

Contesting Boko Haram:  
A postcolonial critique of media representation of the ethnoreligious,  
socio-economic and political conflict in Nigeria

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**Contesting Boko Haram: A postcolonial critique of media representation of the ethnoreligious, socio-economic and political conflict in Nigeria.**

by

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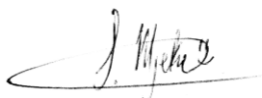
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## **Abstract**

Representative and narrative discourses from international media and academia present an essentialist and misleading idea of African issues, and this misrepresentation has leaked, by association, into a flawed portrayal of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. That is, just as reductionism, ahistorical attributions, and contradictions tend to occur in writing on African conflicts, this has become the tendency with insufficient attempts to define the identity and explain the actions of Boko Haram. Using a postcolonial critique, this dissertation reveals how news media and scholarly reports often undermine and negate the historical, ethno-religious and ideological nuances of Boko Haram's identity, as well as the socio-economic and political issues that motivate the actions of the sect. Additionally, the examination of Boko Haram's origins, influences and ever-evolving identity confronts the contradictions and flaws within the group's own representation, through its ideology and pragmatism. This multi-fold analysis is done through an initial exploration of Nigeria's history under British colonial rule and the lasting legacy thereafter, which has been responsible for the contemporary violent conflicts that journalist and scholars tend to reduced to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. This is followed by a critical acknowledgement of the complicity of Nigeria's political leadership in the socio-economic injustices prevalent between the two predominant religious populations of Nigeria's rich and educated Christian South, and the poor and disadvantaged Muslim North. Critical Discourse Analysis is used as a method to analyse the representation of Boko Haram from three academic journal reports by African scholars and three international print media news reports. This study seeks to contribute to reports/writings on postcolonial interpretations of violence and conflict in African media studies, and to account for the historical and contemporary complexities within African countries and their inhabitants who are often negated by influential libertarian media and trusted analytical-scholarly articles.

**Keywords: Boko Haram, Nigeria, Colonialism, Terrorism, Islamic Fundamentalism, Ethno-religious, Libertarian Media Representation, Postcolonial Studies**



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1 Introduction**

Africa has a well-recorded history of forms of violence occurring over many years that are claimed to be largely attributed to fault lines in religion and ethnicity, owing to the history of violence from the slave trade and colonialism. It was a history of this violence that introduced Western education and Christianity, along with the English language, to most of the African nations that were colonised by the British. This structural and systematic violence infiltrated and influenced the diverse cultures, ethnicities and beliefs that, arguably and overtime, formed the identity of the African people. Furthermore, through the British construction of an ‘amalgamation policy,’ many of these ethnic groups that had their own distinct political systems, social and religious values were forced to come together to create collective and economically viable political entities for administrative convenience. The British administrative style of colonisation in West African countries was consequently the cause of prominent divisions between major ethnic groups, leading to deep-seated religious and ethnic conflicts. One example of such a country that was wholly affected by these drastic changes is Nigeria, which has been under the spotlight due to the acts of violence attributed to the radical Islamic and militant group, Boko Haram.

#### **1.1 Research Problem**

Prominent media sources concentrating on Boko Haram attacks have demonstrated a tendency to present the news stories under a reductive and essentialist Western-centric framework. In academic research, several theories taken mostly from anthropological studies on Africa and African conflicts have also been offered to account for Nigeria’s complex conflicts. However, what is evident from these representative discourses from media and academia is that the generalised and faulty portrayal of Africa easily leaks, by association, into a flawed portrayal of Boko Haram. This Western framework represents the violence enacted by the Boko Haram sect as a mark of bad governance, pathology of backwardness, lack of progress, and religious conflict, whilst framing it as a human rights issue. This is in opposition to a local (African) interpretation coming from certain postcolonial thinkers who frame the violence and conflict in African countries as the former victims of colonialism responding back to the imperial laws and systems. Both these African and Euro-American interpretations do not fully account for the complexity in these deep acts of violence which continue in the post-independent context of a globalised world. Thus, a more nuanced reading is necessary to expose the complex effects of Africa’s violent colonial past on the current phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism and so-called terrorism.

## **1.2 Aim**

This study seeks to critically examine the complexities of the supposed ‘ethno-religious conflicts’ in Nigeria caused by Boko Haram, which go beyond the representations offered through libertarian media and current analytical scholarly commentary, since these do not account for the colonial history, Islamic fundamentalist identities and socio-political dimension of this continuous violence.

## **1.3 Rationale**

Boko Haram has received an intensifying amount of local and international attention over the past five years. Despite this concentrated media attention, an extensive number of media and scholarly reports are, and may lend themselves to, an oversimplification of a complex phenomenon. This results in a distortion of the sect’s ideological nuances, political motivations and eccentricities. This insufficiency in research results in the neglecting of a significant number of lingering historical factors of British colonisation and the post-colonial instability of political leadership that acted as catalysts for years of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, as well as the current socio-political climate and so-called terror attacks by Boko Haram. What is then necessary for a timely study of these issues is that it accounts for the nuances that exist on African issues, in the case of Boko Haram, pertaining to ethno-religious, socio-economic and political conflicts, by problematizing the oversimplified and reductive interpretation by significant international, libertarian media reports on Boko Haram. Additionally, because the representation is not limited to media alone, the study will also present an analysis of academic/scholarly research work that has written on the Boko Haram insurgency. In line with this representation analysis, it is important consider in what ways the Boko Haram group represents itself, in view of the complexities and contradictions that are inadequately articulated by the group’s self-definition. By conducting a postcolonial critique, the study seeks to identify the possible flaws implicit in representations by media, scholarly texts and Boko Haram’s discourse, as well as the historical continuities of struggle that are associated with the sect. As such, this study has substantial contemporary relevance, not only because a nuanced reading of this violence has been under-researched and still needs to be done, but also due to the socio-economic and political issues that Boko Haram is presenting, which not only affect Nigeria but are an immediate concern for most post-independent African nations.

## **1.4 Significance of Study**

The research is of social and political significance since it brings to question the ritual of media practitioners and their tendency to perpetuate orientalist tropes when portraying the victims and perpetrators of contemporary ethno-religious conflicts. This takes into account material factors such as Nigeria’s political history, subsequent socio-economic inequalities and fragmented social identities that have influenced and affected Boko Haram and its apologists. Additionally, the study

has theoretical relevance in that it aims to contribute to the reading of the understated colonial legacy with regard to the resultant formation of post-independent African politics, through injecting discourse reflexivity about Africans being complicit perpetrators when it comes to these issues. When it comes to writings in postcolonial theory, questions about the unending effects of the colonial legacy have been asked but the socio-political, identity and material nuances that exist as a result have not been thoroughly investigated.

## **1.5 Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative approach, collecting textual data (African and Euro-American online news articles and analytical scholarly pieces) to be analysed and discussed. To this end, a postcolonial critique with respect to a Foucauldian framework that derives from a Critical Discourse Analysis of text is used. This involves a critical examination of systems of knowledge, meaning, language and power in the representation of Boko Haram by libertarian media. Multiple sources of information, mainly from published African scholarship, make up the theoretical foundation in which this postcolonial critique is based. In this study, the theorisations of Mbembe, Fanon, Mamdani, and Mudimbe as prominent figures in postcolonial studies are crucial to help provide critical historical context, as well as to draw into conspicuousness what has been said in the postcolonial debate. Thus, this theoretical framework is preferred for this study for its contemporary relevance, since it continues with the tradition of interrogating the colonial residue that remains in post-independent African states. Through a literature search the historical evolution and phenomenon of Boko Haram is studied, whilst also using textual analysis to explore how the sect has been represented over time by media reports and analytical commentary from a selection of sources. The findings of this research will contribute to African scholarship on postcolonial critique and media theory of the press.

## **1.6 Selection of texts for analysis**

Three online news articles and three analytical scholarly articles, from Africa and Euro-America respectively, are critically analysed in this study. The background research of Boko Haram reveals that a bulk of the news written about it mostly comes from *BBC News*, *New York Times* and *TIME Magazine*. For the purpose of this study, news articles were selected from *New York Times* and *TIME Magazine*, as well as *The Nation*, a popular Nigerian news publication. The focus of the analysis for both print media and scholarly work is mainly an exploration of representationally reductive patterns from what has been said and written about the Boko Haram, sect between 2013 and 2015. A dominant number of news reports and academic articles came during these years, due to Boko Haram's increased visibility following its 2012 resurgence. Additionally, the analysis will offer a postcolonial critique of the factors and knowledge foundations which may be responsible for

such contextually insufficient representations, in order to bring to light the complexities which exist when tackling the issue of so-called ‘ethno-religious’ conflict and ‘terrorism’.

## **1.7 Overview of Chapters**

The current chapter is the first and acts as a short introductory chapter, summarising the purpose, significance and scope of the entire research project. The second chapter will deal with the problem that arises with defining and ‘essentialising’ the African continent as one entity. Reference will be made to, among other Western anthropologists and philosophers, Hegel’s conception of Africa as ‘unhistoric’ and ‘undeveloped’ which opened Africa up to a ‘violent campaign of conquest’ through exploitation – as a prime source of natural resources, and subordination by imperial powers of Europe. To balance this Eurocentric perspective, an effort made by Afrocentric scholars and activist voices to rewrite Africa’s ‘true’ history will be examined as a response to the single narrative of Africa coming from the West. From this reactionary comparison, the chapter will bring in the voice of Fanon to offer perspective from his often misinterpreted contribution to postcolonial studies concerning the use of revolutionary violence. The purpose of this is to provide a foundational context for the study by linking the colonial history of violence across several parts of Africa and other nations with the contemporary conflicts mainly attributed to ‘terrorist’ and ‘insurgent’ groups under religious influence.

The third chapter will briefly narrow down the scope of focus to examining the British colonial project in West Africa, and more specifically in Nigeria. The examination will look into the dislocation of peoples of indigenous origin and their diasporic identity. This examination will include an evaluation of the colonization and balkanization processes that led to the distinction and separation of cultures, religious groups and ethnic divisions to suit imperial interests in Africa. This aims to reveal the influence of the imperial British conquest on various nations of the African continent, up until the independence and change of political order in some of these nations. With respect to Nigeria, the chapter will reveal the complex dynamic of identity associations in relation to dominant and minority ethno-religious groupings which led to a number of conflicts during the time of colonisation. For this reason, conflict-based research from diverse theorist in academia will be reviewed to account for the origin and cause of these conflicts, that are still prevalent in the contemporary period.

The fourth chapter explores just how little has changed since independence in the case of Nigeria. The various consequences of colonisation will be discussed, first is that of the Islamic Northern parts of the country being more populated and poverty-stricken than the Christian South. Second, is the effect of missionary education that has resulted in literacy rates that are much lower among

states in the North, giving strength to the idea that those educated by, or raised under, Western/Christian modes of thought are exposed to more employment opportunities and are far better equipped and well-adapted to the ever-expanding global village. Third is the dissatisfaction with the country's leadership failures. These factors, resulting in socio-economic inequalities between different ethno-religious groups and political leaders, will raise the question of the Nigerian government's complicity in the dire situation that it finds itself in. The aim of this chapter is to determine whether Africa, specifically Nigeria, is ultimately just a victim of its colonial past or whether it is equally responsible for its own political errors.

Moving into the contemporary era, we are then forced to consider how the Boko Haram insurgency might possibly be a violent response to this complex history. However, we cannot come to conclude that Boko Haram is reacting to Nigeria's situation if the identity and meaning of 'Boko Haram' is not understood, let alone represented truthfully. The fifth chapter will then examine how the interpretation/translation of the group's name has been misreported to mean 'Western education is forbidden' by almost all reliable news sites and scholarly articles. Moreover, there will be an evaluation of the overt contradictions and ironies that exist in the Islamic military group's ideologically anti-West representation and the technologically advanced means by which it carries out its brutal acts of violence that it considers Jihad. This chapter will also examine whether the group is simply fighting for the cause of Islam fundamentalism or whether it is, rather, concerned with much deeper politico-economic problems that relate to the various failures of Nigeria's government. What will also be discussed are the claims that other Islamic extremist groups such as Al' Shabaab and Al' Queda, along with some Northern politicians/elites, are Boko Haram supporters and sympathisers who are possibly funding the sect to make the country ungovernable.

The Critical Discourse Analysis in the sixth chapter examines the association between the Boko Haram sect and other radical Islamic military groups such as al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda and recently ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) from oversimplified narratives used to make connections between these groups, especially by academic scholars. That is, since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, Islamic fundamentalism invokes, or has become synonymous with, a terrorist threat on a global scale since it is also seen as a challenge to Western ideologies. With this in mind, this chapter will provide an analysis of three scholarly/academic journals in order to examine how Boko Haram's identity and actions within the Nigerian context is understood.

Using journalistic articles from globally leading newspapers, the seventh chapter will analyse the biased, orientalist representations of the Islamic theme by liberal print media. This is done in order to emphasise the reductiveness of the media and Western discourse in comparison to the complex

narratives that make up Nigeria's history, pre- and post-independence, as well as the disregarded nuances of Boko Haram. In this analysis, a critical emphasis will be placed not only on the 'fear factor' induced by the overt demonisation of Islam but also the contradictions that stem from the groups own self-identification in line with its actions.

The concluding final chapter will consider how the theoretical postcolonial responses to African conflicts, similar to the Boko Haram insurgency, tend to interpret the violence as the former victims of colonialism responding to and revolting against the consequent exploitative system of capitalism in the contemporary context. It stands to reason that the perennial problem remains the reductive thinking that prevails when tackling issues concerning the unending yet complex problems in Africa. Moreover, the chapter will challenge the inclination of various journalistic, scholarly and activist groups to seek a redemptive solution to the multifaceted problem of Boko Haram that goes beyond a human right issue.

