

# Foreign Media Framing of Boko Haram Insurgency: A Critical Analysis of BBC and Aljazeera Online Coverage

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## Abstract

The 2015 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) indicates that Boko Haram, which majorly operates in Nigeria, has overtaken ISIL and has become the most dreadful terrorist group in the world, a figure that has placed Nigeria on the world map as the most terrorised country. This study is a critical evaluation of foreign media coverage of Boko Haram insurgency, using media framing as a theoretical framework. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on stories about Boko Haram that appear on the websites of two leading international broadcast media organisations – BBC and Aljazeera. In this study, twelve stories each were sampled from the BBC and Al-Jazeera websites using purposeful random sampling. The study found that BBC framing of Boko Haram insurgency took stereotypic dimension of age-long and deep-rooted narratives of western media that associate Islam with barbarism, killing, suicide-bombing, fanaticism, extremism, and terrorism. Al-Jazeera posture on Boko Haram coverage on the other hand, tends to counter the stereotypic disposition and dominant narratives of western media by establishing the fact that there are “good” Muslims who are committed to propagating peace in the multi-religious society. The findings further expose how western media capitalise on the socio-economic and political failures of African countries to influence the political and economic bearings of these nations. Unlike Al-Jazeera that appeared fair to both the ruling and the opposition parties, the BBC tend to confer the status of competence on the opposition party by continuously portraying the ruling party as grossly incompetent in tackling the menace of Boko Haram. The study recommends that BBC and other foreign media

should be more balanced in its reportage of terrorism in foreign countries by downplaying on the religious status of perpetrators. This is because, when all Muslims are labelled as terrorists, the sympathy the world deserves from “good” Muslims when tackling terrorism would diminish, naturally.

**Keywords:** *Boko Haram, Terrorism, International Media, BBC, Al-Jazeera, Nigeria*

## 1.1. Introduction

The world as it is today remains a complex society that is plagued with social, political, economical and cultural challenges of different shades, colours and depth. Regrettably, terrorism has become part and parcel of the modern society as the number of terrorism-related death in the world continues to double day by day. It is even more poignantly profound to note that the complexity of the world hauls at a geometrical rate, with people in fierce struggle to catch-up with the fast-paced world. In order to catch-up with the rapid movement of the world, people find respite in the media, as they run to the media to experience a more simplified version of the world. So, as the world continues to expand, the functions of the media becomes even more evident as media continue to shrink the world into a miniaturised components that are closely knitted by technologies. Media have therefore become social chords that connect two people or nations, who though, may not be geographically proximate but are interlinked by communication technologies. Mass media can contribute to understanding or misunderstanding of each other’s countries (McNelly and Izcaray, 1986). This understanding and or

misunderstanding created by the media are achieved mainly through media framing. Thus, the manner media frame a nation can affect the way such country is perceived by members of international community.

Globally, terrorism is surging at an exponential rate. The 2015 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) indicates that the total number of terrorism-related deaths in 2014 has increased by 80 per cent from the previous year, with 78 per cent of all deaths concentrated in Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2015). The report also indicates that Boko Haram, which majorly operates in Nigeria, has overtaken ISIL (also known as Islamic State) and has become the most dreadful terrorist group in the world, a figure that has placed Nigeria as the world most terrorised country. With this towering status of Boko Haram within the global context, global media organisations ought to be interested in the activities of this world most dreadful terrorist group. However, the manner media present and represent the Boko Haram insurgency could influence how Nigeria will be perceived by the international community.

From the international communication perspective, African countries are generally given sparse coverage by the western media, except if such event is about disaster (Ndlela, 2005). Generally, there have been allegations by media scholars that western media coverage of Africa has been “irresponsible and inadequate” (Danker-Dake, 2004, p.1) with the continent being portrayed as “the repository of our greatest fears” (Hawk, 1992, p.13); a continent where war thrives like mushroom, where diseases spread like wildfire, and where corruption blossoms; a land dominated “with natural disasters, political turmoil, ethnic violence, disease and savagery” (Danker-Dake, 2004, p.1) and “a crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded situation” (Ebo, 1992, p. 15). Although, Nigeria is regarded as a former British colony and had since gained her independence in October 1st 1960, but the question of whether the diplomatic ties between the two nations are disposed towards dependency or cooperation cannot be squarely answered without controversies. However, facts abound that the British government and its agencies are discernible in the affairs of Nigeria. As a matter of fact, there are indications that media landscape in Nigeria have colonial overhang to some extent. More visible is the fact that BBC, which represents the imperialist’s institution, has huge presence in Nigeria, especially in the Northern parts where the activities of Boko Haram are rife. With a weekly reach of 23.5 million adults, BBC Hausa Service for instance “provides the largest services in terms of the

number of listeners” and with this figure, the “BBC Hausa Service has around four times the size of the audience for the English service in Nigeria” (Vagg, Clifford and Kantar Media, 2010, p.5). This dominance of BBC in Northern part of the country in particular and the entire Nigeria as a whole has social, economic, cultural and political implications. Foreign media coverage of a country has huge implications, as the coverage can portray the country from either a negative or positive dimension, and this in return could affect the perception of foreign audiences about the country.

Al-Jazeera on the other hand has been describe as a global media platform that has come to challenge western domination and hegemony (de Graaf, n.d) and through the media platform, “New voices emerged, competing for audiences through the world by offering news shaped by varied interests and perspectives” (Seib, 2005, p.601). Even though media professionals strive to achieve objectivity in their reportage, studies have shown that media reports are largely not value-neutral; they are shaped and influenced by dominant ideologies (Thompson, 1995; Watson, 1998). The motivation behind this research therefore is to uncover the ways and manners Boko Haram news are framed by the BBC and Al-Jazeera, and to examine the underlying factors, such as social, political, economic and cultural forces that shape the framing of such news. After all, Media are lovers of events “that suggest conflict and the potential for what is shocking and sensational” (Tuman, 2010, p. 196). This study will therefore bring to the forefront how the western media create and recreate the most challenging security issue in Nigeria. As Stuart Hall notes that “the media are...part of the dominant means of ideological production. What they ‘produce’ is precisely representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work” (Watson, 2007, p.107).

