COVERAGE OF BOKO HARAM ACTIVITIES BYSELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS:A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract
The second decade of this millennium is arguably the most precarious in Nigeria's over 5 decades of existence, surpassing even the times of her Civil War (1967-70). At least this much is acknowledged by former Head-of-State and two-term President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. This is arguably, blamed on the security challenges facing the nation in the form of the violent activities of the radical Islamist sect Boko Haram, a group bent on the implementation of strict Shari'ah law (the Islamic system of administration) across Nigeria. This has threatened the 'corporate' existence of the country as a single political and geographical entity. At the centre of all this is the Nigerian press; a sector that is the fulcrum of this study. This study seeks to compare the manner in which the Northern and Southern Press represented by Daily Trust and Daily Sun respectively, cover the activities of the sect; Highlight the differences (if any) and finally proffer solutions. The study discovers that the two papers were outspoken on the Boko Haram issue. This was ascertained through the use of quantitative and qualitative content analysis and the Agenda Setting theory.

Keyword: Framing, Northern Press, Southern Press, media-terrorism symbiosis, Agenda Setting theory

Introduction

The very notion of the press has different meanings to different people and these meanings have been evolving over the past decade. It may be interpreted in general way, including all the media of mass communication; or it may be defined more specifically as the printed media (Okpoko, 2001). The study has adopted basically the latter here. Hence, this study is based largely on newspapers or the print media. It is astonishing to understand how people are easily swayed by what they read in the papers. Many people are ready to take the views of the media hook, line, and sinker. The print media now define the terms in which we may think about the world (Bennett, 1982:44). The implication of this, according to Hall (1996:32), is that "the press could be used [not just] to propagate ideas, beliefs and convictions but also to oppose the same."

So strong is this media indoctrination on people that Okunna and Omenugha, (2006:62) say 'it is often common to hear people say;' it is in the news'-the statement conferring legitimacy to an issue." Pietikainem (2005:17) observed rightly that "news is one of the most influential public spaces of contemporary society perceived as offering trustworthy and accurate stories about the world, events and its people." Thus, because the press often operates for this taken-for-granted manner, it has huge impact when reporting conflicts or controversial issues such that whatever position the press choose to take, such view is likely to be the most widely held opinion of the

audience on such conflict (Okunna and Omenugha, 2006). Reviewing the role of the media in reporting diversity and conflict issues in Nigeria, Pate (2007:1) in Jibril (2010:15) argued that:

> Reading through the literature on diversity and conflict in Nigeria, there seems to exist an agreement that the politicization [poor] mediation of diversity and conflicts issues in pluralistic Nigeria have been partly accountable for the negative turn of events (Lyman, 1988; Egwu, 2001; Albert, 2002; and Pate, 2002). Arguably, one institution that has received occasional knocks for its role in the exacerbation of ethnic and religious violence in the country" (Egwu, 2001)

This perhaps explains the importance of the press in the coverage of conflicts, especially that *of Boko Haram* activities in Nigeria which has serious national and international implications. Gujbawu and Kur, (2010:1-) say "the way and manner this conflict is reported by the press may accentuate or attenuate their severity and frequency." The media, both print and broadcast, can play an important role in defusing tensions, reducing and containing conflicts. It can also do so by being deeply aware of the fragility of a country's social fabric, of the effort being expended at unifying a country's polarized, religious and ethinicised politics, and more importantly, by objectively reporting conflict incidences as they unfold (Peace Bulletin, January 2,005). This is because, whatever the audience makes of media information or messages, is determined by the way such message is mediated (Anyanwu, 2004; Okoye, 2006)

Also, the level of prominence given to any conflict goes a long way in determining the intensity and duration of such conflict. such conflict. This means that a conflict given little prominence, despite being a huge security challenge of national implication like the Boko Haram conflict, will only fuel more crises, leaving the perpetrators to continue with impunity. On the other hand, an exaggerated prominence sends strife and hostility of a scale unmerited of the crisis; only further worsening the already tensed relationship in a deeply divided nation like ours.

It has been established, according to various researches (Umechukwu, 2001; Galadima and Enighe, 2001; Okunna and Omenugha, 2006; Egbon, 2006; Jibril, 2010), that the ownership of a media house, to a large extent, influences the framing of its media content. This view gives credence to the press mantra 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune'. This means there is the infusion of the founder(s) ideology into the operations of the media, which often reflect in the content of the media. Umechukwu (2001:86) advanced that:

> Practically, all news reporting... are influenced by one factor or the other. Some of them are political or ideological. Among the political factors influencing news reporting is ownership, which directly influences the news content of a given news medium. Ownership is of two types -government or private. Thus, when the ownership of a medium is in government or private hands, the medium tends to be megaphone of those in control, instead of performing the surveillance functions on the environment which are the basic task of the media. These owners manipulate their media to work as indispensable tools for retaining power or obtaining it.

