

Conflict Resolution Potential of the Diasporic Media on Boko Haram Insurgency in the North Eastern Nigeria

Wogu, Joseph Oluchukwu, Nwamini, Samuel C.

Department Of Mass Communication University Of Nigeria Nsukka Enugu State, Nigeria

Department Of Mass Communication Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Wogu, Joseph Oluchukwu

ABSTRACT: Conflict is one of the defining features of the modern world. However, diasporic media have a grave impact on conflict situation. They can either escalate conflict by accentuating disagreements, foregrounding confrontations, and lending air time to forceful voices, or, conversely, reduce the conflict by shunning extremism, giving room for alternative voices and visualizing peaceful solutions. The media situation in and around Nigeria provides an interesting context for discussing these issues. The lingering Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of Nigeria has been a recurrent issue for the diasporic media. The aim of this paper is to discuss the emergence of Boko Haram militant group, their act of insurgency and the media situation in Nigeria. It will also argue that the diasporic media acts as an agent of conflict perpetuation, and conflict resolution. The Data for analysis was based on information derived from secondary sources. This paper recommends that both the local and diasporic media should engage in peace journalism and exhibit professionalism in their reportage.

Keywords: conflict, conflict resolution, potential, diasporas, media, Insurgency.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in the modern world. Since the end of the Second World War there have been countless conflicts that have involved the deaths of millions of people and the suffering and displacement of millions globally. No conflict can be attributed to only one factor. Over the years, experiences have shown that most of the conflicts have resulted from interplay of ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic and cultural differences within the context of control of scarce resources without the principles of fair play, equity, balance and justice. In any case, classifying the conflicts as religious, economic, ethnic, cultural or political may itself be misleading. Certain conflicts which may appear to be religious may, after all, turn out to be a façade for pursuing narrow political and economic objectives. Nevertheless, media can help hold governments accountable and coordinate relief efforts, and they can also convey inaccurate information and promote violent agenda. The media has a special relationship with conflict situations, external or internal. This has been an undeniable part of the history of countries across the globe. According to (Rai, 2015), the reasons for such a relationship are two-fold: First; the world over, conflict is acknowledged as being of major news value and, as such, constitutes a major area of operation for the media; second, it is a matter of utmost public importance and interest because of its security implications. However, it needs to be underscored that the parties in conflict try by hook or by crook to use the media to further their own ends, and therefore the media come heavily under all sorts of undesirable pressures and pulls and also threats. The experience in Nigeria as well as other countries with various conflict situations, particularly those pertaining to terrorism, insurgency and war, show evidence that the media succumbed under duress or blandishment (Cottle, 2000). Diasporic media often play a key role in today's conflicts. Basically, their role can take two different and opposing forms. Either the diasporic media take an active part in the conflict and have responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence. The role which the diasporic media takes in a given conflict, and in the phases before and after, depends on a complex set of factors, including the relationship the diasporic media have with actors in the conflict and the independence the diasporic media have from the power holders in society. They also have power that influences the activities of governments. However, Lamed (2012) stated that the power of the diasporic media coverage (and the concern it aroused in public opinion) proved stronger than the will of governments. As international competition between increasingly globalised news corporations grew more intense so the diasporic media began to hunt in packs, seeking the next exclusive.

The roles of the diasporic media in conscientising the society at every circumstance and situation are enormous, vital and have far reaching implications. Neuman (2011) is of the view that any organised society, government or institution which takes the diasporic media for granted does so at its own peril. The diasporic media often play a key role in today's fight against terror all over the world. The diasporic media has enough potential and can contribute effectively to conflict resolution and reconciliation. These purposeful roles are not lost entirely on the diasporic media reportage of Boko Haram insurgence in the North Eastern part of Nigeria.