Since the purpose of this project is to re-engage a critical Afro-consciousness reflective of contemporary problems in the African context, the conclusion proposes that journalistic reporting, especially situated in Africa, needs to be aware of and challenge Western paradigms and discourses that function as a normative benchmark: proposing what is deemed right, worthy and fair according to Western models of liberty and rationality. Additionally, the question of who can write on and speak for Africa is examined, for the purpose of proposing a revised theory and practice of 'Situational Journalism' focusing on African conflicts.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2 The Historical Portrayal of Africa in Colonial Literature

Documented historical knowledge about the African continent is vast, and yet the multitude of sources writing on and about Africa come from *outside* of Africa. The majority of this reproduced knowledge, across various academic fields, goes as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century with Europe's first infiltration of the so-called *Dark Continent*. Unsurprisingly, these century old texts on Africa have not been entirely adequate in writing on the African continent. The most problematic issue in these writings, mainly by European thinkers, is how they often reductively define and *essentialise* Africa and its people; describing them as undeveloped, uncivilised and 'unhistorical'<sup>1</sup> In the pages that follow, I will demonstrate how the international media treatment of Boko Haram in Nigeria is a reflection of the treatment of Africa in an overwhelming number of these historical, philosophical, anthropological and political texts. Furthermore, I will argue that this reductive approach has created the knowledge foundation that has framed the discourses about the problems plaguing Africa in the contemporary era.

#### 2.1 Hegel's Philosophy of History on Africa

One of the foundational voices of this historical knowledge, arguably the Father of this knowledge, is German Philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who wrote the *Philosophy of History* (1892/1991). In Hegel's text, the very idea of Africa as part of history and global development is denigrated and lies on the periphery – a place nowhere near the 'process of humanization' due to its inferiority. This inferiority, as described by Babacar Camara in 'The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa', was supposedly due to the 'Negroes' living in Africa who could not "accede to the notion of objectivity" or reason, because they were "overwhelmed with sensations, instincts, and passions" (2005:85). In contrast, Ancient Greece and beyond this, Europe was the ultimate theatre of history, the pinnacle of all great development and advanced civilisation. Hegel is unapologetic when he writes about the characteristic of the African 'Negro' as "completely wild" and "untamed" because the 'Negro' "has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law" and thus does not possess the concept of a soul and its immortality, or justice and morality (1991:93-95). According to Hegel, this knowledge forms the key moment of consciousness where one may realize one's own being coupled with the knowledge of "an Other and a Higher" being beyond the individual self (1991:93). Due to lacking this knowledge, the 'Negro' shows a certain contempt for humanity with cannibalism being the most offensive

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<sup>1</sup>Essentialism, in a postcolonial context, is the reduction of indigenous people belonging to African, Indian or Arabic cultures as "essentially" defined by their geographical identity, or a homogeneous identity ascribed to them by colonial powers, thus overlooking any other differences that may exist within these nations.

expression of this contempt. These claims and several other theories proposed by Hegel, reveal that a racist ideology and colonialist mentality underpin the *Philosophy of History*.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this brief chapter is not to respond to Hegel's claims and refute them with counter evidence, as that would only be bowing to the simplistic argumentative positions that scholars are drawn to. These positions usually imply that theory created by the West is grounded in *reason* and that the 'true facts' about Africa deserve to belong to that universalist framework. In contrast to these positions, the purpose of this chapter is to show the astounding ignorance that is expressed whenever Africa is spoken about, largely from the writings of historically venerated Europeans, and how this continues to be the accepted knowledge of Africa's history outside and inside the continent.

Hegel defined History as the journey from ancient empires up to modern states, as well as a journey from East to West, where Asia is the beginning and foundation, and Europe is the absolute end where Reason culminates and progress has been fully achieved. This journey of History is also "the progress of the consciousness of Freedom" and through this project, Hegel believes we may begin to investigate and realise this Freedom (Hegel, 1991:9). The 'freedom' Hegel speaks of is, according to him, apparent across the different stages of political and social organisation in various cultures and societies around the globe, except for any events/moments/phenomena from the African continent. For this reason, the "universal" or rather Western interpretation of History allowed Hegel to isolate Africa where Reason is rare and 'Nature' "rules in its blindest fury in form of famine, or the continual recrudescence or persistence of disease and pestilences of unknown origins and severe repercussions, or 'intertribal' wars that on occasion bring genocide in their wake..." (cited in Taiwo, 1998:5). In *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1977), Hegel emphasizes that humans begin at a stage of natural consciousness which only becomes reflective when it enters the 'ground of science'. That is to say, scientific values such as reason, logic and rationality are true expressions of a reflective consciousness. The movement towards reflective consciousness can only happen when natural consciousness begins to see itself as removed from its surroundings and different from nature. The problem for the African, apparently, is that the power of nature is bigger and easily absorbs the attention of consciousness and thus restricts the movement towards reflection (Purtschert, 2010:1045). The power of nature comes from its ability to threaten the body of consciousness through the elements of heat and cold which occur in specific climatic conditions, disallowing consciousness to perceive itself as different from nature (2010:1045). As such, Hegel posits that Reason, development and advancement of consciousness is only possible in 'temperate zones' which can only be found in certain regions of the world (Hegel, 1991).

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert Bernasconi, 'Hegel's Racism: a Reply to McCartney', *Radical Philosophy* (2003): 35-7. Bernasconi suggests that the prevailing racialized concept of history that dominated Europe from the mid-19th century was precluded by Hegel's texts, where only the Caucasian race appeared as a historical subject in the full sense.



## 2.2 Hegel's Marginalisation and Alienation of Africa

Hegel's conception of Africa was divisive, since he divided the continent into three parts to serve his own 'intellectual reasoning' following his work on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The first part which lay south of the desert of the Sahara was 'Africa proper' that had an Upland that was "entirely unknown" along with "narrow coast-tracks along the sea" (1991:91). The second part lay north of the desert and had a coastland, Hegel thought to call this uniquely advanced part of the continent 'European Africa'. The third part was connected to Asia in the region of the Nile River and was the "only valley-land of Africa" (1991:91). Olufemi Taiwo's article entitled, 'Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy' comments on Hegel's problematic intention to describe North Africa as a European Africa due to the "incontrovertible evidence of the many civilizations that had been domiciled there for millennia" (1998:7). Taiwo also points out that Hegel's denial of this station of History would have meant "denying the glory that was Egypt, Carthage, Cyrenaica..." and so it was necessary to "reconfigure the geography so that Egypt is intellectually excised from Africa" (1998:7). The number of contradictions that exist in this geographical theory alone are undeniable, especially since the very assertion by European ethno-centrists that 'the real Africa is south of the Sahara' is false by virtue of the fact that Africa is a continent.

Despite this, according to Hegel, Africa proper differed from the rest of Africa due to its "tropical nature" and "geographical condition" and thus played no key role in world history (1991:91). History progresses in the form of a 'World Spirit' which eventually becomes universal freedom once actualised, and for Hegel, this Spirit remains undeveloped in the land where nature dominates. Africa proper is at a disadvantage for this reason, due to its environment not allowing the Spirit to transcend to the minimum level of consciousness (Kuykendall, 1993:573). Therefore, the African character could never fit into Hegel's idea of Universality, making the African difficult to comprehend using the tools of European Reason. Hegel's attempt at comprehension led him to conclude that Africans (Negroes, in this context) were too attached to their present existence and thus could not "[separate] themselves from nature" (1991:93).

Taiwo reveals the profound lack of empirical investigation in Hegel's description of Africa. In this case, empirical investigation is a method that is usually highly valued by strict practitioners of Philosophy. Taiwo mocks Hegel when she notes that "intricate justification for practices..., the nuances of the languages in which ideas of transcendence, or of immortality of the soul, or of justice and morality, and the complexity of life and thought among African peoples, some of whom had created Empires" were clearly unavailable to Hegel (Taiwo, 1998:11). That is, at the time of

Hegel's writing, the African continent had not been fully explored and many of its realities remained unknown. John Noyes puts it clearly when he writes that, "Hegel never visited Africa, nor did he leave. Only in his imagination. But this imaginary departure is crucial to his historiography" (Noyes, 2012:14). Additionally, Hegel draws the conclusion that the only connection that has ever and could ever exist between the African and the European is that of slavery (1991:98). With this supposition, Hegel declares Africa's place and function in history irrelevant;

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it-that is in its northern part-belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History (Hegel, 1991:99).

### **2.3 Comparisons in Literature Between the 'Dark Continent' and the Industrial West**

Taiwo additionally problematizes the repeated disjunctions that exist when Africa is spoken of, in comparison to the language used when Europe or 'the rest of the world' is mentioned. Such peculiarities include descriptive phrases such as, "ancestor worship" in relation to Africa, "religion" in relation to the rest of the world; "tribalism" in Africa, "nationalism" for the world; "traditional thought" exists in Africa, "philosophy" appears in the rest of the world; "order of custom" relates to Africa, whilst "rule of law" is universal yet excludes Africa (1998:13). Hoskin's paper on 'Eurocentrism vs. Afrocentrism' also emphasises that many myths have been deliberately promulgated by Eurocentric history, especially those which describe Africa as a 'Dark Continent' that is "replete with cannibals, savages, and inferior uncivilised, backward, primitive people, devoid of knowledge and culture and possessing evil traits and desires" (Hoskins, 1992:248). These are the common descriptions and analyses of Africa that one finds in historical, academic texts that are in support of the colonising mission. These texts describe colonialism as an event that was both good and necessary for Africa's integration into the wider, globally industrialised arena.

It is important to note that these distinct descriptions and contrasts between Africa and the West, which are rarely brought to the forefront when Africa's contemporary socio-political problems are discussed, have acted as the key "differentiation between a progressive modernity [the West] and its stagnating Other [Africa]" (Purtschert, 2010:1049). In other words, an understanding of Africa's history, development and progress, as well as the way in which the rest of the world responds to the complexities of Africa's socio-political, economical, ethno-religious and legislative problems have continued to be influenced by ethnocentric prejudices that appear in textual misinterpretations, misrepresentations and misunderstandings produced by the likes of Hegel. One such example is Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, a leading British Empire builder who wrote *A History of the*

*Colonialization of Africa by Alien Races* (1899).<sup>3</sup> In this text, he asserts that the African ‘Negro’ is different from all other humans because of particular mental and physical characteristics which allow ‘him’ to be a slave in ‘his’ primitive state and a great servant of other races (1899:151).<sup>4</sup> Another example of a writer who supports Hegel’s views is Hugh Trevor-Roper who famously stated that, “perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness ...And darkness is not a subject for history” (1963:871). Although this parochial notion about Europeans being the bearers of history comes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it can be argued that it is still widely held by those who have no contact with the African continent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **2.4 African Voices Reacting to Colonial Constructions of Africa**

A number of claims often made by well-meaning academics wishing to defend Africans and their long-existing cultures, values, beliefs and lifestyles, include the need to constantly emphasise that the African does not exist as an individual ‘I am’ but rather as a collective ‘we are’ and that this very fact proves that the African is conscious of his/her existence.<sup>5</sup> Beyond this, these authors claim that collective consciousness is often linked to a society which may then extend to the idea of the ‘universal’ (see Mbiti, 1970). Nevertheless, it has to be considered that the very idea of the ‘universal’ or what is deemed to constitute the ‘universal’, was created by European intellectuals and continues to be dominated by Eurocentric prescriptions, theories and ideologies since time immemorial. Despite this, the Eurocentric universality created by European culture becomes the reference point against which every other world culture is defined.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the compulsion to ascribe Africa’s cultural beliefs and philosophies to the universal for the sake of bowing down to the imperial normative benchmark of what is deemed legitimate and acceptable is a condition that academics have to unlearn. Alternatively, it would be useful to consider what Keto calls a ‘pluriversal’ perspective which suggests that we look at the world “from different centres rather than from a single angle” (Keto, 1989 cited in Oyebade, 1990:234). This perspective would allow for a better understanding of the diversities and multicultural identities that exist around the world, and particularly on the African continent.

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<sup>3</sup> The book is an expression of Johnston’s views in support of the European colonisation and exploitation of Africans by stating that the colonised Negro possessed “great physical strength, docility, cheerfulness of disposition, a short memory for sorrows and cruelties, and an easily aroused gratitude for kindness and just dealing” and was thus evolutionary inferior to all other human races (1899:152).

<sup>4</sup> Notably, in his text on ‘Concerning Violence’, Fanon evaluates this analysis of the native as aesthetic expressions that have been established by the colonisers and capitalist to “create around the exploited person an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which lightens the task of policing [and colonising] considerably” (1963:29).

<sup>5</sup> See Mbiti, J. S in *African religions and philosophy* (1970). Mbiti argues that Hegel is incorrect in his assumptions about African levels of consciousness and existence of a morality since there is evidence that the concept of African morality and consciousness exists and is “not just peculiar to an African society but is typical of African culture on a continental scale” (1970:279).

<sup>6</sup> See Bayo Oyebade, ‘African Studies and the Afrocentric Paradigm: A Critique’ (1990). Oyebade maintains that the Eurocentric worldview has dominated and overshadowed other worldviews, and that there is a hegemonic universal character that is assumed by the Eurocentric paradigm, which for instance, has made the Western definition of civilisation become the standard for what constitutes a civilisation (1990:234). He also notes that African scholars perpetuate the historiography used to describe Africa and its people by using derogatory language to speak of Africa with the continuing use of terms like “tribes” and “Third world” which deny African civilisation (1990:237).

In relation to this, it has become evident that although there is a growing effort by Afrocentric academics to reconsider and essentially rewrite Africa's 'true' history, this project is often remote from, and inconsiderate to the African on the ground who is actually affected by the consequences of how history has played out. That is to say that the intellectual posturing by African scholars that seeks to prove that Africa and its people are unique, culturally diverse and equally worthy of belonging to the greater universalist framework shows little concern for the material effects of the historical miseducation and alienation of the struggling African in the contemporary era. The same problem arises in postcolonial thought that has often been accused of focusing on cultural differences and not enough on economic exploitation. It is as if 'postcolonialism' functions within academia as the easy way out of dealing with the real and persisting problems faced by disenfranchised and once colonised people. This view may be argued to be focusing on one aspect of postcolonial studies, ignoring how the studies have revealed the multiple and far-reaching legacies of colonialism. However, it has become clear that more work still needs to be done that highlights how, in light of recent political and labour driven revolts among disadvantaged masses, it is particularly difficult for the postcolonial African to thrive under the stifling conditions that delimit its economic advancement in an era dominated by Westernised globalisation. This reality arguably applies to Nigeria's case with Boko Haram, which will be further expanded on in Chapter 5.

