



ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS
& PROFESSIONALS OF NIGERIA
BOOK SERIES



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

Nosa Owens-Ibie

To cite this article:

Owens-Ibie, N. (2016). Conflicting communication in the Communication of conflict: Chibok and narratives on media Representation in *Taking Stock: Nigerian Media and National Challenges*, ACSPN Book Series (1), pp. 69—88. Retrieved from <http://www.acspn.org/index.php/books>

(Institutional or Subscribed access may be required)

Please note that this is an electronic, pre-print version of this article published by the Canada University Press, Concord Ontario, Canada for Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN).

The ACSPN Book Series is exclusive to the Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria.

ISBN: 978-0-9948339-3-8

Copyright ©2016
Editor and Contributors

Layout/Design: Olasunkanmi Arowolo

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form or any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passage in a review.

CHAPTER FIVE



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

Nosa Owens-Ibie

Introduction and Context

Communication media as chroniclers, mirror, and interpreters, have since pre-colonial times, been integral to the unfolding logics of Nigeria's development. They have provided among others, a platform for identity development and the construction of emerging images of Nigeria. This includes offering paradoxical perspectives of local and national realities, sometimes questioning the basis of statehood (Gbogun gboro, 2014). Lugard (see Amalgamation proclamation 2014, 2) acknowledged the role of the press in making inputs to the process of structuring Nigeria. In mirroring reality, the media have also provided resource for contending forces in the struggle for power and this is particularly pronounced in the reporting of conflict.

While the Civil War was a milestone in the history of conflict in Nigeria, the Boko Haram conflict is another milestone based on the level of destruction, dislocations, local and international focus. Media Review (2014, 16-26) identified 173 different dates between January 20, 2012 and May 25, 2014 which marked incidents of attacks, reprisals, deaths, and breaches in security due directly or indirectly to the activities of the sect. Kolawole (2014) describes the conflict as “full blown terrorism” with signed threats to government, traditional authority and influential leaders (Timkola. 2014).

Boko Haram is the name commonly used for the Islamic sect Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad). Agbiboa (2013) citing Hickey traces its roots to what he calls

“militant religiosity” with a history.

Adeniyi (2011), chronicles the history of the Boko Haram crisis, not to 2009 when the campaign of violence started, but to 2002 when the sect was established under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf. To begin with, Yusuf was a disciple of the late Sheikh Jaafar Adam until events led to his establishing his own base of followers. Onuoha (2012) traces the sect's origin to 1995 when at the University of Maiduguri, Abubakar Lawan started the *Ahlulsunna wal jama ah hijra* sect as a non-violent movement. Mohammed Yusuf became the leader of this sect in 2002. According to Onuoha, the killing of Yusuf, whose messages resonated particularly with youths, is widely regarded as the trigger for the violent campaign that has so far proved intractable.

Perry (2013) regards the bombing of the United Nations Building in Abuja on August 26, 2011 by 27-year old Mohammed Abul Barra using a car bomb – as the turning point for the Boko Haram campaign from a local to an international threat. Gambo (2014) details the ramifications of the responses of Boko Haram in the prosecution of its defined objectives with the media providing vital surveillance of the conflict and its environments. In the process the media also catalogued casualties, including its own. Some of the journalists who succumbed in this terror campaign are Enenche Akogwu of Channels Television, Nathan Dabang and Sunday Gyang Bede of Light Bearer and Zakaria Isa, reporter and cameraman with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Maiduguri who was thought to have been killed by the sect for allegedly being a spy.

A key feature of the crisis has been the centrality of media engagement by various parties to the conflict. Boko Haram in conformity with patterns in the operations of similar groups has established effective mechanisms for liaison with the media to keep their agenda and activities in the public eye. There is deep sensitivity to the role of the media. While explaining the philosophy of the sect, Onuoha (2012) quoted Mallam Sanni Umaru, its acting leader in August 2009 as even rejecting the designation of the sect as Boko Haram stating that

“Boko Haram does not in any way mean 'Western Education is a sin' as the infidel media continue to portray us. Boko Haram actually means 'Western Civilisation' is forbidden. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West...which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not Education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western Education. The sect frowns at media's description of it as the Boko Haram. Instead it prefers to be addressed as the *Jama'atu Ahlissunnah lidda'awati wal Jihad*”

According to Gambo the sect optimised mobile telecommunication infrastructure, cyber space, and various new media platforms, including YouTube, and international broadcasters like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA) and Radio France International (RFI) through which they released videos and statements like that on the bombing of *ThisDay* newspaper. They claimed responsibility for that act in April 2012. One evidence that the media was critical to the sect is their acknowledgment of national and international media albeit, that they were “misrepresenting the group's activities; inciting the public to support the government against the group; and attacking Islam in their reporting.” Such reference to the media as being supportive or adversarial in projecting particular perspectives (sect or government) was also echoed by Major-General Chris Olukolade, Director of Defence Information. After acknowledging the patriotism of local media and the bias of foreign media, he stated that “in recent times certain section of the media has began to toe the line of the foreign media being mostly untruthful and unprofessional in reporting the events related to the insurgency by being biased to the level of favouring the terrorists.” (Babatunde, 2014, 11). Labaran Maku who was then Minister for Information asserted at the 8th Ordinary Congress of the West Africa Journalists Association (WAJA) that terrorists seek more publicity than election-seeking politicians and that without such free publicity they would be demoralised. So, if there were a stop to the reporting of “any terrorism for two months...they will go down.” (Gambo, 2014). This logic probably informed the appeal by the Deputy Senate President, Bright Ekweremadu (see Onochie (2014) who urged the media to play down their coverage of Boko Haram activities as such coverage instils fear in the public. He advised the media to “see through this propaganda and refuse to help them market their falsehood...”

