

BOKO HARAM AS AGENT PROVOCATEUR OF DESTABILIZATION AND DESTRUCTION IN NIGERIA: THE MEDIA'S CHECK

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Introduction

Ahlan Sunnah Lid Da'waati wal Jihad Yaanaa popularly called 'Boko Haram' has been connected with segregationist fanatical ideology of some Muslim sect(s) as sponsored agents of destabilization and destruction in Nigeria. The expression is supposedly employed in Islam to denote what is "prohibited or permitted for its adherents" (Nwanaju 2012). This article examines the dastardly acts of this group (or its subsets/subgroups) as randomly captured in news items/stories in the Nigerian media and offers suggestions on how the media and other development agents can help put an end to the wanton destruction of lives and properties/ heinous crimes emanating from their extremism. Observably, 'Boko Haram' has undertaken the task of mesmerizing the Nigerian polity since July 2009 on a very large scale of bloodshed, doublespeak, hate-speech, violence, among other barbaric shenanigans. Initially, the sect propounded the doctrine of hating everything 'Western' in the Nigerian society, that is, Western educational and cultural influences. According to Odey (2012), Boko Haram sects "tell us that Western education and the entire gamut of Western influence is sin... they are not pleased with the secular status of Nigeria; they want Nigeria to become a religious state where the tenets of Islam, particularly the Sharia law, would reign supreme." But the deliberate and rabid destruction of every available institutional structure, killing and maiming of innocent human

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beings, both Christians and Muslims, and the grounding of valuable infrastructures in different parts of the country raises the enigma of what their aim really is in relation to the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.

Nigerians have witnessed, almost helplessly, the consistent and large scale annihilation, demolition of church buildings (and even mosques), police posts, military barracks, prisons and reckless destruction of human lives, especially in the northern states of Kano, Borno, Jos, Bauchi, Niger, Kaduna, Yobe, Benue, among others, where Islam appears to have a majority of followers. The destruction carried out on Christian adherents, for example, by the dreaded sect, can only be described as very sadistic and excessively cruel. In fact, Boko Haram's attempts to barbarize and terrorize Nigeria and Nigerians have grown, largely unchecked, and many observers fear that the most populous black nation on earth may disintegrate because of the massiveness of the daily security threats. Igbinovia & Edobor-Igbinovia (2013), citing the *Daily Sun*, argue that in the Nigerian national security context, words do not match action as reflected in the lamentations: It appears that the government of the day has given up on the insecurity in the country. For some months now, hardly a day passes without an accident of bombing or shooting taking place in Nigeria. In all of this, lives are usually lost and valuable property destroyed...the Federal Government...does not appear to have an answer to the security challenge. Government has been running from pillar to post, striving to deal with the issue. But rather than make any head way, the menace continues to rear its ugly head...

It is the aim of this article to chronicle, however elliptically, the various gruesome attacks and destructive activities of the extremist group and re-draw the Federal Government of Nigeria's (FGN's) attention to its negligent, gross lackadaisical attitude about the terror sect, and how development agents, including the media, can help check the incendiary effects the situation is having on the corporate and harmonious existence of the country.

Theoretical anchor and operational definition of terms

This study is based at the crossroads of two theoretical infrastructures. First, it deploys the agenda setting theory (AST). In the view of Daramola (2003), AST holds the assumption that "there is a relationship between news coverage and public perception of the important issues." In other words, the media, and particularly the press determines what is considered crucial and relevant in society and it is this ability to confer importance that sets it out (Okhakhu 2011). Indeed, agenda setting implies that the media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society (Adeseye and Ibagere 1999). In setting an agenda

over an issue, the media according to Okoro and Agbo (2003) can ascribe importance to an issue through:

- The quality/frequency
- Prominence given to the report
- The degree of conflict generated, and
- Cumulative media-specific effects overtime.

The point to note is that thorough, investigative coverage and reportage of issues and events by the media in contemporary society can be used to strengthen the fabric of society, promote good governance and facilitate development. Omoera and Aiwuyo (2014) argue that the media can be used to curtail insecurity and strengthen democratic spaces in Nigeria which is at present under a siege especially at the north-eastern flanks, where a state of emergency has been declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) since 2013.