## 1.2 Boko Haram: From Domestic Violence to International Terrorist Organisation

The evolution of Boko Haram has attracted different appellations and labels at different times, basically shaped and influenced by the modus operandi of a group that has been globally dubbed as the most deadly terrorist organisation in the world. The history of Boko Haram, a terrorist organisation whose official name is “Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad” which in Arabic means “People Committed to the Propagation of the

Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" is somewhat foggy as the origins have been described as "murky" (Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives, 2011, p.5).

The history of Boko Haram is laced with different controversies as there is no clear-cut fact about how it started and who started it. "Boko" initially meant something that is fake, counterfeit but later came to signify Western education, while "haram" means forbidden. The terrorist group was founded in 2002 and the appellation "Boko Haram" was given to the group by the residents of Maiduguri (Ayoola and Olaosun, 2014). The group adamantly opposes what it considers "as Western-based incursions that threaten the orthodox values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria" (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014, p.43). Ayoola and Olaosun (2014, p.50) describe Boko Haram as the appellation used to describe a "Nigeria-based militant Islamic group originally led by Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic Islamic cleric." Richard N. Haass has described the terrorist group as "an Islamic separatist movement" (Campbell, 2014, p. viii).

Different reasons have been adduced as the force behind the emergence of the terrorist organisation. Okoli and Iortyer (2014) identify youth employment, social inequality, economic exclusion, itinerant Islamic catechism also known as Almajiri as reasons for the prevalence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Campbell (2014, p.5) describes Boko Haram insurgency as "a direct result of chronic poor governance by Nigeria's federal and state governments, the political marginalization of north-eastern Nigeria, and the region's accelerating impoverishment." Other similar factors attributable to fuelling Boko Haram insurgency are "feeling of alienation from the wealthier, Christian, oil-producing, southern Nigeria, pervasive poverty, rampant government corruption, heavy-handed security measures, and the belief that relations with the West are a corrupting influence" (Campbell, 2014, p.6).

Historically, at the early stage of Boko Haram appearance, the group was generally perceived and seen as a domestic militant group as all its attacks were targeted at churches, mosques, government institutions, among others. However, after the August 2011 bombing which was targeted at the United Nations office complex in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, international actors began to see the group from a larger perspective. In fact, at its budding stage, the United States of America "Intelligence Community largely underestimated the potential for

al-Qaeda affiliate groups to target the U.S. homeland, wrongly assessing they had only regional ambitions and threats against the U.S. homeland were merely "aspirational" (Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives, 2011, p.3). No wonder, Obama administration had to be pressurised by the Congress before the United States of America could dub Boko Haram as "a foreign terrorist organisation" in 2013 and later "offered a multimillion-dollar reward for information regarding the whereabouts of Abubakar Shekau, the best-known Boko Haram warlord" (Campbell, 2014, p.9). The process of labelling people, group and entities as terrorist has legal, political and fiscal consequences even though such labelling has given birth to demonization of groups based on unilateral criteria determined by the United States of American Government (Van de Voorde, 2006). The moment United States of America accepted Boko Haram as a terrorist organisation the international media organisations reinforced this position and have since become more interested in the activities of the terrorist organisation. For instance, the US Congress perceived the attack on the United Nations House in Nigeria's capital "as an attack driven against an entity that cooperates with the Nigerian government" (Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives, 2011, p.11).

The above suggests that most western countries and their media organisations become more interested in the affairs of other nations when such events have domestic implications. This view is in congruence with a prism that foreign media focus on international event only if such event has high domestic impact (Pande, 2009). In their study on the international news flow and the world system, it was found that many countries appear on the United States of American newspapers if they were at the centre of civil unrest and natural disaster (Horvit, Chang, Lau and Xiaoming (2000). In another study on the international news coverage of US press after the September 11, 2001, it was found that "even if coverage of international news peaked after September 11, 2001, it seems to have returned to – and even fallen below the levels of the 1990s" (Horvit, Kriel, Anderson and Rodriguez, 2007, p.16).

In a recent study which sought to analyse international broadcast coverage of Boko Haram insurgency by two leading international news organisations, CNN and Al Jazeera English, it was found that that these two broadcast organisations mainly rely on "parachute" reporting, a situation where reporters are only dispatched to the scene of

the conflicts immediately there is outburst of crisis (Aliyu and Muhammad, 2013). The danger in this form of reporting is that the reporter who is dispatched to the scene of the conflict may not have adequate knowledge of the people, and he may report the crisis out of context.

### 1.3 Media-Terrorism Relationship: Any Ambivalence?

The society today is described a media-mediated society where we depend on media for relevant information about our society. Media monitor our political, social, economic and religious environment and most of the activities we hear and read come to us through the third eye of the society. However, for any information the media disseminate, it passes through procedural, professional ethical sifting and sieving. Hence, the daily reports of occurrences by the media inundate members of the public with, are subjected to some forms of mediation because media contents are shaped and influenced by both internal and external factors that regulate the activities of the journalist. In reporting insurgence and terrorism, those internal and external factors that shape media contents may become even more palpable considering the sensitive nature of terrorism. The question therefore is, in reporting terrorism, what effect does media coverage of terrorist activities, considering the fact that media contents suffer huge mediation?