The crisis galvanized by the ensuing conflicts also had implications for, among others, cultural security. Weaver describes this as the “capacity of a society to conserve its specific character in spite of changing conditions and real or virtual threats” (see Awaah, 2013, 21). Multicultural societies like Nigeria have a major stake in protecting its diversities through the cohering of group, community, sub-national and national interests and aspirations. It has been noted that identity development is informed by the exchange of messages and involves a process of negotiation, co-creation, reinforcement and challenge through the process of communication (Martin and Nakayama, 2005, 81). The media as instruments of social transmission routinely promote socio-cultural values through what they disseminate and their credibility matter in ordering the public space especially in conflict situations. This therefore is an examination of media coverage of the abduction of the Chibok girls within the context of an analysis of the subject of terrorism in particular and the coverage of conflict in general. There is a focus on the existing contradictions in the coverage of the issue by two of Nigeria's most credible newspapers.

Conflict, Terrorism and the Media

Attempts to explain roots of terrorism have drawn attention to various parameters in the global sphere. The strategic dimensions to terrorism as a tactic, point to the diversity and complexity of motives for it. They also acknowledge such variables as economic distress, religious and cultural differences and political repression. Democracy could diminish or facilitate terrorism which from the Global Terrorism Database is witnessing an increase in suicide attacks as its more frequent mode (Anderton and Carter, 2009, 146-148). The United States Code, cited by Raj and Sreekumar (2014) describes terrorism as pre-meditated and politically-motivated aggression against civilian targets and designed to alter the socio-economic and political order of a country.

The phenomenon derives from “changing political scenario, diminishing geographical borders, cross border governance and above all the explosion in the field of information technology, production and manufacturing.” Marshall (2002, 2, 27, 29) notes that terrorism which seeks political change through the creation and exploitation of fear is integral to conflict with civilians becoming “accidentally, incidentally, and intentionally” victims of violence. Violence in turn attracts both the media and audience. Raj and Sreekumar (2014) affirm that the motive behind terror attacks is to seek attention. Journalism has actively moderated this process with the dissemination of news veering from its professional emphasis on parameters like balance, ethics and from the era of responsible informers. The practice is also changing in the face of commercialization and the attendant increase in competition-induced sensationalism in which language defines the tone of opinions formed. Yet an incongruence remains. While government tries to use the media to minimise the severity of terror attacks, terrorists also depend on the media. They try to use same to get attention and to amplify the horror of such attacks.

These point to an underlying assumption or understanding of the multiplier effect of the media at least in specific incidences. Gerbner (1988) explains it by declaring that

The evidence shows that consistent exposure to stories and scenes of violence and terror can mobilize aggressive tendencies, desensitize some and isolate others, intimidate many and trigger violent action in the few. But it is also clear that media-inspired mayhem does not pose a threat to modern societies.

Bratic and Schirch (2007) agree that media operators determine stories that are covered. In conflict situations, the media define what the audience gets to see or hear while economic interests of media owners influencing editorial decisions. The four values that drive news decisions tend to be “immediacy, drama, simplicity and ethnocentrism.” According to them these values tend to prevent the media from being instruments of peace. In noting the tendency of the media to portray Nigeria as crisis-prone, Owens-Ibie (2002) states that

The media present an arena of war by other means, daily projecting one form of conflict or another. Conflict reporting thus becomes partly a staple of media discharging their professional responsibility of mirroring reality; partly the product of the media as players in the chess game involving contending forces in society which often use them as tools, and partly as a response by the media to the need to remain relevant, competitive and economically secure.

The evolution of this trend in the reporting of conflict and more specifically terrorism/insurgency in an era of globalisation suggests the promotion of values mirroring broad cultural and historical divides. According to Hanitzsch (see García-Avilés, Fuente-Cobo and Maciá-Barber 2014, 123) there are differences with journalists in the West emphasizing universal ethical principles while those outside the West are flexible in the ethical values and more interventionist in the way they perceive their roles. However the study by Garcia-Aviles et al suggests a strained ethical environment even in the Spanish media.

Some evidence exists for biases in media coverage in conflict situations. Ochogwu (2011), for instance, noted the non-adherence to professional standards in the coverage of the Jos crisis by both local and international media. In their analysis of media coverage of the Boko Haram crisis, Amobi and Hussein (2013, 128-130) quoted Mohammed Haruna who accused the media of stereotyped reporting of the sect. The article cited the attack on a burial ceremony in the Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State during which Senator Gyang Datong and Gyang Fulani, Majority Leader, Plateau State House of Assembly, died. It noted that while there were two versions to how the legislators died, namely, that they were shot by the herdsmen, and “as recounted by close family members” that they died probably of shock in the process of trying to escape from the herdsmen, the media tended to report the version of their being shot. This according to Haruna ‘conformed to the stereotype reportage of the evil, “Christian hating Hausa/Fulani Muslim”.’

Burnet, (1974, 3, 9) in her report on a UNESCO meeting which examined the impact of media representation of violence on youth and adults from June 29 – July 7, 1970 however impresses that by their nature the media have inherent inclinations, noting among other conclusions that the media could not possibly be the cause of violence but play a role in spreading it. She stated that “the media never give anything back to society in precisely the form in which it occurred... the news is changed by the very fact of its passage through the media, whatever may be the efforts to present it objectively.”

In his study of the coverage of conflict situations in West Africa, Edeani, (1994) found that the three selected newspapers “outstandingly led by The Guardian” were more

balanced and fair in their coverage than the three selected magazines, although 65% of the coverage by all the media organizations focused on Nigeria echoing the same charge of bias often levelled against Western media in their general under-reporting of Africa and tendency to highlight negative stories when they do report Africa.