However, not everyone agrees with these assertions, Althusser, a student of the Marxist school, argues that the press is a 'site of struggle' for ideological meaning, opening up the possibilities of oppositional readings. Thus, the press is a robust ground for the framing of various conflicting

ideas, a market place of ideas which are framed up in diverse ways for a heterogeneous audience (Althusser, 1991). But Abubakar (2006:226) maintained that:

> Certain issues must be considered [in press performance]. First the ownership structure, which in Nigeria is pluralistic... the ownership structure of the Nigerian media exposes certain glaring features which explains why the media view issues differently and take certain positions. Secondly, the distribution of the media in Nigeria; this distribution has a preponderance that favours certain sections of the country, especially the southwest over other regions..."

This tendency has created an avenue for rivalry to which Danladi (1994) in Abubakar (2006) expatiates that: "emerging newspaper from other parts of the country come to adopt a defensive posture in response to what is now known as the Lagos-Ibadan press."

Furthermore, Aljazeera's Listening Post (28 Jan 2012, 9:37am), in a study on the Nigerian press coverage *of Boko Haram* conflict, proclaimed a verdict on the performance of the Nigerian media thus "Nigeria's news media do not have the best reputation...many [press] outlets seems to be more loyal to the government or their corporate pay masters than they are to sound journalistic principles."

Problem Statement

Nigeria is a country sharply divided along a majority Muslim North and a majority Christian South. Several violent pogroms have, over the years, been attempted on the two halves. Violence and conflicts have been a recurring decimal in the history of Nigeria to such an extent that it is almost impossible to look back in history and see a time when there was absence of one form of violent agitation or the other. These violent agitations have taken on several dimensions from a secessionist movement as seen in the Movement for the Actual ization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (M ASSOB) in the East to an economic-political militant crisis in the Niger Delta such as Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) then to the recent and on-going *Boko Haram* violent agitation in the North. The Nigerian press have always lived, reported and managed these conflicts and that *of Boko Haram* is no exception.

Thus, this study attempts to see how the different axis of the press has influenced the coverage of *Boko Haram* activities.

Research Questions

The research intends to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of prominence accorded to the coverage of the *Boko Haram* crisis in the *Daily Trust* and *Daily Sun* newspapers?
2. What differences, if any, exist in the manner (as par framing) the *Daily Trust* and *Daily Sun* newspapers cover the conflict?
3. What are the *Daily Trust* and *Daily Sun* newspapers' positions on the *Boko Haram* Crisis in Nigeria?

How the Press Gets Its Ideology

At the initial stage, the colonial government took advantage of the indirect rule to set up a regional pattern of government which resulted in the North, West and East Regions. Thus, the political parties and their propaganda organs invariably evolved from these regional enclaves

(Egbon, 2006). Thus, Ahmed (2006:147) said "the identity of the newspapers covers [not just] its basic layout and design, title, editorial orientation [but also] the very ideological basis for the setting up of the paper as well as its readership". He added "for newspaper just as for nation state, identity is constructed, nurtured and developed into reality."

Many communication experts have decried that the Nigerian press is as polarized as the conflicts they cover. The reason, according to Egbon (2006:40), is the "media cannot function effectively if there is ideological, tribal, religious and other ethnic divisions among its corporate members, nor in a situation where journalists see themselves as Northern or Southern-paper journalists." Tejumaiye (2005: 149-50) is on track when he says "On unifying Nigeria, it is difficult asserting that the mass media have performed creditably. This is because as of today... there still exists the southern media axis and the northern media axis dichotomy. These polarizations of the means of mass communication and the practitioners have, in no small measure, affected the stand of each of the two axis whenever national issues are discussed. The result is that they (the media axis) have toed ethnic, religious and sectional lines in their news reports." (Cited in Okunna and Omenugha, 2006:63-4).

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the theory of Agenda Setting. Agenda-Setting Theory states that the news media have a large influence on audiences, in terms of what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them (Mccombs, 2004). This means that an activity is only as much important in the public sphere as the amount of coverage the press choose to give it. Thus, the *Boko Haram* crisis facing Nigeria today, though challenging in every sense, is arguably compounded by the huge focus both the Nigerian and international press place on the terrorist activities *of Boko Haram* whenever and wherever they occur. Grabber (1989:5) explains "besides calling attention to matters of potential public concern, the media also provide cues to the public about the degree of importance of an issue." It is against this backdrop that Azeez (2009:2) inquires: "is the media not magnifying the threat and fear in the way they report terrorism instead of allaying the fear; are the media reports of terrorism encouraging more such acts, as the terrorists may be more emboldened by the massive publicity they gain for their terror and intensify the acts of terrorism."