Beyond this, there are other intellectual voices and culturally black movements that are asking Africans not to chase the movement towards a globalised and industrially advanced landscape taken by other nations of the world, or to even react radically to the neo-colonialism that plagues the so-called 'Third World' countries. Instead, these individual and group activists are asking Africans to consider 'going back' to an Africa of the past, before the advance of Europeans into the African continent. By doing so, these groups argue that Africans would be restoring the uniquely African identity and cultural values that were lost or, rather, taken away from them. A more accommodating perspective maintains that the colonial era in African history should not be removed from how Africa is defined and should rather act as a normal and natural cultural change of course in its history which Africans have to adapt themselves to (Ajayi, 1914:499).<sup>7</sup> The focus of history then, according to this perspective, is the manner and methods in which Africans have adapted to this change whilst maintaining their cultural unity.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the views of the former perspective, proponents of this view do not necessarily deny or reject the dramatic and irreversible changes that occurred during the colonial era which included "the introduction of Christianity, western

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<sup>7</sup> See J. F. Ade Ajayi, 'Colonialism: an episode in African history' (p. 499), and 'Continuity of African Institutions' (p. 192) in Gann and Duignan, *Colonialism, 1870-1914*. In these articles, Ajayi makes the case for the correction of historical texts to move the focus away from the history of colonization in Africa, and rather to African history as a worthy subject.

education, and western social, religious, and political ideas, and the suppression of African practices that were judged incompatible with European Christian traditions” (1914:503). In this view, the colonial period is seen as ‘but one episode in the continuous flow of African history” (1914:506).

## **2.5 Fanon on the Contemporary Consequences of Colonialism**

Of course the first counter-response to both these outlooks that state what and how Africa should be is that there *is* no ‘Africa’ to return to. The second response is that it is nearly impossible for Africans to learn to adapt to the destructive history that has been written of their behalf, mainly due to the psychological consequences of colonisation on the colonised. The political dimension of this psychological argument comes from Frantz Fanon. Fanon argues that colonised people currently suffer under the economic shackles of neo-colonialism because they have not yet freed themselves from their “mental imprisonment, which includes a sense both of inferiority and of alienation” (cited in Hunt, 1973:394). Fanon’s answer to this predicament is recognising the physically and psychologically violent exploitation imposed by the European powers on colonised peoples and responding through reactive violence. He sees this violence as the only way to ‘cleanse’, free and decolonize nations imprisoned by the imperialist and colonial systems that remain in the contemporary era and manifest themselves through globalised governments. The theorisation of Frantz Fanon in this context is particularly crucial to do what most postcolonial theories have fallen short of doing, which is to speak of the residues of colonial violence in most post-independent African nations.

Within this context, Fanon’s often misinterpreted contribution to postcolonial studies concerning the use of revolutionary violence as an anti-colonial tool against ‘former colonisers’ must be considered. That is, one has to consider the multiple episodes of conflicts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from various parts of the world, that have been underpinned by religious and political tensions, and which global voices attribute to ‘terrorist’ and ‘insurgent’ groups. The most violent of these conflicts are currently taking place in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and South Sudan. These conflicts have revealed that there are extreme situations of dehumanisation, genocide and misogynist practices occurring in a time where the UN and ‘Universal Human Rights’ laws exist. With that said, influential world leaders and usually Western societies exhibit an extreme ignorance by not acknowledging the complexities and differences that come with engaging with the problems and the people inciting them and those affected by them. A more specific example of such a country that has been, in recent years, the site of ethno-religious and political conflict is Nigeria, due to the acts of violence attributed to the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram. The case of Nigeria forces one to delve into the complexities, differences and contestations that are often not considered or adequately represented in mainstream media.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3 The Impact of the British Imperial Conquest in Nigeria**

In order to problematize the destabilisation of native citizens and their diasporic identity, this chapter will be focusing on the colonization and balkanization that led to the distinction and separation of cultures, religious groups and ethnic divisions to suit imperial interests in Africa. This is done to reveal the influence of the imperial British conquest on various nations of the African continent, up until the independence and change of political order in some of these nations. As such, this will include an examination into the structurally violent role played by the unranked style of British colonial administration in West Africa, as well as the artificial grouping of multi-ethnic groups within Nigeria's diverse and populous nation resulting in post-colonial ethno-religious conflict. In light of this, the chapter will interrogate the colonial residue of hierarchical power dynamics within the political institutions in contemporary Nigeria. I argue that, due to this unfortunate history of land and resource exploitation, structural and systematic violence, as well as socio-economic injustices, Nigeria inadvertently carries the burden of progressing a fatal legacy inherited from systems and policies of the colonial state.

#### **3.1 The Fallacy of Colonialisation as a 'Civilising Mission'**

For as long as history has been inscribed by those with the means to do so, it has been within the Western logic to characterize the African continent and its people as 'Other'; falling at the lowest order of the global hierarchy of cultural and intellectual superiority. What continues to strengthen convictions of the dominant global hierarchy are structures coming from the West that promote racial difference and cultural superiority which frame "oppositional images of Western self and African Other" (Airewele & Edozie, 2010:15). This imposed hierarchy can be argued to have been a major justification for imperial control. The very idea of colonialism as a 'civilising mission' brought with it the notion of a superior culture and society bestowing its greatly advanced way of life on a people supposedly deprived of intellect, civility, and reason. In this manner, it was the belief of the West that a superior race and culture was doing a great deed by 'discovering' and exploring 'untouched lands', only to forcefully impose on the land's people the knowledge and way of life of a supposedly superior civilization. As highlighted in the previous chapter, anthropological and sociological studies were known to inform the language used to describe the African continent, often in ways that reduce or silence the valuable legacies that Africans have contributed throughout history. Whilst, as Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), Martin Bernal (1987) and other leading historians have made clear, there have been a number of African innovations which have informed the development of European societies, such as contributions in "technology, architecture, medicine, algebra, the arts, socio-political and commercial organization, and global networking" (Diop, 1974).

An extensive number of historical academic texts have written on colonialism and imperialism, but particularly on its devastating effects on the dignity, identity, culture and knowledge of colonised people. As previously alluded to, this comes at the great denial of existing records which prove that even groups such as the Yoruba and Baganda had developed extensive trade along with great cities and highly centralised governments. This knowledge was even recorded by colonial officials in intelligence reports which were simultaneously denied and explicitly rejected in imperial texts and administrative practice (Batten, 1933; Zuchernuk, 1998). Writing on this, Okoth explains that the process of imperialism further culminated in “the production of a people with a perpetual inferiority complex, people who harboured attitudes of subservience, timidity and cowardice, uncreativity, unimaginativeness, idealism and romanticism” (Okoth, 1993:139-40). This easily allowed for the colonised people to be “dominated, manipulated, exploited, oppressed” and made to believe that they were incapable of historical advancements (1993:40). Beyond this, from the history of trial and error that was experienced by the British in their larger colonizing experience, their ‘civilizing mission’ had morphed to transform to “a calculated preoccupation with holding power” and maintaining control of a society and its people (Mamdani, 1996).

It was at the Berlin conference of 1881 that European powers came together to divide the African continent according to their avaricious colonial interests, seeking to take ownership of over 50 marked colonies (Osundu, 2010:36). This invasive and violent campaign of conquest to balkanize the African continent was not concerned with the fact that it was negating “existing boundaries of states, empires, cultures, or over 1 000 ethnic nationalities” (2010:36). This disregard meant that some individual colonies alone held multiple ethnic groups, while other territorial boundaries divided several ethnic nationalities between more than two colonies (Blanton, et al., 2001:476). After African states gained independence, these territorial boundaries became internationally legitimised and recognised as newly sovereign states (2001:476). It is from this circumstance that firstly, the new African states were immediately faced with the twin challenge of “secessionist sentiments within their borders,” and the “threat [of] irredentist wars across the borders” (2001:476). Secondly, because European powers established a specific kind of administrative control and transformed the productive relations within the colonial territories to suit the demands of their own markets, the patterns of social organization that had existed and evolved in these local communities had been disrupted (2001:477).

### 3.2 The Structural Violence of British Colonialism

Nigeria consisted of many independent states, kingdoms and empires before the advent of colonial rule, among these were the Nri Kingdom (948-1911), Kanem-Bornu (1068-1900), Kwararafa (1400-1800), Benin (1440-1897), Hausa States (1500-1808), Oyo (1608-1800) and Sokoto Caliphate (1809-1903), which were all ruled by their own religious and political systems (Abdurrahman, 2012:167). When the British first arrived in Nigeria around the 1870s, they already began establishing their commercial and administrative centres, which included “shipping export commodities to Europe through Lagos and Calabar” (2012:168). Beyond this, it is arguable that the territorial boundaries that were imposed by European powers across Africa in 1885 sowed the seeds for ethnic conflict that were to erupt in post-colonial Africa (Blanton, 2001:473).<sup>8</sup> Of course the way these ethnic conflicts have played out across Africa have not been uniform or predictable, and usually express themselves in different forms. This is to mean conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi cannot be compared to those in Angola, DRC or Nigeria for that matter (Blanton, 2001:474).

A good starting point to explore ethnic nuances within the African context is to look at the work of peace research authors Blanton, Mason and Athow, who have produced valuable research on the “Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa” which brings attention to the violent legacy left behind by colonialism. This legacy has seen approximately 45% of ethnic minorities involved in armed rebellion that occurred after independence in some African states (cited in Scarritt & McMillan, 1995:331). In the paper by Blanton and Athow, a contrast is made between the colonial styles of the British and French which were responsible for the varying degrees of ethnic stratification that were created in African colonies (2001:473). On the one hand, the system of the French was ranked and functioned through a centralised administration of formal bureaucratic control that ensured ethnic minorities could not mobilize and systematically challenge the rulers. On the other hand, the British worked on an unranked system, which fostered competition and rivalry between ethnic groups/communities, consequently triggering frequent and intensified ethnic conflicts. Both colonial powers were driven by economic imperatives which dictated that their administration be as self-supporting as possible, without relying on colonial settlement (Young, 1994:97).

I wish to focus particularly on the British style of colonialism, which largely affected West African states, with Nigeria, among them, consequently being prone to ethno-religious conflicts after independence. The British functioned by having just one administrator for every 100 000 Africans

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<sup>8</sup> Beyond this interference, Umar Abdurrahman notes that what disrupted the socio-political values existing in these states was also the trade, diplomacy, and later, “the military might of the new European adventurers who would later become colonisers” (2012:167). And since the ultimate goal was colonisation, the careful and economically driven decision to employ trade and diplomacy seemed to be the best option.



in Nigeria, co-opting or coercing “indigenous local elites to manage the day-to-day affairs of the colony,” and having only 75 Africans present in a colonial army of 4 000 to serve British rule (Blanton, et al.,2001:477; Emerson, 1964; Wilson, 1994:19;). This form of administration was effective in northern Nigeria where there already existed strong structures of social control and elites from each ethnic group who were willing to collaborate with British administrators (Young, 1988:42-43). And so, unlike the French who dismantled indigenous social structures, the British did not disrupt the existing traditional patterns of social organization (Blanton, et al., 2001:479). However, these existing traditional structures of control had internal differences and oppositions due to their varying ethnicities, which the British used to ‘divide and rule’ the populations. Due to this preservation strategy, the British could ensure that there would be no coalitions formed within a colony to challenge the British administration (Clapham, 1985). This was to also guard against the possibility of a national anti-colonial formation as was the case in India (Wilson, 1994:21). To achieve this in the case of Nigeria, and even in Uganda and Kenya, the British often chose one of the smaller, subordinate minority groups within a multi-ethnic colony to receive British education and later to “dominate the colonial civil service and police/military forces” (Blanton, et al., 2001:480).

As previously stated, British colonies were more prone to frequent ethnic conflicts because of the traditional patterns of social organization left behind after the end of Britain’s indirect style of colonial rule (2001:475). Authority structures formed by these institutions of social organization allowed for the collective mobilization of various ethnic groups to mobilise and engage in several forms of political violence after the end of colonial rule (2001:475). Additionally, the style of administration ensured that no single ethnic group was dominant, and that class in British colonies was not easily determined by ethnicity.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is not by mere coincidence that disparities that continue to occur within African government structures since the end of formal British colonialism are not defined by identities such as class, gender, or wealth but “interpreted through the lens of ethnicity” as well as regions and religion (Blanton, et al., 2001:480; Mamdani, 2007).

This then speaks to the reductive analysis of the political reality faced by many African nations that is often framed under the primordial lens of backwardness, underdevelopment and native violence. Nigeria in particular faces major political problems which are often violently “contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country” (Smyth & Robinson, 2001). In this regard, the Nigerian state is not foreign to dealing with fierce groups competing for citizenship, state control, resource and land acquirement (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:4). This colonial

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9 As explained later, ethnic groups such as the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba only became dominant groups after Nigeria's independence, due to belonging predominantly to designated North, East and Western regions.

legacy not only makes it harder pursue a project of nation-building, democratization or socio-political stability, but it also makes the state vulnerable to continuous tension and conflict between disaffected groups and towards political leadership.<sup>10</sup> That is, while some groups are “pushing for greater participation in the running of the affairs” of the Nigerian state, others are “clamouring for greater autonomy” (Omuabor, 2000:146). However, as previously examined, it would be oversimplistic to state that the diversity present within Nigeria's divided state is the only sufficient explanation for conflict. This is considering the number of diverse countries such as Tanzania, Malaysia and even Belgium that remain relatively peaceful and socially stable, whilst the least diverse countries such as Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia are unstable and prone to violence (2005:5).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the most violent aspect of the British colonial project was in its systematic construction of seemingly arbitrary regions and the artificial grouping of multi-ethnic groups within a populous nation consisting of a diverse society and culture. Even the urban setting of the colonial era – acting as the centre of mining, commercial and administrative developments – was key to the “formation of kinship, lineage or ethnic associations as a means to cushion the insecurity, instability, alienation and competitiveness of colonial urban life” (Coleman, 1958:8). Undeniably, colonialism became the primary and most dominant factor responsible for the formation of contemporary identities and further, identity conflicts in Nigeria (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:16).

