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Victims, Witnesses and Survivors in the Boko Haram Insurgency and the Conceptual Stalemate over Collateral Damage

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Abstract

Collateral damage is a highly contested concept. This paper takes the inconclusive debate on the concept to victims, witnesses to and survivors of Boko Haram atrocities, given how the insurgency has been largely narrated as a harvest of collateral damage. This was done through a series of unstructured conversation with carefully selected respondents in urban Maiduguri across 2018 and 2019. It was in the context of Search for Common Ground's program on Accountability Journalism aimed at enabling researchers to "increase visibility of salient and/or under-reported human rights issues in the Northeast". The paper argues that the meaning of the concept of collateral damage supported by the discursive data from victims, witnesses and survivors of Boko Haram insurgency fundamentally critiques traditional Strategic Studies and its rational choice theoretic freezing of subjectivity. It is then further argued that the data strengthens the case for reflexivist approach to science as has been happily adopted and practicalised by critical security studies. This study, therefore, contributes methodologically to the phenomenological point of departure in studying puzzles involving meaning. It is also a rare attempt at applying reflexivity to victims and survivors of a violent conflict in Africa such as the cruel Boko Haram insurgency.

Introduction

A defining part of the effort to humanise wars since the Second World War has been the several statuses making up a body of laws specifying collateral damage as unacceptable dimension in the conduct of wars. Although this historical struggle to humanise wars has been criticised as, among others, another way of tolerating instead of eliminating wars, it has continued to gather momentum.

However, the more the efforts, the more contentious the concept becomes among traditional conflict actors such as powerful states, the military and intellectuals of war. Is there a way this conceptual stalemate can be moved closer to some clarity by listening to victims, witnesses and survivors of collateral damage as in the Boko Haram insurgency narrated largely as a harvest of collateral damage?

This question is considered apt in the light of the contradiction between the theory and the practice of collateral damage. This is in that the more laws and universal codes in the laws of armed conflict, the more instances of collateral damage the world is confronted with from the battlefields. This is not only illustrated by recent battlefields such as Iraq in 2003 but also by narratives of aggravated but unintended death of civilians which has characterised narratives of Boko Haram insurgency, for instance, (Amnesty International, 2015; 2011; HRW, 2018; Leahy,

(www.thewill.org/accessed02-02-2018).

Undocumented claims of scorched earth operations, killing and maiming have also been part of this narrative, all of that suggesting high degree of collateral damage.

The above background drives this study within the logic of not only bringing to the fore certain unexplored dimensions of the interface between war and human rights in the management of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria but to also do so from the perspective of popular understanding of the theory and practice of collateral damage. Inserting popular understanding of the theory and practice of collateral damage is not arising from ignorance of the fact that terrorists generally use marginal groups to make political statements, thereby making the idea of victims and survivors or popular understanding in this study to look superfluous. The point, however, is that the Boko Haram insurgency has since 2009 become a war between the Nigerian military and the insurgents, making ordinary people bystanders. Secondly, and very crucially, we are also talking of where the collateral damage is equally coming from the military in the circumstances explained below.

The essay argues that the consensus of the respondents on Boko Haram insurgency itself being an operation in collateral damage is interpreted along the Taking a reflexivist framework as a contingent reading completely

admissible in terms of the meaning of the concept in question. Why this is so is defended in this essay below.

This report goes into four main headings: a review of the debate over the concept; the methodological outline; the synthesis of data/discussion and the summing up.

Review of the Debate over Collateral Damage

The controversy over collateral damage might have been best captured in Cian O'Driscoll's recall of George Orwell's idea of how certain expressions function to distance its users from the grim implications of such expressions. That was in Driscoll's review of Frederick Rosen's 2016 book, *Collateral Damage: A Candid History of a Peculiar Form of Death*. Classifying Rosen's book in the category of works that individuate victims of collateral damage as opposed to those that privilege writing off of civilian deaths as collateral damage, the reviewer concluded how Rosen's interest lay "in the victim whose death is rationalized as an acceptable, if undesired, side effect of an otherwise military operation", (2017: 402). By implication, collateral damage is, for him, an exercise in constructivism which not only authorises killing but also makes it condonable in international politics.

