

Nigerian Media, Boko-Terrorism, and Politics of the 2015 Nigerian General Elections

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Abstract

Terrorism is not new to Nigeria but the dimension of terrorism unleashed on the Nigerian people by Boko Haram and the extent of damage to the nation's collective psyche remain "strange" in the nation's history. This paper evaluates the role of the Nigerian media in the face of Boko Haram terror activities. The highpoint of the paper is the evaluation of the role Boko-terrorism played in the politics of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. It is the position of the paper that the Nigerian media did not fare very well in their handling of the Boko Haram terror activities because of lack of editorial independence and ethnocentricity. The paper also argues that Boko-terrorism played a vital role in the Peoples Democratic Party's loss of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. Using personal observation, evaluation of news

reports, and literature analysis as the basis of our argument, these authors submit that the Nigerian media have operated more as active players in political crises that followed the Boko Haram carnage than as impartial judges of such crises. The paper therefore calls for people ownership of media firms, expert reporting and cautions against ethnocentric journalism.

Keywords: Terrorism, Boko Haram, Politics, Expert Reporting, Advocacy Journalism, Media, Nigeria

Introduction

Very few nations on earth today will claim ignorance of the existence of terrorism or its use in national and global politics. Terrorism is present in many countries of the world and has become a regular feature in news headlines of major news organizations around the world. Majority of the major wars going on around the world today are about terrorism or terrorism-related concerns. Individuals, religious and socio-cultural groups now use terrorism as an effective means to address their grievances against their government and people. The sanctity of life, which used to be the case before the madness called terrorism took a deadly dimension, is no longer respected. Man is now man's greatest enemy in this life! Man invented technological, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction which he uses easily to prosecute senseless wars and bloodletting like terrorism. Without sounding simplistic, terrorism and technological advancement in weapons (nuclear, biological, or hydrogen) development are two major factors that will lead to the Third World War, which this world may never recover from if allowed to happen.

Terrorism has also become a political instrument in many parts of the world. Those who seek political attention or share of political power or complete take-over of political power resort to terrorism to achieve their inordinate ambitions. Innocent blood that is shed along the way is thus regarded as mere collateral damage in the pursuit of political power. There are clear examples in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine, Kenya, Sudan and more recently in Nigeria where terrorism was openly and in the case of Nigeria, subtly used for political reasons and to gain political control.

We will not bore our readers with the history of terrorism or engage in the unfortunate debate by scholars to define the term; we only wish to state that although the western prediction that Nigeria could disintegrate by 2015 did not come to fruition, the nation is still in danger of political and economic disintegration if Boko Haram, a relatively new terror organisation in Nigeria, is not stopped. And for the sake of emphasis: the failure of the Nigerian State will have dire consequences for the West and the whole of Africa. Nigeria is the single largest black nation in the world and the centre of black civilisation. She is also an economic superpower in Africa, trailing behind only South Africa. Nigeria is the strongest economy in West Africa and her political leadership has kept the Sub-Saharan Africa stable. We may have heard that any part of the world you go to and you do not find a Nigerian or Coca Cola, move out immediately because life may not be in existence there! You may have also heard that when you meet five black persons anywhere in the world; one most likely may be a Nigerian.

We are not sure anyone has bothered to assess the impact of a 21st century war like situation in Nigeria and the refugee crisis that will erupt as fallout. Nigeria is not in a full-fledged war yet most western nations are already battling with Nigerians seeking asylum in their countries. The West cannot manage the situation if Nigeria goes up in war flames because the whole of the West

African sub-region will go up in flames too. In case you don't know, each time Nigeria closes its porous borders in West Africa, unimaginable economic consequences happen to nations in Sub-Saharan Africa. You also need to know that a city like Ibadan, in Southwest Nigeria is bigger than Niger Republic, a country in West Africa.

We have taken this route so that we do not leave anyone in doubt on the need for the leaders of the free world – the West – to come together and destroy the monster called Boko Haram. However, we must also mention here that the emergence of Boko Haram and its sustenance so far, is just one of the manifestations of the loose state of the Nigerian federation because in truth Nigeria does not really exist. Shocking as this may sound; Nigeria is a mere geographical expression and fallout of an administrative convenience of the colonial masters, Britain. The basis of statehood does not exist. The nationals first converge as ethnic chauvinists, groups, religious bigots before thinking Nigeria. Most things in Nigeria (resources, power, positions etc) are discussed and shared along ethnic lines first, religion second, and then to hell with the centre called Nigeria.

Nigerians never came together to be one. The West brought the nation together, has continued to manipulate her staying together, and so has to fight her battles to stay together. Nigeria cannot survive on her own because she has been structured that way. We do not pray for disintegration by war because the consequences are unimaginable but we also think that we have not reached a point of no return as a country. The emergence of true independent states from Nigeria or a renegotiation of the basis for unity by true representatives of the people of Nigeria may be the only solution to the problem called Nigeria.

In a special seminar presentation at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), London, six months before the Nigerian Presidential Elections, Ekeanyanwu (2014, p.

2) observes thus:

Let me get back to my earlier mention of the prophecy by the West of a possible disintegration in 2015. If President Jonathan wins a second or third term (as the North views it), Boko Haram and its sponsors will take over the Northern part of Nigeria and make it ungovernable for him. If they encroach to the Southern part of Nigeria, the country will go up in flames. If President Jonathan loses the election, Boko Haram will strategically refocus its operations to end the violence but other militant ethnic groups within Southern Nigeria will metamorphose into terror groups. Sponsorship will never be a problem from southern politicians. This potential new threat will also destroy the oil resources, which is the mainstay of the country and our bragging rights in the world. Therefore, 2015 is the year. How the West helps Nigeria to deal with Boko Haram before 2015 General Elections will determine the eventual reaction after the elections.