Chibok as a Narrative

On April 14, 2014, operatives of the Boko Haram sect invaded Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State at night, abducted students in the school and destroyed its physical facilities. That event proved to be the defining point in the conflict and has been marked by intense local and international media focus on Chibok, the girls and the conflict. Chibok according to a story essentially sourced from the Daily Beast is said to be the last territory in Nigeria to be conquered by the British colonialists (Harolds, 2014). This development made Chibok of symbolic historical significance. A highlight of the Chibok incidence is the social media campaign started on April 23, 2014 when a civil rights advocate Jibrin Ibrahim (Murdoch, 2014) “tweeted the call” in a speech made by the former Vice-President of the World Bank for Africa, Oby Ezekwesili under the hashtag #Bringbackourgirls. The event was the honouring of Port Harcourt by UNESCO as the 2014 World Book Capital City. The campaign turned global attracting over a million tweets within a fortnight including from leaders and international figures (Howard, 2014).

A local highlight of the #Bringbackourgirls has been the sit-in at the Unity Fountain, Abuja from April 30, 2014 by a group by the same name which as at May 26, 2014 had met for 27 consecutive days (Ibrahim, 2014). According to Adeniyi (2014) the peaceful protest against the abductions featuring some women and men wearing red T-Shirts first started under the aegis of the “Women for Justice and Peace” in solidarity with mothers of the Chibok girls and under the heavy rains. The group became less visible following a series of developments, including disruptions, exchanges between its leaders and government/other groups and occasional protest marches, including marking 140 days of the abductions with a protest on September 1, 2014.

Although other committees were set up at federal and state levels to deal with exigencies deriving from the Boko Haram crisis and the Chibok abductions, the Federal Government set up a Presidential Fact Finding Committee on the abduction of Chibok Girls headed by retired Brigadier General Ibrahim Sabo on May 6, 2014. This committee brought clarity to the contradictions and some of the misinformation associated with the abductions, especially the number of those who were kidnapped.

On July 22, 2014 President Goodluck Jonathan met with the parents of the Chibok girls and those who escaped from the abductors in Abuja. The meeting followed a visit to the President by the 17-year old Pakistani education activist and advocate, Malala Yousafzai.

These developments have in a way positioned Chibok as a focal point for local and international discourse on the Boko Haram crisis, media representation and the dynamics of conflict management and resolution in Nigeria.

Theory as Framework

Theory provides a rich context for illuminating this discourse and clearer basis for interrogating the media's current and future in addressing the contradictions inherent in the transitions of Nigerian statehood. Conflict theory (n.d) with a focus on dissension in society highlights the structural basis and triggers of conflict with religion, ethnicity or race and nationalism as key catalysts (Moller, 2003). The role of religion is emphasized by Neubeck and Glasberg (2005, 515) who state that while religion could be used to mitigate the potentially disruptive activities of rebellious groups it could also be the source of ideas for groups to challenge inequalities and injustice. Palen (2001, 15-17) states that different groups engaged in the struggle for scarce resources remain within the framework of society but continually struggle for dominance with control determining the predominant worldview. While acknowledging its inevitability, conflict theorists unlike the Marxists recognize that conflicts can be over values and not just about economic power. Conflict often manifests in hostile action and aims at harming its target. They could be overt, violent, involve combat or accusatory (Fink, 1968, 447). As Bernard (see Fink, 1968, 435) notes it may be latent over a length of time before the issues are clearly formulated and crystallize into overt crisis or confrontation. That is why it could be misleading to gloss over the basic issues driving such conflicts.

Multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria ordinarily derive their strength from the coalescing of the vibrancy and dynamism which define its constituents while these very qualities could be the very source of their fragility in the face of external threats or internal turmoil (Giddens, 2003, 257).

The media are regarded as factors in understanding the dynamics of conflict. Baudrillard (see Giddens, 2003, 426) ascribes to the mass media a profound level of impact in transforming lives greater than those of any other technology. Thompson (Giddens, 2003, 463) attributes to media messages the quality of being discussed at reception and transferred through "telling and retelling, interpretation and reinterpretation, commentary, laughter and criticism" thereby making them a part of us and therefore using them to modify our knowledge, test feelings or tastes and expand our experience.

This potential or capacity of the media to influence the pictures of reality in the minds of the audience or public is at the heart of the subject of framing. Chong and Druckman (2007a, 105; 2007b, 104, 109) define framing as a process through which people conceive of an issue in a particular way or modify their conception of an issue. Such frame in the thought process has implications for how opinions are formed and have implications for attitudes and behaviours. Through frames which could either be

positive or negative, everyday realities are organized. They could be manipulated to deceive people. The competitive environment of the frames, level of repetitiveness and individual motivations are critical to impact.

Cissel (2012) identifies differences between mainstream and alternative media in their framing of issues with a variation in emphasis in news coverage and interpretation. The dominant frames are defined by media agenda which are themselves moderated by factors in the macro-environment including those deriving from advertisers. There are empirical approaches to measuring and identifying news frames. According to Tankard (de Vreese (n.d.) quoting Tankard, a comprehensive list of 11 such framing mechanism include "headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and statements and paragraphs." A study of these elements is a useful pointer to the framing of the news by a particular medium. But there have been variations in perceptions and research focus on media effects summarized by Scheufele (1999) mainly from analysis of McQuail, and including the contributions of Klapper, Noelle-Neumann and Beniger and Gusck. The progression has been from the phase when propagandist media of the 1st World War era were seen as sources of messages with influence on attitudes, through the phase ending in the latter half of the 1960s when personal influence was seen as influencing attitudes more, to a phase starting at the beginning of the 1970s when cognitive effects rather than attitude change became the locus of research. The current phase explores the paradox of strong effects in framing reality and limited effects from both the media and audience. In framing, audiences are assumed to be influenced by the way an issue is presented by the media. Weaver (2007, 143-144) quotes Entman as arguing that framing involves the selection of a part of reality as perceived and communicating their salience in a way which promotes "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." Frames apply to different aspects and types of messages. As Allan (2010, 74-75) noted the process of deciding what to include in and exclude from the news are frames which tend to create order of events and make them meaningful. Gitlin cited in the analysis by Allan notes such frames are implicit in news operations; they are 'principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters'.