The relationship between terrorists and media has been empirically documented (See Rohner and Frey, 2007; Frey, 2004). But does media coverage of terrorism increase terrorist activities? The available historical facts have shown that the relationship between media and terrorism is not mutually exclusive, but mutually beneficial (Rohner and Frey, 2007). In his book titled "Terrorism, the Media and the Law" Miller (1982) asserts that media and terrorism "are entwined in an almost inexorable, symbiotic relationship. Terrorism is capable of writing any drama – no matter how horrible – to compel the media's attention...Terrorism, like an ill mannered enfant terrible, is the media's stepchild, a stepchild which the media, unfortunately, can neither completely ignore nor deny" (p.1). Cohen-Almagor (2005) describes media as terrorist best friends, as the success of terrorist groups depends on the amount of publicity they generate. This might be one of the reasons why most notorious terrorist organisations are good media propagandists. While terrorist groups capitalise on the publicity generated through media to rain more terror on the society, media seize their stories as opportunity to make sales. Nacos (1994) captures it in a more dramatic

manner: "If terrorism is seen as political theatre performed for audiences...clearly the mass media plays a crucial role...Without massive news coverage the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest" (p.175). Wilkinson (1997) tersely captures the relationship thus:

It would be foolish to deny that many modern terrorists and certain sections of the mass media can appear to become locked in a relationship of considerable mutual benefit. The former want to appear on prime time TV to obtain not only massive, possibly world-wide, publicity but also the aura of legitimisation that such media attention gains for them in the eyes of their own followers and sympathisers. For the mass media organisations the coverage of terrorism, especially prolonged incidents such as hijackings and hostage situations, provides an endless source of sensational and visually compelling news stories capable of boosting audience/readership figures (p.52)

Media, aside taking advantage of the sensational spectacle of terrorist activities to generate readership and viewership, media also serve as vital platforms where terrorist groups share vital information. In his analysis of the impact of media coverage on terrorism tendencies of Muslim zealots found that the technical know-how that surround the modes of operation of terrorists are learnt through media (Schbley, 2004). There are also terrorist websites that provide details on how to make Improvised Explosives Devices and there are websites that have been distributing electronic materials on how to make poisons, bombs, and perform terrorist attacks (Ishengoma, 2013). In addition, terror spectacles are also essential component of contemporary politics where terrorist organisations take advantage of dramatic images and media sensationalised portrayals of their attacks to gain global attention (Kellner, 2004). Examples of such terror spectacles in history include the hostage taking at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985, and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on New York's twin towers are all examples of where terrorist organisations harvested public attention through media publicity that preceded the various attacks (Frey, 2007). Terrorist's spectacles such as bombing, gruesome killing, maiming of children and the innocents are therefore means through which terrorist groups communicate with their targets and media wittingly or unwittingly, covertly or overtly, partner with these organisations in actualising their wicked plans. The attention given

to terrorists' destructive activities generate huge unpaid publicity and this draw the attention of the governments to the groups behind the terror.

Many have also criticised media a scheming tool in the hands of political elites through blatant conspiracy against some groups by labelling the groups and their cause as a terrorist organisation in order to give dog a bad name. Those critics believe that terrorism is a complex social phenomenon that deserves multiple appellations. People have therefore designed phrases such "one-man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" to explain the complexity and diversity of what terrorism entails, and media are accused of being used to reinforce such position. Although, in some quarters, the argument that one's man terrorist is another man's freedom fighter rather sounds ridiculous and untenable, as the operational freedom fighters

The idea that one person's "terrorist" is another's "freedom fighter" cannot be sanctioned. Freedom fighters or revolutionaries don't blow up buses containing non-combatants; terrorist murderers do. Freedom fighters don't assassinate innocent businessmen, or hijack and hold hostage innocent men, women, and children; terrorist murders do. It is a disgrace that democracies would allow the treasured word "freedom" to be associated with acts of terrorist (Shutz, 1986, pp. 18-19, quoting Senator Henry Jackson).

Turk (2004) therefore considers terrorism as a socially constructed phenomenon that can be subjected to multiple meanings and interpretations. Such interpretations and meanings "are not unbiased attempts to depict truth but rather conscious efforts to manipulate perceptions to promote certain interests at the expense of others. When people and events come to be regularly described in public as terrorists and terrorism, some governmental or other entity is succeeding in a war of words in which the opponent is promoting alternative designations such as 'martyr' and 'liberation struggle'" (Turk, 2004, pp.271-272). Certainly, in a conflict scenario, parties or actors involved, make frantic efforts to stigmatize one another by dismissing the "enemy as an evildoer" in a desperate effort to "win support for one's own cause" (p.273). Drawing from the happenings in the United States of America, a country that has been brandished as both fighter and perpetrator of terrorism, Davidson (1986) further attest the fact that labelling a particular group or organisation as terrorist can be an ideological warfare in the hands of powerful nations such as the United States of America. He posits thus:

Labelling one's opponent a terrorist is one way to barbarize both his image and his cause. Many world leaders see terrorism as monolithic: that is, they trace all important terrorist actions – either directly or indirectly – to the same source. In the U.S. they are branded as degenerative acts of immoral enemies... The terror of one's foes is real terror, premeditated and pathological, while that of one's friends is only a temporary aberration, a mistake, to be addressed, if at all, by quiet diplomacy... (Davidson, 1986, p.109).