Methodology

The study employed the quantitative and qualitative data collection process, which involves the use of content analytical research method. Two newspapers, *Daily Trust* and the *Daily Sun,* were chosen. The choice was because the newspapers are published in places widely separated by religious, cultural and geographical differences. *Daily Sun,* owned by Kalu Orji, former governor of Abia state, is published in the South-West (Lagos). On the other hand, *Daily Trust* is published in Abuja and chaired by Kabiru Yusuf, a senior journalist.

This study covers 3 months report of the conflict from May to July, 2012. A sample of nine editions of each paper was selected. A sample size of three editions a month was chosen randomly. On the whole, eighteen editions of the newspapers, that is, nine for *Daily Sun* and nine for *Daily Trust,* were studied. Data collected were carefully analysed. The data analysis focused on the following:

i. How many news, editorials, articles, opinion letters, columns and others were carried by these newspapers on the *Boko Haram* issue over the period. This is the prominence each newspaper gave to the *Boko Haram* conflict.
ii. The stand of the paper (favourable, neutral or unfavourable)

The concept used was to divide the code sheet into three categories namely; *Boko Haram* attack, dialogue, and Joint Task Force (JTF). These three variables represent the dimensions of the *Boko Haram* conflict where there is the overwhelming call for dialogue on one hand and indiscriminate *Boko Haram* attacks on the other complicated with the government response offeree using the instrument of JTF, which according to Mohammed (2012), "has a scorch earth agenda" aimed at crushing the radical sect. The assumption is that the selected papers are likely to frame their reports in manners which will favour one of the subject variables and in such doing will not favour the other or a paper will favour dialogue and be neutral on *Boko Haram* attack.

This method was adapted with slight modifications from John I. Okpoko (now Or Okpoko) in a study titled "Agenda Setting Theory and Foreign Policy: A Study of Nigerian's Policy on Liberation Movement in Angola (2001).

Concept of Conflict

One recurring decimal evident and constantly present in man's long history is his agitations of one form or the other. These agitations most times are in form of conflict which sometimes devolves into violence. Hence, conflict has become an integral part of human existence and societal development. But when its attendant violence becomes extended over a long period, such society or country is at risk of being dragged to a retrogressive state, which if not well managed, will plunge such society into anarchical chaos.

Friedman, (2005:362) opines that "the beginning of the third millennium is accompanied by an increase in localized conflicts and violence and an intensification of terror attacks. These are often asymmetrical conflicts in which one state or group has markedly more power than its rival." Often, the response to asymmetric violence is increased support within the stronger party, for retaliatory aggression against the weaker, vulnerable and often dependent out-group (Bar-On 1998: Bar-On and Kassem 2004). However, it can be understood that such support stem from the nature of media coverage the conflict receives.

For instance, in a situation where the press paints such an out-group like Taliban or AI Qaeda or even *Boko Haram* as Islamist, extremist group like is done by the Western media in defence of the American so-called war against terrorism, then public opinion will tend to sway against these groups. But if they are labelled as legitimate freedom fighters standing up to a gruesome or oppressive regime like the ongoing Western media's coverage of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in Syria and the militants in Libya during the Arab Spring, then they will receive sympathy from much of the population irrespective of the reality on ground.

Obviously, no society or peoples are immuned from conflict. In fact, literatures on conflict have shown that the phenomenon is not limited to one segment of people or section of the world. Visser, (1999) in Toure (1999) asserts "Conflict transcends geographical and cultural boundary cutting across race and ideologies." Conflict is a necessity but too much of it can paralyze the status quo of the affected community.

In summary, Vesna (1994) in Adedeji (2004:10) concluded with this encapsulating overview of conflict "throughout the world, conflict are the consequences of the fear of the future lived through the past". It is the collective fear of the future based on a history of social uncertainty, due to the failure of the state to arbitrate justly between or provide credible guarantees of protection for groups, resulting in emerging anarchy and social fractions (Adedeji, 2004).