One of the key issues to be interrogated by media researchers in relation to conflicted societies is the extent to which the diasporic media serve to escalate or reduce the overall conflict situation. The argument is that the media either escalates the conflict by accentuating disagreements, foregrounding confrontations, and lending air time to forceful voices, or, conversely, reduce the conflict by shunning extremism, giving room for alternative voices and visualizing peaceful solutions (Gamin, 2010). For several reasons, the media situation in and around Nigeria provides an interesting ground for discussing these issues. For one, the long-lasting Boko Haram Insurgency has been a recurrent issue for both the local and the diasporic media. In addition, the extraordinary situation of the growing Nigeria diaspora has provoked a diasporic media engagement that in a special way treats issues of conflict through civic-driven, transnational media channels. Within this backdrop, it is the aim of this paper to discuss the emergence of Boko Haram militant group, Boko Haram insurgency and the media situation in Nigeria. It will also explore diasporic media; as an agent of conflict perpetuation, and conflict resolution.

II. METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts the document review technique and predominantly derived information from secondary sources. Data were accessed through the review of relevant texts, journals, newspapers, official publications, magazines and the internet which served as a tangible source of insight into conflict resolution potentials of the diasporic media on Boko Haram insurgency in the North-eastern part of Nigeria.

III. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

For the purpose of conceptual clarification and to limit the level of ambiguity, which as a rule is the hallmark of academic research, it is important to examine some of the concepts and terms that are used in this paper i.e. conflict, conflict resolution, potential, diasporas, media, insurgency.

- **Conflict**

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict can arise between members of the same group, known as intragroup conflict, or it can occur between members of two or more groups, and involve violence, interpersonal discord, and psychological tension, known as intergroup conflict.

- **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution, otherwise known as reconciliation, is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. Often, committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions, reasons for holding certain beliefs), and by engaging in collective negotiation (Forsyth, 2009).

- **Potential**

Potential generally refers to a currently unrealized ability. The term is used in a wide variety of fields, from physics to the social sciences to indicate things that are in a state where they are able to change in ways ranging from the simple release of energy by objects to the realization of abilities in people.

- **Diaspora**

A diaspora is a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic locale. Diaspora can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland (Melvin, 2004). It is a group of people who live outside the area in which they had lived for a long time or in which their ancestors lived.

- **Media**

Media are the collective communication outlets or tools that are used to store and deliver information or data. It is either associated with communication media, or the specialized communication businesses such as: print media and the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), and/or publishing.

- **Insurgency**

An insurgency is a rebellion against a constituted authority when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerents (Paret, 2004). An insurgency can be fought via counter-insurgency warfare, and may also be opposed by measures to protect the population, and by political and economic actions of various kinds aimed at undermining the insurgents' claims against the incumbent regime.

IV. EMERGENCE OF BOKO HARAM MILITANT GROUP

Boko Haram, which calls itself 'Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqīyya'h (Islamic State's) West Africa Province, ISWAP), and was formerly called 'Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād' (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad), is an Islamic extremist group based in north-eastern Nigeria, also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon (Morgan, 2015). The group is led by Abubakar Shekau. Estimates of the group's membership vary between 7,000 and 10,000 fighters. The group initially had links to al-Qaeda, but in 2014, it expressed support for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant before pledging formal allegiance to it in March 2015 (EXCLUSIVE, 2015). The name "Boko Haram" is usually translated as "Western education is forbidden". Haram is from the Arabic حَرَامٌ *ḥarām*, "forbidden"; and the Hausa word *boko* [the first vowel is long, the second pronounced in a low tone], meaning "fake", which is used to refer to secular Western education. Boko Haram has also been translated as "Western influence is a sin" and "Westernization is sacrilege" (Paul, 2013). Until the death of its founder Mohammed Yusuf, the group was also reportedly known as *Yusifīyya*. Northern Nigerians have commonly dismissed Western education as *ilimin boko* ("fake education") and secular schools as *makaranta book* (Aliyu, 2014).

V. BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

After its founding in 2002, Boko Haram's increasing radicalization led to a violent uprising in July 2009 in which its leader was summarily executed. Its unexpected resurgence, following a mass prison break in September 2010, was accompanied by increasingly sophisticated attacks, initially against soft targets, and progressing in 2011 to include suicide bombings of police buildings and the United Nations office in Abuja. The government's establishment of a state of emergency at the beginning of 2012, extended in the following year to cover the entire north-east of Nigeria, led to an increase in both security force abuses and militant attacks. (Jack, 2015), Boko Haram has killed more than 17,000 people since 2009, including over 10,000 in 2014, in attacks occurring mainly in north-east Nigeria. Six hundred and fifty thousand people had fled the conflict zone by August 2014, an increase of 200,000 since May; by the end of the year 1.5 million had fled. Corruption in the security services and human rights abuses committed by them has hampered efforts to counter the unrest. The group have carried out mass abductions including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 (Human Right Watch, 2014).

On 3rd January 2015, Boko Haram again attacked Baga, seizing it and the military base used by a multinational force set up to fight them. The town was set ablaze and the people massacred. Although the death toll of the massacre was earlier estimated by local officials to be over of 2000, the Defence Ministry dismissed these claims as "speculation and conjecture" and "exaggerated". They estimated the death toll to be closer to 150 instead. Starting in late January 2015, a coalition of military forces from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger began a counter-insurgency campaign against Boko Haram (The Christian Science Monitor, 2015). On 4th February 2015, the Chad Army killed over 200 Boko Haram militants. Soon afterwards, Boko Haram launched an attack on the Cameroonian town of Fotokol, killing 81 civilians, 13 Chadian soldiers and 6 Cameroonian soldiers. On 24 March 2015, residents of Damasak, Nigeria said that Boko Haram had taken more than 400 women and children from the town as they fled from coalition forces. On March 27, the Nigerian army captured Gwoza, which was believed to be the location of Boko Haram headquarters (Penney, 2015). On election day, 28 March 2015, Boko Haram extremists killed 41 people, including a legislator, to discourage hundreds from voting. Boko Haram militants attacked multiple mosques between July 1 and 2 2015. Forty-eight men and boys were killed on the 1st at a mosque in Kukawa while seventeen were wounded in the attack. Ninety-seven others, mostly men, were killed in numerous mosques on the 2nd of with a number of women and young girls killed in their homes. Several days after the bombing, Boko Haram claimed responsibility via Twitter, signing as the name "Islamic State, West Africa province" (The Independent, 2015).

VI. MEDIA SITUATION IN NIGERIA

Historically, Nigeria has boasted the most free and outspoken press of any African country, but also one which has consistently been the target of harassment by the past military dictatorships and now under the governance of Nigeria's civilian president, General Muhammadu Buhari. Many agents of Nigeria's press have been imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or murdered. However, as with most other countries, blogging has increasingly become a much safer, and much easier conduit for Nigeria's growing Internet-enabled minority to express their dissatisfactions with the current state of affairs in Nigeria. On the other hand, while newspapers

(and, most recently, blogging) have long thrived through both thick and thin in Nigeria, radio and television have not received as much recognition, due to limited resources and press restrictions which beset the establishment of radio or television services in Nigeria. However, such limitations are being worked around in order to reach larger audiences both within and outside Nigeria, such as with the growth of satellite television (which has long been preferred throughout the African continent due to the infavourability, geologically and financially, of laying ground cables). Virtually all Nigerian newspapers have an internet presence; in addition, there are several websites which are dedicated to allowing Nigerians to air their opinions on a variety of topics. However, the current low penetration of the internet in Nigeria means that radio and newspapers remain the primary means of consuming information in the country.

VII. DIASPORIC MEDIA

Many diasporas have developed a range of media channels to bind members and maintain connection with the homeland. For communities of people who have re-located from their homeland to another part of the world, diasporic media do not play simply one role. By definition, the word 'diaspora' means a dispersal or scattering of people and can be for a huge range of reasons, from the pursuit of greener pastures to escaping a threatening home society. This indicates that this scattering can be either voluntary or forced. From this, one can derive a meaning of diasporic media, media whose content is relevant to, representative of or produced by or for these groups of people. Cottle (2000) noted that because of the different forms of diasporic media, they often play many differing roles, with fluctuating and debatable significance, for these communities of people. In this sense, diasporic media can play the role of helping to socialize migrant communities into their new environments and familiarising them, in a less intimidating way, with the host country. It is apparent that most, if not all, mainstream media are neither designed nor intended to serve this purpose. Diaspora media can provide a space in which the 'lost' connection with the home country can be temporarily 'reconnected' and are "enhancing a sense of diaspora consciousness" (Gillespie, 2000) Arguably a very significant role to play in an environment where, within mainstream media, consistent and unvarying representations of ethnic minority and migrant groups mean that they "can become a target for envy, stereotyping and discrimination" (Cohen, 2008).