The inference is a disagreement with the definition of collateral damage that the Department of Defense of the United States of

America uses, for example. In the book in question, that sense of the concept is the one that sees collateral damage "as the unintentional or incidental injury or damage to persons or objects that would not be lawful military targets in the circumstances ruling at the time". The definition goes on to mention how unlawful such a damage is once it is not excessive in relation to the military advantage that was expected from it. This disagreement between the text and the definition is that it brings up two distinct but opposed definitions of the concept: that of the book and its reviewer on the one hand and the United States on the other. Interestingly, the position of the United States Department of Defense is the one in the rule book on collateral damage where four cardinal features ground the conduct of armed conflict in relation to collateral damage.

By Koppe, (2013: 57)'s list, these are the principles of military necessity or the necessity to undermine the enemy militarily; the principle of distinction between enemy combatants and non-combatants/civilians; the principle of proportionality or keeping harm to non-combatants to the minimum and, lastly, the principle of humanity which puts a peg on use of certain approaches to war.

These were the features aimed at blocking "superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering"

for non-combatants whose immunity from such fate became a major issue of concern in the aftermath of the atrocities associated with the Second World War, (Conway-Lanz 2006: xi). His recollection on this is that much of the sense of horror and revulsion that define modern warfare, genocide and terrorism in popular psychology are products of collateral damage: violence suffered by bystanders or individuals who pose “no immediate threat to their attackers”. He goes on to say that “This aversion to harming non-combatants has supported a long-standing and widespread normative belief that non-combatants should and could be provided with immunity from the violence of armed conflict”, adding the claim of how ‘non-combatant immunity’ has become the marker by which many cultures define what is atrocious or not. He is thus absolutely right to say that “In the twentieth century, non-combatant immunity has emerged as a basic human right codified in international law”, (2006: xi).

The question that arises would then be the possibility of a clean war as implied in the four principles undergirding collateral damage. Some scholars such as Asad (2010) have tried to answer this question by arguing that the Just War theory to which he traces the idealism of clean wars is itself flawed. The flaw, for Asad, lies in how Just War theory ends up distinguishing between war and

terrorism, permitting the former but not the latter. Citing Afghanistan and Iraq, Asad says post modern conflicts are such that the killer with good intentions (the soldier) and the killer with bad intention, (the insurgent) have become indistinguishable except where “immunity for war crimes is secured” such as “US negotiations in August 2008 with the subordinate Iraqi government, in which immunity for all American soldiers and contractors was sought”, (2010: 11). It is interesting that this is the same conclusion the Justice Goldstone Report which investigated human rights violations in the 2008/9 Israeli-Hamas War arrived at by concluding that distinguishing civilians from combatants in modern urban warfare verges on the near impossible, (Carpenter, 2011: 145).

Those who think along with Asad would argue as Hitchen, (2018), does that victims of collateral damage are neither cases of accidental deaths nor criminals and that the language of collateral damage is only a legal acknowledgment of the gap between what should happen and what does happen. Hers is an articulation of the constructivism of collateral damage which she identifies in the paradox of so much attention to the concept of collateral damage by politicians and war planners while collateral damage intensifies with very little attention to its victims.

What all these point to is a deep division on the question of when is it collateral damage vis-a-vis human rights. The question thrown up by the division is what becomes of collateral damage if we shift the debate from intellectuals and practitioners of statecraft to victims and survivors of post modern conflict such as Boko Haram insurgency and the counter-insurgency against it in Nigeria? What would this category of people think about the distinction between 'killers with good intentions' and 'killers with bad intentions'?