Causes of Conflict

There have been various causes of conflict that have been put up by experts<m violence which might result into conflicts. This study will focus basically on two: ideology which includes: Ethnicism, tribalism, religion etc. and scarcity of resources. However, it should be noted that the above causes are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

Ideology

One of the facts to note is individuals or group of individuals have different values, needs and interests (Toure, 1999:23). Ethnicism and tribalism are often put forward as the main factor responsible for intra-state conflict like that *of Boko Haram.* But Alain (1995:21) argues that:

> The problem with this type of approach or analysis is the lack of clarity and consensus as to the exact makeup of the ethnic or tribal phenomenon. This is because ethnicism or tribalism is not simply a question of object data such as language, culture and religion. Ethnic identity is more a question of perception than an absolute phenomenon and the identity cannot be perceived by the group or family themselves or can be attributed by outsiders nor can language be used as a guide to ethnic or tribal identity

Adedeji (1999:7) had a similar thought when he opined that "it is quite simplistic to regard conflict, civil strife and to resort to stereotypic ari9 facile analysis or dumping everything at the door of ethnicism and tribalism."

Also, Poulton and Youssouf (1998:3) asserted "language [alone] like dress and skin colour is a poor guide to ethnic origin". Despite this, one major factor that keeps recurring in most conflicts in Nigeria is ethnicism, tribalism and religion (Ideology). But why is this so? Adedeji (1999:9) had an explanation, he says "while the Ideological factor cannot be ignored entirely it is more often than not exploited and manipulated by those bent on promoting conflicts." Hizkias (1993:23) maintained that "a conflict started by the elites ends up becoming a self fulfilling prophesy engulfing the entire ethnic group".

Accordingly, we cannot but agree with the Carnegie Commission on Prevention of Deadly Conflict (1997:29) that:

> The word 'ethnic', 'religious', 'tribal' or 'factional' -important as they may be in intergroup conflict-do not, in most cases, adequately explain why people use massive, violence to achieve their goals. These descriptions do not in themselves, reveal why people will kill each other over their differences. To label a conflict simply as an ethnic war can lead to misguided policy choices by fostering a wrong impression that ethnic, cultural or religious differences, inevitably

> result in violent conflict and that differences therefore must be suppressed. Time and again in this century attempts at suppression have too often lead to bloodshed, and in case after case, the accommodation of diversity within appropriate constitutional forms has helped to prevent bloodshed.

Scarcity of Resources

One factor, which triggers conflict world over, is the fact that human wants are unlimited whereas the resources to manage these .unlimited wants are meagre. Toure (1999:23) championed this view asserting that "most resources are not available in unlimited quantities and so access to them must be controlled and fought for." Therefore, competition for resources lies at the heart of conflict. This accounts for intensity of the struggle for political power in many African countries including Nigeria, It is generally accepted that Africa's and particularly Nigeria's persistent economic crisis, severe as it has been, is but a consequence of its political crisis. Civil wars and civil strife are but violent reactions to the pervasive lack of democracy, the denial of human rights, lack of empowerment and accountability and generally bad governance (Adedeji, 1999).

Thus, perceived threat including competition for scarce resources, clearly plays a major role in the development of negative dispositions toward an out-group (Gordon and Arian, 2001). These are common characteristics of a divided society. In a divided, conflict and conflict ridden country, justice which encompasses equity and fair play as the ethical basis of national politics, is conspicuous for its absence such an absence is reason enough for political instability and violence, conflicts and wars inevitably bad governance. Herein lies the vicious cycle (Adedeji, 1999).

Conflict Resolution/Management

Most of the approaches put forward by conflict experts have proved abortive or, at least have succeeded in only dampening down the conflicts. Peacemaking, mediation, conciliation and arbitration on which attention has so far been concentrated have turned out to be very poor substitutes to empirical study on conflict. Adedeji (1999:7) opines that "we need to do away with the pretence that cessation of hostilities amount to peace. Cessation of hostilities, negotiated cease fires, peace agreements and national elections are no more than useful markers in the conflict resolution continuum". As a result, Adeyanju (2004:71) noted that

> the trend of conflict management in Nigeria has been more of coercion and repression than dialogue. For instance ethnic clashes in various parts of the country may be attributed to the bottle up anger of the people. Whenever the anger is expressed, the people are suppressed without serious attempt to getting to the root of the matter. In most cases, commissions of inquiry are set up but they end up achieving little or nothing because of their elitist nature

Cessation of hostiles does not automatically guarantee peace, stability and good governance. In other words, the element of good governance must be crafted and introduced into the social and political system otherwise, chaos and anarchy will persist and injustice and violation of freedom and rights will remain. (Kouca and Ecawell, 1999: Zartmaru 1995; Adedeji, 1999; Green 1999; Quentin, 1997).