This provocative thought may have influenced the last minute efforts by the Goodluck Jonathan administration to rally support and defeat or at least curb the activities of Boko Haram in the Northeast before the 2015 General Elections. This led to the postponement of the 2015 Presidential and the entire General Elections by six weeks, which also caused mixed reactions both at home and abroad. The renewed support by some powerful western nations to fight Boko Haram in Nigeria may also not be

unconnected to some of the permutations this lead author highlighted in his LSE seminar paper.

The Nigerian General Elections have come and gone but our fears are still there. The re-emergence of agitations in the Southeast by some disgruntled elements within that body polity for an independent state of Biafra may not be unconnected to the feelings of marginalisation in the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. The Niger Delta region is still watching the configuration of the current administration and weighing how it favours or disfavors the region before war mongers take over the Greeks again and resume the resource control war.

The point we are driving out here is that Nigeria is not safe yet from the prediction of disintegration. How the current Buhari administration manages power, shares state resources, as well as fight the Boko Haram terrorist organisation, will inevitably determine whether Nigeria remains a unified and single entity before the next General Elections. How the current administration douses tensions arising from perceived notions of marginalization, agitations of nationhood as well as manage the promised “change” in the fortunes of the majority of the people of Nigeria who supposedly voted for change in the 2015 General Election, would also go a long way in making the West a fake prophet of doom.

It is not in anyone or ethnic nationality's best interest for Nigeria to degenerate into another Civil War. It is also not in anyone or ethnic nationality's best interest for the country to disintegrate into small homogeneous nations. The disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. Second, the experiences at the United Nations and other related global bodies have shown that the bigger a nation is the better in terms of international political and economic relations and gains. In essence, Nigeria gains more as a strong, big and economically viable nation but the decision to remain united in Nigeria must come from the people and the terms agreed by the true representatives of the people.

Historical Overview of the Boko Haram Uprising in Nigeria

The emergence of Boko Haram as a major terror group in the Nigerian society has changed the political, economic, cultural, and religious setting of an already highly polarised nation and people. Terrorism is not new to Nigeria or Nigerians. However, the dimension of terrorism unleashed on the Nigerian people by Boko Haram (which we have referred in the title of this paper as 'Boko-Terrorism') and the extent of damage to the nation's collective psyche remain strange in Nigeria's political history.

We will not delve in-depth into the infamous beginnings of this group or begin to elevate its regrettable history at this level. But to help us establish some perspectives, Boko Haram means "western education is sinful". That is why the group is fighting against western civilisation, education, culture, and modern science. What we do not understand is why the group uses western made bombs, AK-47 Rifles etc that are results of modern science to execute its course. This is a clear evidence of the type of hypocrisy that fans the embers of such agitation.

The group emerged from Northeast Nigeria with one Mohammed Yusuf as its leader in 2002. The original group with the original leadership and members have been lost to this new terror group. Boko Haram is not the official name of this Islamic sect. The official name of the sect is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, which means, "People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad". The name Boko Haram came from locals when the group re-emerged in its present form in 2002 in Maiduguri, Northeast Nigeria. It was founded as a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist sect advocating for a strict adherence to Sharia Law (Musa, 2012). The group seeks for the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria. It views western education as corrupting Islam and weakening the religion. This made most renowned Islamic scholars in Nigeria to shun the group as lacking in knowledge in Islamic teaching. This proved to be a mistake as politicians found it easy to hijack the group for their

selfish political ends. A former Governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sherrif, cannot in all honesty deny sponsoring, using, and attempting to dump this group after using them to achieve certain political ends (Musa, 2012).

Musa (2012, p. 113) analysed Danjibo (2009) to establish some kind of connection with Boko Haram past and present histories and argument over its correct name and meaning thus:

Yusuf's radical sermons were similar to those of Muhammadu Marwa; he criticized the use of technological equipment like the radio and television and forbade western civilization, including education. Yusufiyya, which is today known as Jama'atu Ahlissunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, also preaches hate against the state, political office holders and security officials. In a recent speech by its current leader Abubakar Shekau, the group says it is referred to by its corrupted name 'Boko Haram', which means western education is forbidden. Danjibo (2009) says the two words, 'Boko' (meaning western education) and 'Haram' (meaning forbidden or what is forbidden) when put together mean that western education is forbidden. The intent of the group, he says, is to replace western education or western civilization, including modern state formation, with the traditional Islamic state and values, like Sharia. This is because the sect claims that western civilization has eroded Islamic values. It also incites its followers against other

Islamic clerics who do not subscribe to the group's beliefs.

The epileptic Nigerian school system, massive youth unemployment, high-level illiteracy, poor or non-existence infrastructure, political and economic corruption, and poor security apparatus helped Boko Haram's emergence and sustenance. These made it possible for the group to win more converts for the violent stage of its uprising. In the words of Ekwueme & Akpan (2012, pp. 55-6),

The core beliefs of the sect run contrary to that of many Muslims. They believe strongly that the system of taxation and banking in the country that leads to the exploitation of the citizens, especially the poor, are against the spirit and teachings of Islam. They also kicked against man-made laws as practiced in Nigeria instead of the laws of Allah as taught by his holy Prophet Mohammed. The group rejects the mixing of boys and girls under the same shade much like the Taliban. Finally, they believe that western education is an embodiment of what the Islamic faith abhors.

