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CONFLICTING COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMUNICATION OF CONFLICT: CHIBOK AND NARRATIVES ON MEDIA REPRESENTATION

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Abstract:

Mass media in their assortment of forms, and variety of offerings - information, entertainment, surveillance, cultural transmission, arbitration and mediation, socialization and influence – still constitute a theatre of unfolding history. This fits with established prescriptions of how the Fourth Estate should act. As facilitators of good governance, mass media are to hold governments accountable. In Nigeria, media as sources of news and opinion have evolved as key transmitters of journalistic traditions in the pursuit of this mandate. Their coverage of conflict provides a scenario for interrogating the nuances of that tradition, and prospects of the media as moderators and consolidators of the democratic process.

At the heart of this paper is the Boko Haram saga. Making it the locus of an analysis of the communication of conflict, the paper focuses on the abduction of “over 200” secondary school girls from Chibok, Borno State which as a critical incidence in the persisting instabilities especially in the north east of Nigeria spawned the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign locally, then globally. Within the framework of theory, the paper (re)constructs a narrative in the representation covering a fortnight of the Chibok story through a qualitative analysis of a sample of Nigeria's newspapers. The Guardian and The Punch were selected because of their pedigree as independent, non-partisan papers. The analysis highlights a journalistic dilemma where media as sources for communication of conflict become enmeshed in conflicting communication. Findings suggest that underlying this pattern is a more general challenge – the media are incapacitated, partly because of their need to rely on secondary sources which are themselves caught in the web of politics, intrigues, and ethnic and religious proclivities.

Key Words: *communication, media, conflict, Boko Haram, Chibok crisis, insurgency*