Terrorism and the Media

Since the tragic 9/11 Al Qaeda terrorist attack on the world trade centre in the United States, and the subsequent declaration of a global war against terrorism by the US, the world including Nigeria, has arguably seen the rise of more localized radical groups among which is *Boko Haram.* At the centre of all these terrorist activities is the media, partly because, on one hand, terrorist groups rely on cheap publicity to incite fear on the larger population or even across nations and by so doing increase their power and influence and the media provides them with such publicity; N.A. (2008:3) says:

> In most cases, terrorist attacks are very localized, and affect only a few people. The goal, however, is to spread the message to more people than just those who were directly hit in the attack. The media play an important role in achieving this by spreading the news of the attacks or even by directly transferring the message of terrorist organizations.

Azeez (2009:3) weighed in saying "the main objective of a terrorist act is to maximize publicity in order to create a psychological effect on the public." Whereas, on the other hand, the terrorist groups carry out barbaric carnage indiscriminately which makes for "good" stories in the media and increase viewership or ratings which in turn brings in much needed advertising revenue to the media house. Azeez (2009:2) suggests that "the theatrical and dramatic ways the media report terrorist acts encourage further violence." Some have even said media publicity is the "oxygen" of terrorism (Muller, etal. 2003, 65; Vieira 1991,73-85) in (N.A:2008:3). However, this symbiotic media-terrorism relationship should not be taken out of context, as the primary function of the media is to inform, including terrorist activities. Thus, there can never be consensus on the complex issue of how the media report should report on terrorism.

Press-Conflict Relationship

The media is a vital player in times of conflict such that Anyanwu (2004:113) advanced that "There is no conflict so great that it dominates the freedom of a nation and its people which cannot be settled by the media" Galadima and Knighe (2001:63) posit that "Nigeria is a developing country that needs a press that will pre-occupy itself with developmental issues rather than with conflict and crisis which are normal happening within any human set-up." This is because, according to Nwuneli, (1986:6) "too much crisis journalism can have a disturbing effect on the tranquillity and rationality of a society".

From the foregoing, it is obvious that some scholars expect the media to relegate the fiery issue of conflict to the back burner while championing other development and integrating factors inherent in the country. But there is a drawback with this position. Because if conflict, as said earlier, is an integrated facet of development in any society then, should it not be wise or even rational for the media to give a complete coverage of all aspects of such development? Sean MacBride, Chairman of UN's Commission on World Communication, says the role of the media in times of conflict is significant in informing the public of necessary facts however unpleasant or disturbing they may be (MacBride, 1980).

Thus, there is deep division among experts of the actual role of the press during conflicts and that *of Boko Haram* inclusive. Some claim the press should clip the wings of the Islamist insurgents by giving them a media 'blackout' which focusing on the tolerance and peaceful coexistence amongst Nigerians. On the other hand, others claim it is the moral responsibility of the press to

cover the activities of *Boko Haram* no matter how inhumane or dehumanizing they are. This, according to Anyanwu (2004:113), "will make it possible for the general population to know the conflict and their sponsors. It would not just help to give the background of the conflict but also make those involved to call themselves to order or be socially ostracize" After all, it is said that the worst truth is better than the best rumour.

In response, Galadima and Enighe (2001:63) acknowledged that "although MacBride's assertion maybe professional, they do not really apply in the Nigerian context. They strongly argue that Nigeria is a multi-cultural country with different sectional and group interests and the press laying emphasis on these differences, may create new divisions." This is what Osundare (1994) in Galadima and Enighe (2001:63) meant when he said: "The North-South gap is deepening into a gulf that 'handshake across the Niger' is stiffening into a fisticuffs". Galadima and Enighe (2001:64) make it clear, "It is not that the [Nigerian] press should not reflect the reality of our differences but in doing so, they should avoid distortion and caricaturization".

Challenges in Press Coverage of Conflict

Unfortunately, conflict by its very nature, holds a forceful attraction for the mass media. As Owens Ibie (2002:32) puts it "the media are naturally attracted to conflict not just that, conflict is also hard to talk about without engaging the emotions of the discussants". This is largely due to the humanitarian implications, especially when conflicts get violent like the security challenge facing the country in form *of Boko Haram.* Within a four year period, that is, (July 26th 2009-January 20th 2012) over 2,173 Nigerians' lives were lost due to the indiscriminate violent activities *of Boko Haram* (National Mirror, 2012). Presenting an objective and balance report of such activities become tortuous, almost impossible task. The principles of reporting are put to severe test when your nation goes to war (Adie as cited by Allan and Zelizer, 2004:3).