Coupled with the above is the gate-keeping theory (GT). Defleur (2010) contends that there is so much going on in contemporary society, and far more stories are generated than can be included in any medium daily news presentation. Consequently, some system for screening and selecting must be emplaced to sort out what will be reported to the public and what will be ignored. Okugo and Onwukwe (2012) state that “at the same time to remain competitive and profitable – which is determined largely by audience size, stories must be selected that are of interest and importance to those who read, listen, view or surf the medium.” It is this process of screening and selecting through the use of complex criteria that has come to be known as gate-keeping (Defleur 2010).

The implication of these theoretical constructs is that through the process of screening, selection and conferring importance, stories about Boko Haram’s terrorist activities can be consciously allowed to pass through the ‘gates’ kept by the reporters, editors, among other media professionals. Thus, stories/news items on Boko Haram extremism permeate the spaces and airtimes of the print and electronic media, apparently, to ensure the issue remains in the public domain and the populace is kept abreast of the dimensions, perspectives, and attempts at curtailing the excesses of the terror group(s).

Boko Haram: The Islamic term known as ‘Boko Haram’ is better explained than defined because it does not have an English equivalent. Nwanaju (2012) explains that it is “an ideology of isolation and segregation”. Kukah (2010) argues that although the “etymology of the word Boko Haram still remains suspect...in the mind of the Muslim, every act is either ‘Halal’,

permissible or 'Haram', impermissible". Nwanaju (2012) interprets further that "'Haram' and 'Halal' are two Arabic transliterations, meaning: 'to prohibit', 'to forbid' and possibly, 'to project' an idea or something; as well as 'to permit,' 'to allow' any practice, value, or exercise in preference to some other activities deemed proper for the particular group or community." In contemporary Nigeria, these concepts have become somewhat twisted because Boko Haram is increasingly associated with ethno fundamentalism, religious fanaticism and hypocrisy.

Agent provocateur: The term 'agent provocateur' is a French expression that is translated to denote: A secret agent implanted in an organization, as a trade union or political party, to incite its members to action or declarations that will incur penalties or punishment (*The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language*, 2004). In the context of this article, it is used to describe a sect(s) or group(s) of people who hide under ethno-religious veneers to perpetrate evil on behalf of some faceless, interest groups whose incendiary motive is to, all intents and purposes, make Nigeria ungovernable.

Destruction and Destabilization: On the one hand, *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language* (2004) asserts that 'destruction' is a noun from the verb 'to destroy' which means to ruin utterly, to demolish; raze, tear down...to kill. 'Destabilization' on the other hand is a noun from the verb 'destabilize' which means to undermine and make unstable; to make something, especially a government or economy, unstable in order to impair its functioning or bring about its collapse (Encarta 2009). In the context of this article, 'destabilization' goes with 'disintegration' which means to reduce to fragments. Regrettably, this is the depraved ultimate intention of the Boko Haram sect(s) in Nigeria.

Media: The word 'media' means the various means of mass communication considered as a whole, including television, radio, magazines, and newspapers, together with the people involved in their production – takes a singular or plural verb (Encarta 2009). Akpoveta and Ogbemi (2006) see the media as "modern mechanical devices specially designed to reach a large number of people simultaneously, over a very large area." In this study, the media is extended to mean the deployment of various information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as remote sensing, satellite imaging, crime mapping, electronic news gathering (ENG) and satellite news gathering (SNG), among other new age computer gadgets and processes, which can be used for surveillance and security purposes.

Consequently, the media can be used to check insecurity and terror threats posed by the Boko Haram menace as well as reinforce national ideals,

cohesion, and emphasize the harmonious cords that bend the multi-lingual and multi-faith peoples of Nigeria. This thinking is informed by the fact that the “media is considered a very powerful medium which influences the culture with pre-decided goals and objectives” (Singh & Meenakshi 2014), and its high definition technology components can be used as effective and efficient crime control mechanisms.

Religious fanaticism, northern Nigerian elites and the Boko Haram complexes

Today, one of the biggest challenges confronting Nigeria as an entity is terrorism as embodied in Boko Haram sect(s). The spate of daily bombings and killings currently being witnessed especially in the northern parts of the country is doing a lot of damage to national unity and development in the country. At the outset, the motive of the Boko Haram fanatical movement was thought to be merely a protest against the corrosive effects of all that persisted in the name of modernizing Nigeria in the ‘Western’ sense. But the malefic effects of corruption, total lack of security and welfare, the persistence of corruption, collapse of public morality, injustice, etc., may have emboldened and empowered the Boko Haram sect(s) to win followers and sympathizers, especially among Nigerian youths whether rightly or wrongly.