As Scheufele D. A. and Tewksbury D. (2007) posit, the related concept of Priming has also attracted focus. Priming refers to how content of news provides standards with which audiences appraise the performance of those in leadership positions. Through priming, media help shape factors that audiences take into account in judging issues or candidates. Through agenda-setting some issues receive more prominence through the media. Wu and Coleman (2009, 776) elaborates by stating that apart from being prominent such portrayal is frequent but the consequence is that audiences as a result recognize such issues as being of greater importance. McCombs and Shaw (1972, 184; Agenda setting..., n.d.) pioneered agenda-setting with the Chapel Hill study which did not prove the agenda-setting function but their evidence pointed to

conditions which have to exist if agenda-setting would occur in the media. Their premise in the consideration of agenda-setting was that “we judge as important what the media judge as important.” As McCombs (n.d., 5) explained further agenda-setting is not restricted to the initial focus of public attention on particular issues, they also condition the perspectives on such subjects of focus and their understanding.

These perspectives point to the two extremes of theory on media effects. Klapper pushes the argument on the Limited Effects Model and Elisabeth Noelle-Newmann authored the Powerful Effects Model (Severin and Tankard, 1992, 248, 258). The Limited Effects Model states that mass communication are not sufficient to bring about audience effects and that they only function within a nexus of other factors which mediate the process which are dubbed selective process – selective perception, selective exposure, and selective retention. Noelle-Newmann whose Spiral of Silence theory illustrates the powerful effects model drew from evidence from studies conducted by Mendelsohn, Maccoby and Farquhar, and Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, and Grube. One of the projects by Mendelsohn showed that an informational soap opera series which targeted Mexican-Americans resident in Los Angeles, resulted in the achievement of a key objective of the series with 13, 400 viewers (6 per cent) saying that they joined a community organization.

Paul Lazarsfeld's empirical studies in the 1930s and 1940s affirmed the Limited Effects Theory by concluding that the media are not as powerful or influential as assumed since people, given their many other influences or moderators, had different mechanisms for resisting the media and their influence on attitudes (Baran and Davis, 2009, 30). McQuail (1980) states that the direct answer to the question on the power of the mass media “although in many respects misleading,” is negative as most of the evidence from the most careful surveys and experiments have not supported the fears of critics or claims of the all-powerful media. This is corroborated by Schoemaker and Stremlau (2014, 185) who declare as insufficient and unproven evidence that in violent conflicts the media and technology are capable of the ambitious and widespread claim of empowering end-users and influencing choices politically. Fisher (1982, 11) on the other hand tended to affirm the Powerful Effects Model within the context of international news flow by quoting the assertion that the media are too powerful and have wide and effective penetration and thus a great threat to the cultural identity and values in that case of developing countries.

In their analysis therefore, Bailey and Harindranath (2010, 275) assert that media representations are crucial in the structuring of reality by giving meaning to events through their prism, and in the words of Shapiro whom they quoted include their use of grammar, rhetoric and the narrative. Gaillard (Louis da Costa..., 1980, 6) stated that the media in mirroring civilisation express mental attitudes through a “distorting prism” due to internal and external factors. Central to the ironies in its operations is what Owens-Ibie, (2013, 34) refers to as the sustenance of a convention by the media which exalts the “shocking, negative and whatever represents a deviation from order.”

Pratt (1988) quoting Fair who conducted a study on Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire cited the reliance of the media on government as the major source of news and that this has implications for how critical they can be in presenting the news or evaluating issues and events.

The dilemma of journalists appears compounded by factors in their working environment which may tend to dictate extra-professional considerations in news judgements. As Owens-Ibie (2009, 342-343) found based on a survey of print media journalists in some Lagos-based publications, there are indications that they face spells of unpaid salaries, reliance on family, friends, moonlighting, gratification and even gifts from news sources to meet their needs, admitting a conflict of interest as a result of their economic conditions. Yagboyaju (2014, 88) explores the theme of religion and suggests that the domination of the media by Christians in Nigeria has led to the trend where whatever is negative is attributed to Muslims. While Kukah (1996, 141) sees the issue deriving more from the reliance of local media on secondary sources of news, Cole (2014) focusing on the case of the Chibok girls wondered if any local journalist ever went to Chibok, instead of crediting foreign media as sources of news and reports from there. The Cable News Network (CNN) visited the community and provided visuals of a guided tour and interview with a victim of the abduction. Idowu (2014, 68) attributes the performance of the Nigerian media to the "failure of reporting" and the recourse to the "journalism of convenience".

Method

As a critical incidence (Critical Incidence Analysis, n.d.), Chibok and the abduction of girls interpreted as a problem or challenge in a national context offers a platform for examining the mass media in Nigeria and the frameworks of its performance in the communication of conflict. It adopts in a broad sense the analytical method which is a tool in interrogating critical incidents and as a technique was developed by Flanagan (1954) for job analysis. It has been used across disciplines including communication and the intercultural studies (Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Malio, A.-S. T. (2005).

The analysis focused on two independent private national newspapers selected because of their respectable profile in representation and regard for core news values. The study by Edeani (1994) adjudged *The Guardian* for instance as balanced and fair in covering conflict. The logic is that the trend in the content of both newspapers could be indicative of best practices in representations by media in Nigeria though deductions there from may not spur conclusive generalisations. The logic is that partisan publications whether government-owned, politician-funded or blatantly commercial are not appropriate benchmarks for interrogating mass media representation in a conflict situation. Findings would assist an assessment of performance levels in the quality of reporting and signpost the contributions of these media to the democratization of the media space, how well information is generated and managed to support national development indices within the framework of the

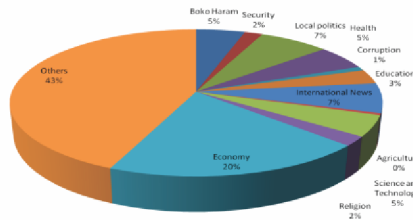
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The paper involves a qualitative analysis of the content of 14 judgmentally sampled editions each of *The Guardian* and *The Punch* between April 14, 2014 and May 16, 2014.