Often journalism is in a fix, caught between staying true to the principles of reporting and responding adequately to the urgent realities of conflict. As Allan and Zelizer (2012:3) aptly stated, "confronted with the often horrific realities of conflict, any belief that the journalist can remain distant, remote or unaffected by what is happening tends to go out through the window in a hurry". Dramatizing the character of the media in times of crisis, Pate (2002: VI) quotes Rotime Sankore to the effect that:

> Nothing defines the character of the media establishment more sharply than any crisis that pitches nation against nation or one section of the society against another. In times of conflict, the responsibility of the media is magnified ten folds by society demand for more news, information and analysis, and, therefore, its increased capacity to influence debate and shape public opinion. Every word written or spoken by the media is a potential machete, bullet or bomb in the minds and hands of victims and perpetrators. This raises serious questions on what should be the role of the media in time of war and conflict. The ethical, moral and professional obligation is to provide the public with accurate balanced reporting that does not distort or suppress information (This Day Newspaper, November 1, 2001 pg.5)

Consequently, it will not be out of place to describe the Nigerian press thus "In a situation whereby a sect or segment of people inflicts mayhem on another, a newspaper that is 'pro-the-

aggressor' gives the event a media blackout or if eventually reported, is under-reported, misreported and drenched in awful bias. On the other hand, the 'pro-victim' newspapers pounce on the event with sensational ism and by so doing, unduly exaggerates the magnitude of the conflicts, by that falling prey to the same 'journalistic sacrilege' committed by the initial newspaper.

The way the Nigerian press frame their reports when covering conflicts could either bind the nation together despite its numerous divisive 'ingredients' or plunge the nation into irreparable division. Tejumaiye (2005: 150) amplifies this view saying "the influence and power of the [press] in building, unifying, or destroying a nation state, particularly a complex multicultural and multi-linguistic society such as Nigeria is all possible with its framing." Okunna and Omenugha (2006:63) says the press can achieve this "by choosing one source of news and not the other, by giving salience to this issue and not that, by 'withholding' certain information, by constantly harping on an issue, the press in Nigeria might possibly be fanning hostilities and not peace: it could be leading the nation into possible disintegration".

Boko Haram as an Agent of Conflict

People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, is the English translation *of Jama'atu Ahlissunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad,* is the official name *of Boko Haram.* The term "Boko Haram" comes from the Hausa word *'Boko*' meaning "western education" and the Arabic word '*Haram'* figuratively meaning "sin" (literally, "forbidden"). Thus, *Boko Haram* loosely translates to mean "western education is forbidden". The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything Western, which it sees as corrupting Muslims (Wikipedia.com).

In 2009 *Boko Haram* turned to violence, especially after the group's founder and then leader Mohammed Yusuf was arrested at his father-in-law's house, in a room where domestic animals were kept in Maiduguri and later brutally killed during this time while still in police custody. But, this is not the official police version. The official version is that Yusuf died during a gun fight with security agents. John Ahmadu, then deputy inspector general of police, DIG in charge of operations, said "the sect leader died in a gun shoot- out with the police." But the fact that Yusuf was arrested alive is given credence by a video recording on YouTube, showing him being interrogated by some unseen persons. (TELL, August 17, 2009).

Deluge of information point to the direction that Yusuf was summarily executed to cover the tracks of his sponsors and strong backers who are said to be high profile individuals, some of whom are believed to be in the corridors of power. After Yusufs killing, a new leader, Abubakar Shekau, emerged whose identity was not known at the time until recently. *(TELL* magazine).

Seeking revenge for extra-judicial killing of Yusuf and other members, Herskovits (2012) opines that *"Boko Haram* targeted the police, the military and local politicians-all of them Muslims" Mohammed (2011) echoed this view saying "more Muslims have been killed since the inception *of Boko Haram* than Christians."

While *Boko Haram* attacks have been widespread, they have all been concentrated only in the North without a single attack recorded in the South. The table below shows the distribution of the severity and frequency of the sect's attacks across Northern Nigeria.