Methodology

Self-reporting as a technique for studying consciousness informed this study. The attempt at accessing data that are not documented anywhere else but only in the mental recesses of the interviewees involved speaking to either on account of being a victim, witness to a particular instance of what is broadly conceived of as collateral damage or a survivor. In the end, a diffuse collection of respondents, some convenient, others purposively selected, made the research population. In other words, there is no positivist representatives in the list of respondents that, eventually, stretched from a Ramat Poly academic who survived a Boko Haram threat letter which is a rare experience in the early days of the insurgency; two members of the Borno State Council of the

Nigerian Union of Journalists, a former Chairman of the Borno State Council of the Nigeria Labour Congress; a member of the Civilian Joint Task Force, (CJTF); a professor of Medicine from the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, an administrator from the State Specialist Hospital in Maiduguri; a high ranking official of the Borno Health Management Board.

Others are an inmate each from two different IDP camps in Maiduguri town; two operatives of the Borno State Command of the Civil Defence; two undergraduates of the University of Maiduguri students; a woman leader/development practice expert involved in insurgency management; a member of the Borno Leaders of Thought; a respondent with links to the now dormant Borno-Yobe People's Assembly; an independent Historian, two activists from the Bama Initiative for Human Development involved in Boko Haram related local dynamics, a Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leader, two intellectuals with the University of Maiduguri Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, a member of the Borno Elders; a baker, a retired police officer of Borno State origin and a retired Immigration officer of Kano origin but domiciled in Maiduguri.

But it is not a random list in that each person interviewed occupied a strategic position on

the aspect of the insurgency he or she was being interviewed. All the interviews were conducted face to face. They involved elaborate note taking from a questions guide and problematisation of the answers through follow-up questions. In this reporting, however, only the institutional affiliation of respondents will be mentioned as the insurgency is still largely on-going and a good act could easily end up exposing someone to unforeseeable risks.

In all, there was no participant from either Boko Haram or the Nigerian Armed Forces. Apart from the risk implications, the question to which an answer is being attempted does not need their participation as neither the armed forces nor Boko Haram is covered in the concept of popular discourse of collateral damage.

In tandem with reporting interpretive research, the approach to analysing the discursive and opinionated data is simply by synthesising data along clear areas of convergence and those that stick out on a different direction which are then re-situated. In other words, this is not where content analysis is involved but a matter of drawing inferences based on convergence of opinion and of argument. The appropriateness of that approach lies in the qualitative nature of the concepts that define the research problem.

We cannot talk of such concepts as pain, hurt, hacked to death, cruelty, among others in numeric terms or in terms of percentage as there is nothing like 30% pain or 70% cruelty. Content analysis would, therefore be useless in this analysis. Rather, we follow the pathway scholars of qualitative research reporting such as Devine have outlined and which, in contrast to quantitative research, involves subjecting the totality of intensive interviews to repeated readings until the emergence of clear themes. It continues “until an overall argument is established. The interpretation of the material is usually presented by means of an interplay of quotes from the interviews and commentary on the selected transcript”, (1995: 144). This is also the position that is upheld in the literature, (Chernoff, 2007; Jackson, 2012, 2011).

Synthesis of Data and Discussion

The puzzle under investigation here is what and when is it collateral damage if we take the construct to those who experience it as survivors, witnesses, victims or intimate observers in the Boko Haram insurgency rather than what soldiers, intellectuals and practitioners of state craft say it is. The essence is twofold. One is to draw attention to an aspect of the war that is not in the public domain while the second is to factor popular understanding of collateral damage into human rights advocacy and campaigning.