In summary, the following factors may have contributed to the sustenance of the Boko Haram as a terror organization in Nigeria:

First is the issue of massive youth and graduate unemployment. It is a common knowledge today that more than 70 percent of Nigeria's youth and graduate population are unemployed notwithstanding the argument that 70 percent of this statistics are unemployable. Nigeria's tertiary institutions are churning out graduates in amazing numbers but the saturated labour market has no plans of taking more than five percent of these massive figures.

The second factor that may have encouraged the rise of terrorism in Nigeria is the high-level illiteracy which sustains flawed ideologies and makes indoctrination possible and even easy. The cost of education and the poverty level in Nigeria have made the country retain a high percentage of illiteracy population in the 21st century. Till date, the primary school enrolment continues to drop in both the Northern and the Southern part of the country. This is the primary factor that drives illiteracy.

The third factor is the embarrassing and unfortunate poor state of infrastructure in Nigeria. The amount and diversity of natural resources God has endowed Nigeria with are not reflected in the general poor state of its infrastructural development. In Nigeria today, basic issues like affordable housing, good road network, electricity/energy supply, drinkable water etc are still basic concerns that stifle individual and national development efforts. These issues could cause violent agitations because they emanate from corrupt practices by the elites; not because the country is poor to provide the basic amenities its citizens deserve.

The fourth factor, which we regard as most volatile amongst the various factors that may have fuelled the Boko Haram insurgency is corruption. Corruption is one single factor that can and is destroying Nigeria. From observations and deductions from media reports on corruption, we can argue that about 10% of Nigerian politicians are clean. The remaining 90% are morally bankrupt, visionless, and lack the forthrightness to lead this country. But unfortunately, this population stratum is the one that has ruled the country to the ground and continues to rule the country. This view is further explained in Ekeanyanwu (2015, p. 186) thus:

One major issue that ordinarily will have made a headline by itself even if the media “refused” to promote it as an

agenda in the elections is the issue of corruption. Most Nigerians, including the political class that are guilty of perpetrating this heinous crime against humanity, believe that corruption has eaten deep into the heart of this nation and see it as a cankerworm that will eventually destroy the nation if nothing urgent and drastic is done to stop it. President Buhari was always quoted during the Presidential Election campaigns to have said, "If we don't stop corruption, corruption will stop Nigeria".

Corruption is the single largest factor that has contributed most to Nigeria's underdeveloped status even as a so-called giant of Africa. Corruption has only produced a five percent stupendously rich class as against whopping 95 percent poor masses. Most Nigerians live below the UN poverty index and youth unemployment is very high. Lack of infrastructure, epileptic power/energy supply, poor housing facilities, non-existence of a viable middle class, inadequate/absence of modern health facilities, and the sorry state of educational facilities and opportunities in Nigeria are manifestations of the symptoms of corruption in government, civil/public service, and even in the private sector.

The fifth factor that has aided the Boko Haram uprising in

Nigeria is related to poor security apparatus in place in Nigeria, which is further worsened by the nation's porous borders that make policing and border protection difficult. The Nigerian security infrastructure is very poor and porous. The Nigerian Armed Forces, Police as well as other security agencies are ill-trained, ill-equipped and poorly motivated to want to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of nation. Related to this pathetic situation is that the inadequate budget allocation to the security sector is often embezzled or misappropriated by those entrusted with its management. Recently, Nigerians woke to the shocking revelation of how monies meant for the purchase of arms to prosecute the war against terrorism and Boko Haram was shared by the then National Security Adviser, Retired Colonel Dasuki, among his cronies in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The trial and media circus from the trail is now commonly referred to as “Dasukigate”. Meanwhile, the same corrupt forces within the Government arranged and sentenced to death helpless soldiers who refused to fight the heavily armed Boko Haram with bare hands. If President Muhammadu Buhari and his party, APC has not won the 2015 Presidential and General Elections in Nigeria, those condemned soldiers will have been executed by now and the looters will have been smiling around with their loot and Boko Haram will have continued to unleash terror on innocent Nigerians unchallenged.

The sixth factor that may have helped the cause of Boko Haram and which we consider very dangerous is the ineffective and epileptic Nigerian educational system. The current educational system leaves many behind especially in the Northeast part of Nigeria where Boko Haram operates from and those accommodated are not properly trained to fend for themselves. This leads to massive unemployment of graduate and secondary school leavers because the type of education they receive only prepares them for white-collar jobs that are no longer in existence.

Back to the historical overview of the Boko Haram uprising, we note that the sect was less violent in the first seven

years before the Conspiracy Theories on why it turned violent and deadly. Various reports have indicated that government at the State and Federal levels in Nigeria repeatedly ignored warnings about the increasing militant character of the group. It was only in 2009 that the Nigerian police began an investigation into the group code-named “Operation Flush”. On July 26, 2009, the Police arrested nine Boko Haram members and confiscated weapons and bomb-making equipment from them. This led to a reprisal attack on the Police. A joint military Task Force was launched in response and by July 30, 2009, more than 700 persons were confirmed dead. Boko Haram had the highest casualty figure. In the battle that raged, many Police Stations were destroyed and schools, Churches, persons, and government buildings were torched.