Kukah (2010) argues that over 90% of Boko Haram members are without Western education and even the few educated Muslims, in the Western sense, have no jobs or means of livelihood. Hence, the strange community, that is, the Boko Haram group, becomes an alternative state and their leaders are ready alternatives to the failed political class. Historically speaking, this sort of transfer of allegiance and search for succor is not new. For instance, leaders of strange sects such as the *Peoples’ Temple* (Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana, 1978); *Branch Davidians* (David Koresh, Waco, Texas, 1993); *Heaven’s Gate* (Marshal Applewhite, San Diego, California, 1980), etc., claimed mass following and led their followers to tragic ends. Perhaps in the reasoning of late Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau, among other leaders of the Boko Haram extremist group, those who are in government are corrupt because they have acquired their tool by gaining Western education. These same people, in their eyes, call themselves Muslims but they persist in things that are impermissible in Islam. Therefore, as their argument go, “it is their acquisition of Western education that has polluted public morality” (Kukah 2010).

Another likely point is political reason. Here, it becomes very obvious

that the fanatical movement is believed to be a-gent pro-vo-ca-teur. It would not be out of place then to argue that the leitmotif of the Boko Haram sect is not really a spiritual uplift of Muslims but a craze for political leadership and domination over the people by means of terrorism. Essentially, terrorism involves “unlawful acts of violence committed in an attempt to overthrow a government” (Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary 1963). This presupposes that terrorists’ acts are often well calculated. Terrorists seek change through the use of fear and intimidation (Umeagalasi 2012). In Nigeria, the inflammatory statements of some northern elites historically underscore the fanatical/terrorist activities we are experiencing today. For instance, the comment by Sir Ahmadu Bello years after Nigeria has gained its political independence, on October 1, 1960 is still very fresh in several people’s minds. He pontificates:

The new nation Nigeria should be an estate from our great-grandfather Othman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We must use the minorities of the North as willing tools, and the South as conquered territories and never allow them to have control of their future (*Sunday Sun*, May 22, 2011, 72).

This kind of conspiratorial hate-speech and ethno-religious sentiments among northern elites have also historically pervaded the ‘corridors’ of political power in Nigeria. Odey (2014) points out that “we have had the clandestine hijacking of Nigeria into the membership of the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 by Ibrahim Babangida’s military regime; General Sani Abacha had behind closed doors of Aso Rock, signed a secret pact which smuggled Nigeria into another Islamic group made up of eight developing countries known as D-8. We have also seen what the imposition of the full-scale implementation of the sharia legal code on Zamfara State on October 27, 1999, by Alhaji Ahmed Sani Yerima has cost the country.

From the above, it is very likely that many of these self-serving, ethno-religious/political leaders are deliberately sponsoring the Boko Haram fanatical sect as an agent of terrorism to force all Nigerians, particularly the southerners to convert to the Islamic religion either by hook or crook, more so, that the current Nigerian political head is a southerner and a Christian by faith. In fact, Sheikh Abubakhar Mahmoud Gumi boldly declares that:

Nigerian unity, if I am to do my best, is to try to convert Christians and non-Muslims as much as possible...I do not think that Muslims can allow a non-Muslim to be their prime minister by election. It could be by force or by army coup, but by election it would be difficult for a non-Muslim to be a leader in Nigeria by election (*Quality Magazine*, October, 1987, 34).

Many of these northern Nigerian elites fanning the embers of trouble have failed to realize that a meaningful evangelism cannot be *a main armée*. These kinds of leaders easily forget that Nigeria is a multi-faith and multi-ethnic nation with enshrined laws of secularity and religious practices, aside that of Islam. Again, they also forget that any likely combustion – as Boko Haram point towards – is, at the end of day, also likely to consume them and their offspring as well. Some highlights of Boko Haram reprehensible acts underline this ominous likelihood.

