been noted globally as an area where the most violent terrorists operated. With the commendable success of the military it is necessary to think ahead and find ways by which peace can endure in this region. The international community has shown a lot of interest and has been delivering or making promises for assistance to the region. The United Nations, European Union, European Embassies (Norway, United Kingdom and Sweden, for example) and non-governmental organisations have been sending teams or delegations to discuss on what can be done in the areas of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. The Federal Government has been on ground through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) providing support to the hardest hit victims of insurgency along with the Borno State Government. These are important contributions to bringing the life back to the region. There is still more that needs to be done to ensure
that peace returns and is sustained (Bintube, 2015)

**Way Forward**

Community action would be more enduring as external support is only a useful intervention. The people resident in the North East have to take steps to ensure that this experience is never repeated for the sake of the present and future generations. Community conversation is necessary to understand what went wrong and what needs to be done to ensure collective security and safety. This is very important to building an enduring peaceful society. The reputation that has been created of the region as the hot bed of terrorism needs to change. The region is blessed with large tracts of land for farming. It has unexplored mineral resources, which in present day parlance is called solid minerals.

Community Registration is an important step that needs to be taken into consideration. Gone are the days when communities in the North East can afford to allow people to enter into their communities without some form of regulation. In the past, it was the practice among many communities to keep tap of strangers. No one enters the community without the knowledge of the traditional authorities. This needs to be reconsidered and religiously record the presence of strangers in the community. This can be done at ward level in the urban areas to ensure that questionable characters do not have the room to wreak havoc on the community.

Community meetings are necessary from time to time discuss the concerns of the community. This can be in the form of town hall meetings. Some people will dismiss that in the present times no one would have time to dos. But given our experiences and what we suffered, it is only reasonable to take back our communities and exercise control over it in our collective interests and for peace to prevail.

There is the need for the regulation of the Islamiyya schools, mainly the Almajiri system of education. No one should be allowed to simply set up a Tsangaya without registration. It is good to keep a record of those involved in the teaching, their location, their pupils and conditions for the operations of such schools.

The reason that Muhammad Yusuf succeeded in attracting followership is because of the failure of governance. If government had been delivering services to the people, there would have no large population of youths unengaged in productive ventures. Political office holders in particular must live up to their responsibilities. The tendency of going into elections for self-enrichment must change; It is the deprivation of the large segment of the youths that draws them into drugs abuse and accepting to join groups such as Boko Haram that promises them a better future both in this world and the hereafter.

We must build a network of cooperation between one community and another and sustained vigilante activity as a means of ensuring safety and security. There is the need to have a way of monitoring our schools to ensure that students do not stay idle and need to send delegations to the relevant authorities to address whatever challenges are in the schools.

We must also take it upon ourselves to speak in language that is neither provocative nor demeaning. One of the challenges we face is the tendency to look down upon other people, individuals and groups, claiming to be superior to them. We must cultivate a culture of respecting people of different religions, ethnicity and region.

**References**


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