#### 1.4 Foreign Media Representation of Africa

Over the years, Africa has recorded abysmal attention by the foreign media and even when the western media report Africa, they often portray the people as uncivilized, backward and a people who indulge in dangerous cultural practices (Michira, 2002). Studies indicate that negative news of Third World origin attracted more prominence than those from the industrialised countries (Schulz, 2001). In fact, of all the negative images of Africa by the media of the developed countries, the most consistent and recurrent one is that which portray Africa as a continent enmeshed in acute famine and severe starvation (Michira, 2002). Imagine a whole continent that is made of diverse people with different nationalities, diverse cultures and values being seen as a homogeneous entity and myopically described as "a crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilization" (Ebo, 1992, p.15). More debilitating is a portrayal of a dark continent that is characterised by "primeval irrationality, tribal anarchy, civil war, political instability, flagrant corruption, incompetent leadership and managerial ineptitude, hunger, famine and starvation as well as rampant diseases, especially AIDS" (Michira, 2002, Abstract, Para 5).

Globally, the constant negative portrayal of Africa and other Third World Nations by the western media, had generated lots of controversies in the past, and these controversies were consummated and crystallised with the establishment of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems in the 1980s by the UNESCO. Under the Presidency of Sean MacBride, the Commission which is also known as the MacBride's Commission was to find solutions to the numerous problems associated with international communication, especially, in the areas of imbalance and negative portrayals of Third World nations by the western media. The task of the MacBride's Commission was undoubtedly, innately phenomenal,

multi-faceted and fused with some inherent complexities, owing to the fact that the imbalance of information flow between the developed countries and the third world nations is perceived to be an extension of the economic, political, and cultural inequalities that exist between these countries. The Commission, although admitted there was imbalance but the colourations and shapes of these imbalances take varied and complex dimensions. It argued that there was imbalance between developed and developing countries; between countries with different political and economic interest; between countries, especially between bigger and smaller countries; between third world nations themselves; between economic/political news and news about culture of the people; between what is generally referred to as 'good' news (news about inventions, successes) and 'bad' news (news about disaster, diseases, failures) (MacBride, 1980).

The BBC History Seminar, 24 November, 2004 captures the dilemma of African continents in a manner that portray that even the African journalists cannot rescue the continent from the sledge-hammer of the international media domination. For instance, one Salim Amin, son of the famous cameraman Mohammed Amin once describes himself as "...an African journalist who also tries to peddle my wares to the international media... but we cannot sell anything positive about Africa. We do plenty of positive stories, on subjects other than war and disaster, but they are mainly for an African audience now, because we cannot move them internationally" (Cited in Frank, 2005, p.133). Even with the emergence of new media, African media cannot compete favourably with the international media organisations in terms of telling her own story; internationally, most stories about Africa are still told through the eyes of the foreign journalists.

Stereotypes are the quickest ways of getting the stories about Africa written by the Western media and this makes negative events about Africa to have greater chances of being selected than positive stories (Ndlela, 2005). Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland (2008: Sheet 2, p. 1) define stereotype as "a belief that all members of a given group share the same fixed personality traits or characteristics as a result of this group membership. Stereotypes are always based on an oversimplified generalisation of a social group." In media, "stereotype reflects the well-established attitudes towards a particular object, it is schematic averaged, familiar, stable representation of genres, social processes / events, ideas, people, dominate in the media texts, designed for a mass audience" (Fedorov, 2015, p.158).

Media stereotypic identities are attached to different group memberships such as gender, age, ethnicity, family, religion, and race among others. Although these identities that are being distributed by the media can be right or wrong, negative or positive, overt or subtle, but they are presumed identities that may not be true. "Since there is never enough time or space to describe people in all the rich complexity that their individuality deserves, short-cuts have to be taken, comparisons made, generalisation risked, labels attached" (Medhurst, 2002, p.315). In the study of Norwegian media coverage of a Zimbabwean crisis, it was found that the Norwegian media reduced the crisis to a typical African "story of tragedy and despair" as the "selection of the events, the angles taken and the comments are influenced by the interpretations and stance of the international community in relation to the conditions in the country", a perspective that "do not present a comprehensive and balanced account of the crisis, but rather fits into the dominant paradigms associated with the representations of Africa in the Western media" (Ndlela, 2005, p.89).

## 1.5 Media Framing Theory

Media contents have the propensity to define the reality of a target audience; they can shape people's thinking, knowledge and their understanding about a given issue (Jamieson and Waldman, 2003). Since media contents are not value-neutral, they convey and transmit both intrinsic and extrinsic values, images, stereotypes and ideological postulations about groups, individuals, events, and nations. Media frames therefore represent different realities and impressions about an incident, group or people as created through the media lens. These realities, impressions, values or ideologies that are conveyed by the media are framed, presented, packaged and organised in a manner that would either elicit negative or positive feelings from the target audiences. Hall (1997) therefore argues that media can misrepresent event by constantly emphasising the mean perspective of such event. Dangerously however, is that blatant lies, distorted truth, and warped realities can be perceived to be truth if the media continue to bombard their benighted audience one-sided information. In such case, the masses are at the mercy of the media, especially in an environment where media access is limited either as a result of mass illiteracy, poor infrastructure or economic disabilities. In an environment where the majority of people have limited access to diverse sources of information, most circulated lies become the truth of the day.