The overarching conclusion of this study based on the consensus among respondents in the totality of the interviews is the idea that Boko Haram is, by its very nature, an operation in collateral damage in the sense that combatants set out to take the entire Northeast hostage even though that is not the essence of their insurgency. Pervasive in the interviews are attempts to substantiate this position by reference to a number of terror techniques Boko Haram has been using, chief among which is a very horrific ideology and practice deriving from Wahabist indoctrination. This ideology makes shedding the blood of all those who are not with them and are, therefore, understood to be against them crucial. “So, you are either with them or you are against them even if you are their sisters, brothers or parents” was how a scholar put it. In other words, Boko Haram set out to make everyone a victim of collateral damage as can be seen in the large number of people Boko Haram dealt with as well as the ruthlessness or cruelty in doing so.

Following horrific ideology and its practice is what is articulated as a strategy of diffuse destructiveness across the region, diffusiveness and destructiveness that go beyond collateral damage as ever discussed in the literature. The destruction, it is argued, goes from that of human beings, structures, communities and governance far beyond death

of non-combatants. In fact, central to the narrative is the notion that the entire Northeast became collateral damage, challenging conventional conception of collateral damage.

Leafing through the text of a March 2014 press conference by the Borno – Yobe People’s Forum, a respondent insists collateral damage in Boko Haram insurgency and counter insurgency is about “bloodshed, destruction, dislocations and upheavals, insecurity and unanswered questions” as opposed to accidental death of non-combatants. Expatiating and standing by the claims of the parent body in the 2014 text, he emphasises how the situation has not changed in 2018 and 2019. If anything, he says, the 2014 list of communities sacked or burnt down has expanded beyond Kawuri, Konduga, Izge, Bama, Michika, Buni Yadi, Mafa, Mainok, Jakana, Auno, Shuwa, Madagali, Malari, Wajonkoro, Ajigin, Benishiekh, Gamboru and Kalabalge that the body listed in that news conference. His argument is that in each of such attacks, destruction of lives went along inseparably from destruction of structures, governance and community life as a whole. That is to say that these are cases of collateral damage in the sense that these communities are no military or state targets but collateral damage in which the objects of attack are

human beings as much as animals, structures and civil authority.

This line of argument is echoed by his counterpart from the Borno Elders Committee whose analysis is that after a certain limit, collateral damage can no longer be understood as unintended killing. The elder argues how the concept of collateral damage could be otherwise when only five out of the 27 local government councils in Borno State have been functional since the end of 2017. The 22 others are dysfunctional, all floating in Maiduguri while Boko Haram militants roam about the rest of the rural areas like wild animals. He says that Boko Haram has scattered Borno residents into Kano, Adamawa, Abuja, Gombe and Southern parts of the country. So, there is no schooling, no farming, no trading and no civil authority in those local governments of the state.

The line of argument is also upheld or reinforced in the separate interview with a leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN). His poser is: where are you going to start from in discussing collateral damage in the context of Boko Haram?" How many local government councils have not been sacked, he asked. By his own figure, 877 churches have been burnt in the course of the insurgency. For him, collateral damage for the Christians is more about such destruction of the

structures than about loss of lives to the crisis because, by 2015, most Christians had left areas of vulnerability either by migrating away from the state or becoming internally displaced persons in the IDP camps in Maiduguri. According to him, there are four IDP camps in Maiduguri, strictly for Christians and there are more than 10, 000 people in those camps. He argues that no one can claim to know the number of houses, business centres or animals that have been lost to Boko Haram.

Taking a peculiarly Christian angle to his conceptual framing of collateral damage, the Maiduguri based CAN leader is of the opinion that Boko Haram presents a puzzle unique to Christians. He identified this puzzle in the problem of how Christians might distinguish between the Muslims and Boko Haram since Muslims do not recognise Boko Haram as Muslims and vice-versa. Muslims denounce Boko Haram as a reversal of the Jihadist logic by Usman Dan Fodio. In the course of the Jihad, whoever submitted to the Jihadists saw the lowering of the sword, meaning his conversion into Islam along with the protection and safety that comes with that. But this is not the case with Boko Haram. Surrendering to them does not protect a potential victim from being slaughtered by Boko Haram Jihadists who would be invoking the Prophet even while carrying out the

cruelty. It is something mainstream Muslims see as a reversal of the Jihadist tradition of conquest. This is at one level of the Bishop's argument.