Findings: Analysing Contradictions

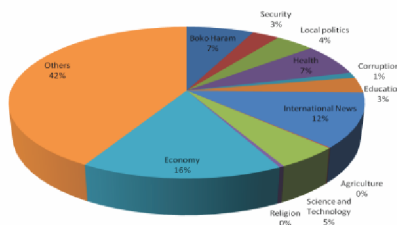
A major feature of media portrayal of the Chibok abductions was the contradictory or conflicting communication of the facts of the incidence, highlighting the challenges posed by the sourcing of information during conflicts on the one hand and the contestations for the dominance of the public sphere by the respective interests in conflict situations. By conflicting communication is meant content which convey different facts on the same event with the possibility of confusing the audience and raising doubts on the capacity of the medium to provide the truth. German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (see Gibbens, 2003, 462) envisioned the public sphere as forum for public debate where general issues of concern are discussed and opinions are formed. Mass media play the role of catalysts in defining as Walter Lipmann puts it not what to think but what to think about (Baran and Davis, 2009, 279). In playing this role the deduction of Burnet (1974) that media by their nature tend to somewhat alter the nature of information they process may not explain a deviation from ethical universals.

The first observation from the two newspapers analysed is that in terms of numbers, both newspapers did not necessarily devote more space to Boko Haram issue coverage or conflict in general. The picture that emerges is as follows:

Frequency of Issue Coverage: *The Guardian*



Frequency of Issue Coverage: *The Punch*



Stories in *The Guardian*

A major evidence of conflicting communication was in the number of Chibok girls abducted. While “about 100 girls” were reported abducted on April 16, by the following day, the paper reported the “rescue of 80” of the girls by vigilantes, hunters and soldiers stating that one of the rescued girls claimed that 243 girls were actually abducted as there was said to have been a headcount. By April 22, the parents of the victims were quoted to have said that 39 of 134 girls had “returned” as against the 44 credited to government as having returned. On May 5, a list of 180 names of missing girls was reported to have been released by the Northern Christian Forum. On the same date the newspaper reported that the President admitted that there was no agreement on the number of girls abducted or freed. According to a report by the Police in the May 7 edition, “220” were still being held, but more than “200” were simultaneously reported as kidnapped. While the figures remained unclear, the Chibok abductions provided fodder for politicking by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The newspaper on May 2 reported the Interim National Publicity Secretary of APC, Alhaji Lai Mohammed as describing as “incautious and insensitive” a statement credited to the Women Leader of PDP, Mrs Kema Chikwe for doubting that the abductions took place. The paper also quoted Mrs Chikwe as being “heartbroken and deeply pained by the unfortunate incident.” On May 8 the Northern chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) through its Secretary General, Prof Daniel Babayi and the Public Relations Officer, Sunday Oibe sought for support to get the Borno State Governor to facilitate the release of the girls. Most of these stories were front page news.

Stories in *The Punch*

The first major evidence of conflicting information on the Chibok abduction was on April 17, 2014 when Director of Defence Information, Major-General Chris Olukolade was reported to have said that out of “129” girls abducted only “8” of them were still missing. By the following day the newspaper reported the principal of Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok to have said that she was only aware of the 14 girls who escaped from their captors. In the same edition, the paper said the Borno State government was in custody of “30” while informing that it was possible that “99” of the girls were with the military authorities. The Borno State Commissioner for Education, Musa Kubo said “16 other girls” were presented by their parents. On April 22, the “principal” of the school declared that “190 school girls remain missing not 77”. The story said that “230” of the girls were reported missing by their parents and “40” escaped from their kidnappers. The paper stated that a total of “52” girls reportedly escaped in the same story. While a hostage negotiator was reported to have tried to broker a deal between Boko Haram and government on May 1 to free the girls, the “head teacher” was said to have affirmed that “53” girls were back home on May 6 just as the leader of the sect, according to an account threatened to sell the girls. Still on May 6 the figure of those abducted was given as “267” and “234” in the same edition, while the wife of the President was said to have said no girl was missing and the Boko Haram leader admitted responsibility for the abductions on

page 3. On page 12 of the May 5 edition the newspaper reported that the Northern States Christian and Elders Forum (NOSCEF) released the names of 180 of the abducted girls but on page 9 of the May 6 edition the former chairman of the group, Evangelist Matthew Owojaiye declared that the group did not authorize the issuing of the list.

Conflicting Communication

Chibok has in a way demonstrated the possibility of a negative multiplier on contradictory information disseminated by local media. It is a showcase of possibilities; in an industry constrained by its context, leading media organisations face similar challenges as others. Consequently, lines of quality journalism may become blurred. Bwala and Ibrahim (2014) provided possible answers to the conflicting media information that created the Chibok dilemma. Their explanation attempts to account for the discrepancy in the number of missing girls. Statements credited to the Borno State Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Lawan Tanko show that 530 students from five [neighbouring] areas –Ashigashiya, Izge, Chibok, Waraba A, and Lassa actually registered for the Senior Secondary School Examination (SSCE). The actual number of those taken from Chibok were estimations. The commissioner speculated that “276” were “allegedly abducted” by the sect members based on “claims of the people”. He admitted that there were conflicting figures on the number of missing girls. Getting the exact number was compounded by the destruction of the school records by the invaders. The claim was that the school was reputed to be a “miracle centre” so-called because of the very high number of candidates who enrol there. The speculation is that this was one of such centres where candidates enrol because it assures certain outcomes in the examinations. Foreign media echoed the confusion over figures and the New York Times in a column by Kristof (2014) stated that “about 50 girls escaped, but the police say that 276 are still missing.”