Dairy of Boko Haram Attacks

Date	Location	Casualties
July 26, 2009	Bauchi	39
July 27, 2009	Yobe, Bauchi, Kano, Borno	800
January,2010	Maiduguri	4
March 13,2010	Jos, North	300
October 1,20 10	Independence day bombing, Abuja	12
Dec 24 & 27, 2010	Jos (Plateau) and Maiduguri (Borno)	86
Dec 29, 20 10	Maiduguri, Borno State	8
Jan 28, 2011	Maiduguri, Bomo	6
Jan, 20 11	Jos	200
Mar 3, 2011	INEC secretariat in Suleja	14
April 16,2011	Maiduguri Lami Sula district	6
April 25, 2011	Maiduguri, Borno State	5
May, 28 2011	Dam Boa Divisional Police station	5
June 7, 2011	Church and two police posts, Maiduguri	14
June 16, 2011	Police HQ, Abuja	2
June 26, 2011	Beer Garden, Maiduguri	25
July 10, 2011	Church in Suleja, Niger State	1
Aug 26, 2011	UN Building, Abuja	24
Nov. 4, 2011	Damaturu, Yobe State	150
Nov. 27, 2011	Geidam, Yobe State	7
Dec. 22-23, 2011	Damaturu, Pokistum, Maiduguri	100
Dec. 25, 2011	Christmas Day bombing, Madallah	49
Dec. 30, 2011	Maiduguri	7
Jan. 5, 2012	A church in Gombe	6
Jan.6, 2012	A church in Mubi, Adamawa	17
Jan.20, 2012	Kano	200
Jan.23, 2012	Bauchi	11
Total=	**10 states out of 19 Northern states**	**2184**

Note: All these were attacks that *Boko Haram* reportedly claimed responsibility.
(National Mirror, January 23, 2012)
Table: Attacks of Boko Haram right from inception to the month of January, 2012

Press Coverage of Boko Haram

A renowned Nigerian expert, Jean Herskovits, who has written on Nigerian politics since 1970 wrote in an article titled 'Boko Haram is not to be blamed' that the governments and newspapers around the world attributed the horrific Christmas Day bombings of churches in Nigeria to "Boko Haram"-- a shadowy group that is routinely described as an extremist Islamist organization based in the northeast corner of Nigeria. Indeed, since the May inauguration of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta in the country's south, the media has blamed *Boko Haram* for virtually every outbreak of violence in Nigeria. (Herskovits, 2012).

Thus, Mohammed (2012) drew two conclusions: "first, it provides one more piece of evidence of media anti- Muslim bias. Secondly, it exposes the official claim that government has virtually won the war against domestic terrorism as an empty boast" (Mohammed, Daily Trust; Wednesday, April 11, 2012, Back page).

Data interpretation and analysis

In studying the press coverage of *Boko Haram,* two newspapers were content analysed, one Southern and one Northern paper, The *Daily Sun* and *Daily Trust,* respectively. It was found out that these two papers were outspoken on the *Boko Haram* conflict

Issue	Daily trust				Daily Sun			
	Favourable	**Neutral**	**Unfavour-able**	**Total**	**Favour-able**	**Neutral**	**Unfavour able**	**Total**
BH Activities	8	25	11	44	4	9	21	34
JTF Activities	7	9	24	40	8	12	5	25
Dialogue	21	3	2	26	14	5	3	22
Sub-total	36	37	37	110	26	26	29	81

The study of 18 editions of *Trust* resulted in a total of 110 news reports, opinions, and editorials. Three things could be deduced:

1. *Trust* had 44 reports on *Boko Haram,* of which eight tended to be favourable. 25 neutral and 11 unfavourable towards the Islamist sect
2. Figures from the table show 44 percent of the total coverage, which are 40 reports were on the activities of JTF. Twenty-four of these reports were unfavourable towards the JTF mainly due to the framing of the report which for example in an interview with Shettima read in part "the soldiers were sent here (Maiduguri) to create peace but went and worsen the situation by not actually doing what their leaders told them to do...they go into people's houses by night and during the day confiscate jewelleries, causing havoc, breaking shops and looting" (march, 2012). Also reports calling for the total withdrawal of the JTF from the streets of Maiduguri were abundant. However, the researcher considered seven stories to be neutral, as it just reported the events as they occur without any personal angle, whereas, nine stories can be categorise under favourable as they praised the actions of JTF.
3. Finally, 26 reports centred on the non-lethal resolution of the conflict. That is, 28.6 percent was on dialogue of which 21 reports and four editorials say dialogue and negotiation between the government and members *of Boko Haram,* is the best way to finding lasting peace. These reports praised the inauguration of the Galtimari panel as a step in the right direction. Two reports stance were unfavourable and three reports neutral on dialogue.