### **3.3 The Consequence of Britain’s Colonial Structural Violence in Nigeria**

Writing on “A History of Identities, Violence, and Stability in Nigeria,” authors Osaghae and Suberu note that in post-colonial Nigeria at least two waves of violent identity conflicts, that can be identified as colonial conflict legacies, have hit “during 1960-70 and since the early eighties” (2005:17). The two well-known conflicts that occurred in the early eighties were based on riot events in Kano. The first is attributed to the Maitatsine, which provoked a subsequent series of others “involving the Maitatsine heretical, anti-materialist, Islamic sect in other northern cities like Bulunkutu, Yola, Jimeta and Gombe” (Christelow, 1985; Lubeck, 1985). The second was the work of Muslim mobs causing destruction to a Christian owned church which was newly built in Kano’s Muslim centre (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:18-19). The two authors note that the turning point in Nigeria’s post-civil war and the post-independence “relapse into inter-group strife” was the 1987 ethno-religious riots of the Kafanchan-Kaduna (2005:19).

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<sup>10</sup> Writing on “Ethno-religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria,” Daniel Egiegba Agbibo states that “in the consciousness of many Nigerians, ethno-religious identities have proved far more resilient than national interests” (2013:10).

Consequently, past tensions between the Muslim Hausa/Fulani and non-Muslim communities were revived all over the northern region of Nigeria and beyond (2005:19). These inter-groups which began to gain prominence could be classified into four over-lapping types, mainly: “Ethno-religious clashes, inter-ethnic violence, intra-ethnic and/or intra-religious conflicts, and inter-group economic clashes” (2005:19). However, among these four distinctions, it is ethno-religious clashes which tend to be the most prominent and violent, occurring mostly in the Middle-Belt and Muslim north of Nigeria between Muslim Hausa/Fulani groups and non-Muslim ethnic groups (2005:19).<sup>11</sup> Although it can be difficult to distinguish between religious and ethnic conflicts, the strong and defining identities held by people in Nigeria sometimes assist with this differentiation. In this sense, the implementation of Sharia in the 12 northern states of Nigeria has been the common denominator in the conflicts between northern Muslim populations and “southern, Middle Belt, and northern Christians who fear that the Sharia movement will violate their rights and reduce them to second-class citizens” (Okpanachi, 2010:2).

### **3.4 The Rise of Dominant Ethno-Religious Groups in Nigeria**

The colonial period represents an era where the culture, values and ideas of Europe dominated, whilst the beliefs, traditions and needs of the majority who belonged to the land were denigrated; a denigration that continued to play out in Nigeria's federal institutions due to the state's unrevised constitutional and customary laws, until recent years.<sup>12</sup> Such laws ensured that group identities were shaped by the leaders of the dominant ethnic groups such as the “Hausa/Fulani in the Northern region (predominantly Muslim), Igbo in the Eastern region and Yoruba in the Western region [which exercised] some form of hegemonic control” over the regional structures of the Nigerian federation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:7). These three dominant ethnic groups that came with the establishment of these federal regions in 1954 now exist as ethno-regional identities which also have conflicts arising between them. Moreover, even though Nigeria has been divided into “six semi-official geo-political zones” with political potency since the late 1990s, the three dominant ethno-regional structures, which were inherently divisive and dis-integrative in their construction, still represent the dominant ethnic groups within those areas (2005:7).

Likewise, regional cleavages reflect the formations of religious identities across the country, with a predominantly Muslim North and a predominantly Christian South (2005:7). The ethno-religious category that has been ascribed to this formation is commonly used to define the identity of the Boko Haram insurgency. Unsurprisingly, the polarization of the North and South regions was part

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<sup>11</sup> The Middle Belt is also commonly referred to as the north-central zone and consists of a mixed population including Christians and Muslims. The same religious mixture goes for the Yoruba-speaking population in the south-west of Nigeria (Okpanachi, 2010:6).

<sup>12</sup> Nigeria's current political development has included consistently working to remove this dysfunctional colonial federal legacy in order to accommodate a multi-state federalism (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:22).

of the initial colonial state construction, which still existed even after the 1914 amalgamation that allowed these two units to be administered separately (2005:12). The confrontation between the North and South was further aggravated by the 1963 creation of the 'Mid-West' region in the South which caused an imbalance in the existing tripartite ethno-regional structure of the North, East and West (2005:16).<sup>13</sup> This became an issue mainly because it disrupted the perceived dominance of the boundaries that were already created between the three regions by the dominating Hausa/Fulani whose ethnic group contained half of the country's then population. Adding on to this train of historical chronology, Suberu insists that Nigeria's problems are "deeply rooted in complex historical and structural processes of pre-colonial and colonial incorporation and consolidation of diverse ethnic segments, federal territorial evolution and reorganizations, revenue allocation, and political competition and representation" (1996:xi).

Notably, the prescription of the ethno-religious identity in the northern Islamic region functions as a signifier to distinguish between minorities and the majority.<sup>14</sup> That is, in northern Nigeria it matters more that one is of a particular religious group than an ethnic one. A Muslim who belongs to one of the minority ethnic groups like the Igala or Idoma is favoured and enjoys more privileges than a Christian belonging to a majority group such as the Hausa/Fulani (2005:7).<sup>15</sup> This privilege was most apparent in matters of politics where the elite of the majority ethno-religious group "deployed strategies of ethnic mobilization and exclusionary politics to establish hegemonic control of the regions" (2005:12). In his, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996), Mamdani rightly points to the politically driven strategy of the British colonial powers to intentionally and sometimes forcefully divide multi-ethnic groups within colonies. These ethnicities would be ruled locally by elites or so called Native Authorities appointed and supervised by European officials and white colonial administrators. Moreover, it was made the responsibility of the Native Authorities to control ethnic groups by means of force, a force that was passed off as customary. Thus, whenever the locals were reluctant to accept a new development that the colonialist introduced to their environment, it was the sole duty of the Native Authorities to communicate to the locals through the language of force, which was disguised as organised customary law (Mamdani, 1996). In this regard, the divisive power of the elites from these three dominant groups to rule over their respective ethnic regions post-independence was a carry-over of

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<sup>13</sup> This tripartite structure disadvantaged minority ethnic groups in that they denied them options of security within their own regions, fueling agitations between the minority groups to compete and fight for limited resources (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:16).

<sup>14</sup> Just as Christianity has many dominations – although not comparatively the same – Muslims also separate themselves into different sects including the Sanusiyya, Tijanniyya, Ahmadiyya and Quadriyya which have been in some conflict with each other

<sup>15</sup> In this sense, although ethnic identification in Nigeria is "presumed to be the most salient and consistent source of social identity," research by the Pew Research Forum conducted mid-2000's reveals that religion is the most prominent form of identification (Lewis, 2007).

the pseudo-power afforded to them by the indirect style of rule used by British colonialist. This is the same residual power that affirms the rule of tribal political institutions in contemporary Nigeria, which inadvertently carries the burden of progressing a fatal legacy inherited from systems and policies of the colonial state. It is then no wonder that since formal colonialism ended, the African continent has been marred by poverty, famine, ethnic violence, genocide, warfare, socio-economic underdevelopment, and so on. Although there is a tendency in contemporary times to bring to attention the technological and infrastructural advantages of the colonial period, it cannot be denied that the British imperial and colonial project was full of grotesque violence and injustices against African people, which has had disturbing and violent effects to this day, with Nigeria's ethno-religious conflicts being a prime case.

### **3.5 Critique of Studies on Ethnicity and Identity-Based Conflicts in Nigeria**

There are studies on ethnicity/identity-based conflicts in Nigeria which posture that a civic integrative approach is necessary for the resolution of the so-called primordial conflicts (Oommen, 1997; Ekeh, 1972; Oyoybaire, 1984). According to Oommen, these primordial conflicts generate a resilient and unequal society of ethnic exclusion, whilst a more inclusionary and equality-oriented approach to conflict resolution would foster in a society led by a civil citizenship, thus leading to national cohesion (1997:35). The flaw with this theorisation is its implied assumption that 'primordial ties' are inherently separate and distinguishable from class, nationality or other civil ties (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:6). Whereas, in a country like Nigeria where the contemporary landscape of identities reveal an explicit influence from the country's colonial history, civil ties are inextricably linked to past primordial ties. More especially since, ethnicity in Nigeria is "regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity," with ethnic formations reinforced by colonial and post-colonial regimes being "the most historically enduring behavioural units in the country" (2005:8-9). Additionally, in Nigerian society, ethnicity tends to be understood as "the employment and or mobilisation of ethnic identity or differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or co-operation" (Osaghae, 1995:11). Oommen's notions of a civic society being capable of fostering an equality-oriented system fails to take into account how unequal most civil societies are based on class and socio-political factors.

It is also no better to take on the conflict-based approach of defining identities according to the impact of their political affiliation. This politicisation of identities often concerns how present or involved these identities are in political actions, demands and mobilizations (Young, 1976; Rothschild, 1981). Thus, the participation or visibility then determines the salience and value of the identities in the bigger scope of Nigeria's ethno-religious diversities. The reason this is not an advisable approach is, firstly, due to the alluded assumption that all the ethno-regional and ethno-

religious identities which are prominent in Nigeria participate in all civil conflicts, no matter how situational. The second flaw in this conception of political identities is its reduction of the complex identifications present particularly among Nigerian people. This complexity, as expanded on earlier, is in the way these identities were formed, constructed, and even amalgamated by the colonial policies of the British to be inter-connected and exist in hybrid and sometimes tri-brid distinctions.

As such, the reduction then lies in the conclusion that some of these complex identity distinctions that participate in civil-like conflicts can stand as viable representations of the key identities which are most relevant and important in a diverse nation. In the case of Northern Nigeria, Osaghae and Suberu also note that members of a hybrid or tri-brid group could choose to “identify themselves as religious rather than ‘ethnic’ [...] depending on the level or scope of the conflict” (2005:6). From this, it can be concluded that although identity classification matters and is often highlighted when examining the causalities and trends of civil-like conflicts in Nigeria, identity is still a complex quality among the Nigerian people which exists beyond issues of politics and civil-hood. Moreover, if we are to examine the current manifestation of ethno-religious identities in Nigeria, the intricate link between their ‘primordial’ beginnings and their present civil development must be acknowledged.

The ethno-religious identification which the Boko Haram group has been placed under was also used to describe the Maitatsine riots of the early 1980s which “ushered in a regime of religious fundamentalism in the Northern parts of the country” (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:7). In another instance, it has been an historical phenomenon that northern Nigerian people are preoccupied with religious and ethnic identification, due to prolonged conflicts existing between Hausa, Fulani and various ethno-religious minority groups. In the recent past, however, this has become a phenomenon that has spread all over the country due to the “increased politicisation of religion by the state, including the adoption of Islamic penal law by several northern states in the Fourth Republic” (2005:8). There also seems to be the ‘National Question’ which arises when so called ‘primordial’ identities, such as “non-indigenes, migrants and settlers” are not offered the same rights and privileges, access to resources, or even access to certain spaces, as those seen to belong to the land they inhabit. And so, this too has provoked conflicts arising from the “hierarchical, unequal, and ranked system of citizenship” (2005:8). Ironically, this existing hierarchy of class and privilege identification specifying which ethnic groups belong to the land and which do not, is not only rooted in pre-colonial patterns of inter-group relations, but also in the discriminatory colonial practices that entrenched ethnic inequalities which continue to play out within the current post-independent administrations (2005:8). Exploring various identity distinctions present in Nigeria in

this way, helps to readjust the notion of ethnic diversity being defined in terms of “categories employed by linguists and ethnographers,” (2005:9) and thus opens the possibility of the group members and even outside community members affected by the mobilizations of the active group to provide their own self-definition, as has been the case with Boko Haram.

### **3.6 Review of Theoretical Studies Contextualising African Conflicts**

In response to similar cases in other African countries, a corpus of work has been written to account for the emergence of violent ethnic conflicts in postcolonial Africa. Most of this socio-anthropological work contains models used in an effort to account for and analyse the sources of ethnic disparities in various African countries. The grievance-based model often emphasizes issues of economic, political and social deprivation as key drivers of conflict, but this model is often criticised for generating an inadequate explanation both empirically and theoretically (Blanton, et al., 2001:474). Collectively, this model along with the greed-based and deprivation-based models often attributed to Collier and Hoeffler, further attribute the prevalence of civil war across the continent to “the lack of economic growth in Africa” which has made rebellions more viable and governments unable to quell rebellions due to inefficient resources (Collier & Hoeffler, 2000). However, these models have been criticised for their Primordialist approach in that they often offer a pathological and Hegelian assessment of African states when they frame heterogeneous communities and ethno-religious/regional groups as inherently predisposed to ‘irrational’ and uncivilised acts of predatory conflict (Caselli & Coleman, 2002; Seher & Green, 2003). This behaviour by Africans is supposedly due to an “unrestrained warrior spirit” among tribal adversaries that inevitably led to violent conflicts even before the colonial era (Isaacs, 1975; Barth, 1981).

Beyond the problem of the western-centric constructions of these models, they prove to lack empirical evidence to show that the above mentioned factors are direct causes of ethnic conflict. Instead, the factors affect the possibility of groups emerging to agree on shared grievances, rather than to mobilize for conflict (Lindström & Moore, 1995). Furthermore, although these models indicate a potential for conflict, only the effectiveness of mobilization would predict the probability of ethnic conflict better (Scarrit & McMillan, 1995:337). If mobilization fails, there would be no conflict. According to collective-action and social-movement theories, this would mean that aggrieved groups would need available mobilizing resources and structures to convince other individuals to participate when going up against counter-elites (Blanton, et al., 2001:474).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> There exists extensive literature on the problem of collective action and solutions. Works by Moore (1995) and Lichbach (1994) provide a useful summary.

Participants would also likely demand rewards from the mobilised group, “both public goods and selected incentives... in return for their support” (2001:474).

Continuing this criticism are Instrumentalists which contest these western-centric models by bringing on the role of politics into the mix of so-called ‘primordial identities’ of tribalism, ethnicity, culture and religion. Instrumentalists argue that such identity factors do not naturally result in violent conflict on their own, but instead are deliberately used by local elites and political leaders to manipulate the masses and serve themselves (Dowd, 1992; Omeje, 2005; Suberu, 2005; Ukiwo, 2005), in order to gain popularity to influence elections and “dominate the discursive agenda of politics” (Barth, 1969; Nnoli, 1995; Olzak, 1986). Unsurprisingly, with over 370 ethnic groups, including three majority ethnic groups, plausible observations show that in Nigerian society ethnic identity is commonly used to “gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or co-operation” (Osaghae, 1995:11). In present circumstances the Instrumentalist approach can provide a much better understanding of the continuities that arise from Nigeria’s politico-colonial past. In this instance, there is the case of Boko Haram whose current leader, Abubakar Shekau, recruits alienated and disillusioned Islamic youth, sometimes forcefully, to serve as militias for the group’s violent acts and to become tools for northern politicians funding the sect (Salkida, 2005).