Muhammed Yusuf, the leader of the group was arrested but killed in controversial circumstances. Official reports, however, indicated he died trying to escape from Police custody. Some leaked video footage proves otherwise. His deputy, Abubakar Shekau, who vowed to avenge their leader's death, succeeded him. Under Shekau's leadership, the group improved its operational capabilities and broke more than 100 of its members from prison. The group also released more than 600 other prisoners, some of who joined the group to launch an unprecedented reign of terror on Nigeria. The use of suicide bombers by the group was very strange in Nigerian history. In Africa as a whole, suicide bombing has only been used by al-shabab, a terrorist group in Somalia and AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb).

It will be very painful to begin to recount the deaths, rape, and wanton destruction caused by this terror group. For the records, as at December 2015, Boko Haram has killed more than 5000 in 160 attacks, making Nigeria the highest number of terrorist killings in a year. These figures do not include the over 260 Chibok school girls abducted from the school premises over two years ago.

Conspiracy Theories on the Sustenance of Boko Haram in Nigeria

The unfortunate “success” story of Boko Haram in Nigeria could be best explained using the argument of conspiracy theorists who have researched deep into the group. The first of the Conspiracy theories is based on the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis (FAH). FAH as noted by Jeong (2000) explains how and why people turn to violence when there is a perceived notion of betrayal of trust or disruption of efforts to achieve set goals and objectives. This is better explained by Musa (2012, p. 121) thus:

There is a need to consider the relevance of the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis (FAH) in the attempt to explain the emergence and continued survival of Boko Haram. One of the key causes of aggression or violent behaviour is the failure of human beings to achieve certain goals they have set for themselves. They become highly predisposed to violence if they perceive that someone has interfered with the achievement of their goal (Jeong 2000, p. 67). This usually begins with frustration, followed by anger and the anger (in the form of a violent outburst) is finally vented on the blocking source or a weaker target. In a situation like this it is not always the blocking source that is targeted but a weaker one is invented and attacked. In the case of Muhammad Yusuf, it is helpful to recall that he dropped out of secondary school and became more committed to Islamic education in neighbouring Chad and

Niger Republic. Moreover, he became exposed to radical ideas, which he returned to Nigeria to spread by attacking the authorities, whose actions and inactions might have played a role in his failure to acquire western education.

The second of the Conspiracy theories is religious in nature. There is no contention that Boko Haram has strong religious views on both Islam and Christianity. We can therefore argue that Boko Haram is anti-Christianity and has continued to bomb Churches in the North. The group has also continued to attack other Islamic faithfuls and sects/groups that do not share same Islamic views. There is also no contention that religious fanatics and zealots populate the group. The group wants to enshrine Sharia Law in Nigeria beginning from the Northern part (Musa, 2012). The same Conspiracy theorists also argue that the elements that mooted Sharia Law in Nigeria are supporting Boko Haram and financing the group's operations. Nigeria on paper does not have a state religion but the military dictatorship under Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) secretly registered the country as a member of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). OIC is the umbrella body of Islamic countries in the world. These same powerful forces, according to this Conspiracy theory, are supporting and shielding Boko Haram. The theorists argue that the refusal to condemn or weak condemnation of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria by these powerful persons is suggestive of their support for the group (See Musa, 2012; Ekeanyanwu, 2014; Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

The third Conspiracy theory is economic in nature. Some scholars have argued that Boko Haram emerged because of the poor economic conditions in Nigeria, especially in the North (See Musa, 2012; Abubakar, 2012; Ekwueme & Akpan, 2012; Ekwueme & Obayi, 2012; Ekeanyanwu, 2014). This is why

Muhammad Yusuf chose to commence his uprising from the poorest part of Nigeria (Northeast), which has the almajiris (poorest citizens in the North) as targets for recruitment and membership sustenance for the group (Musa, 2012).

We have already highlighted in this article that poor economic conditions helped raise Boko Haram and also played a part in sustaining the group. This is not in contention as the economic situation of the almajiris in the Northeast is very pathetic and a shame to the leadership of this country especially in the North. However, we cannot dismiss the religious or even political arguments of the group's emergence and aims. No doubt, the economic conditions in Nigeria have helped the group recruit members and get some sympathy, but economic conditions alone do not raise heartless murderers. If the Nigerian economy raised Boko Haram, most of us, including these authors should be murderers and terrorists by now. This is because we also feel the corruption and negative economic conditions in Nigeria, as most other persons do. Very few Nigerians, less than 25 percent to be specific, are deemed to be economically buoyant and ok to avoid any negative economic slump the rest of the citizenry are suffering or face from time to time. It is our reasoned view, therefore, that poor economic conditions could only raise thieves and armed robbers; not terrorists of the worst kind like Boko Haram that has killed more than ISIS and Al Qaeda put together in 2015 alone. One question piquing our mind as scholars and researchers is how do these gory killings of innocent Nigerians by Boko Haram change the economic conditions of its members?

The fourth and rather controversial Conspiracy theory is political. Under this argument, it is believed that some powerful political forces within the Northern part of Nigeria are using Boko Haram to negotiate their way back to power. These forces argue that the North was cheated out of political power in Nigeria after the death of Musa Yar'Adua. The calculation was that Jonathan should not stay in power beyond the Yar'Adua tenure so that power

could return to the North. In fact, the North claimed there was a gentleman's agreement with President Goodluck Jonathan to serve a single tenure and return power back to the North (See Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

The Nigerian political arrangement is to zone the Presidency to a particular geo-political region for say eight years (This again supports my earlier argument that Nigeria exists only on paper). In this arrangement, (after the military dictators who were all from the North) have left political power, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was installed as President. He is from the Southwest part of the country and served eight years (two tenures). Chief Obasanjo installed a surrogate, Musa Yar'Adua as President after the expiration of his term in office. Yar'Adua is from the North. Just two years into the Yar'Adua tenure, he died of cancer/kidney related issues. His deputy, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, was sworn-in as President (as required by the Nigerian Constitution). After completing the Yar'Adua tenure, President Jonathan contested the 2011 Presidential Election and won. He defeated a popular Muslim retired general, Muhammadu Buhari, who was also a former dictator. The North felt cheated and worried that power, which it was used to wielding, is gradually slipping out of its hands. Buhari's humiliating defeat heightened religious and political tension in the country, which was followed by terrorist acts perpetrated by Boko Haram.