According to Entman (1993, p.52), "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." To Ryan (1991, p.53), framing is seen as "how news stories are made, i.e. how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their writers and audiences" (Reese, 2001, p.9). It is also an "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world." These "socially shared" realities may not be captured holistically, for it can be "some aspects of a perceived reality" that have been made "more salient in a communicating text" (Entman, 1993, p.52). In other words, the media sometimes choose "one aspect (selection), inflates it into the defining characteristics (magnification), then establish it as the most easily recognizable image (reduction)" and through this, the "media shrink, condense, and select/reject aspects of intricate social relations in order to represent them as fixed, natural, obvious and ready to consume" (Ndlela, 2005, p.73). Frames therefore "call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements" (Entman, 1993, p.55). Dangerously, when media continue to bombard their audience with a single perspective, by emphasising continually on some aspects of reality and downplay on others, such misrepresentation may soon become the only reality that the audience can reckon with. As it relates to democracy, Payne (2008) contends that media, whether from democratic or authoritarian perspective, are seen as ideological appendages of the elites, and their contents are prejudiced towards serving the economic, social, political, and cultural interests of the elites by aggregating homogeneous contents as against the divergent representation of realities. "A concatenated set of structural and social forces contribute to homogenisation of mass media news content, and...the homogenisation naturalises a distorted reality, by foregrounding myths and narratives serving elite interests" (Payne, 2008, p.1). This diminishes democratic values where divergent perspectives are held in high esteem, as against unilateral, one-dimensional representation dished out by media corporations. In their work on the diversities and convergences of television news, it was found that more prominence is given to an event if such event is in tandem with popular narrative framework "that is already familiar to and recognisable by newsmen as well as by audiences" (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh, 1991, p.207).

Entman (1993) identifies four functions of frames which are to: identify problems, establish causes, identify causal agents and proffer solutions to the

problems identified. He further argues that frames are domiciled in four different locations within the communication process; the communicator – who "makes conscious or unconscious framing judgements" within his or her belief system; the text – which conveys "key words, stock phrases, stereotypes, images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters or facts or judgement; the receiver – whose understanding of reality is shaped by the frames presented by the communicator as embedded in the text; and the culture – which is "defined as the empirically demonstrable set of communication frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping" (pp. 51-52). This indicates that the legitimacy and functionality of framing is better understood within the framework of communication process. This framework of communication process is better understood within the following criteria: it must be discernible in terms of conceptual and linguistic characteristics; it must be observable within journalistic purview; it must be distinguishable and must possess valid representation (Capella and Jamieson, 1997).

Iyengar (1991) identifies two types of framing; episodic and thematic. While episodic framing as a type of frame that focuses on event; it provides fragmented information about the event, thematic framing put the event in context by providing additional background information thereby creating greater understanding (Iyengar, 1991). In identifying these two types of frame, study of media contents is pertinent. Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p.24) once noted that media content is the precipitant of media impact and "the most obvious part of the mass communication process." Stressing further, she maintains that the impact of what the audience consume can be uncovered by studying media content.

## 1.6 Method of Study

This study employed qualitative content analysis to analyse the latent and manifest meanings of foreign media coverage of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The web contents of two leading international foreign media organisations (the BBC and Al Jazeera) were the focus of the study. The population for the study therefore are all stories and reports on Boko Haram as published on the websites of BBC and Al-Jazeera, that is, on [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com) and [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com) respectively. The topic "Boko Haram in Nigeria" was employed as the main theme to access the home pages of these two international news channels and in the end twelve stories were sampled from each of the websites using

purposeful random sampling method. In employing this sampling method, credibility is “considerably greater than the personal, ad hoc selection” (Patton, 1990, p.180). It should be mentioned however that the purpose of purposeful random sampling is to reduce suspicion about why certain cases were selected and not to achieve statistical generalisation or representativeness. In terms of sample size, in purposeful sampling, Patton (1990, p.) citing Lincoln and Guba “recommend sample selection to the point of redundancy” That is, “If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (Patton, 1990, p.186). Upon downloading the twenty four articles, codes one and two were assigned to the BBC and Al-Jazeera, respectively. It should be noted however that the stories are not arranged in any chronological order. For example the first article of the BBC was coded 101 while the second was coded 102 in that order. On the other hand, the first article from Al-Jazeera was coded 201 while the second article was 202 in that order (See table 1).

In terms of analysis, the study employed qualitative method of analysis to uncover the latent and manifest representations of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria by the two global news media. In media studies, content analysis can be used to uncover the latent as well as manifest contents as a means “of understanding meanings of texts” (Macnamara, 2005, p.4). To understand the meaning of texts in this study Critical Discourse Analysis was used. In research, discourse analysis is seen as an “analysis of how texts work within social practices” (Fairclough, 1995, p.7). This means that for any text to convey desired feelings and achieved expected impact it must work in tandem with the social context in which it is conveyed. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) therefore describe the relationship between texts and social context as being dialectical because both live in mutually-interdependent existence.

**1.7 Findings/Discussion**

Below are the sampled stories drawn from the websites of the BBC and Al-Jazeera at [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com) and [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com).

**Table 1: Headlines of sampled stories and their codes**

Story Code	Headlines
101	Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?
102	Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in profile
103	Boko Haram crisis: Why it is hard to know the truth in Nigeria
104	Nigeria: What next for the rescued Boko Haram captives?
105	Boko Haram crisis: The Nigerian truckers risking attack
106	Niger hit by Nigeria's Boko Haram fallout
107	Nigeria schools walk line between Islamic and Western traditions
108	Escaping Boko Haram: How three Nigeria girls found safety
109	Will moving army to Maiduguri help Nigeria against Boko Haram?
110	Islamic State ties broaden Boko Haram threat
111	Using football to tackle Nigeria's Boko Haram
112	Feeding the children of Boko Haram's victims
201	Boko Haram attack: Children burned alive in Nigeria
202	Seeking peace with Boko Haram?
203	Interview: Nigeria has the measure of Boko Haram
204	Opinion: Boko Haram has lost its fearsomeness
205	Nigeria mosque bombers kill 22
206	Note to Boko Haram: Western education is NOT a sin
207	They're back: Boko Haram's return under Buhari
208	Nigeria army: More than 800 Boko Haram hostages rescued
209	I remember the day... I confronted Boko Haram
210	Meet the Nigerian woman taking on Boko Haram
211	Suspected Boko Haram attacks rock Maiduguri
213	Muhammadu Buhari: 'I haven't failed' against Boko Haram

## Dominant Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Western media have been accused of usually being biased against Islam by constantly associating any act of terrorism with Islam or Muslim. It then becomes pertinent to analyse how BBC and Al-Jazeera framed Islam in the various reports on the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Ramdane and Souad (2011) admit that associating Islam with terrorism and “the portraying of Arabs and Muslims as terrorist or potential terrorist has become habitual in the work of institutions which shape the views of ordinary westerners, such as the media, literature and entertainment enterprises.”