The other level, however, is that "the same Muslims who denounce Boko Haram have bounced on us every now and then since the Danish cartoon controversy and even before". He is referring to how, much, much earlier in 1998, there was a rampage by Muslim youths in which Christians were the target. The rampage was triggered by the pronouncement of the Sole Administrator authorising the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in the state. That had been the subject of a litigation during which the court asked the CAN and the government to settle out of the court, the development to which the Sole Administrator (Military Governor) responded by making the statement. So, Christians have, in his submission, encountered Muslims in conflict in each of 1998, 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2014 and hence the difficulty for Christians in terms of what to make of the difference between Muslims and Boko Haram.

This insight connects well with an earlier analysis by one of the respondents at the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital that Boko Haram has provided people advantage to settle historical quarrels. This is in the sense that Christians would say that it

is Muslims coming to kill them while Muslims would say that "it is the military that has come to kill us" presumably on behalf of Christians. His postulation is that "if you extrapolate, this is a historical conflict". In other words, he is saying the degree of destruction reflects the complexity involved and collateral damage in this context must extend beyond inadvertent killing. The killings and destruction are deliberate but they are still collateral damage because "these people (referring to Boko Haram) say that their aim is a Sharia Republic. So, you ask yourself what getting a Sharia Republic has to do with wanton destruction of lives and property. To us, all such destruction must then be understood as collateral damage"

Interviewees from the Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies at the University of Maiduguri provide further evidence of this dominant claim. That is the narrative of destructiveness that is beyond the accidental. While not discounting loss of human lives as a fundamental category of collateral damage, the two researchers reinforcing each other at the joint interview session insists there were no situations where human beings were killed and the insurgents did not destroy the rest of the place. In their estimation, the all time spaces of the most horrific killings and most comprehensive destruction of material things must be Banisheikh and Maniok in 2013. For the centre, Gamboru and Potiskum markets

must, however, hold the record of “the worst market attack of all time” outside Maiduguri. For respondents from the centre, Gaboru has still not recovered from the attack till today, that is from the deaths and looting that occurred during the attack sometime in 2013. In fact, the respondents wondered briefly if there are any banks operating in Azare in Potiskum now before one of them said Unity Bank is, indeed, operating in Potiskum now. By their categorisation, Bama must have the record in terms of concentration of destruction. That is the number of times that place has been attacked.

Activists of the Bama Initiative for Human Development differ slightly from the intellectuals at the Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies by saying that Bama holds the record as the scene of worst human slaughter. That is, they are not contesting the grand narrative but reinforcing it with a different stress. One of their leaders who responded puts Bama in perspective in relation to why it may hold such record. One, Boko Haram recruited many young men from there. Two, there are several routes to Bama: Gwoza, Sambisa and Konduga. Three, it is the route from Maiduguri through Dikwa to Gaboru-Ngala, Cameroon, Chad, CAR, Sudan, Zaire and even Saudi Arabia. These are international routes through which everything produced in Nigeria come to Maiduguri and goes out.

Four, it is, by population, among the largest of the 27 local government areas in the state. The fifth reason is how Bama was left intact as an emirate after the excision of Dikwa, Ngala and Kalabalge into one emirate from the old Bama Emirate under the governorship of Ali Modu Sheriff. This point was not well explained as to how it made Bama a foremost killing centre and there was no follow up questions in the transcript of interviews available.

As at the time of this interview, (January 3rd, 2018) and subsequently, Bama is still the area whose IDPs have not been allowed back from Maiduguri. Speaking through Mallam Mohammed Hassan and Kachalla Kyari, its Chairman and Secretary respectively in its September 1st, 2017 press conference, the Bama Initiative for Human Development applauded what it called the Federal Government Initiative on rebuilding Bama and in which 3000 new homes would be built as well as 10 police stations, 18 primary and secondary schools, creation of a special Bama Squad for security and the recruitment of 1500 local hunters as Agro Rangers. The statistics go to support the claim that Bama was a major killing field.