Since Jonathan became President of Nigeria till date, Nigeria has not known any peace. His desire to contest the 2015 Presidential Election compounded the violence in the North led by Boko Haram. The theory is to make Nigeria under former President Jonathan ungovernable and unsafe. The ultimate aim is to get him out at any cost as the current security situation in Nigeria makes him look very weak and incompetent in keeping the country together and safe. So, many powerful political elements in both axis of the country were bankrolling Boko Haram operations and frustrating every effort to defeat the group

under the Jonathan's administration. If these Conspiracy theorists are wrong, how does one explain the wanton and disgraceful embezzlement of security votes meant for arms procurement to fight the war on terror? Retired Colonel Dasuki who is the alleged mastermind of this embezzlement was the former National Security Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan but most importantly, he is from the North (which is the major victim of Boko Haram attacks). If he (Dasuki) and his evil cohorts have no hidden agenda, who else would have seen the need to adequately equip the Nigerian military to fight Boko Haram if not a son of the soil?

The Jonathan's group, on the other hand, also decided to take advantage of the terrorist situation in the country as noted by Ekeanyanwu (2014, p. 5) thus:

The continued violence in the North may favour Jonathan's re-election bid in a way the Northern elements did not envisage. As it stands now, Jonathan cannot win any credible election in the North. His Northern opponents have succeeded in branding him weak, incompetent and someone against the North. So, it is good for him to allow the violence to continue. Three things are possible in such a situation: First, he goes ahead with the election in 2015 and disenfranchises the affected Northern areas because of the violence and the State of Emergency, which empowers him to do so. Second, the entire elections are postponed because of the violence and insecurity. He will then continue in office until the violence recedes. Third, if violence stops and peace required to

conduct elections is maintained, Jonathan takes the credit, takes the advantage to the election, and possibly wins. All of these possible scenarios favour his re-election ambition.

You can call the four points we have presented above Conspiracy Theories but the truth may not be far from the arguments. Some of the arguments presented above were made in October 2014 at a special presentation by this lead author at the London School of Economics and Political Science, London. A year has passed since that initial presentation and the 2015 Presidential Election has also come and gone. But a critical analysis of the events leading to the elections, the eventual outcome as well as the post-election situation in the country now may suggest that some of the Conspiracy theories' permutations as presented may have been well thought out. This, however, remains debatable. The North is practically and totally back in power as the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary arms of Government are currently and firmly led by the North but Boko Haram continues to fight. Some have argued that Boko Haram has tasted blood and blood money and that there is no going back now no matter who is in power. This again remains debatable.

How Boko-Terrorism Influenced the Politics of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

Many media agendas defined the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). Since the media have strong relationship with politics and many have argued that the media are political instruments used by politicians to achieve their political ambitions, it suffices to say that the way the media highlight, emphasize or frame a political issue will definitely has impact on how the people perceive such an issue. This may have informed Ekeanyanwu's (2015, pp. 168-9) question in an attempt to establish a connection:

What is the connection between the media, politics, and democratic practice that seems to make the link tight? The connection between the media and politics is very obvious and strong. The role of the media in politics is no longer debatable as many democracies all over the world regard the media as instruments of political mobilization and sensitization. In advanced societies particularly, the mass media are actually an integral part of political life, serving for most people as their major and sometimes, only link with the government and a major source of information to correlate events in their environment. The media also provide their audiences the information they need to make sense of political issues, which helps them to make political judgments based on their political attitudes and perceptions. The mass media also play important roles in the society or social system. That is why no known government can do without the mass media. In addition to providing information about the political process, the mass media can confer status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues.

This analysis by Ekeanyanwu (2015) highlights the obvious reasons why politicians run after the media as part of the political process. It also rests the fact that indeed there is a connection and that this connection makes the media an integral part of the political process.

Having established the relationship between the media and politics, which we will further interrogate in the next section of this paper, our next line of argument is to establish how the media set terrorism and Boko Haram as two of the major media

agendas during the 2015 General Election in Nigeria. Ekeanyanwu (2015, p. 185) gives an insight into this thus:

The issue of Boko Haram, terrorism, and the general level of insecurity, which unsettled many Nigerians and made them disillusioned about the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) Presidency, was the fourth major issue that metamorphosed into a media agenda during the Presidential Election campaign. Meanwhile, a conspiracy theory seems to suggest that powerful political elements sponsored Boko Haram against the Nigerian state under GEJ to make him look weak, incompetent etc of leading Nigeria in a state of war. The idea was to moot for a former general with solid military background and most importantly, a northern Muslim, to take over and restore peace and security in the troubled North.