The current study found that BBC framing of Boko Haram insurgency took stereotypic dimension of age-long and deep-rooted narratives of western media that associate Islam with barbarism, killing, suicide-bombing, fanaticism, extremism, and terrorism. To the average and perhaps, above average westerner, “Islam appears as a fanatic, bloodthirsty, reactionary, xenophobic, and largely destructive force. The obvious present-day poverty and backwardness of most Islamic countries...are all too easily equated with Islam itself” (Mansfield, 1992, p.482). However, whenever a non-Muslim is engaged in terrorism, western media go quiet about the religion of the perpetrator. For instance, in 1995, Timothy McVeigh blew up Alfred P. Murrow Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the explosion killed 168 people but “It's doubtful that many people in the United States know that Timothy McVeigh...was Baptist...none of the news stories said "Baptist Bomber" Timothy McVeigh, perhaps because his faith was not a factor in the attack” (Emery, 2008, para 5). This stereotypic stance of western media has the tendency to spike, and trigger upheavals, tension, suspicion and religious animosity among Nigerian people, as Muslims and other sympathisers of Islam could unconsciously show soundless empathy with Boko Haram because of the biased posture of Western media to Islam.

### Media Portrayal of Boko Haram: Between the “Good” and “Bad” Muslims

In his intellectual contribution to global debate on the nexus between Islam and terrorism, Mandani (2002) contends that Islam just like all religions of the world is not monolithic in composition, arguing that efforts must be made to quarantine or exorcise the “good” Muslims from the “bad” Muslims. He therefore recommends that “the test of democracy in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies is not

simply to get the support of the majority...but to do so without losing the trust of the minority” (p.774). In the BBC and Al-Jazeera coverage of Boko Haram, Islam is portrayed differently. While the BBC tends to associate Boko Haram with Islam, Al-Jazeera tends to counteract and dispel such portrayal. By being emphatic on the religion of the bomber, or the terrorist, the world is immensely starved of solutions to terrorism; by labelling all Muslims as terrorists, the world moves miles away from getting the solution to terrorism. This is because, when all Muslims are labelled as terrorists, the sympathy the world deserves from “good” Muslims when tackling terrorism would diminish, naturally. Moreover, according to the 2014 Global Terrorism Index “There are many peaceful Muslim majority countries that do not suffer from terrorism such as Qatar, the U.A.E. and Kuwait” an indication that “there are other social, political and geopolitical factors at play other than religion in breeding terrorist activity” (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014, p.3). Media, instead of denigrating and demonising Islam and Muslims due to the demonic activities of the few should rather solicit the support of the good Muslims in addressing challenges of global terrorism. James Emery, a professor of Anthropologist in the United States of America put it more succinctly:

There are over 1 billion Muslims throughout the world who are not terrorists, stretching from Singapore to Nigeria and from the United States to the Central Asian Republics. Radical terrorist groups may be of Christian, Jewish, or Hindu persuasion. Their religion is irrelevant: first and foremost they are terrorists who often cloak their actions in a cause, sometimes adding the veil of nationalism or religion to justify their crimes. Most terrorists are self-serving thugs, more concerned about gaining power and influence than in helping the people or the cause they supposedly represent (Emery, 2008, para 7).

However, the “over 1 billion Muslims through the world who are not terrorist”, who hate terrorism, who desire peaceful coexistence of all people, irrespective of religious diversity, who tell the world that the terrorists who blow up themselves or carry out terror acts are not Muslims, have big role to play; they either speak out to define their religion or wait to be consumed by those defining their religion. If the Boko Haram, ISIS and Al-Qaeda of this world continue to proclaim that they are the real Muslims, then burden rests on the “good” Muslim to tell the world what makes them different. For instance, in all the sampled reports, Al-Jazeera never linked Boko Haram to Islam or any religion; it rather described Boko Haram as “terrorist” group whose religious is

wholly amorphous. Al-Jazeera used its stories to debunk some assumptions about Islam and terrorism by emphasising on what the “good” Muslims are doing in order to curb the menace of terrorism. Story 210 which is titled as “Meet the Nigerian woman taking on Boko Haram” the interviewee, Hafsat Mohammed, who was described as “former radio journalist-turned-civil society activist” copiously and proudly distinguished herself from the “bad” Muslims through this emphatic expression: “I am confident, I am strong, I am a Muslim, I am anti-violent-extremism activist.” By identifying herself as a “Muslim” who is committed to countering violent extremism in the country, the message is intended to cleverly counteract the dominant narratives in western media that portray Islam and all those associated with the religion as violent and extremist. Also, such statement also depicts that even though western media make some ideological generalisations about the Muslim community as though all Muslims possess the characteristics of Boko Haram, or all Boko Haram members are Muslims, there are Muslims who are committed towards building a peaceful society.

The Al-Jazeera’s story on how Hafsat Mohammed is taking on Boko Haram is a clear effort at separating the “good” Muslims from the “bad” ones, and to counteract the dominant narratives in western media that usually paint all Muslims as terrorists. From Al-Jazeera’s own account, it is obvious that Muslims (including Hafsat Mohammed), are angry that each time Boko Haram bombing, killing or maiming is reported in the western media, it is usually linked with Islam or Muslim. In the story, the interviewee gave an account of a dialogue that ensued in Damaturu (one of the epicentres of Boko Haram) that captured why a group of youths were angry because the media always call Boko Haram fighters “Islamic extremists.” One of the youths insisted that “Why don’t they say Christian terrorists” making reference to the June 17, 2015 Charleston church shooting in South Carolina, United States of America which claimed nine lives.