Despite this, Achille Mbembe, writing *On the Postcolonial*, condemns the Instrumentalist paradigm as being “too reductionist to throw intelligible light on fundamental problems touching on the nature of social reality in Africa” (2001:6). It is for this reason that, although the Instrumentalist approach may be insightful in revealing how political elites are systematically responsible for the deterioration of inter-group relations, resulting in an escalation of violent conflicts, it needs to be re-examined to ensure that the study accounts for the nuances that exist on African issues pertaining to ethno-religious conflicts. This examination will be in the form of discourse and content analysis appearing in Chapters 6 and 7.



## CHAPTER 4

### 4 The Legacy of Colonialism in the Language, Education, and Socio-economic Inequalities in Nigeria

In the language and history of colonial education, “Europe was the centre of the universe. Africa was discovered by Europe: it was an extension of Europe” and the first original, ancestral human race was that of the Anglo-Saxon (Ngugi, 1977:22). By virtue of this pedagogy, Nigerians educated by the earliest mission schools held a view of their history and culture that was not their own, but one that was constructed by the colonisers. This meant that the little history southern Nigerians received from missionary schools was limited to the “biographies of ‘good men’ like General Gordon and David Livingstone [whose purpose was to function] as a means of moral instruction, inculcating respect for authority” (Zuchernuk, 1998:487). Contrary to this colonial narrative, there actually existed great scholars with diverse scholarship from the Sokoto Caliphate before they were defeated by the British in 1903 during the colonisation of the Northern region of Nigeria. These scholars consisted of the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio along with his brother and son who “had written hundreds of books on Islamic theology, law, politics, history and philosophy” (Abdurrahman, 2012:171).<sup>17</sup> Likewise, some middle-school texts from 1937 reveal particular histories involving local Nigerian communities, describing stories of “wars and raids... of monetary greatness and sudden falls into obscurity, of accessions and deaths of chiefs” but these were dismissed as mythical legends, holding no particular interest for history teachers in the colonial curriculum (Niven, 1937:61). Within this context, this chapter seeks to offer a critical overview of the structural and systematic factors of the British colonial administration that were responsible for changing existing educational and language policies, consequently resulting in the socio-economic inequalities among ethno-religious groups we see in post-colonial Nigeria today. Moreover, the chapter will reveal the kind of socio-economic and political impact that British colonialism had on religious, regional and ethnic identities.

#### 4.1 The Systematic Residues of Colonial Education in Post-Colonial Nigeria

Zuchernuk’s paper on ‘African History and Imperial Culture in Colonial Nigerian Schools’ (1998) reveals that the schools built in Nigeria during the colonial period were created to “produce clerks for government or mercantile work, catechists and teachers for the missions” (1998:487). Correlatively, it is well believed and acknowledged that the function of the colonial education system was to “train good civil servants for the extant regime, who should prove educators of others

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<sup>17</sup> For this reason, this family of scholars played a major role in placing the Caliphate as the important centre for Islamic education. Murray Last, a historian on the Sokoto Caliphate, reveals that at that time the Islamic education system was broad-based as it “incorporated the teaching of European languages and new sciences in its core curricula” (Murray, 2005).

and in their turn: to produce a conservative white-collar middle-class, animated by ‘western values,’” that essentially infer the desires and ideas of the colonisers to an illiterate people (Thornton, 1962:342). Furthermore, it was the belief of the British and French colonialist that their colonies had to be educationally trained in preparation for their day of independence (1962:342).

Among other things, this preparation has meant that many states in contemporary Africa either use French or English as their language of business and sometimes even social lifestyle. However, it is critical to remember that it is often “easier to speak in a foreign language than think in it,” (1962:353) and other times the frame of one’s thinking is heavily influenced by the intricacies of the language used to express ideas. It is also no secret that one of the main purposes of imperial education and language transference was to impart in the colonial subject negative, prejudicial and demeaning ideas of themselves and their place in the world.<sup>18</sup> This very factor makes the doctrinal nature of colonial education to subordinate its colonial subjects that much more apparent. Furthermore, according to the, then, Governor Lugard, who was responsible for the amalgamation policy in Nigeria, the ruling government of the time along with the mission schools were collectively in charge of ensuring the replacement of ‘tribal authority’ with specific religious instruction that would act as foundations for morality and rational truth (Lugard, 1922: 79-80). This supposed ‘rational truth’ ensured, among other things, that the colonised was aware of, and remained within their assigned racial, class, social and global hierarchies.

#### **4.2 The Complex Politics of Language Education in the Colonisation of Nigeria**

To further expand on the implications of colonialism on written language, scholars have shown through an extensive number of literature that colonial policies were responsible for prohibiting the use of Ajami script “in official documents and correspondence,” introducing Roman script, and making English “the official language of administration, education and commerce” (Abdurrahman, 2012:167).<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, although colonial policies interfered in matters pertaining to education and language, they were not as intrusive when it came to religious matters. This non-interference was seen a way “to pacify Northern emirs whose territories had just been forcibly occupied” (2012:166). This is because Qur’anic schools were established by scholars centuries before the colonial period, with northern Nigeria functioning under a formal education system driven by Islamic studies and principles (Lemu, 2002). For instance, Paden writing on *Religion and Political culture in Kano* notes that “when Lord Lugard came to take over as the Governor of northern Nigeria in 1914, he found over 25 000 Qur’anic schools with a total enrolment of 218 618 pupils” (Paden, 1973). This system of Qur’anic schools remained uncontested or changed as a means to

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<sup>18</sup> According to JanMohamed’s work, this can be described as the ‘manichean allegory’ designed by the colonial authorities that extends on the Hegelian idea of Europeans being ‘self’ and Africans being ‘other’ (1986:81).

<sup>19</sup> Ajami describes Arabic script that is used for writing African languages. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are examples of such languages.

avoid any unwanted clashes between the British colonial administration and the social organisation of the Islamic North.<sup>20</sup> It was the majority from the rural population which made use of the Qur'anic schools, whilst the elite schools catered to children of the aristocracy.

However, colonial education followed “after the consolidation of British colonial rule in northern Nigeria” (Abdurrahman, 2012:172). This subsequently led to the polarization of two groups, namely the Muslims and the Christians, especially when it came to the management of public affairs, such as education. In this regard, colonial education was provided by the government for areas that were considered to be Muslim, whilst the Christian missionaries provided education for the non-Muslim areas (Ashafa, 2005). Because the strategy of the British colonial administration under Governor Lugard was to “shield Islamic religious education from the influence of Christian missionaries,” both the Islamic and missionary schools could operate independently “without interference from the colonial administration” (Ashafa, 2005). This strategic policy was of enormous benefit to the colonial administration as it was directly in line with the colonial policy of “divide and rule and indirect rule” (Abdurrahman, 2012:172).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, this non-interference meant that the colonial administrators could maintain a partnership with the Northern emirs, who would act as “collaborators in regional governance” (2012:172). Fittingly so, the emirs did not openly express any rejection to the colonial policies on language and educational reform – exposing their territorial surrender to the British. Beyond this passivity, the emirs also benefitted from the partnership as it “served their imperial ambition” since the British would be supporting them in the rule of their people (2012:173). This meant that emirs, along with the chiefs, possessed the authority to rule and govern their territories under Islamic religious laws and values, without interference from the colonial administration in this regard (Saeed, 2005). In addition to this non-interference, there was also the use of Hausa “as a language of communication in official documents, missionary schools and translation of the Bible” (Abdurrahman, 2012:174). It was Lugard’s successor, Captain Wallace, who outlawed the use of Hausa, and by extension Ajami script, to introduce English as an official language accompanied by Roman script. This decision was also favoured by colonial officer, Captain Merrick, who favoured the discontinuation of Arabic (Philips, 2000).

The gradual introduction of Roman script and English had a direct impact on the on how the northern regions developed educationally and culturally. In this sense, what was now described as “Boko” (Romanised Hausa) was a detriment to the foundations of Islamic education, and in addition, “stunted the rapid development of adult literacy as well as the long established tradition of

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<sup>20</sup> This ease and support of the active Qur'anic schools in northern Nigeria by the new British Governor, Lugard, was also legitimised by the monthly stipends that were paid to the teachers from these schools, affording them official status (Abdurrahman, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Writing on Indirect rule: The development of central legislature in Nigeria, Okafor quotes Governor Lugard who defined the creation of indirect rule in northern Nigeria as a “rule through the native chiefs who are regarded as integral parts of machinery of Government, with well-defined powers and functions recognized by the Government and by law, and not dependent on the caprice of an Executive Officer” (Okafor, 1981:5).

scholarly writings in northern Nigeria” (Argungu, 2005). Furthermore, because the Sokoto Caliphate originally had schools which only taught in Arabic, with the use of Ajami script to assist in combating illiteracy, the introduction of Roman script and the English language meant the education system used would require drastic changes. As a result, of the existing 25 000 Qur’anic schools whose education system Lugard had not altered, those that had graduated could only be employed under the colonial administration after a re-education with the then new education system (Philips, 2004:66).

A number of flawed arguments were made in favour of reforming northern Nigeria’s educational system, such as “the use of Ajami would mean the government would be spreading Islam”; “learning Roman script would be faster”; “to print Arabic with vowels would be very expensive” and “few colonial officers could write Ajami” (Philips, 2004:75). From this, educational reform was accepted and implemented by the colonial administration with little consideration for the effect this may have for the future of educational planning in northern Nigeria. On the one hand, Argungu points out how the educational reformation policy “alienated the Qur’anic schools ... that were allowed to function without interference” and further “replaced a centuries-old literate tradition and value system symbolised in the Ajami form of writing” (cited in Abdurrahman, 2012:176). On the other hand, it is arguable, as author Ngugi Wa Thiong’o states, that what was fed as the “gospel truth into the education system” worked well as an indoctrination method that would imprint certain ideas into the minds of learners which gave “rational expression and legitimacy to exploitation, oppression and domination” (Thiong’o, 1993:130). In this regard, 21<sup>st</sup> century talks of decolonising education speak not only to the structures and methods of instruction introduced by colonial policies and used within the education system, but also to the Eurocentric epistemologies or Western foundations of knowledge that influence how the African people perceive themselves in relation to the world

The decision by the colonial government to make English into the official language also created bigger problems for Islamic education in the North spoiling the culture of reading and writing. This meant that anyone who was not educated in Ilimin Boko, or Western education, was considered illiterate and that still remains the case up until this day. Although Ajami was banned, it only meant that native languages written in Arabic script were no longer allowed, however the use of the Arabic language was still accepted besides the fact that it was “synonymous with Islamic knowledge and values” (Abdurrahman, 2012:177). The Arabic language formed a valuable role in matters pertaining to religion (the Qur’an), education (Islamic theological teachings) and the judiciary system (Sharia) in northern Nigeria. It was therefore not beneficial to ignore its influence

completely, since, when partnered with English it played an integral part in social and political arenas. As such, English and Arabic remained as non-indigenous language and Hausa was made into a 'regional lingua franca.' As long as the languages did not interfere with the objectives and mission of the colonial British administration, their continued use was allowed. In this context, the use of Hausa as a regional language would allow colonial administrators to be able to reach the masses who could neither speak Arabic nor English. This endorsement also did well to "increase the level of adult literacy in the society," and beyond this Hausa was further used as "a language for both the print and electronic media" with the BBC starting a broadcasting service for Hausa speakers in West Africa (Abdurrahman, 2012:177).

### **4.3 The Domination of Missionary Schools and Marginalisation of Qur'anic Schools**

The period of transition from Islamic education to Western education allowed the English language and Roman script to play more major roles. As a result, "traditional Islamic education in the form of the Qur'anic school system became marginalized" forcing teachers who taught in this Islamic method to retire or learn to adapt and adopt the new English system (Abdurrahman, 2012:180-181). For the Qur'anic schools that continued to run even during the newly introduced system, there was little to no support gained from the government, with rare donations from parents and charity being of little help. Despite this, Qur'anic schools continued to thrive due to the dedication of teachers who worked under little financial support. Abdurrahman notes the purpose played by these Qur'anic schools that remained functioning, as they were useful in opening up "the social, educational and religious perspectives during the period of transition from traditional Islamic education to dual education system introduced by the British" (2012:181).

The plan of the British was to secularise and modernise education for young men and women in northern Nigeria through the establishment of the Kano Law School as well as Kastina College which opened in 1922. This plan, or objective, which ensured a different educational philosophy, teaching methodology and new content in the curricular, "gave men greater advantages [than it gave] women, while totally ignoring the children of the poor people" (Abdurrahman, 2012:185).<sup>22</sup> Katsina College was seen to be the new training ground for princes, in the same way institutions of learning were set up by the British in India. Thus, the new form of education was no longer an attempt to empower women and the poor, as the British colonial civilising mission would have suggested. Despite the way in which traditional and Islamic education were illegitimated by the system of governance used by the British, their "colonial policy of non-interference in religion had helped to preserve the Islamic culture and educational system" (2012:185).

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<sup>22</sup> A majority of the poor rural population which was disadvantaged from attending schools built under the new British educational system sent their children to Qur'anic schools.

#### 4.4 The Teaching of Educational History in Nigeria

Although history often frames the actions, events and effects of the colonial mission under one narrative, it is important to consider that there were in fact debates among British colonial thinkers falling between two groups, the ‘conservatives’ and the ‘progressives’. These debates often concerned the proper implementation of educational ideas in missionary schools created in Africa. On the one hand, the conservative groups believed that “Africans required a racially distinct education” that would maintain an inferior people who would never advance (mentally and psychologically) to challenge the colonial masters. On the other hand, the progressive groups held that “Africa’s social development required a fully modern education” coupled with a combined Christian and cultural conversion of beliefs (Awoniyi, 1975:76). Arguably, this ‘progressive’ type of colonial education was implemented in southern Nigeria through the administration of British mission schools. An assumption, or rather conviction, that came from this ‘progressive’ way of thought was that Africans would soon “learn about the struggle to create modern ‘civilisation’” which would then make them “appreciate how much they had yet to learn from the British” (Zuchernuk, 1998:489).