On the contrary, *Sun's* coverage of the *Boko Haram* conflict revealed that there were a total of 81 reports. 34 stories (that is 27.5 percent) were on *Boko Haram* activities of which 21 were unfavourable. *Sun* achieved this by framing news reports in a manner Okunna and Omenugha (2006:64) described as "human-interest frame: this frame places emphasis on the personal, emotional side of an event, issue or problem". 'This is exemplified by one of the series of reports of the victims of the August, 26 2011 United Nations suicide attack with this graphic headline "Blast ripped offmy colleague's head- survivor". The account went on to say "Paul Waziri, his head completely cut off: Joy Audu and one of her hands completely shattered, a metal object pierced through the stomach of Blessing Attah while llliya Gambo had one of his leg completely

blown off' says a cleaner with the Nigerian Cleaning Services at the UN House (28 August, 2011).

There were 22 stories concerning dialogue between *Boko Haram* and government, 9 stories favoured dialogue, five were neutral and eight refuted any form of dialogue. In an interview with Primate of the Anglican Church Nigeria, Peter Akinola which read in part"...the investigation panel [that is Galtimari Panel] set up by the government to handle the *Boko Haram* issue is useless and exercise in futility and what are they to investigate?".

Another, account says "granting the Boko Haram members amnesty will only not be hypocritical but also unrealistic" the account went on to insist that"…Nigerians should not see the activities of the Boko Haram sect in isolation insisting that their aim is to 'Islamise' Nigeria. The *Boko Haram* believes our financial education and political system is wrong so they should be Islamised." (August 16, 2011). Such reports shut the door on the possibility of *Boko Haram* and the Government sitting on a round table to talk.

On the issue of the Joint Task Force, (JTF), *Sun* had 25stories news reports and opinions which clearly supported the Federal Government actions. Using clauses such as "JTF was established by Federal Government to restore order..." and stories which "praised the swift deployment of troops to the restive states in Northeast" (Aug, 3, 2011) the stance of the paper of the use of force to solve the *Boko Haram* conflict is obvious. Eight reports were against the JTF activities and 19 were considered neutral.

Findings

From the foregoing it is evident that the two papers had reported the *Boko Haram* conflict differently and more so, the two papers are divided on the way forward. *Trust* wants the government to dialogue and negotiate with the radical sect whereas, *Sun* has rather opted for the use of stick and carrot' that is use of force and dialogue to resolve the present security challenge facing the country.

It can be observed that *Trust* in most of her descriptions avoided giving graphic accounts of the victims by just giving the details as they occur, thus giving a neutral stance of the *Boko Haram* sect. Also, *Trust* focused a great deal of her reports maintaining *Boko Haram* is not an Islamic group and does not represent Muslims. This made them to sometimes frame reports in questionable manner such as "... Eight Christians arrested attempting to bomb their church in Miya Barkatai Toro Local Government Area in Bauchi State..."(Daily Trust, March 12, 2012 p.3) Besides the disintegrative tendency of such reports, this report rises a number of questions: howdo we know their religion? Or is it simply because the attackers declared their names to be from Christian background? Religion is not written on the forehead of any one. However, *Trust* also devoted a large chunk of her pages to calls from religious clerics and elder statesmen for calm and restrain, denying the *Boko Haram* sect is representing Islam. D'Haenens and de Lange (2001) cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2006:64) describes this kind of framing as "Morality framing- whereby stories contain a moral message or some specific code of behaviour."

Sun maintained reporting the brutality of the sect in graphic details and even ran reports calling for South-South States governors to send vehicles to relocate stranded indigenes from the North Eastern states like Borno and Yobe (August !6. 2011 p.l 3). Such reports do not just have the

tendency of heightening tensions but also it places the *Boko Haram* conflict in a sectarian manner of Northern Muslims persecuting Southern Christians.

Conclusions

It can be said that although *Trust* and *Sun* widely condemned the violence and called for a quick resolution to the *Boko Haram* crisis, their geographical and ideological affiliations of Arewa press and Lagos-Ibadan press took a better part of them, as evident in the manner in which they frame reports relating to *Boko Haram.* This seeming rivalry among and between the Nigerian press exacerbates instability especially in times of crisis.

But MacBride Commission (1980) gave this recommendation saying "[despite the fact that] in times of tension, the news consists largely of military moves and statements by political leaders, which give rise to anxiety, it should not be impossible to reconcile full and truthful reporting with a presentation that reminds the readers of the possibility, indeed the necessity of peaceful solutions to disputes" It is against this back drop that Galadima (2002: 66) posits that "avoiding the use of value laden expressions such as 'freedom fighters, ethnic militia, Hausa-Fulani domination, Islamist militants, Moslems and Christian fanatics etc. will go a long way in avoiding or mellowing down volatile situations."

Finally, Gambo's (1994), in Galadima and Enighe, (2001) advise that "there is the need for the press to rise to the challenge of a constructive and balanced journalism rather than plunge into the unedifying journalism of scoop and sensation."

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