The BBC on the other hand, described Boko Haram as “Islamists”, “Jihadists”, “militant Islamist group”. In a story titled “Who are Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists?” BBC Farouk Chothia described the group which aims to “promotes a version of Islam which makes it “haram” or forbidden for Muslims to take part in any political or social activity associated with Western society.” The question is which version of Islam forbids Muslims to vote in election, wear shirt and trousers, or receive secular education? In its effort to vehemently demonise the Northern Nigeria and Islam, BBC regards the northern region as having a long history of “spawning militant Islamic groups” (Story 101). In story 103, BBC also

describes Boko Haram as “Darul Taweed” which is an “orthodox doctrine of the uniqueness and oneness of Allah, which is the cornerstone of Islam.” In Story 107, a story titled “Nigeria schools walk line between Islam and western traditions” has a highly misleading heading that portrayed Nigerian state as an Islamic state. The story highlights the efforts of Kano State (the largest state in Northern Nigeria) Government at designing a new pedagogy for the educational system by integrating both Islamic and western education, so that the two can co-habit and thrive in a mutually-beneficial system. The story, although admits that “British forces, using mainly African troops, captured Kano in 1903. Since then, there has been a degree of resistance to “Western education” because of the link to colonialism and a perception that Islam was under threat” (Story 107). Kano state, although unarguably the most populated state in northern Nigeria, but it is repulsively erroneous to lump northern Nigeria into one monolithic entity, with no consideration to the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the region. After all, it is not every part of the northern Nigeria that is under the threat of Boko Haram, literally.

### **“Issue Ownership” in BBC and Al-Jazeera Coverage on Boko Haram**

BBC and Al-Jazeera ideological orientations toward the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the then ruling political party, placed the PDP at a dangerous and disadvantageous spot. This is what is referred to as issue ownership (Baum and Gussim, 2005). The theory of issue ownership accentuates that in political campaigns, political parties or candidates emphasize on issues that they “own”, while downplaying on issues “owned” by other contending parties thereby shaping the political landscape in their favour (Petrocik, 1996). In issue ownership, the political party or individual that benefit more from the issue of media emphasis, “owns” the issue.

As it relates to media, issue ownership is when media weight on certain issue during election campaigns places parties or individuals in unequal or disproportionate podium, where one party or individual is portrayed as being more capable in handling certain issue than the other (Baum and Gussim, 2005). Unlike the BBC whose reports tend to be ideologically-laden on who was more capable of handling the security threats posed by the Boko Haram, Al-Jazeera appeared more fair and balanced, by not taking side on which political party or individual was more capable of tackling the menace of Boko Haram. Hence, in BBC reports, the All Progressives Congress, the then opposition party, was placed on vantage position, thereby portraying a picture that the BBC was on the side of the

opposition. In a story titled "Boko Haram crisis: the Nigerian truckers risking attack", BBC demonised the government of President Goodluck Jonathan by quoting local sources that described the president as "Chairman of Boko Haram" who is as "guilty as Boko Haram killers because he has chopped off all the money to repair the road." The story also called for the ousting of President Goodluck Jonathan as the only panacea to the protracted grip of Boko Haram on Nigeria, saying: "We hope he will leave – we want change." It must be noted that "change" is the slogan of the APC. The BBC frame of the personality of the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (also known as GEJ) suggested that Muhammadu Buhari if elected, would better tackle the prevailing insecurity challenges in the country.

In another story written by the BBC Will Ross, titled "Boko Haram crisis: Why it is hard to know the truth in Nigeria", the then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's regime was painted as a government that thrived on lies and deceptions, as government officials could not provide consistent casualty figures. Story 103 admits that "there has been no mobile phone connection in Baga for many months after the jihadists attacked mobile phone masts in the north-east" thereby making communication essentially difficult. The story also acknowledges that "every witness we speak to is fleeing for their life. They are not hanging around Baga to check exactly what's happening so it is hard to be sure we are getting facts"; all these may have culminated into why it was complex and difficult "to know the truth" about the real casualty figure on Baga Massacre. BBC, in a seemingly desperate effort to ascribe negative status to the government, juxtaposed and compared two disparate incidents – the Baga Massacre in Nigeria and Paris killing where "12 people were shot dead by gunmen." The report stated that few minutes after 12 people were shot dead by gunmen, French President, Mr. Francois Hollande "is speaking to the world's media offering some clarity and leadership", but "Ten days since Baga was first attacked...we have not heard a word from Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan - except for a statement condemning the Paris attacks."

Although, Stephen and Iyengar (1994) argued that "owning an issue is not a victory unto itself" but if the political party that owns the issue takes advantage of the issue, its benefits are of many folds. "First, there is the victory that comes from securing media coverage and, second, there are the electoral benefits that flow to the party's candidate because of the coverage" (p.6). Media continuous coverage "of owned issues confers a sense of policy competence on one party over another, successfully shaping the issue agenda confers a different, more starkly political, kind of competence" (Stephen and Iyengar,

1994, p.6). The BBC emphasis on the failure of the government to address the challenges of Boko Haram insurgency, conferred a sense of policy competence on the opposition party (APC), thereby putting the ruling party, the PDP at a disadvantage.