President Jonathan in setting up the Presidential Fact Finding Committee on the abduction of Chibok Girls chaired by retired Brigadier-General Ibrahim Sabo admitted to not being pleased with the lack of accurate information on the number of girls abducted (Jonathan sets up..., 2014). It was this committee which eventually found that out of the 276 abducted 219 are still missing, that there were 395 girls in the school when the incident happened. Out of these 119 escaped before their school mates were taken away and 57 of those abducted had returned home (Chibok: 219..., 2014).

Despite challenges posed by the security situation, the contribution of the media to wide circulation of confusing facts and conflicting communication became a statement on the capacity and performance of the media. As Babatunde (2014) noted that media organisations should have provided leadership by becoming source of reference through their informed investigations. He asked

Why for instance, didn't the media obtain the list of students from

the West African Examination Council (WAEC) being the body that conducted the Examination the victims were said to be writing as at the period of abduction?

The report quoted two correspondents of national newspapers based in Borno State highlighting the danger of attempting to physically go to Chibok. This situation led to heavy reliance primarily on official government sources, the sect or even foreign sources in the coverage of the Chibok and the Boko Haram crisis by Nigerian mass media. Martin Oloja, editor of *The Guardian* admitted the newspaper's inability to "reach the beat" and to be embedded with the military during their operations; the indiscriminate killings were a deterrent to physical coverage, he said. "It is easy for people to condemn us, but it is the circumstances that have brought shame upon us." (Babatunde, 2014, 8-10)

Conclusion

This scenario presented in the study raises questions on the capacity of the mass media to function responsibly as expected in a democratic setting. It calls to question how efficiently the framing mechanism outlined by Tankard (see de Vreese, n.d) functions for instance. It shows how compromises in the reporting (news gathering) impinge on the ultimate selection process. There is more to the newspaper's account, the narratives constructed for publication than the selection criteria. Given that available details available are unverified, how do the media determine headlines responsibly? Consequently this illuminates further the media influence debate. It raises questions regarding audience reception in a conflict situation where there should be a high reliance on the media. What do the audience believe when there is conflicting information? How do they respond when there is no certainty in what should otherwise be obvious, but is not, yet the same media organisations show or report videos from parties to the conflict? What are audiences likely to believe? These questions were beyond the scope of the study. However, the inadequacy which is illustrated in media performance demonstrates a hitherto overlooked dimension – constraints within the macro-environment that impacts on framing.

From the agenda-setting perspective, questions arise on what the media are able to make salient given their obvious limitations. In line with the logic of priming, what do media suggest as being more important considerations for decisions that audience(s) need to make? If the way issues are presented by the media have implications for how audience opinions are shaped (Framing) what do the conflicting communication on Chibok say of media representation? These three as conceptualized by Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) are crucial in defining the relevance of mass media especially in a transitional democracy.

The dynamism in the competitive news market puts more pressure on the processing of breaking news and certainly the conflicting figures in reports of the missing Chibok girls illustrates this and more. The revelations regarding media performance in this

case calls for closer interrogation of the prospects of ethical journalism practice and the impact of this on the development agenda. Media have a responsibility to report and communicate in conflict situations which are inevitable. The contestations for power and attendant jostling by various interests, including religious and ethnic groups for a presence in the public sphere is to be expected, even likely to intensify. There should be appropriate balance in media perspectives and in unfolding reality, the media should work within the framework of Article 19 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which stipulates that everyone has the freedom of opinion and expression.

Though it remains attractive in the increasingly commercialised press, covering and communicating conflict is an uphill task particularly for local practitioners who must effectively screen major news sources. Their professional challenge is how this is done whilst maintaining the desired level of commitment to truth, accuracy, and respecting demands of national security and personal safety. Journalists are more than mere reporters whose views on the issues they report may matter, their wellbeing and that of their organisations must be considered in national security strategies. It is however difficult to justify the sub-optimal performance by the mass media of their traditional roles as they attempt to “mirror reality”. The foregoing only highlight institutional limitations in the capacity of the media to perform their functions in society. Chibok has highlighted the challenges of the mass media in an unfolding conflict situation. From all indications combatants in conflicts and the audience alike continue to look up to the mass media to be channels of communication, not conduits of conflicting or confusing communication. There are constituted expectations which require the media as the Fourth Estate of the realm to foster accountability. That domain needs to be (re)organized to respond to the peculiarities of the Nigerian society. Undoubtedly, Nigerian mass media have been credited for their leadership in the nation's evolution. A new impetus is now required for charting the path of hope given peculiar challenges at this contentious moments in its history.