Highlights of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria

The massiveness of the destruction of lives and properties in different parts of the country unquestionably puts Boko Haram attacks as pogroms/massacres which every right thinking person, organization, religious group or community must think of ways of stopping. A random chronicling of some of their acts as streamed or reported in the media reveals the gargantuan proportions of the destruction the extremist group(s) have wrought:

- i. *Nigerian Tribune*, August 26, 2011, 44: Abuja, Boko Haram suicide bomber in a car drove straight into the UN building; Boko Haram raid bank in Misan, Bauchi State, killing 5 policemen, robbing the bank, killing 4 soldiers a day after, different parts of Borno and Yobe States came under series of attacks by the same group(s) in November 2011. In the attacks a number of Yobe State buildings were massively destroyed at least 67 persons were killed
- ii. *Nigerian Tribune*, December 28, 2011, reports courtesy of the Associated Press some terrorist events unleashed by Boko Haram captioned “Chronicles of Boko Haram Attacks”. They are: November 4: Sect members bombed government buildings and shot their way through the city of Damaturu, killing more than 100 people, while bombing and a suicide attack in Maiduguri left 4 dead. August 26: A sect member detonated a car loaded with explosives at the United Nations Headquarters in Nigeria’s capital Abuja, killing 24 people and wounding another 116. April 16: A car loaded with explosives got detonated at the Federal police headquarters in Abuja, killing at least two people. The police first called the attacks a suicide bombing, but

- later denied it. April 9: Gunmen from the sect set fire on the Maiduguri International Hotel and killed a politician ahead of local elections. December 31, 2010: A bomb allegedly planted by the sect exploded at a crowded and popular outdoor beer garden at a military barracks in Abuja, killing at least 4 people. September 7, 2010: Gunmen with the sect freed about 700 inmates from a Bauchi Federal Prison. July 2009: About 700 people died after sect members rioted and a security crackdown hit Maiduguri, the sect's spiritual home.
- iii. *Nigerian Tribune*, Friday December 30, 2011: President Goodluck addressed the nation on security issues that made 2011 tick. Striking excerpts are as follows: Suleja INEC in Niger State was also bombed on April 8, 2011, leaving 16 people dead mainly members of NYSC dead; Gunmen shooting in Damaturu, Yobe State; killing more than 100 persons, ... On another occasion December 22-24 at Damaturu, Boko Haram terrorists killed 61 persons. A Boko Haram member detonated a car loaded with explosives at the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja, 24 casualties, comprising Nigerians and foreign staff of the UN was recorded with about 116 wounded...
- iv. *Nigerian Tribune*, December 30, 2011, back page: "The bomb wiped out whole families and scalped a baby...dozen of worshippers suffered shocking injuries that may lead to permanent disability... blasphemous Muslim youths in Kano attacked Southerners, respectively especially the Igbo and hacked many of them to death... Boko Haram, due to its activities is said to have displaced over 90,000 people in Yobe State.
- v. *Nigerian Tribune*, December 30, 2011: Niger State, The St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla, Christmas Day by Boko Haram bomb blast: 7 vehicles burnt, 4 churches destroyed, 35 people died, more than 80 people wounded.
- vi. *Nigerian Tribune*, December 30, 2011: Sapele L.G.A of Delta State, 9 children and a woman in the bomb explosion by Boko Haram that rocked an Islamic School.
- vii. *Nigerian Tribune*, December 30, 2011: Gombe, 15 people injured in a bomb blast explosion by Boko Haram in a hotel.
- viii. *Nigerian Tribune*, January 28, 2012, reports; "For months, the nation has been battling the series of attacks and bomb explosions perpetrated by members of the terrorist group in the Northern part of the country which had led to the death of innocent Nigerians in their hundreds... speculations became rife