In the BBC reports on Boko Haram, President Goodluck Jonathan's efforts at addressing the menace were highly downplayed; where government was reported to have succeeded, it was dismissed as strategy for winning the hearts of potential voters, but most of the time, the complexity of tackling terrorism was never emphasised. Even when the government declared state of emergency in north-eastern states, BBC while quoting a local source, reported that the strategy had only "radicalised Boko Haram more than anything else and generated other gangs and groups of bandits" (Story 103). However, this particular story never unravelled how state of emergency has "radicalised Boko Haram" or "generated other gangs and groups of bandits." The BBC stories tend to portray a picture that the challenge of Boko Haram started with Goodluck Jonathan and would definitely come to an end when he is ousted. However, when Goodluck Jonathan lost in the election and ousted, Boko Haram persisted, especially during the first few months of the new regime of President Muhammadu Buhari. Amazingly and suddenly, BBC became taciturn, soft and diplomatic on its coverage of Boko Haram; all those things which the former President Jonathan were accused of, were subtly and tactfully downplayed on in the new regime. This was a direct contrast to Al-Jazeera's report that still re-echoed that the end of Jonathan Goodluck regime did not put an end to the incessant and sporadic bombing, and flagrant Boko Haram killings in Nigeria. Through one of its stories, Al-Jazeera announced that "In less than three months of Buhari's reign, the gory era of terrorism is back in Nigeria." The story reports that "In the week of July 5, there was not a single day without an attack. In the preceding week, 145 people were murdered in twin raids in the north-eastern Borno state."

It went further that "On July 16, Boko Haram suicide bombers detonated bombs in Gombe, another state in the northeast, killing 49 people at first count." Also, "In July alone, there have been bomb attacks in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina and Plateau as well. In the southwest, a Lagos-based journalist, Adeola Akinremi received a death threat from the sect in May." The story summed it up thus: "While Boko Haram may not be seizing territories and controlling local governments as it did under the rule of the former President Goodluck Jonathan, its attacks in the last month - plus a death toll now nearing 1,000 - are a negative turnaround from the victories recorded in the final weeks of Jonathan's presidency." All these compelled many Nigerians to express their

disappointment over the new government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Some Nigerians are of the opinion that government reactions to Boko Haram when President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was the president of Nigeria was not different from the approach of President Muhammadu Buhari, and it is curious to know why foreign media, especially BBC refused to comment on this. A media organisation that was vehement and vocal at condemning the copious silence of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan when Boko Haram unleashed terror on Burnin Yadi, should also speak out each time Boko Haram spit out its heinous venom on Nigerian people, especially now Muhammadu Buhari, a man who promised Nigeria and Nigerians peace in the north-eastern part of the country if elected.

Ekechi Sean Nnadozie, a Nigerian who once clamoured for change posted this on his Facebook timeline on 18th June, 2016:

Whoever thought GEJ (Goodluck Ebele Jonathan) had no human sympathy when he went dancing Kokoma in Kano as Burnin Yadi went up in flames is yet to meet President Muhammadu Buhari. Save for the kidnap and Burnin Yadi Massacre, every other terrorist act that killed Nigerians came with a timely response from GEJ with his usual trademark statement “The President shares the grief of all bereaved families and is deeply saddened by the continued loss of many innocent lives at the hands of misguided and desperate fanatics...GEJ condemned the Burnin Yadi attacks, but we only cried foul when he went dancing in a rally the next day” but the current President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari has not for long released any press statement condemning terrorist acts both by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen, the President conspicuously didn’t even condemn the herdsmen in his tasteless May 29th speech. He was quick to write a letter to the US condemning the Orlando shootings but again he is yet to utter a word about the 24 people killed by Boko Haram in Adamawa... (Italics ours)

## Conclusion/Recommendations

World powerful media organisations continue to exert great influence on the polity of the African nations. The tones and colouration of their coverage of the political, economic, social and religious challenges that confront the continent are sometimes shaped by the political and economic interests of those that fund these media organisations. Foreign

media coverage of a country has huge implications, as the tone of the coverage can either portray the country from a negative or positive dimension, and this in return affects the perception of foreign audiences about the country. This study is a demonstration of the fact that BBC and Al-Jazeera framing of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has some political and religious undertones. The BBC framing of Boko Haram insurgency took stereotypic stature of the age-long and deep-rooted narratives of western media that associate Islam with barbarism, killing, suicide-bombing, fanaticism, extremism, and terrorism by undermining the diversity of Muslim population. Al-Jazeera coverage on Boko Haram on the other hand tends to counteract and dispel the dominant narratives of western media that associate terrorism and insurgency with Islam by separating the “good” Muslims from the “bad” Muslim. There is a great danger in ascribing the status of terrorists to all Muslims. This is because when all Muslims are labelled as terrorists, the sympathy the world deserves from “good” Muslims when tackling terrorism would diminish, naturally. Moreover, this stereotypic stance of western media has the tendency to spike, and trigger upheavals, tension, suspicion and religious animosity among Nigerian people, as Muslims and other sympathisers of Islam could unconsciously and unwittingly show soundless empathy with Boko Haram. In other words, if the western media continue to equate Islam with terrorism, some Muslims may choose to stay united against whoever confers such negative appellation on their faith, rather than fighting the perpetrators of terrorism. On the other hand, if Muslims continue to display hatred and disaffection towards “enemies” of terrorism, the world might be forced to equate Islam with terrorism; after all, Islam just like any religion of the world can be gauged by the behaviour of its adherents. It is therefore recommended that in the coverage of the challenges of insecurity and terrorism in Africa and elsewhere, western media should downplay on the religious identity of the perpetrators, so that the world can stay united against terrorism that is gradually eclipsing the global peace. The findings further expose how western media capitalise on the socio-economic and political failures of African countries to influence the political and economic bearings of these nations. Unlike Al-Jazeera that appeared fair to both the ruling and the opposition parties, the BBC tend to confer the status of competence on the opposition party by continuously portraying the ruling party as grossly incompetent in tackling the menace of Boko Haram.

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