Maiduguri town is also in contest for the sort of destruction that is forcing a different understanding of collateral damage from victims, witnesses and survivors of Boko

Haram spate of violence between 2009 and 2019. The list of the affected settlements and sites of human destruction that comes out from across the interviewees with the most detailed evidence on the dynamism of the insurgency include: Budum, Gidan Yashi, Lawan Bukar, Kumshi, Abbaganaram, Jere, Bulabulin Ngarrannam, Shehuri, Umaruri, Mafoni, Bolori I & II, Fezzan, (a settlement of predominantly Lebanese and Tuaregs identities), Hausari, Bulumkutu and Maisandari. In these settlements in the early days of Boko Haram, people died, schools closed as there was no movement in or out whenever Boko Haram or a military siege was on. In such circumstances, death from stray bullets was substantial in most of these settlements in the early days of the emergency. This was before the birth of the Civilian Joint Task Force, (CJTF) in 2011. In fact, this presaged the CJTF as would be explained below.

Out of these main spaces of destruction, the worst hit, according to the totality of evidence are Monday Market; Hausara; Fish Market; Adamu Kolo/Gofa near the University of Maiduguri, Gwange/Sabon Line and Customs Bridge, especially the attack on it sometimes in 2012. A major explanation for this is the phase of Boko Haram operation at this point in time. That is the phase of *kan mai uwa da wa bi*, a Kanuri expression meaning 'whoever is

attacked, it is his or her own problem'. In other words, this was the phase of total destruction in contrast to when Boko Haram concentrated on selective elimination of suspected informants, village heads and anybody who disagreed with them before shifting to those it called strangers, then to security operatives, (government forces). As the military Joint Task Force was expanded and as it stepped up its counter-insurgency operation in the first two years of the insurgency, the insurgents no longer dealt with categories of enemies but went into what could be called 'Operation Total Destruction' and during which the expression came up. During this phase of total destruction, naming, wedding and burial ceremonies as well as markets became soft targets. It was compounded by the planting of bombs on the body of very young lads to go to such occasions.

The dynamics of collateral damage in these settlements is the fusion of Boko Haram attacks and the military's counter-insurgency tactics. The fusion came about following Boko Haram's change of dress code along the line. Initially or when Boko Haram started, they were identifiable with their trade mark turban. But with the formation of the Military Joint Task Force, they discarded that in favour of dressing styles that no longer marked them out in the crowd. With that, they became

unidentifiable from the rest of the populace. As soon as they became unidentifiable by any trademarks as insurgents, the Military Joint Task Force also changed tactics. They adopted operational engagement that left little room for the escape of suspected insurgents. Such tactics included the cordoning off of any space, community or settlement where Boko Haram launched an attack. The assumption behind this is to make it impossible for Boko Haram commanders or foot soldiers to slip away in any of the disguises, either as women or as religious operatives in which they entered shopping areas, markets and then bomb such a place or carry out shooting as in Maiduguri Monday Market, the Fish Market or Customs Bridge, etc. The military JTF would arrive such a space where there had been bombing, cordon off the entire space. The practical impossibility of sifting plausible insurgents from innocent bystanders or dwellers in such areas meant that whoever was found in such place at the time had got a name for him or herself. That was how 'sorry' came into language use. It means your name or your fate is 'sorry' if you happened to be found in such space at that time. It was such that anyone under 30 was permanently in danger of being killed or becoming study in 'sorry'. And this is cited to further buttress the argument that an expanded meaning of collateral damage is required for it to capture its application in the Boko Haram insurgency

because the entire region rather than bystanders was under attack.