- that the dreaded Boko Haram had stormed Bayelsa with bombs and other explosives to unleash violence on Mr. President's home state.
- ix. *Nigerian Tribune*, June 25, 2012, reports: "There was an attack on Yobe Prison this morning. The Boko Haram attacked the prison through the emir palace, 40 inmates escaped. They attacked with rifles
- x. *Nigerian Tribune*, April 29, 2012: Ado Bayero University, Kano, Gunmen suspected to be Boko Haram members killed church worshippers.
- xi. *Nigerian Tribune*, January 28, 2012, reports: The day Kano turned theatre of war... Last Friday 20/11/2012, will not be forgotten in a hurry by the people of ancient city of Kano... both Muslims and Christians were running helter-skelter for their lives due to multiple bomb blast explosions that rocked the city occasioned by the Boko Haram, the dreaded Islamic sect... several hundreds of people dead and several wounded, several properties, both, private and government worth millions of naira were destroyed... 29 policemen, 3 (SSS) officers, 2 immigration officers, 1 custom officer and a total of 150 civilians including a journalist were killed by the extremists during the massacre in the state... back to Kano Bompai police barracks and unknown to many people (number not specified) running away either from Dakata and its environs enroute Club road and King's garden they all fell to the bullets of the Boko Haram or those of security operatives who were there for counter attacks. The extremists attacked and brutally killed innocent civilians who were going about their lawful business along Tundu Wada road... It was the day, on the following Sunday, when President Goodluck visited Kano, that the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero could not control his emotion and wept while receiving Mr. President'. On page 14 of the same newspaper, January 28, 2012, journalists reported in addition, that the recent bomb attack by the Boko Haram sect on Kano has made it one attack too many... the bombing attacks on lives and properties have left the society devastated and people living in fear... the once sonorous sound of music in these homes has turned into a dirge. Nothing seems to comfort the chief mourners who were yet to wake up to that reality that their loved ones were gone. Their bread winners, best friends were gone without bidding them farewell.
- xii. October 29, 2012: Independent Radio News Benin at 6.00 am reports that gunmen and suicide bombers attacked St. Rita's

- Catholic Church at Kaduna killing 5 people and leaving 98 seriously wounded.
- xiii. February 22, 2013: Some corps members gruesomely burnt by Boko Haram in Yobe State (www.Nairaland.com/712404/bokoharam)
 - xiv. February 8, 2013: *The Guardian* newspaper reports that 10 female health workers were killed, unsuspected gunmen who later claimed to be Boko Haram sect in Kano State claimed responsibility. (www.guardiannewspaperonline)
 - xv. May 15, 2013: Nigerian troops begin an offensive attack against Boko Haram in the states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, where a state of emergency is declared in order to retake areas that have fallen into the hands of the insurgents. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xvi. June 4, 2013: Nigeria formally declares Boko Haram and Ansaru, its suspected offshoot, "terrorist" groups and issues a law to ban them. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xvii. July 6, 2013: Gunmen believed to be from Boko Haram attack a secondary school in the north-eastern state of Yobe, killing 42 people, many of whom are students. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xviii. August 10-11, 2013: Suspected Islamic extremists kill 56 people in the north-west, including 44 in an attack on a mosque in Konduga. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xix. September 12, 2013: A military strike on a highly-fortified Boko Haram camp in the north-eastern state of Borno kills 150 Islamists. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xx. September 17, 2013: An attack by Boko Haram extremists disguised in military uniforms in the north-eastern Benisheik area in Borno State kills at least 142. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xxi. September 29, 2013: Boko Haram gunmen open fire on sleeping students in a college dormitory in north-eastern Yobe State, killing at least 40 people. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xxii. November 13, 2013: The United States blacklists Boko Haram and Ansaru as terror groups. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
 - xxiii. December 2, 2013: Hundreds of heavily armed Boko Haram gunmen besiege an air force and army base in the northeastern city of Maiduguri, destroying aircraft, razing buildings and setting shops and petrol stations ablaze. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)

- xxiv. December 16, 2013: The United Nations says attacks by Boko Haram have killed more than 1,200 people since May. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxv. December 20, 2013: Scores of suspected Islamic gunmen storm a military barracks in the north-eastern town of Bama, spraying gunfire at the troops inside before torching the compound. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxvi. January 26, 2014: At least 78 people are killed in two separate attacks in north-east Nigeria — one on a busy market in Borno State and the other in neighboring Adamawa, with suspicions falling on Boko Haram. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxvii. February 15, 2014: An attack blamed on the sect leaves 106 dead in the mostly Christian village of Izghe in Borno. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxviii. February 19, 2014: An attack by scores of Boko Haram Islamists in the north-east town of Bama kills 60 people and causes major damage to public buildings. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxix. February 19, 2014: Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau threatens attacks in the southern oil region in a new video. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxx. February 25, 2014: Suspected Boko Haram insurgents kill 43 people when they attack sleeping secondary school students in the town of Buni Yadi in Yobe State. (<http://news.naij.com/60318.html>)
- xxxi. No fewer than 30 persons were killed this morning when Boko Haram insurgents attempted to seize the national headquarters of the Department of State Security (SSS). Following the attempted jailbreak by the destined Boko Haram members in the rumour mills, the presidential spokesperson had to reassure Nigerians that the president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is safe. (*NewsExpress*, March 30, 2014).
- xxxii. Independent Television News Benin at 7.30 pm on April 12, 2014, reports that Boko Haram kills scores of UTME candidates in Bornu.
- xxxiii. April 13, 2014: *The Punch* newspaper reports that men believed to be members of the Boko Haram sect have again invaded the Bornu villages of Ngoshe and Kaigamari, in Gwoza and Konduga local government areas respectively, killing 38 people. (www.punchnewspaperonline)
- xxxiv. April 14, 2014: Nigerian Television Authority News Abuja at 9.00 pm reports that scores of people were killed and maimed as early morning bomb explosion rocked a motor park in Nyanya