While these ideas on approaches to history education in the colonial tradition differed, it was always evident that the primary focus of history education was to justify colonial rule whilst propagating and advancing the ‘superiority’ of Europe. This is made even more explicit in Ward’s *The Writing of History Textbooks for Africa*, in which he explains that the study of constitutional and economic history from the European worldview was to help the African arrive closer to an answer as to, “why is the European so much ‘wiser’ and stronger than himself, and can the secret of his wisdom and strength be acquired?” (Ward, 1934:198). Similarly, T. R. Batten who was responsible for developing the history syllabuses in Ghana and Nigeria, held that a way to get the African people to appreciate the benefits of British rule in their respective countries was to make them historically aware of how much each African country lacked in development before the control of the British (Batten, 1933:409). This, Batten believed, would allow the younger people present during colonial rule – who were without experiential knowledge of how things were before the colonial takeover – to accept the “order of things” created by British government without question or doubt (1933:409).

Whilst Lugard, Ward and Batten are common names mentioned when examining the education curricular adopted during colonial times, other approaches – although not as dominant – were also utilised to instruct historical education. For instance, several textbooks produced in the 1930s-40s and used to teach history in Nigeria paid no attention or effort into an African history before the advent of colonialism, arguing that there was no record of worthy history to retain, “but a morass of

slavery, juju priests and cannibalism” (Potts, 1937: 34-42, 92-108).<sup>23</sup> And thus, most of these texts focused on the progression of the African countries, including Nigeria, after the colonial takeover, supposedly leaving people of the country to be merely passive observers to the history that was recreated by the colonisers for them (Zuchernuk, 1998:491).

#### **4.5 Socio-economic Imbalances between Christians and Muslims as a Colonial Legacy**

Beside the history that was reinvented through the History curricular, a different kind of history was being created in the way in which the British colonial policy developed parts of Nigeria unevenly. As alluded to in earlier paragraphs, the most structural and systematic way in which this was done was to build and run Christian missionary schools only in southern Nigeria, a region that was already designated for a majority of the Christian population among Nigerian people (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005:16). This uplifting of the South through the institutions of the school and the church, among other westernised developments, disadvantaged the predominantly Muslim north which continues to suffer from this socioeconomic imbalance, decades after Nigeria gained independence. Moreover, until 1947, “any political contact between the north and south” was discouraged, disallowing an agreeable legislative council from the politicians belonging to the two regions (Diamond, 1988; Dudley, 1973). This tension between the North and South of Nigeria did not only create an unequal socio-economic stratification but it also added another layer of complexity to the damaging legacy of colonialism. The most troubling of these layers are the politics of religious identity and how they have played themselves out within the context of Nigeria’s history of conflicts.

Thus, the colonial education missionaries that were responsible for educating more societies in the south of Nigeria, privileging them to a Western model of education and turning the majority of the southern population to Christianity, led to the unequal socio-economic and political development between the poor north and rich south in post-colonial Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> Beyond the privileged regions based on religious groups, through indirect rule, colonial administrators also conveniently empowered members of particular ethno-cultural groups over others based on their size and influence over communities. This privilege plays a big significance to this day in terms of which Nigerian population was most educated and thus “[recruited] into the public service, . . . security forces, and [well qualified for] career development” (Omeje, 2005:15). Unsurprisingly, this privileging has also had the negative consequences of creating “ethnically motivated discrimination,

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<sup>23</sup> Writing on ‘Education under indirect rule’, Murray further affirms the Hegelian idea that if history education was meant to teach about the progressive unfolding of past events, then Africa’s past was in no place to feature in this education, since its history was stagnant (1935:248).

<sup>24</sup> This southern advantage meant that after Nigeria’s independence “cities like Lagos and the oil hub Port Harcourt, [were] economically powerful and more educated than northern Nigeria (AFPC, 2013:3).

exclusion, marginalisation, violence and repression championed or perpetuated by some of the elite factions that inherited the colonial state apparatus in the post-colonial dispensation” (2005:15).

With that said, the effects of this in post-colonial Nigeria has arguably been the ongoing cultural, regional and ethno-religious conflicts which have led to a struggle to define a common Nigerian nationality. Correlatively, Ikelegbe posits that ethnic, communal, religious, regional and sectarian identities remain on the rise in Nigeria since they provide “a safe haven for increasing numbers of people fleeing an incompetent, insensitive and, at times, predatory state” (2005:71). An indication of this lack of a common Nigerian citizenship is the inclusion of identity markers such as religion, ethnicity, region and culture among ordinary Nigerians when they articulate narratives of their belonging (Hussein, 2013:30).

#### **4.6 Ethno-Religious Identities and Conflicts as a Colonial Legacy**

Unlike the predominantly Christian south of Nigeria, Northern Nigeria is “polarized into Muslims versus non-Muslims and Hausa/Fulanis versus non-Hausa/Fulanis” which equates to “a lack of ethnic and religious cohesion” (Oyeniya, 2014:89). Notably, this polarization is said to be attributed to land, wealth and power distribution rather than the religious divide that Boko Haram has infused into the struggle in the north. This is because the Yoruba - a predominantly Christian community – had their land invaded by the elite Muslim group Hausa/Fulani during their migration (Felbab-Brown & Forest, 2012:33). Hausa/Fulani then became the dominant ethno-linguistic group in the north-east, surrounded by smaller ethno-linguistic groups in other parts. According to Osaghae and Suberu, religious-related violence and killings to achieve some political or religious ends are not a new phenomenon, especially in the northern part of the country, since “religious and ethno-political crises have remained part of the Nigerian history,” even after Nigeria’s independence in the 1960s (2005:18). To further contextualise Nigeria’s situation, journalist Zach Warner clarifies that communal violence has been a constant for the last three decades, while “the mobilisation of faith-based political identities” has been a defining feature of northern Nigeria for centuries (2012:39). The situation in northern Nigeria is not just about the cultural and ethno-religious diversities present, but is also indicative of the fact that frictions and conflicts are bound to arise when the identity one religious or ethnic group is elevated above all others, as demanded by Boko Haram.

#### **4.7 The Politics of Identity Formulations in Post-colonial Nigeria**

There are undeniable complexities that exist within the myriad of conflicts in Africa that are largely ascribed to ethnic jostles for power, amidst the terror brought on by the actions of bad governance and the chronic symptoms of underdevelopment. It has been under this perceived climate that dominant theoretical frameworks concern themselves with the role that identity politics have to play



in deconstructing this unveiling and perpetual crisis of insurgencies destabilising the authority of the state. Often identity is understood in one of two ways; on one hand it is singular and relates to the individual, on the other hand it is what defines a group and is created from a collective meaning. Neither of these perspectives of understanding identity are seen as mutually exclusive when analysing the state of ethno-religious and ethno-regional identities in Nigeria. Instead they are considered as equally valuable in understanding how identity association, the implied sameness and difference among individuals and groups, directly influences the daily socio-political climate in Nigeria, which at times plays out in terms often defined by international media as ‘violent threats of terror’. Of course identity, especially in relation to collective groups, cannot be seen as a wholesome signifier that offers a complete formulation of what the common attributes of all the members in the group are. That is, since identity can be seen as a constructed set of meanings related to particularly defined socio-cultural attributes or beliefs, only a minimal number of these attributes and beliefs are required to allow for an individual to belong to a certain group identity. This is to say that, an individual may personally identify with a number of identity markers, but only a few of those are generally prioritised in relation to the identity group they may belong to. However, identity must not be mistaken for the role-sets that people belong to, as ascribed by the norms that are structured by society’s institutions and organizations (Okpanachi, 2010).

Belonging to an identity creates a source of meaning that begins with the individual who first has to internalise this constructed meaning before acting on the identity. Only after the self-identification and definition can the chosen identity of an individual come to existence (Castells, 2004). It makes sense then, that once an individual comes to accept their identity, it becomes more or less fixed, and therefore easily influenced by socio-political actions and/or ideologies that speak to that identity. For this reason, “mobilization, provocation and agitation are central to the formation of a requisite identity consciousness,” which is seen as crucial to identity based politics (Okpanachi, 2010:3). This perspective also extends to multiple identities, wherein which an individual’s political conduct or social role may be a reaction to a trigger that speaks to any one of the multiple identities. In the case of Boko Haram, it is arguable that identities of the members are multiple and complex, in such a way that reducing their identity to Islam fundamentalist is a failure to acknowledge the nuances present. These nuances are not only amongst the ethno-religiously diverse population of Nigeria northerners but also in the factors that have been responsible in the creation of these multi-fold identities.

Be that as it may, research supports the claim that “Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of religion than any other identity” which may be considered traditional or ‘African’ (Okpanachi, 2010:7). This identification factors into the level of trust that one religious group has

for another, as a Pew survey carried out in 2006 on Christians and Muslims presented results that indicate that each religious group has little to no trust of the people belonging to another group (Ruby and Shah, 2007). Similarly, the ethno-religious conflicts that have turned to violence since the upsurge of religious extremism in the country are indicative of this mistrust and intolerance that is embodied in the actions of the authorities which are often blamed for the socio-economic and political crises in Nigeria's state.

Due to these affiliations with strong ethno-religious identities by the economically disadvantaged Northern populace, according to Oyeniya, northern Nigeria is more prone to terrorism. Oyeniya attributes this to factors such as "poverty and illiteracy, fundamentalist Islam, and a general fascination with Islamic/Qur'anic education, as well as support from sympathetic (or sometimes diasporic) organizations or from hostile governments" (2014:86). Poverty and illiteracy remain as motivators and influencers in Boko Haram's recruitment strategy of disempowered youths. The culture of illiteracy and the absence of employment and economic stability in northern Nigeria gives Boko Haram an opportunity to exploit deprived members of the youth as well as gain support from a marginalised social class made up by a majority of Muslims. According to Imoagene, writing on *The Nigerian Class Structure* (1989), there are two broadly identifiable classes in Nigeria that are strongly influenced by Marxism and perspectives of a radical political economy. The first class is that of the dominant elite which can variably be referred to as the 'ruling class', the 'political class', the 'privileged class' and 'the hegemonic class' (1989). The second class is under domination by the first, and is usually referred to as the 'masses' to define the ordinary urban people who are poor and underprivileged, also including the 'commoners' who are the peasant rural dwellers (Imoagene, 1989). However, the working/labour class is also part of the dominated masses, although within its own special category. There is a profound and fairly evident belief that the Nigerian elite reveals the ethnic, regional and religious divisions within the country.

#### **4.8 The Limitations of Western-centric and Afrocentric Approaches to Nigeria's Socio-Economic Problems**

Nigeria's corrupt capitalist system is inescapable when the reality for over 50 million unemployed youth is that economic opportunities and an astounding value of natural/environmental resources – including 80% of Nigeria's oil wealth – are owned by a few exploitative elites (*Socialist Party*, 2014). The reality of riches held by an upper class minority whilst the lower class majority starves under socio-economic discontent and mass misery is not exclusive to the Nigerian state, but is a common trend across most Third World developing countries. The difference between these developing nations usually comes from, on the one hand, the ways in which historical factors of colonial takeovers, imperialism, and exploitation underdeveloped these nations leading to a

reoccurring dependency. On the other hand, the level of development also depends on what actions and strategies the political leaders of these nations implemented or barely considered in order to salvage what was left of their nations. In this regard, on the most fundamental level, there's a lot of work that would need to be done by the Nigerian government. This includes, putting an end to corruption in all sectors, creating a diversely inclusive government, alleviating poverty and the lack of access to health care by the majority, expanding the access to education across the board, as well as creating reliable transportation, utilities, and communications infrastructure that is capable of sustaining the economic growth of its populous nation (Pham, 2012:7). The absence of this kind of development and governmental intervention is most felt by those living below the poverty level in northern Nigeria, and unsurprisingly, Boko Haram members fall under this category.

Admittedly, this is a common restorative view that is often offered by a Euro-centred liberal paradigm in order to deal with the problems that have been affecting African states since their respective independences. This approach arises from the assumption that “the progress and ‘development’ of the newly independent African countries . . . must proceed along the path of liberal democracies and free market economies adopted by former colonizers and other Western societies” (Schraeder, 2003:23). It then continues to be that the voices that come from the liberal West that offer solutions to Africa’s problems dominate scholarly text and journalistic work as the suitable models to most of the continent’s problems. Ironically, it is the consequences of the colonial legacy that the West uses to continue describing Africa by using recycled Hegelian prejudices, which simultaneously motivate the West to want to come to the rescue of Africa. The problem with the Euro-centred liberal framework and approach to Africa’s problems is its historical bankruptcy within the context of the continent’s economically disaffected past. Schraeder explains that, although a powerful idea, such a framework explicitly “ignores the actual roots of Western economic growth and vibrancy,” which are not without the inhumanities present in the system of slavery which advanced the industrial revolution and “global imperialism that spurred the global ascendancy of European and other Western powers” (2003:24). There are a number of factors at play which contribute a great deal to this dangerous assumption that all Africa needs is to adapt the Western-centric neo-liberal model in order to develop and thrive. These factors are informed by what Schraeder calls “a culturally misinformed ideological paradigm,” that includes the “manipulation of African societies, incapacity to understand ongoing discourses around

decolonization, and continued dependence on global superpower interest and resources exploitation” (2003:25).<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, since colonialism and imperialism brought a warped history of its own to Africa, it has been crucial to begin to recover and examine the silenced history of Africa. For instance, the European conquest in Africa is often justified by the presupposition that because of its lack of history, and by extension, civilisation, Africa needed an imperial take-over and rule. Through this same perspective, the West saw Africans as passive victims of colonialism, and this is an outlook that has persisted and continues to be reproduced in some research and literature today beyond Euro-America. That is, some postcolonial perspectives coming out of Africa, although grounded in undisputable legacies of colonial history that have contributed to socio-economic inequalities and ethno-religious conflicts, are often guilty of portraying Africa and its people as unequivocal victims, presupposing an absence of agency. It is then necessary to interrogate to what extent is this victimhood is plausible. Within this context, although there have been African universities established to better focus attention on the development of African societies throughout history, instead of the study of European activities within African, the aspect of Africans as participants in their relationship with the oppressors is often ignored.