Whether this was the case or not is immaterial in our argument because many illiterate electorates (which constitutes more than 50 percent) especially in the Northern part of the country bought the idea that Nigeria is no longer safe under President Jonathan. The pictures and situation reports from the media supported this viewpoint and created an atmosphere of fear making some section of the electorate to regard Jonathan as “bad luck” that must be sent back to Otuoke, Bayelsa state, where he came from. This again was aptly captured by Ekeanyanwu (2015, p. 185-6) thus:

This chapter does not intend to pontificate on the veracity of this theory

or school of thought. What is important here is that a section of the media promoted the argument that GEJ was clueless in tackling insurgency and subsequently made Nigerians believe that four more years for him will help worsen the state of insecurity in the country. This was a well-told story that Nigerians believed because they have never seen the magnitude of violence and terrorism that Boko Haram unleashed in some sections of the country. Therefore, any agenda that help to restore the country to a state of relative peace pre-Boko Haram insurgency will be most welcomed and generally supported. Jonathan's late minute attempt to defeat and disgrace Boko Haram through the postponement of the Presidential Election by six weeks rather came too late. Nigerians generally asked, why do in six weeks what you should have done in six years? This effort, rather than help, hurt the Jonathan presidency during the build up to the elections.

Our argument here is that terrorism, insurgency, and the general level of insecurity as perpetrated by Boko Haram became a defining issue in the 2015 Nigerian General Elections. That the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lost the Presidency and most of the states of the Federation (especially in the North) to the then opposition party (and now ruling party), All Progressive Congress (APC) is clear evidence that Boko Haram was a major concern of

the electorates during the elections. This cannot be divorced from the fact that most Nigerians, apart from those who witnessed the unfortunate Civil War of 1967-70, have never seen the level of carnage on the human population as this one perpetrated by Boko Haram. To therefore ignore the fears of continued violence by Boko Haram if PDP and Jonathan were returned to political power was too much to ask of the beleaguered and helpless Nigerian electorates. We therefore conclude here that if three factors are prioritized as having tilted the balance of the context in the 2015 General Elections, Boko Haram/terrorism will jointly account for a factor. Corruption and the failing economy may take the remaining slots.

Role of the Nigerian Media in the Face of Boko Haram Terror Activities: Issues and Concerns

The media coverage of terrorist activities is an irony we are struggling to understand. Why the forces of bad get media attention more than the forces of good is also a logic that dislodges our reasoning. The Nigerian media, like the international media, have given undue and undeserving attention to terrorist activities in Nigeria and all over the world respectively. In a related study by this lead author, to find out how the Nigerian media reported the 2004 United States Presidential Election, Ekeanyanwu (2006) found out that the Nigerian media gave more attention to Osama Bin Ladin, leader of the infamous terrorist group called al-Qaeda than they did to George W. Bush, leader of the United States of America and the free world, during the period of investigation. This again pushes the bad news is good news theory too far.

According to Ekwueme and Obayi (2012), the media thrive in bad news coverage because such significantly increases readership, viewership, and listenership. This also leads to more advertising and more revenue from advertisements. This explains why the media respond to terrorist attacks with undisguised zeal and enthusiasm. Ekwueme and Obayi (2012), summarising the

views of Mueller (2007, p. 33) also observe, “Apart from the well-known media quest for ad patronage is the issue of news definition: the media's ravenous appetite for unusual, alarming, anecdotal, highly melodramatic, and human-interest stories. “There is this popular (even if cynical) media aphorism that 'if it bleeds it leads' and its less obvious corollary, if it doesn't bleed, it certainly shouldn't lead and indeed, may not fit for print at all” (Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012).

The lust for human interest stories and drama according to Nacos (2000, p. 174 cited in Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012), can lead to over coverage of terrorist activities. An example is CNN, BBC, Skynews, and Aljazeera, four leading international media organisations that broadcast more terrorism related stories than stories on poverty, crime, unemployment, and discrimination combined.

On their part, the terrorists covet media publicity with something near to obsession. Gerges (2005, 194-7 cited in Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012) had noted that the “use of media publicity was so important to al-Qaeda former leader, Late Osama bin Laden, that his close associates within the group variously speak of him as being 'obsessed' with international media; 'a publicity hound' and as having 'caught the disease of screens, flashes, fans, and applause'. He adds that Al-Zawahiri (bin Laden's second in command) had once remarked, “more than half of this battle is taking place in the battle of the media.”

Scholars and experts on terrorist warfare have come up with positions and views on why the merchants of terror avariciously crave the media. Alexander, Carlton, and Wilkinson (1979) had identified three reasons: attention, recognition, and legitimacy for their evil objectives. Nacos extended the terrorists' media objectives to four. According to him:

The first is to gain attention and awareness of the audience, and thus to condition the target population (and

government) for intimidation: create fear. The second goal is recognition of the organization's motives. They want people to think about why they are carrying out the attacks. The third objective is to gain the respect and sympathy of those in whose name they claim to attack. The last objective is to gain a quasi-legitimate status and a media treatment similar to that of legitimate political actors (Nacos, 2007, p. 20 cited in Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012).

Before we argue this thesis through and discuss how the Nigerian media have reported Boko Haram terror attacks as well as recommend how they should now manage the situation, we need to briefly update our readers on the character/feature of the Nigerian media, because it is our believe that these features influence the role, way or manner the media have reported the Boko Haram terror attacks. Our conclusion and recommendations will also be influenced by these features.