area of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

xxxv. April 16, April, 2014: *The Guardian* newspaper reports that Boko Haram abducts 103 female students in Chibok, Bornu State.

Needless to say that the foregoing is a tip of the iceberg as the threats, violence and menaces of the dreaded fanatical sect have been escalating uncontrollably and without solution in sight. But the point remains that every Nigerian (whether Christian or Muslim or African Traditional Adherent, northerner or southerner), except those who kill their fellow Nigerians in God's name and their sponsors, is tired of being threatened or killed. People are particularly worried that the federal government appears to be pampering the members of the egregious Boko Haram sect(s) while their sponsors (some of them who are known either by their provocative and unguarded statements) are aiding and abetting those that have been arrested. However, it is instructive that the political class/Nigerian politicians, especially from the north avoid politicizing insecurity for the greater interest of the Nigerian populace and the corporate existence of Nigeria.

While the federal government is telling all who cares to listen that it is doing its utmost to check the terror sect, many Nigerians are angry that it (the government) is contemplating amnesty settlement with the nearly faceless group which on a daily basis goes about killing their fellow Nigerians in cold blood. The perceived inaction of the federal government may not be unconnected with the forthcoming 2015 presidential elections. This is because the kid-glove's treatment the extremist group appears to be enjoying is probably to make sure that the Jonathan government scores political advantage in the north and remain in Aso Rock villa for another term of four years. This is very likely as recent history shows how the federal government had clamped down ruthlessly on other groups, especially in the south, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Biafra Zionist Movement, and the militants in the Niger Delta, who have valid grounds and grouses for going on rampage and for insisting that they should be listened to.

It must be noted that other groups like the South-South Peoples Assembly (SSPA), Afinefere, Odua People's Congress (OPC), Ohaneze, Middle Belt Consultative Forum (MCF), etc, have been watching keenly the unfolding events. The members of these groups are not sleeping. They have consistently drawn the federal government's attention to the ruinous activities of the Boko Haram group(s) and the dire consequences of treating them as if the government is afraid of them or their sponsors – both national and international security agencies have maintained that the group has powerful political links in government. Many of their own

people (southerners and even northerners) have been mindlessly killed in the north and they have equally drawn the killers' attention by saying that they should remember there is no particular ethnic nationality or religious group that has the monopoly of violence.

Indeed, it is safer to recognize that the stability of any society depends largely on the ability of its citizens to live together in harmony and peace. Its religious history can also be assessed by the effort made by the different religious affiliations in the same society to interact maturely through dialogue and mutual co-existence (Nwanaju 2007; 2010). The security and unity of Nigeria is extremely important to the black race, including its diasporic communities in the Americas and elsewhere. But as the country marches towards the 2015 general elections all hands need to be on deck to take drastic measures/actions to avoid an imminent implosion which the Book Haram sect's criminal activities may precipitate, if not checked.

That Nigeria may not go under: the media's check

The coverage of crimes has always been a complex issue for the media and in this era of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) the coverage of terrorists' activities has become an even greater concern. Undoubtedly, the global nature of new communication technologies has brought about easy and quick access to information. Both peace lovers and perpetrators of evil activities are caught in this inevitable web of information packaging and dissemination. Adora (2010), while commenting on the worrisome nature of terrorism globally says that we live in a world of strife, violence and wars. Despite the untiring effort of individuals, groups, organizations and countries all over the world to promote peaceful co-existence among men and women, this generation is still being threatened by the ravage of terrorism. Instances abound in the atrocious activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and their ilk in other parts of the world.