As a means to explore this, it must be acknowledged that African countries that gained independence after the overthrow of colonial rule had to start governing themselves, a task that carried the pressure of having to demonstrate that they were in fact capable of ruling themselves (Wrigley, 1971:279). Beyond governance, there was also pressure to disprove the impression that Africa had neither the social systems nor economic capacities to develop itself to match even the agrarian societies of early medieval Europe (Goody, 1969:395). Just as the Japanese disguised themselves during the working day to dress and act like Westernisers, Thornton suggests that China, Africa and India had become susceptible to a similar attitude and political leaders were not ashamed to use this to their advantage (Thornton, 1962:352). Furthermore, there is the continually held notion, as propagated by Hegel centuries before, that the advancement of civilisation and technology had already been mastered by the West and the rest of the world just needed to immolate itself for this greater goal of progressing towards Western perfection. However, as much as this is the ultimate goal, there is the underlying belief that developing nations may never fully transcend to reach the glorious epoch without the help and insight from Euro-American powers. And until that is so, nations who do not buy into this packaged ‘globalisation’ project are disadvantaged and are guaranteed to fall behind the rest of the civilised and rich world.

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<sup>25</sup> Schraeder makes a reference to the decades of “‘Western liberal’ policies and treatment by International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and world trade prescriptions” which have been responsible for the unending socio-economic and political crises which have disempowered a number African countries (2003:25).

## CHAPTER 5

### 5 Boko Haram as a Fundamentalist Religious Group with Socio-economic and Political Objectives

Author Thornton (1962) maintains that the conviction and intentional acts of colonialists who enforce their superior systems and ideologies on unsuspecting civilizations are no different to the convictions and dogmatism of the ideological imperialism of great religions. Hence, Thornton argues that followers of religions like Islam and Christianity do not consider themselves subjects forced to “conform to the rigid rules devised by men long gone” (1962:346). The same can be said about Boko Haram, which exists as a Sunni Islamic group fighting to make Nigeria an Islamic state ruled under Sharia. That is, the sect does not believe that its religiously motivated objectives are informed by an outdated and unrealistic worldview. However, beyond its religious objectives Boko Haram also exists as a group dissatisfied with a corrupt Nigerian government that has failed to develop the socio-economy of northern Nigeria. Using this context as a backdrop for an analysis of Boko Haram, this chapter aims to highlight the apparent contradictions and ironies between the Islamist group’s philosophical beliefs and ideologies and its behaviours and actions. From this, an attempt will be made to extract – from the group’s self-definition over the years – what Boko Haram principally stands for outside its ideological representation by local and international media.

#### 5.1 The Origins of Radical Islam in Nigeria

In order to contextualise Boko Haram’s origins, it is necessary to provide a brief and relative genealogy of how Nigeria came to be the home of a number of radical Islamic groups, all of whose goals were arguably similar upon their origin. In a scholarly article titled “The Plot to Islamise Nigeria,” Suleiman explains that radical Islam in Nigeria can be “traced back to the proselytizing works of several men” namely: Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzakky from the Muslim Brotherhood, which later changed to the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MWWN); Ahmad Gulan who created the Ahmadiya Movement; Nasir Kabara who started Khadiriyya; Abubakar Gumi of the Izala; Isiaku Rabi of the Tijjaniyya, and Dahiru Bauuchi who was responsible for the Tariqqa (Suleiman, 2009). According to Suleiman, these men were responsible for leading “different groups with Salafi-Wahhabis Islamic inclinations across northern Nigeria” (2009:20).<sup>26</sup> Salafi-Wahhabis originated from Sunni Islam which is well-known to be the largest branch of Islam.<sup>27</sup> Sunnis have six core beliefs: 1 – Having one God named Allah, 2 – Allah having his own angels, 3 – The truth and

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<sup>26</sup> Salafi-Wahhabism, also known as Salafism only appeared “in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to the spread of European ideas [and] sought to expose the roots of modernity within Muslim civilization” (Blanchard, 2008:3).

<sup>27</sup> The Salafi movement is often considered interchangeable with Wahhabism as both names – although emerging from two different centuries, eighteenth and nineteenth – ascribe to a puritanical, fundamentalist approach to Islam. Sunni is derived from the Arabic word, ‘Sunna’ which means ‘tradition,’ since Sunnis believe Muslims should follow the traditional ways of life as practiced by Muhammad.

authority in the holy books of Allah (the Qur'an and the Hadith), 4 – That the prophets of Allah should be followed, 5 – That Muslims should prepare for and believe in the Day of Judgement, 6 – That Allah alone is the most supreme and his will and predestination will forever reign (Oyeniya, 2014:76).<sup>28</sup>

However, the Salafi-Wahhabist group is more radical and fundamentalist<sup>29</sup> than Sunni in that it advocates for those who claim to be Muslim to “return to the original ways of Islam as practiced by Prophet Mohammed and his companions,” as well as to have the state unify under the orders of Sharia (Blanchard, 2008:3). Salafi-Wahhabism is seen as the purer form of Islam, since any form of Islam that is influenced by cultural, national or political agendas or associations is considered un-Islamic. In comparison, Sunnis are any Muslims who can live in accordance with the daily life, sayings, and practices of Muhammad, even in a secular society. Nevertheless, Muslims who fall under both these religious sub-groups (Salafi and Sunni) believe and live by the sayings of the prophet Muhammad and differ by extremes of belief. These sayings, also known as the Sahaba, are said to have been compiled by prophet Muhammad's companions, a short while before the death of the prophet. They have since existed as holy Islamic texts in the form of the Qur'an which Muslims follow and accept to be “injunctions of God as revealed to the holy prophet” (Oyeniya, 2014:75). What is excluded from the Qur'an but appears in another text called the Hadith, are the daily life and practices of Muhammad that were recorded by his first followers (2014:75). Thus, both the Qur'an and the Hadith represent what we now understand as Islamic faith.

As mentioned, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzakky who founded the MSSN was the most influential Islamic activist in Nigeria. El-Zakzakky was an economics student in the 1970s who was inspired by Middle Eastern countries, particularly Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, which were in the long process of establishing an Islamic state through radical activism (2014:76). The MSSN's values were in line with the teachings of the Qur'an in that they believed all Muslims should shun immorality and “live according to the dictates of the Qur'an” (2014:76). After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, El-Zakzakky began to romanticise the idea of implementing Sharia in Nigeria instead of pursuing it practically, leading to his followers breaking away from his Shi'ite ideology in the early 1990s (2014:76).<sup>30</sup> This dissatisfaction with El-Zakzakky's leadership was due to his pacifism when it came to mobilising to fight for the cause of implementing Sharia in Nigeria. Some of the followers

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<sup>28</sup> These core beliefs do not stand alone. There exist key documents of Sunni Islamic theology that list a further 105 creeds of belief that Sunnis are required to subscribe to (Trevor, 2005:3).

<sup>29</sup> Fundamentalist groups see the concept of 'fundamentalism' as a utilitarian and philosophical way of life which demands “rigid adherence to orthodox belief or practice as a way of ensuring continuity and accuracy in the belief or practice” regardless of how the belief or its practice may transform or be comprehended differently over time (Oyeniya, 2014:76).

<sup>30</sup> Of the two main Islamic groups – Sunni and Shi'ite – the latter was part of the minority that held the belief that the successor of Muhammad should be his son-in-law Ali, whilst the Sunni's argued that a process of election and consensus would work better to appoint a successor, as dictated by tradition (The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy).

who broke away created their own groups, such as the popular, Kano-based Jama'atul Tajdidi Islam (JTI) that expanded beyond northern Nigeria and “recruited young and idealistic members from schools, mosques, and cities across Nigeria” (2014:76). Apart from religious preaching to its devotees, the point of JTI's activism was to ensure the implementation of Sharia in Nigeria.

## 5.2 The Origin of Boko Haram

At the time, throughout the 1980s and 90s, Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf was the amir (leader of the faithful) for JTI's Borno State region until he too broke away to create his own Islamic group in 2001 which he would name the Yussufiyanu movement after his own name (2014:77).<sup>31</sup> This name would later change to Boko Haram, derived from the inhabitants of Maiduguri's view of the group's basic preaching and beliefs. Thus, Boko Haram is the name that has been taken up by the group as well as the media that reports on the group's intentions and actions. However, the group has expressed that it prefers being known as the “People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad” (Smith, 2014).

Boko Haram has been translated to ‘Western education is sinful/forbidden’ by a number of academic papers, reports and print media (Salkida, 2009; *Vanguard*, 2009; Madike, 2011; Davis, 2012; Andelman, 2012; Abbah, 2013; Murdock, 2013; Onineche, 2014). As alluded to in Chapter 4, in the Hausa language in which this name originates, the word *boko* does not directly translate to ‘western education’ or ‘book’ as some scholarly texts inaccurately state. Rather, it has a variety of meanings focused around “things or actions having to do with fraudulence, sham, inauthenticity” or deception (Newman, 2013). The flawed translation of the word goes back to colonial government's introduction of a Western education system in Nigeria, seeking to replace traditional Islamic education. It was this act that the northern locals of the time called ‘boko,’ believing it to be a ‘deceptive’ way in which the West sought to replace the values of Hausa and Islamic traditional culture taught to schoolchildren, with Western models of thought. From this, British government schools assumed the word ‘boko’ to mean their Western form of education, and this misrepresentation of the Hausa language continues to this day.<sup>32</sup>

Yusuf was not the only one to break away from JTI. There was also the Taliban which came from “a group of young radical students who created a stir in 2003 when they struck in Yobe State, killing policemen, burning down police stations, and attacking Christians” (Oyeniyi, 2014:77).

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<sup>31</sup> Some texts claim that the group's official name is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad*, an Arabic phrase approximately translating to the ‘Movement for the Enthronement of Righteous Deeds’. There is also no unanimous agreement on when the group was founded. Other dates under speculation are 1999, 2002 and 2003.

<sup>32</sup> It is also said that the word ‘boko’ appeared in a 1934 dictionary of the Hausa language that was collated by a Western scholar who “listed 11 meanings for the word – ten of them about fraudulent things and the final one asserting the connection to ‘book’” (Newman, 2013).

Despite this concurrent breakaway by Yusuf and the Taliban from JTI, it is still believed by some academic reports that Boko Haram was inspired and influenced by the Taliban. Evidence of this will be explored in the analysis of scholarly journals in the following chapter. Upon inception, Boko Haram – under the leadership of Yusuf – had two fundamental objectives: the first was to restore Islam and Islamic practices amongst Muslims in Nigeria; the second was two-fold in that it wanted to establish a “pristine state based on the Qur’an and Hadith of Prophet Mohammed” as well as to ensure the inauguration of Sharia in northern Nigeria (2014:77).

Some texts claim that Boko Haram was actually a “reincarnation of the Maitatsine movement” a radical brand of Islam which originated from “the preaching and teachings of Muhammadu Marwa from north Cameroon” (Ewi, 2015:220). One of these scholarly texts that make this comparative claim will be analysed in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the Maitatsine movement rejected flaunted wealth, and the materialism and technology of Western influence and culture that had permeated Nigerian society. The group’s revolt, which was responsible for numerous deaths, was active throughout northern Nigeria in the 1980s and ‘90s, but went underground during the period of Boko Haram’s popularity and hype. For reasons relating to the core aims of the Maitatsine movement, Boko Haram has been compared to the group “particularly in view of the similarities between the two groups” in terms of their anti-Western ideologies (2015:220). Dues to the fact that the Maitatsine movement was created before Boko Haram, it is speculated that the sect was possibly modelled on the Maitatsine.

### **5.3 The Evolution of Boko Haram under Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf**

The growth of the Boko Haram movement started with the establishment of a religious complex in Maiduguri, “which included a mosque and a school, where many poor families from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries enrolled their children” (Umar, 2011). This religious complex had ‘ulterior political goals’ as it was responsible for the recruitment of unemployed and estranged youths whom Yusuf instructed under strict Islamic law. Umar argues that this was the training ground for “future jihadists . . . who came from neighbouring Chad and Niger and only speak Arabic . . . to fight the state” (2011: 131).<sup>33</sup> Over 280 000 of these trained members were attracted by Boko Haram. Yusuf also gave radical sermons where he criticized northern Muslims for partaking in Western modernity, which he believed manifested in Muslims being educated under Western education, dressing in a Western manner, and using technological equipment like radios

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<sup>33</sup> Under Shekau’s leadership, Boko Haram also took in recruits from Cameroon, a country with similar characteristics to Nigeria in terms of the religious demographic. Reports also reveal that Cameroon has become a place of refuge for many Boko Haram militants, including Shekau who “fled to Ngaoundere in northern Cameroon after Boko Haram’s January 20, 2012 attacks in Kano, which killed 186 people” (AFPC, 2013:5). Shekau also found refuge in Saudi Arabia in 2005, and has since been receiving funding from the country’s organizations because of this history.



and televisions (Mu'azu, 2011; Johnson, 2013). In this way, he aimed to preserve northern Islamic societies from what he saw as the excesses of globalisation.

In the course of the group's operation, it was responsible for violent acts across the north of Nigeria until the intervention of the Nigerian National Security (NNS) forces in 2009. During the NNS investigation, Yusuf was arrested and died in police custody. This was a key turning point for the group as Yusuf's death "led to clashes between police and the terrorist group that resulted in the deaths of some 700 of its members" (Francis, 2011). Another theory proposes that Boko Haram's 2009 radicalisation was instigated by the refusal of their members to wear helmets, breaking the motorbike-helmet law and leading to police having to take action to arrest them (Johnson, 2013). An uprising erupted from these "heavy-handed police tactics . . . which spread into the states of Borno, Yobe and Kano," further involving the army who suppressed these groups, killing more than 800 (Johnson, 2013). From this speculated series of events before and after Yusuf's death, it can be quite difficult to determine who the real victims were between the Boko Haram sect and the Nigerian military forces. Records state that nearly 1000 Islamist militants died in the first half of 2013 under the authority of the state, through police brutality (Johnson, 2013). However, this was not without the death of "over 119 police officers [who] lost their lives in Boko Haram attacks . . . between January and September 2012" (Onuoha, 2012). There are also, of course, civilians who were caught in the crossfire during the investigation by NNS.