The unique features of the Nigerian media as summarized by Ekeanyanwu (2015) include: First, the Print media in Nigeria are now 100% owned by individuals except for the few state government-owned regional or local newspapers. Unfortunately, these individuals are either politicians seeking personal glories or businesspersons who enjoy government and politicians patronage. Second, the Broadcast media in Nigeria are still under the control of the Federal Government. So, there is still heavy government influence on editorial matter. Third, there is still heavy government control of the media industry in Nigeria through subtle legislations and selective government patronage. Fourth, the Nigerian media operate along parochial individual or ethnic interests. We are sure you may have heard about the “Yoruba Press”, which is

symptomatic of ethnocentrism in the Nigerian media industry. Fifth, there is a strong ownership influence on editorial matter, leading to ethnocentric journalism and other forms of media manipulation to meet publishers' interest that most of the time runs against the collective National Interests. Sixth, the Nigerian media industry is among the poorest in the world. This throws up other ethical issues as the game is termed “the survival of the corrupt” You may have heard about brown envelop journalism and news commercialisation in the Nigerian media industry. They are true. People practically pay for news. So, if you cannot afford it, it is not news worthy but if you can, it receives first class treatment. Seventh, the industry hardly attracts the best from journalism training institutions because of poor career prospects and remuneration. So, we have an industry that is largely run by “outsiders”, people who have little or no media background masquerading as media professionals. This negatively affects the level of professionalism in the industry (See Ekeanyanwu, 2015, pp. 173-5).

Back to the media-terrorism interface, media role, and our concerns of the type of coverage perpetrated by the Nigerian media in their coverage of the Boko Haram terror attacks, especially within the period of the 2015 General Election in Nigeria. As we have noted earlier, the Nigerian media have given undue attention to Boko Haram as a terrorist organisation. Against the need to keep the public duly informed, Boko Haram, like most terror organisations, use fear and threats to achieve its objectives. The group has achieved this using the media. Recall late Prime Minister of Britain, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher's reference to the media as the “oxygen” of terrorism. Nacos (1994 cited in Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012) believes that getting the attention of the mass media, the public and decision makers are the reasons behind modern terrorism's increasingly shocking violence.

Languer (1976 cited in Ekwueme and Obayi, 2012) also states that “the media are the terrorists' friend because the

terrorists' act by itself is nothing; publicity is all". The argument here is that the media also profit from terrorism as people out of fear and the need to know what is happening in such moments of tension and crises increase their patronage of media products and reliance on them for updates. This makes the people not just victims of the terror groups but also victims of the media coverage.

This also informs our argument that the best description for media coverage of terrorism in most parts of the world is nothing but Media Terrorism. Media Terrorism is a loose concept that describes how the media take undue advantage of the people in moments of anxiety to create a sense of fear in the populace so that they will rely on media products for security and by so doing create a false sense of security in the media. In other sense, it describes how media coverage/reportage can deepen the anxiety in the audience and create general atmosphere of insecurity and thus 'force' people to rely, accept, and patronise the media for security reasons. This again prompts our position that it is not Boko Haram that has dealt more blows to Nigeria; the media have. A good percentage of deaths so far in the war against terrorism globally have come from sensational media coverage than direct terrorist acts. This sounds very ironical but true.

The Nigerian media (our case study in this paper) have shown no restraint, professionalism, ethics, and public morality in the quest to bring the news of terror to its already traumatised audiences. This informs our consideration that the Nigerian media coverage of Boko Haram activities smacks of sensationalism, unprofessionalism, unethical, and immoral. The level of attention and prominence given to their objectives, their views, killings, and wanton destruction of the already inadequate public infrastructure are unwarranted and unprecedented. We therefore understand the idea of oddity being news worthy but not evil!

Based on this understanding, we accept Hoffman's (2006) argument that without media coverage, terrorist attacks impact would be significantly minimized, remaining narrowly confined

to the immediate victims of the attack, rather than reaching the wider target audience. Scholars like Nacos support this view, “equating lack of massive media coverage to the falling of the proverbial tree in the forest. If no one learnt of an incident, it would be as if it had not occurred. In essence, it would have no significance and with time, lose relevance”.

This argument, obviously challenges the public right to know. How do we then balance the situation? The solution, we argue, is to exploit the benefits of Expert Journalism and manage the risks associated with it. So far, in the Nigerian-Boko Haram case, the media have largely done their reporting the traditional way – attempting to play the “objectivity” card that does not really exist. Experts now prefer the more inclusive and realistic term “transparency” than the vague and unrealistic term called objectivity. Expert Reporting involves putting some expert reporters on a story for a long period until such issue disappears. Based on the reporters' expert knowledge, investigative abilities, and findings, they can draw their own conclusions for the public and give their own “expert view” of the situation instead of the traditional “all sides view” of the issue that has caused more harm than good.

The second media role related to Expert Reporting is Advocacy. This lead author has often frowned at Advocacy Journalism because he considered it very subjective, but in the Boko Haram case, it will do more good than harm. In any case, objectivity is no longer a core/preferred news value or element of journalism. Transparency is now preferred. Boko Haram has no right to kill or destroy, so, why should it have a right to be heard or why should anyone give the group the opportunity to justify the killings and wanton destruction of property and national infrastructure?

As part of the issues that came up in the media role in the face of Boko Haram terror attacks in Nigeria is the issue of Ethnocentric Journalism. We have earlier mentioned that the

Nigerian media are run along ethnocentric lines. This impacts on the quality, level of professionalism, and manipulation of media reports in favour of particular ethnic groups. Till date, some media channels in the Northern part of Nigeria have refused to call Boko Haram by its correct designation – terror group. What you hear, see, or read are militant group, Islamic fundamentalist, Islamic sect etc. This we also found in Aljazeera's coverage of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria. The station refrains from tagging Boko Haram a terrorist group. The obvious conclusion (we may be wrong) is that the Arab/Islamic origin of Aljazeera and the similar religious undertone of Boko Haram aims and the station, may be playing up in such flagrant refusal to regard Boko Haram as a terrorist organization.