References

- Adeniyi, O. (2011) *Power, Politics and Death: A front-view account of Nigeria under the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua*, Lagos: Kachifo Limited.
- Adeniyi, O. (2014). How do we get out of Chibok? May 15. Retrieved from <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/how-do-we-get-out-of-chibok-/178521/>
- Agbibo, D (2013). The Ongoing Campaign of Terror in Nigeria: Boko Haram versus the State. *Stability. International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(3): 52, pp.1-18, doi. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.cl>
- Agenda Setting Function of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.isns.uw.edu.pl/materialy_od_wykladowcow/sobiech/E.Griffin-A-First-Look-at-Communication-Theory-ch.31-32.pdf
- Allan, S (2010). *News culture* (3rd ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.
- “Amalgamation Proclamation of 1914”, Speech by the Governor-General (Sir F. Lugard) on the occasion of the declaration of the Constitution of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, January 1, 1914, *The Guardian*, March 5, 2014.
- Amobi, I.T. and Hussein, S. (2013). Boko Haram, The media and national security. *Unilag Communication Review*, Volume 7 Number 1 May.
- Anderton, C. H. and Carter, J.R. (2009). *Principles of conflict economics: A primer for social scientists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Awaah, F. (2013). Emerging issues and threats to cultural security in Ghana: Women and youth to the rescue, *Journal of African Culture and International Understanding*, No. 5 July-September.
- Babatunde, F. (2014). “The underreporting of the Chibok abductions”. *Media Review*, May/June
- Bailey, O. G. and Harindranath, R. (2010). Racialized 'othering': The representation of asylum seekers in news media. in S. Allan, (Ed.), *Journalism: critical issues*, Berkshire, England: Open University Press.
- Baran, S. J. & Davis D.K. (2009), *Mass communication theory: Foundations ferment, and future* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Bratic, V. and Schirch, L. (2007), Why and when to use the media for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, Issue Paper 6 December. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, www.gppac.net. Retrieved from https://www.sfcg.org/articles/media_for_conflict_prevention.pdf
- Burnet, M. (1974). *The mass media in a violent world. Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 63*. Paris: The UNESCO Press.
- Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Malio, A.-S. T. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954-2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research*, 5(4): 475–497
- Bwala, J. and Ibrahim, H. (2014) Abducted girls of Chibok: The untold story of a 'miracle centre'. May 3. Retrieved from <http://www.tribune.com.ng/special-feature/item/4504-abducted-girls-of-chibok-the-untold-story-of-a-miracle-centre>
- Chibok: 219 girls officially missing – FG (2014) June 21. Retrieved from <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/06/chibok-219-girls-officially-missing-fg/>

- Chong D. and Druckman, J.N. (2007). A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 99–118. Retrieved from https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=A+Theory+of+Framing+and+Opinion+Formation+in+Competitive+Elite+Environments&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&client=firefox-a&channel=fflb&gfe_rd=cr&ei=8CHuU66MivDH8geUz4HYCQ
- Chong D. and Druckman, J.N. (2007). “Framing theory” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2007.10:103-126. Downloaded from [arjournals.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org) by 24.12.195.203 on 05/08/07. Retrieved from <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054?journalCode=polisci>
- Cissel M. (2012) Media framing: A comparative content analysis on mainstream and alternative news coverage of Occupy Wall Street. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* Vol. 3, No. 1 Spring. Retrieved from <https://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol3no1/08CisselEJSpring12.pdf>
- Cole, P.D. (2014). Where do Nigerians get their news from? (2). *The Guardian*, Thursday, July 3. Conflict theory (n.d), Retrieved from <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/llkkl/law&soc/trevino.conflict.pdf>
- Critical Incidence Analysis, professional development for academics involved in teaching (n.d.) Retrieved from www.prodait.org
- de Vreese C.H. (n.d.). News framing: theory and typology *Information Design Journal + Document Design* 13(1), 51–62. Retrieved from http://www.jcmcr.com/upload/Studies_file/1233468300.pdf
- Edeani, D.O. (1994). Nigerian mass media handling of conflict situations in the West African sub-region, *Africa Media Review* Vol. 8 No. 1.
- Fink C. F. (1968). “Some conceptual difficulties in the theory of social conflict, Conflict resolution, Vol XII, Number 4. Retrieved from http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/67560/10.1177_002200276801200402.pdf?sequence
- Fisher, D. (1982). *The right to communicate: A status report*. Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 94. Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1982
- Flanagan, J.C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4): 327–358
- Gambo D. (2014). Audacity of the pen in a challenging environment (1). Keynote speech presented by Prof Gambo of the Department of Mass Communication, the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, at the Second Ibru Legacy Lectures, organised by the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt, on Thursday, May 15, 2014, *The Guardian*, Thursday, May 22.
- García-Avilés, J.A, Fuente-Cobo, C. and Maciá-Barber, C. (2014) Journalists' perceptions about regulation and conflicts in their work: The case of

- Madrid-based news professionals. Observatorio (OBS*) Journal. vol.8 - n°2, 123-1421646-5954/ERC123483/2014. Retrieved from <http://obs.obercom.pt>
- Gbogun gboro (n.d.) Failings of three largest nations: Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. Retrieved from <http://thenationonlineng.net/new/failings-three-largest-nations-hausa-fulani-igbo-yoruba/>
- Gerbner, G. (1988). Violence and terror in the mass media. Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 102. Paris: The Unesco Press.
- Giddens, A. [with the assistance of Karen Birdsall] (2003). Sociology (4th ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Harolds, L. (2014). Chibok: The story of Nigeria's last people to submit to British rule, May 17. Retrieved from <http://www.tribune.com.ng/special-feature/item/5429-chibok-the-story-of-nigeria-s-last-people-to-submit-to-british-rule>
- Howard, E. (2014). Bring back our girls: global protests over abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls (n.d.). [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), Wednesday May 7. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/07/bring-back-our-girls-global-protests-abduction-nigerian-schoolgirls>
- Ibrahim, J. (2014) ... and finally, they Attacked Us: The site, the message and the diversion, Jibrin, 28th May (Internet)
- Idowu, L. (2014) Chibok girls and the failure of reporting, *The Guardian*, Monday, June 30,
- Jonathan sets up fact-finding committee on Chibok girls (2014). Saturday, May 03. Retrieved from <http://www.nigerianeye.com/2014/05/jonathan-sets-up-fact-finding-committee.html>
- Kolawole, S. (2014). Home truths about Boko Haram. Retrieved from <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/home-truths-about-boko-haram/176588/>
- Kristof, N. (2014) 'Bring Back Our Girls' May 3. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/opinion/sunday/kristof-bring-back-our-girls.html?_r=0
- Kukah, M.H. (1996). Public perception on the press in Nigeria., in Dare, O. and Uyo, O. (Eds.), *Journalism in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives*, Lagos: Nigeria Union of Journalists, 1996
- Louis da Costa, A., Aboubakr, Y. Chopra, P., & Matta, F.R. (1980). News values and principles of cross-cultural communication (Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 85), Paris: The Unesco Press.
- Marshall, M. G. (2002) *Global Terrorism: An overview and analysis*. Center for Systemic Peace Draft: September 11, Occasional Paper Series #3 Retrieved from <http://www.systemicpeace.org/vlibrary/CSP3GlobalTerrorism2002.pdf>
- Martin, J.N. and Nakayama, T.K. (2005). *Experiencing intercultural communication: An introduction* (2nd Ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- McCombs, M. (n.d.). The agenda-setting role of the mass media in the shaping of public opinion. Retrieved from http://www.infoamerica.org/documentos_pdf/mccombs01.pdf

