


Chapter 19

Cross–Regional Analysis of Terrorism Reporting and Dynamics of Ethnic Relations in Nigeria

Doris Ngozi Morah

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7854-3238>

Madonna University, Okija, Nigeria

Omojola Oladokun

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8362-4588>

Covenant University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The news sociology and news determinism perspectives do project both the integrationist and disintegrative capabilities of the media. This projection is premised on their agenda-setting tradition, meaning that the social responsibility performance credential of the reporter can help build a nation or be a factor of the collapse of social control. This work explores this oxymoron by examining terrorism reporting and how it impacts on ethnic relations among the three dominant regions in Nigeria. A total of 400 respondents from Southeast and Southwest Nigeria respond to seven items on their relationship with the Northern Region that has been affected by the activities of the terror group Boko Haram. The findings portray a violent nature of the Northern Region. However, they do not support six of the media-framed and widely-held assumptions by the southerners about the conflict, including the statement that the insurgents represent northerners' interest. The media can scale down ethnic tension by publishing and framing stories that promote de-escalation.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7464-8.ch019

INTRODUCTION

The role played by a reporter in a conflict is instrumental to the outcome of that conflict. The uniqueness of the reporter is why the media coverage of terrorism or a terror organization is a critical factor that could either aggravate or eradicate the disaster that goes with it. The perspective of media determinism tradition is that the media abet the transmission of the terrorists' ideas, messages, propaganda and the like, thereby promoting the radicalization of the citizens and providing some form of legitimacy to a cause that should otherwise be condemned and quickly destroyed. This factor appears to undermine the social responsibility performance credential of the media, especially in this age of information technology (Folayan et al., 2018; Morah & Duru, 2017; Lamberti, 2012; Sicilia, 1993; Smith & Marx, 1994; Schudson, 2003, Williams, 1974). It makes reporters accomplices of non-state actors who are only out to kill and destroy. One troubling upshot of this development is that the media come across as legitimizers of terrorism and a factor in the breakdown of socio-political control (Janowitz, 1981).

On the other hand, is the perspective that promotes the social construction of news in a way that guarantees objectivity and objectivity as well as makes the journalist accountable? (Dickinson, 2013; Omojola, 2008; Neumeyer, 1974; Unnithan & Scheuble, 1983). Concerning terrorism, it means that reporters take into cognizance of the interests of readers and tries to publish in a manner that protects those interests. What this connotes is that the media have an integrated and interactive capability to shape the socio-political landscape (Boadu, 1981) and make the world a better place. As the media articulate the relationship between a government and its citizens, it becomes a visible part of the political structure (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1990) and endeavours to build consensus with the government and citizens on what public interest is and is not. Media democracy is also one hallmark of new media, which guarantees increased participation to foster public interest though envisaged as the end of mass media (Chaffe & Metzger, 2001).

The optimism and pessimism perspectives are popular with scholars, but they have a common weakness, which this work endeavours to unravel. Each of them is invisible in terms of how media coverage of conflict affects the ethnic relations of a country. For over a decade, the Nigerian government remains saddled with the task of combating terrorism, which has remained unabated by the day. The citizens have accused the Nigerian media of perpetuating this situation with their screaming headlines of newspapers, radio and television presentations, and digital offerings on the internet. Terror attacks, especially in the northern part of the country by the Boko Haram sect, have caused the deaths of many citizens and contributed significantly to the inadequacy of security situation in not only the affected region but in the country as a whole (Morah & Omojola, 2011). Scholars have shied away from how the reportage of Boko Haram affects Nigeria with more than 250 ethnic groups. Besides legitimizing terror organizations, it appears media coverage of insurgents in Nigeria, especially Boko Haram, also affects ethnic relations, which creates some dynamics that are worth investigating. This work zeroes in on Boko Haram as the insurgency movement of reference. It became noticeable in 2002, but its organizational roots date back to the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The media is often ascribed with the power to set agenda in the society, which they achieve through media contents and coverage. The issue of Boko Haram attacks and its reporting by both online and main-

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