The other dimension by which people died came from fleeing when Boko Haram attacked. Such people risked being interpreted and/or felled by JTF bullets. Shuwari Buri settlement is given as the best example of this in the attack on it on April 13th, 2015. Boko Haram attacked the town for four hours. The claim is that when the military responded, most of the victims were those fleeing the attack, mistaken for the insurgents.

A different variant of the Boko Haram – military nexus in the study of collateral damage is the case illustrated by a 2014 incident in the semi-urban town called Kalabage. The people had acquired the capacity to protect themselves. In one Boko Haram attack on a particular settlement there, the "community defence forces" successfully killed all the Boko Haram insurgents before the military responded to pack the dead bodies. As Boko Haram commanders were used to disguising in military fatigue, the community took the genuine soldiers for Boko Haram reinforcement and killed some of them. The genuine military, however, interpreted the attack as a deliberate provocation and, naturally, retaliated. "The outcome was bloody", said this respondent.

This is a pointer to the complications and diffuseness of collateral damage in Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency created a permanent state of siege within which security or safety became a matter of luck arising from reliance on many strategies and tactics by all manner of actors. The boundary between insurgents and government forces could be indistinguishable in such a circumstance. Many right things were done for the wrong reason(s) and vice versa. In some cases, the perpetrators such as the people in the Kalabalge community could not be blamed. Nor could the military either, theoretically speaking, because, as far as they were concerned, they had been attacked in a circumstance in which it was dangerous to try to find out why such might have happened. Or situations that compelled the military to rely on what Cronin refers to as “legally sanctioned war-fighting strategies that result in significant numbers of civilian casualties”, (Cronin, 2013: 176) and which this particular situation could be cited as an example

Explaining why collateral damage became more associated with the military JTF at a certain point rather than Boko Haram in popular narratives, respondents such as the interesting baker interviewee. He was interesting in insisting on taking the interviewer and his escort to the ruins of his bakery before the onset of the insurgency and the attempt at reviving the ‘factory’. He is also

interesting for allowing access to what serves as an informal, miniature IDP and what it reveals about how some Nigerians actually live and where they live, right in urban Maiduguri town. The fear that pictures and the publication of them makes him traceable made it forbidden to do that. He gives two reasons why ‘collateral damage’ became more associated with the Military JTF. While the people expected the military to go for the culprits and by which they mean Boko Haram, the military was adopting cordoning off spaces of attack which made civilians vulnerable. Disappearances cannot be accounted for because no one could be sure whether such people were abducted by Boko Haram or were in military detention centres or had fallen to bullets, from whichever side.

Another expression emerged to cover this phenomenon: Bai chi ba, bai sha ba: expression in Hausa on the mystery of having to pay a debt one did not incur. It is the popular framing of the paradox of the innocent becoming a victim. That is innocence in the sense of knowing nothing about when and where Boko Haram insurgency was planned and about how and who was carrying it out but being held to account, even with one’s life. Hence, the expression which states this paradox whereby those who feel no liability for Boko Haram were paying for it with their lives. It is a critique of why the

masses were being made to pay for the sins of insurgents.

In all these, one mystery that even respondents could not answer is why big hotels, the State Radio and the State Secretariat were never attacked. There is a claim that businesses suffered the worst consequences of Boko Haram but this was the argument of only one respondent. Although he gave examples of how the cordoning off of any place automatically meant the cordoning off of business for the length of time involved, the type of business he used as example to buttress his argument is peripheral to the Borno business world such as big hotels. The only exception to this might be the *Giwa-Giwa* business which went down at the height of the insurgency and is just witnessing resurgence. *Giwa-Giwa* is the local name for the extended version of the trailer that moves up from Nigeria and might be going as far as Central African Republic, Sudan or so. It takes days to load because it has been expanded in size and length.