In essence, ethnicity, religion, and other parochial consideration in news coverage and reporting are what constitute Ethnocentric Journalism. The media playing up ethnocentric sentiments in their coverage of Boko Haram terror attacks should be condemned in its entire ramification. This style is also unacceptable because it makes the so-called media professionals active participants in the conflict.

We also found out that the media reports have been more of ordinary straight news reports using the so-called eyewitness accounts and rushed interviews after the act. In essence, the Nigerian media have been more of mere reportorial agents in their handling of the Boko Haram activities. These reports are not based on detailed investigation and therefore lack perspectives. Some media organisations were bombed for carrying negative reports on Boko Haram and others warned to desist from such or face similar fate. This obviously worked in Boko Haram's favour as the needed perspectives, in-depth analysis, investigation features, and revealing articles on/about the group were glaringly lacking in the Nigerian media. Most Nigerians got a better view of the situation from international outlets like CNN, BBC that brought their

experience/exposure covering international terrorism to bear on the Nigerian case. If Nigerians have relied on the Nigerian media alone for updates on Boko Haram and the war on terror, most will have be confused right now on what next to do or what is actually happening. This again justifies our earlier call for a media role that is based on Expert and Advocacy Journalism.

Beyond these major roles and suggestions that we have proposed, it is also advised that the Nigerian media consider the six principles developed by the Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Martin E. P. Segliman committee that was set up after the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. The Committee's work is titled “*Six Rules for Government and Press on Terrorism: Undercutting Fear Itself*” We strongly recommend that the Nigerian media should consider a slight modification in adopting these recommendations in their coverage of Boko Haram terror activities in the manner presented by Ekwueme and Obayi (2012, p. 6) thus:

1. **Reduce Helplessness:** Dangers like the one posed by Boko Haram become less fearful when they are presented in controllable manner. Measures like advising and encouraging the public to report any suspicious movements or unknown, new faces to the security operatives and such other actions will have positive impact.
2. **Blunt Availability:** According to Tversky & Tversky (1973) cited in the report, because evocative images are more available in memory, we tend to over-estimate how likely they are to occur. By showing, printing or airing vivid pictures of the victims of Boko Haram attacks, we are unwittingly playing into the hands of Boko Haram as these pictures help in spreading their message of fear. Though news has to be reported, they should be couched in strong reassuring words and phrase that give the audience confidence.
3. **Reframing:** Framing has a lot to do in how people perceive risk and danger. Frame a risk in terms of loss

and people are less likely to take it but reframe it in terms of gain and they are more inclined to take it. Instead of overly stating the number that died in a Boko Haram attack, we may pay more attention to the number that survived it. This will give people confidence that after all, the sect's attack is not an immutable death sentence.

4. **Tell the Story of Survival:** It does not help if our local media keep on harping only on government's lack of preparedness, ineffectual policies, the success of the Boko Haram raids, the sect's invincibility among others that tend to make the people helpless in face of a ruthless enemy. Rather, they should pay more attention to similar situations where the government came out triumphant through diligent and purposeful use of resources.
5. **Preach Courage;** It is Contagious: Just as fear is contagious, so too is courage. Those who preach courage and heroism inspire it in others (Bandura, 1977). Both the government and media should inspire courage and not fear and helplessness when speaking on Boko Haram activities. Hence, those making such announcements (reporters and government officials) should convey a sense of courage and confidence as it will impact positively on the audience.
6. **Use Safety Signals:** The public should be informed of when threats are no longer expected as much as they should be told when there is a palpable threat. Leaving the public to live in perpetual fear of imminent Boko Haram attacks weakens their resolve to face the threat. So when the media in collaboration with security operatives should give the people the all-clear signal to relax their anxiety and enable them go about their business when there are no immediate threats.

This seminal analysis by Ekwueme and Obayi (2012) aptly captures our thoughts on how the global, especially Nigerian media should handle the coverage of terrorism in Nigeria. Their solution may not be foolproof but this recommendation will go a

long way in reducing the fear impact on the populace as well as make the people less of victims of media coverage of the group's attacks and activities.

Concluding Remarks

No doubt, Boko Haram has terrorised the Nigerian state and the Nigerian media have helped it more than they have helped inform the Nigerian public. The Nigerian media have helped the terror group also achieve its objective of instilling fear in the public mind, leading to what we call Media Terrorism. The traditional method of media coverage is no longer suitable in the Nigerian situation, hence, the call for Expert Reporting and Advocacy Journalism. For a long-term measure, People ownership of the media organisations is advocated to replace the current private individuals and government ownership, which are sustaining Ethnocentric Journalism. People Ownership is a form of community ownership, which removes control and editorial influence from a small group of individuals seeking parochial ends.

This lead author was among those who argued that media ownership should move from government to private individuals when Government turned the media as its tool of propaganda. Private ownership has, however, failed us in Nigeria as we merely moved from government manipulation of the media to politicians/private individuals' manipulation. People or Community ownership seems to be the only way out now. In our understanding of people ownership, a community can own these mega media firms and by law, the government is constitutionally expected to give such organisations a special fund but have zero control on operations, editorial issues, appointment, promotions, discipline, and other allied matters. The community-appointed Board or Trustees would oversee all of these issues. This we think is the only way out of the Nigerian current dilemma. The current private media organisations have turned into a worst form of media terrorists and dictators, holding the people and the media to ransom.

The media have a part to play in stopping terrorism. We strongly believe that if we stop reporting terrorists, the world will not stop; terrorism may (Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

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