- McCombs, M. E and Shaw, D.L. (1972) The agenda-setting function of mass media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol 36 No 2 (Summer) pp. 176-187
http://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/PLSC541_Fall06/McCombs%20and%20Shaw%20POQ%201972.pdf
- McQuail, D. (1980). *Towards a sociology of mass communications*, London: Collier Macmillan.
- Media Review (2014). "Diary of bestiality: 3 years of Boko Haram attacks". May/June.
- Moller, B (2003), *Conflict theory*. Research Center on Development and International Relations (DIR) Aalborg University Denmark Development Research Series Working Paper No. 122 Retrieved from <http://vbn.aau.dk/files/33796614/122.pdf>
- Murdoch, H. (2014) Behind Nigeria's 'Bring Back Our Girls': Can we allow sex slaves in 2014? (+video), June 27. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2014/0627/Behind-Nigeria-s-Bring-Back-Our-Girls-Can-we-allow-sex-slaves-in-2014-video>
- Neubeck, K.J. and Glasberg, D.S. (2005). *Sociology: Diversity, conflict and change*. Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Ochogwu, J.P. (2011). Introductory narrative on media, conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. in Golwa, J.H.P and Ochogwu, J.P. (eds.), *Media, conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria*. Abuja: Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution with support from Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).
- Onochie, B.C. (2014). Ekweremadu, Fayemi task media on Boko Haram. *The Guardian*. July 18.
- Onuoha, F.C. (2012). Boko Haram: Nigeria's extremist Islamic sect. *AlJazeera Centre for Studies*, February 29. Retrieved from <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2012/2/29/2012229113341793734BOKO%20HARAM%20NIGERIAS%20EXTREMIST%20ISLAMIC%20SECT.pdf>
- Owens-Ibie, N. (2002). Socio-cultural considerations in conflict reporting in Nigeria, in Umaru A. Pate, (ed.), *Introduction to conflict reporting in Nigeria*. Lagos: Frankard Publishers for Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Owens-Ibie, N (2009). Poverty, professionalism and the challenges of democratization among conflicted print media journalists in Nigeria, in M'bayo, R.T.
- Onwumechili, C & Musa, B.A. (Eds.), *Communication in an era of global conflicts: Principles and strategies for 21st century Africa*. Lanham: University Press of America Inc.
- Owens-Ibie, N. (2013). *Communicating an implosion: Signs and wander, popular culture and the crumbling of empire*, Maiden Inaugural Lecture, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, April 9.
- Palen J. J. (2001). *Social problems for the twenty-first Century* (1st ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Perry, A. (2011). Threat Level Rising: How African Terrorist Groups Inspired by al-Qaeda Are Gaining Strength, Monday, December 19. Retrieved from

- <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2101780,00.html>
- Pratt, C.B. (1988). Responsibility and ethical reasoning in the Nigerian press. *Africa Media Review*, Vol. 2. No. 2.
- Raj, S. J.1 and, Sreekumar, R. (2014). Dynamics of 'Terror Reporting': Indian media and the changing perspective on terrorism. *European Journal of Academic Essays* 1(4): 82-88, ISSN: 2183-1904. www.euroessays.org. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/7761472/Dynamics_of_Terror_Reporting_Indian_Media_and_the_Changing_Perspective_on_Terrorism-_Rohini_Sreekumar
- Scheufele D.A. (1999) "Framing as a theory of media effects", *Journal of Communication, Winter*. Retrieved from <http://www.asc.upenn.edu/usr/ogandy/c45405%20resources/scheufele%20framing%20as%20effects.pdf>
- Scheufele D. A. and Tewksbury D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication* 57 9–20 International Communication Association <http://scholar.harvard.edu/scheufele/publications/framing-agenda-setting-and-priming-evolution-three-media-effects-models>
- Schoemaker, E. and Stremlau, N. (2014). Media and conflict: An assessment of the evidence. *Progress in Development Studies* 14, 2 pp. 181–195 DOI: 10.1177/1464993413517790. Retrieved from <http://pdj.sagepub.com/content/14/2/181>
- Severin, W.J. and Tankard, Jr. J (1992), *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*. New York: Longman.
- Timkola (2011) Boko Haram Final Threat - Nigeria Belongs To Allah, December 29. <http://ngmix.net/lib/vendor/web/articles/2/5333.html>
- Weaver, D.H. (2007). Thoughts on agenda setting, framing, and priming. *Journal of Communication* 57 142–147 International Communication Association http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/thoughts_on_agenda_setting_framing_and_priming.pdf
- Wu, H. D. and Coleman R. (2009). Advancing agenda-setting theory: The comparative strength and new contingent conditions of the two levels of agenda-setting effects. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* Vol. 86, No. 4 Winter 775-789 mOWAEJMC
- Yagboyaju, D.A. (2014). Politics, religion and Nigeria's national security (2), *The Guardian*. Thursday, July 3.