Also unresolved is why *Giwa Barracks* was attacked. Was it an insider job or a daring exploit by Boko Haram? All the accounts do not tie up. Yet, it is a major site of collateral damage in the accounts across the board.

Why are the IDP camps filled up? As at the time of the interview, they were filled up in the Borno State capital. IDP camp population is a major indicator of the degree of collateral damage. Aside from all the reasons given above, there is still a major claim about this. It has to do with another unique style of Boko Haram in terms of occupying settlements or communities, melting into the people until they got information of the military heading there to dislodge them. And then they would burn down such a village and take off with the able bodied men, leaving women, aged and children to their fate. These are normally those the military picks up and take to the relative safety of the IDP camps.

Conclusion

The body of evidence from eye witnesses, victims and survivors challenges the subsisting notion of the concept of collateral damage that we saw in the literature review. Instead, the evidence here provides detailed but discursive data to show that Boko Haram itself is an operation in collateral damage in which taking the entire Northeast region hostage is the mission. This sense of the concept takes it beyond the sense of collateral damage as circumstantial death of a few unlucky bystanders or non-combatants caught in one cross-fire or another. Here, the details of deaths and destruction in the Northeast is more than a few unlucky persons perishing accidentally from Boko Haram using

marginal elements to send a message to the government in asymmetrical confrontation. Or even deaths from bullets fired by the Nigerian military in the course of the counter-insurgency operation. Instead of that, there are too many instances where people in many spAdagbo Onoja emselves trapped or under attack, by Boko Haram or by the military.

What the evidence from the respondents raise is the question of the possibility of humanizing wars. Can wars, by its very nature, ever be humanized? The instances disapprove of that thinking. The story of the series of interpretive errors in Kalabalge community should be particularly instructive about the impossibility of humanizing war. The victims of anarchy surviving in the destroyed bakery support the thesis of the impossibility of war without collateral damage in the sense conveyed by the respondents in this study. There is thus a message in this study for the United Nations which superintends the practice of humanizing wars. As noble as it looks, the agenda of 'hygienic' wars is not realizable, whether in the rural spaces of Nigeria's Northeast or in Bosnia, Baghdad, Afghanistan or any of the theatres of violence since the end of the Cold War.

What this argument critiques is the rationalist account of meaning in the study of

war. That is the binary notion of things when, in fact, there are always more than two parties, many of which go beyond what the eye can see or what the senses can establish. These binary oppositional frames such as the inside/outside binary that dominates a lot of the thinking in International Security and traditional Strategic Studies are implicated in collateral damage through the design of conventional wars, counter-insurgency operations and similar internal security operations. In war, we may we meet more than friends or enemies whose safety are outside the scope of the operational designs.

The alternative way of resolving this lies in the tradition of critical security analysis where binary differentiation determines such concepts as enemy, friend, ally, solidarisers and supporters. An enemy is only so because he or she is not a friend in a particular space and time, not in the sense that there are permanent insider/outside of the nation; the racial group such as black versus white; ideological camps such as capitalism versus communism or systemic terms such as 'dictatorship' versus 'democracy'. In a war situation, the binary reasoning rather than differentiation could lead to collateral damage because the 'insider' could find him or herself the 'outsider' and vice-versa.

The above broad resume supports the case for discursive evidence and dialogic production of meaning which underpinned this study. That is, to endorse the conceptual framework of collateral damage favoured by the evidence of the interviewees because of the principle of contingency of meaning. And to argue that this position shows that collateral damage is nothing but a discursive practice of powerful militaries who are defining it carelessly as accidental deaths in war. There is nothing accidental in collateral damage in most contemporary wars. It is rather an indication of power relationship between armies in combat operation and this position needs to be forced into the advocacy and campaigning programs on laws of war.

Although the specificity of this study means that we cannot generalise this conclusion that does not challenge the scientific validity of the conclusion. It stands solidly within the grand logic of the social construction of reality, with all its potentials for rupturing the status quo sense of collateral damage.

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