Examples of diasporic media are Radio Biafra and Biafra Television that operates illegally in exile and in an undisclosed location in South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Africa Independent Television (AIT) based in Lagos, Nigeria and broadcasts across the United Kingdom and United States. Yoruba FM, London that operates in United Kingdom. Omo Oduduwa Radio (also known as OORadio), based in Marietta, Georgia, provides quality radio programming centered around educating the global community about the traditional aspects of the Yoruba religion, culture, and customs, respectively.

VIII. DIASPORIC MEDIA AS AGENTS OF CONFLICT PERPETUATION

As the diasporic media made their debut in the 19th century, their potentiality as mass communicators were soon realised, and they were used both as informers as well as propagators. So, what was born essentially to disseminate factual and objective information came also to be used to misinform and disinform, to control and manipulate news, and to shape and mould views. It emerged as a powerful weapon to influence public opinion and to rule the people through manipulations. In the last century when it came to be reinforced by the electronic media, first by radio and then by satellite-based television channels, the diasporic media by itself became an all-powerful institution of society—on many occasions more powerful than the state. This mighty and all-pervasive power of the diasporic media was successfully used in conflict situations, by vested interests to serve their purpose, benevolent or malevolent. A typical example is the role of diasporic media in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, where sections of the diasporic media, including radio and newspapers, gave editorial support to the conflict.

The inertia, the incompetence and the corrupt motives of the diasporic media often bring about conflicts, or prolong or aggravate them. The internal and external vested interests also create and perpetuate conflicts of all types to promote their social, religious, political and economic agenda. To attain their nefarious ends, these forces manage to manipulate, corrupt and coerce the diasporic media in several ways, and use them as a pawn in their diabolical chess game. Under these inexorable pressures, a diasporic media outlet either closes down, cowers or allows itself to be controlled and corrupted. Sometimes it becomes a willing partner in the wicked game. Probably the most cited reference in this regard is the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, which began in earnest in 2000 and resulted in the closure of democratic space for many citizens who did not support the ruling party, Zanu-PF. The closure of privately-owned newspapers by the state made hundreds of journalists and other media workers jobless, and many of them left the country. From their bases in the Diaspora, some of the citizens started online news websites, weblogs and 'pirate radio' stations which provided alternative and oppositional narratives of the crisis, countering the state's version of events. These developments attracted and continued to attract scholarly attention.

This reality of diasporic media vis-à-vis conflict situations contrasts sharply with the defined role of the media. In actual or potential conflict situations the role of the diasporic media is crucial. They should on no account contribute directly or indirectly to the creation of conflicts or situations which breed conflicts. But the reverse is the case for some diasporic media set up by some Igbo indigenes abroad known as “Biafra Radio and Television” which they operate illegally from exile. They disseminate oral or written words of disunity with respect to Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East Nigeria. They project scenes and depictions of pictures, which inflame passions of the people, create hatred between different sections of the populace, and lead to violence. All audiovisuals, news and views disseminated by them, and the manner and method of their dissemination, do not conform to the most elementary precautions taken for civilized living. They blow Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East out of proportion. They broadcast fictitious figures on the number of people that lost their lives, displaced and properties destroyed in the ongoing insurgency in the North-East.