Indeed, the Boko Haram phenomenon in today's Nigeria is something that is most disturbing and calls for renewed counter terrorism approaches, including the deployment of the media, both personnel and equipment. Ekerikevwe and Nwafor (2012) report that a recent study conducted in Plymouth University on crime control and technological culture discovers that:

Contemporary crime control strategies strongly rely on the use of advanced information and communication technologies (Extensive database, CCTV, crime mapping, risk profiling, etc). The new technologically

mediated control strategies seem to be drawn by a different logic from traditional crime control and policing.

At present, the media density, penetration, and functioning, especially at the grassroots in Nigeria is too low and weak to serve as 'backbone' for community policing and prompt detection and interception of crimes and in the case of this study the nefarious activities of the Boko Haram insurgents. Nigerian authorities concerned with security issues must recognize this critical point and make concrete efforts at developing information and decision management systems to check crimes such as the recurring ones perpetrated the Boko Haram group(s).

To this end, the Nigerian communication satellite, artificial intelligence devices, among other ICTs, should be put to optimum use. These media gadgets should be used to track, and test trends in crimes and criminalities, and in the specific case of this paper to forecast, and intercept terrorists attacks through intelligence gathering, and prompt information sharing among security operatives, communities and well meaning Nigerians for more secure society. After all, Boko Haram insurgents are no ghosts, they live among Nigerians/Africans and some level of efficiency, effectiveness and sincerity in community media functioning can greatly help to stem their menaces and keep Nigeria as one united, indivisible entity. This will also help to ensure that there is peace in the West African subregion as the Boko Haram insurgents have been reported to have carried out odious attacks in communities in other West African countries such as Cameroun, and Niger Republic.

Nigerian media personnel/professionals should not unnecessarily hype the activities of the criminal sect(s) in order for the insurgents not to ride on that in their subversive campaigns. Instead, as part of the terrorism checking mechanism, the media should disseminate information to help defuse the tension of a situation, not contribute to it. Okugo and Onwukwe (2012) contend that "keeping the public reasonably calm should be an important priority of the media coverage in the wake of terrorist strikes." This explains why Ekwueme and Akpan (2011) call for reportorial paradigm shift to tell the story of survival, preach courage, reduce helplessness, and increase the confidence of the populace through the use of strong reassuring words, etc.

In doing the foregoing, the media must refrain from circulating shocking images or pictures of terrorists' acts which violate the privacy and human dignity of victims or contribute to the terrorizing effects of such acts on the populace. We thus advocate that less coverage should be given to terrorists inhuman activities which often make people think that

the world is no longer safe to live in. Media coverage, among other things, should focus more on developmental feats, peacemakers, and conflict-peace resolution bodies (Asogwa, Iyere, and Attah 2012).

Again, the media should work in tandem with relevant security agencies, community based organizations (CBOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), well-meaning Nigerians, especially among ethnicities in northern Nigeria, and border communities with Cameroun and Niger Republic to denounce in unequivocal terms the brazen callousness of the Boko Haram insurgents, and play up mantras of patriotism, unity and brotherliness. Stroehlein supports this approach as he argues that the effective tackling of Boko Haram requires a strategic, concerted, collective and coordinated action of all and sundry, not just the government and security agencies, but traditional and religious leaders, members of the public, and most importantly, the media (2012).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the media in concert with other development agents can be used to check the criminal activities of Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria. In this regard, it posited that the more informed the citizenry on an issue (e.g. Boko Haram) the more security conscious they would be and a combination of community efforts in conjunction with security surveillance can be very profitable. It equally argued that in spite of the serious negative impact which the activities of the nearly faceless group has had on the socioeconomic and sociopolitical fortunes of Nigeria – to the extent that many Nigerians/non-Nigerians are afraid that the country is on the brink of collapse, the media (including its cutting-edge technological components) can be used to study vigilantly the modus vivendi and modus operandi of the Boko Haram sect(s), downplay the fear and apprehension they seek to impose on the people and make the country more secure, peaceful, economically buoyant and politically stable.

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ABSTRACT

The following article intends to examine the role Boko Haram has been playing over the years. Based on the analysis of the news randomly taking from the Nigerian media, it seeks to offer suggestions on how the media and other Nigerian development agents can contribute to an end of the attacks carried out by this group. Subsequently, it is expected to show that the media, in conjunction with other Nigerian development agents, can be used to identify the criminal activities of Boko Haram insurgents in the area, and also used to study the modus vivendi and modus operandi of this group.

KEYWORDS

Boko Haram; Media; Nigeria; Attacks.

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