IX. DIASPORIC MEDIA AS AN AGENT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Diasporic media can play a significant role in shaping modern conflicts that could help foster peace in the country. The diasporic media was a force to reckon with in the struggle and attainment of the nation’s independence in 1960. It was in Nigeria’s pre and post-independence era that the diasporic media like West African Pilot, The Gong, Ichoku among others, cut their teeth in purposeful, vocal, dogged and professional journalism. Since then, the Nigerian media have carved a niche for itself in performing its traditional role of education, information, entertainment, shaping of opinions and swinging of the views of the society on knotty national issues. Whichever role the diasporic media play in a given insurgency or conflict, and in the phases before and after, depends on a complex set of factors. A strong independent media contributes to the retention or creation of peace and stability in conflict prone zones. This exactly is the role expected of the diasporic media in the case of Boko Haram insurgency. The diasporic media should be commended for not wavering in this role since the inception of Boko Haram onslaught in 2009. Concerns were raised by critics that only horrible statistics of the dead, injured, attacked, kidnapped or houses burnt are reeled out often for public consumption. The diasporic media is therefore charged to set up genuine sensitisation effort on safety precautions to apply in this perilous time. It should be able to sway the society to give undiluted support and reliable information to the government and security agencies in this fight. The advocacy role of the diasporic media in speaking out against societal ills and vices and recommending practical solutions to problems should be maintained. The diasporic media does this better and the answer is found on the broadcasting of Africa Independent Television (AIT), Omo Oduduwa Radio (also known as OORadio), Yoruba FM London among others. Examples of these broadcast programmes are: AIT- “Focus Nigeria” every Monday through Friday by 10 – 11 AM, Omo Oduduwa Radio – “Engage the Spirit” every Thursday 8-9 pm EST, and Yoruba FM London “Yoruba Gospel Music” Sunday through Friday by 06 – 12 pm.

During conflicts such as Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East, the diasporic media are expected to issue reminders on how best to achieve peace. The diasporic media could assume the role of arbitrators and mediators, in to settling the differences and reaching a compromise. The diasporic media can ensure a resolution of conflicts by being objective in its coverage. In this way, the parties in dispute may be willing to adhere to solutions to the problems that are proposed by the diasporic media. In case of deadlocked negotiations, the diasporic media can provide new alternatives on how best to solve the conflict. The diasporic media could help in resolving conflicts by generating a consensus which the parties in the dispute might adopt to find a settlement to the conflict. It can also influence the opinion and views of government and other important parties as this could help to achieve a resolution.

X. CONCLUSION

The media, whether local or diasporic, will always face a considerable challenge in trying to cover conflict. There will inevitably be commercial pressure to focus on the immediate, most violent or dramatic incidents, at the expense of explaining the background and issues that may underpin the conflict. In order to explain the conflict in terms that are comprehensible, not just to the external audience but those affected by the conflict itself, the media must have the ability to operate freely and without threat and with the capacity to report on all aspects of the conflict. While policy makers (including combatants) have a role in providing the circumstances in which the media can operate, a high responsibility falls on journalists and editors themselves.

Diaspora groups are not homogenous; they differ from each other in terms of their history, circumstances, and the ways in which they manifest themselves. However, they share a number of qualities, and, as demonstrated, they can be forces for peace and resolution in as many ways as they can promote conflict. Furthermore, they show no signs of lessening in importance or influence—in fact, all evidence points towards the contrary. Therefore, it is of vital importance to look at the commonalities in the way they advance the cause of peace in order to reframe the discussion of their role in international relations to focus on their media potential for positive contributions. Of all lessons to be learned, one stands out primarily: Diasporic media must be recognized as independent and influential actors in peace processes.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The diasporic media should consider developing and sharing editorial guidelines about how to cover conflict, including such issues as embedding reporters in military units.
2. Diasporic media should dedicate their attention to reporting conflict and insurgencies especially as it relates to using such reports to create peace rather than aggravate the situation.
3. Diasporic media groups should consider developing partnerships with local media to help develop and nurture local talent.
4. Diasporic media groups should consider how best to establish a mechanism of self-regulation to respond to complaints about misleading reports or lack of professionalism.
5. Diasporic media should give emphasis on information that neutralize friction and clear the ignorance and misconceptions which breed the Boko Haram insurgency.
6. Diasporic media should encourage collaboration over the use of expensive resources, such as printing presses, fostering co-production arrangements or rebroadcast arrangements with local media organizations.
7. Both the local and diasporic media should engage in peace journalism and exhibit professionalism in their reportage.

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