According to the Human Rights Watch, Yusuf's execution was televised; an event which also included "the bloodletting of his father-in-law and other group members" (HRW, 2012). Unsurprisingly, Boko Haram's objectives evolved after this major event to include, 1 – "the release of its members held in different police custodies and prisons," 2 – for the police who were responsible for killing their members and Yusuf to be prosecuted (*Journal of Religion in Africa*, 2012:120). With that said, the members of Boko Haram still see themselves as the victims who have been unfairly treated by the state, which remains an obstacle in their way to attaining Islamic reformation in northern Nigeria. This perspective of viewing themselves as victims came after the 2009 clash between the sect and Nigeria's security forces that included the extrajudicial killings of its leader Yusuf. However, a conversation between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram's new leader about the justice that also needs to be afforded to victims of Boko Haram's attacks is yet to take place.

Some texts, such as "Islamic Arguments for Western Education," in which Umar analyses Mu'azu Hadejia's Hausa poem as a frame of reference, depict Boko Haram's actions as the result of a "long standing negative attitude toward Western education among Muslims in northern Nigeria"

(2002:91). Interestingly, despite this hatred for Western education, those who led the breakaway groups that followed Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines were said to be well educated in Mecca and Medina universities, but nonetheless “preached against education for any of their members” (Oyeniya, 2014:78). Thus, it might be argued that contradictions already existed in the way in which the leaders and exponents of these radical sects went about their proselytizing, before similar contradictions were noted in Boko Haram’s current self-identification and representation. However, it is important to note that the original founder of Boko Haram – when it still went by the name of the Yussufiyanu movement – was self-educated and semi illiterate, unlike the leaders of the other groups which were mostly started by university students.<sup>34</sup>

#### **5.4 Boko Haram’s Particular Affiliation with Islamic Religion and Identity**

Yusuf’s original objective for creating the group was a simple one, based on the belief that “Muslims were duty bound to wage unrelenting war against Western (secular) education” (Oyeniya, 2014:78). This is a contestable claim since other reports reveal that, under Yusuf, the approach that the group took was inspired by the model that the Taliban in Afghanistan used to create an Islamic State (AFPC, 2013:1) However, the approach used by Yusuf would reportedly be “through preaching the faith (*dawa’a*)” instead of inciting a holy war (Jihad) (2013:1). In contrast, Yusuf’s successor Shekau “sought to create that Islamic State not through *dawa’a*, but through violent jihad” (2013:1). Besides this, there is a general agreement amongst most scholars and journalist writing on Boko Haram that its ideological mission is to overthrow the secular Nigerian state and impose its own interpretation of Islamic Sharia on the country. This type of Sharia is often connected to “violence, inhumane punishments, anti-Western sentiment and oppression of women” (Lamptey, 2014).<sup>35</sup> Such a depiction by mainstream broadcast and print media not only obscures the details in the relationship between Sharia and Boko Haram but is also an indication of the insufficiencies in scholarly work and in the media’s understanding of the differences between the old and new Boko Haram leaders’ thoughts and attitudes. This means that the version of Sharia that Boko Haram subscribes to and believe to be a fixed set of principles and laws is often not distinguished from the Sharia that Muslim people opposed to extremists like Boko Haram follow. A sincere attempt at gaining a nuanced understanding of Boko Haram leadership would begin with an assessment of the intentions behind Yusuf’s introductory sermons on Western education.

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<sup>34</sup> The education received by the religious leaders of other Islamic groups gave them the advantage of an “eloquence and proficiency in spoken Arabic, with an equally impressive command of Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines” which ensured a large number of followers and afforded them the opportunity to gain international support “from Islamic leaders and governments across North Africa, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East” (Umar, 2003:153). Furthermore, these connections allowed these groups to build and maintain mosques and Arabic schools, fund community projects, and thus play more prominent roles within Nigeria’s socioeconomic and political space (Oyeniya, 2014:78). This level of popularity and support was only gained by Boko Haram much later under the progressively violent leadership of Shekau.

<sup>35</sup> Boko Haram having its own brand of Sharia suggests that Islamic Law is “not a codified, static or agreed upon collection of laws” (Lamptey, 2014). It also alludes to the idea that Sharia can work as a set of principles that are there to guide Muslims in how they should live their lives.

Yusuf's ideas can be said to have been driving a decolonial project that sought to restore the knowledge taken from the Qur'an and Sunna by rejecting any influences that could be deemed contradictory, unsupportive or different from the teaching of these holy texts. These contradictory influences were from the colonial education system that was introduced decades before, which came with its own knowledge, methods and socializations that were vastly different and seen as anti-Islamic. Thus, Western epistemologies and philosophies were socialised during the colonial takeover and since they contradicted writings in the Qur'an and Hadith, they were religiously forbidden for Muslims. The extent of this extreme rejection of Western knowledge for Yusuf is also apparent in his attitude towards advances in science that do not appear in the Qur'an and Hadith. Yusuf revealed that these sources of knowledge and practices, "medical, technological, communication, human security, and so forth" were forbidden by the holy texts (2014:79). Theoretically, Yusuf's rejection of science, specifically scientific explanations, was influenced by the Qur'an. The Qur'an illustrates how Islamic ontology and causation differs from that offered by Western science. For example, rain is believed to be created by God, the earth is believed to be flat not spherical, the age of the earth as measured by science is incorrect – it was created in two days by God and the universe in six days, human beings did not evolve – they were made of clay by God, etc. (2014:79-80).<sup>36</sup>

### **5.5 Contradictions in Nigeria's Secular Constitution Simultaneously Benefitting and Disadvantaging Boko Haram**

A number of other fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram do exist and promote the same views. However, they had made the decision to go underground when Nigerian security forces began putting efforts into disempowering Boko Haram members. Some of these groups are Maitatsine, Kala Kato, Hisba and Darul Islam and differ from Boko Haram in the approach they take in the key matters concerning Western education and the establishment of Sharia (Oyeniya, 2014:81). These groups have a more conciliatory view and would seek to negotiate the way in which Islamic culture, values and knowledge exist alongside Western modernity, culture, democracy, and education, in the age of globalisation. Likewise, when it comes to the question of Sharia and its implementation, these groups are more willing to work with a government that is not wholly founded on Sharia, as long as their internal beliefs and practices remained entrenched in their Islamic teachings. Contrary to this, because of its strict adherence to the dogmatic Salafist philosophy, Boko Haram advocates for the propagation of Islam by everyone, whether willing or not (Adesoji, 2011:106).<sup>37</sup> The approach taken by the groups that decided to go underground may arguably be, on one hand, a

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<sup>36</sup> Yusuf expressed this cosmological view in an interview with BBC in 2009, arguing that, "Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam . . . If it runs contrary to the teachings of Allah, we reject it" (Pham, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> According to Onuoha, believers of radical Salafism – which influences Boko Haram ideology – are further influenced by a phrase in the Qur'an which states that, "anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors" (2012:4).

response to “the spirit of secularism” within Nigeria’s constitution, alongside a state which “lacks jurisdiction over internal politics within religious groups” (Oyeniya, 2014:15). This means that according to its constitution, as a secular state, Nigerian government must maintain neutrality in religious matters and not favour, interfere or support any religion or irreligious issues. On the other hand, the underground groups’ non-participation in religious radicalism to force the state may also come from an understanding of the limited role of the state in religious matters. That is, the Nigerian state is limited to ensuring that all religious groupings are afforded the same state privileges, and that any inter-religious conflict that arises is dealt with through dialogue and understanding. Interestingly, at a National Conference in 2014, two delegates from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) raised an issue about the 1999 Nigerian Constitution not being neutral, but rather skewed in favour of Islam and Muslims (Pam, 2014). The two delegates, a pastor and a bishop, brought to the attention of the fellow political delegates that the words ‘Shariah’, ‘Grand Khadi’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ are individually mentioned over 20 times, with Shariah appearing 73 times in the constitution (Pam, 2014). In contrast, “the words ‘Christ’, ‘Christian’, ‘Christianity’ or ‘church’” are not mentioned even once (Pam, 2014). Additionally, the promotion of one major religion over others in Nigeria’s ‘secular’ state is most apparent in the country having 12 out of its 36 States ruled under Sharia Law, something that is in direct violation of its constitution.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, in comparison to other radical Islamic groups, Boko Haram is more populist and perceived to speak for the common man and woman in northern Nigerian, defending them from “the rapacious depredations of the riches represented by the state itself” through campaigning for Sharia (Hansen & Musa, 2013:290). Within this context of a general dissatisfaction with the state, the socio-economic, educational and political conditions that the masses are expected to live under are underdeveloped, unequal, and corrupted due to a lack of intervention from this same government that cannot constitutionally intrude in internal affairs felt by religious groups. This has arguably been the biggest frustration for Boko Haram – having a state that does not take their plight and demands seriously enough to act in their favour. Northern Nigeria is thus considered to be “among the most backward and poverty-stricken areas in the world” (Hansen & Musa, 2013:289).<sup>39</sup> Arguably, what Boko Haram has done since its insurgence is to worsen matters in the Nigerian socio-economic, religious and political landscape it disfavours.

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<sup>38</sup> Section 10 of Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution states that “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as a state religion” (cited in Pam, 2014)

<sup>39</sup> A study conducted in 2011 found 72% of people living in poverty in northern Nigeria, a stark contrast to the 27% in southern Nigeria and 35% in the Niger Delta (US Department of State, 2013).

## 5.6 The Resurgence of Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau

Since the death of its charismatic founder, Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf, and the takeover in late 2009 by its current authoritarian leader Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram has become a lot bigger, smarter, bolder, and arguably, more violent. The group has carried out a multitude of deadly, large-scale attacks on “police stations, military facilities, churches, schools, cell phone towers, beer halls, newspaper offices, the United Nations [headquarters], politicians, Muslim critics (especially clerics) and Christians” (Agbiboa, 2014:400). These attacks included the “September 2010 assault on a Maiduguri prison that resulted in the release of 700 prisoners, including Boko Haram members” (US Department of State, 2013). Shekau’s role under Yusuf’s leadership was that of second-in-command. Under the leadership of Yusuf, Boko Haram had been rooted in “a northern millenarian tradition, demanding justice against corruption within the Islamic establishment,” and arguably took on a “global terrorist outlook” during Shekau’s leadership, following the global jihadist movement (Oyeniya, 2014:81).<sup>40</sup> Another perspective offered by Hussein Solomon is that Boko Haram was not solely driven by religious interests but was also a response to the wider community’s dissatisfaction with Nigeria’s “deteriorating living standards,” their disappointment with the political elite who were “not responsive to people’s needs,” and the sectarian divisions that have been reinforced by the Nigerian state that have not allowed for its citizens to transcend “divisions of language, ethnicity, religion, and region over the years” (Hussein, 2014). Some of these concerns have been implicit in Boko Haram’s expressed objectives, but have not necessarily expressed as lucidly as Hussein implies.

In a 2009 interview with *Sunday Trust* Shekau did reveal that Boko Haram is not fighting Western education itself, but are instead opposed to “the various un-Islamic things slotted into it and the system upon which the study of Western education is rested” (Pothuraju, 2012:6). Other goals of the group that have been made apparent since 2009 are, regaining the political power that the Islamic North lost in 1999 during the change of Presidency; reversing whatever socio-political evolutions that have threatened the “political and cultural hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani elite”; and defending the struggling commoners from the ‘depredations’ of the rich state (Warner, 2012:38; Davis, 2012:17). The group plans to do this through campaigning for the expansion of strict Islamic Sharia law “beyond the twelve [out of nineteen] states in Northern Nigeria, already under Islamic law” (Warner, 2012:38; Davis, 2012:17). The group even demanded that the then President, Goodluck Jonathan, convert from Christianity to Islam in order for them to cease fire, as well as expecting the state to evict all non-Muslims living in northern Nigeria. They even threatened to

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<sup>40</sup> The perceived corruption of the Islamic establishment by Yusuf was a reference to how the “socio-religious and political elites in northern Nigeria” were seen to be corrupting Islamic practices (Oyeniya, 2014:83).

kidnap the president and his daughter. Ultimately, spiritual ideology is central to the group and provides an underlying basis, not only for the recruitment of young, unemployed men with the promise of a good life now and hereafter, but also for motivating members to “fight against the apostate state and help overthrow it” (Hansen & Musa, 2013:290). Considering that a populous country like Nigeria is “multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural,” it is a little difficult to imagine how Boko Haram’s demands and objectives could ever be fully achievable (Oyeniyi, 2014:84). Furthermore, Boko Haram has evolved so much over the past five years, that it is therefore difficult for analysts to predict what the group plans to do next or what motivates a change in their tactics and target groups. Similarly, as a scholar, it would be disingenuous to make proclamations that attempt to reveal the true identity and intentions of Boko Haram, beyond a critical analysis of historical and contemporary influences and events.

## **5.7 Boko Haram and Supposed Links and Affiliations**

From the above stated aims, goals and objectives of Boko Haram which are still centred around religious ideology, socioeconomic and political issues in Nigeria – particularly the north – it is difficult to compare the group with others that are said to fall under international jihadist movements. Nonetheless, the mass media and scholarly works still draw many similarities between the sect and other radical Islamic military groups, such as al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda and recently ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).<sup>41</sup> It is claimed that Boko Haram have expressed similar ambitions to those of al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab in that they eventually want to join the fight for a global jihad.<sup>42</sup> *Vanguard*, a Nigerian newspaper, reported that Boko Haram admitted to being a version of al-Qaeda, as well as a supporter of Osama bin Laden (2009). Indeed, according to Agbiboa, in November 2012 Boko Haram spokesperson, Abdul Qaqa confirmed the links the group has with al-Qaeda, revealing that they often assist each other (2014). However, the same spokesman was reported dead by news media in September 2012, after he was supposedly “killed at a Checkpoint in Nigeria’s Kano” following his arrest months earlier by the State Security Service, SSS, in Borno State (Mezzofiore, 2012). This is a clear indication that, as far as news reports go, there is very little certainty when it comes to reporting factually on Boko Haram.

BBC International Development Correspondent, Mark Doyle, has written about Boko Haram’s affiliations with al-Qaeda in connection to the members of the group who have “fought in Mali alongside groups affiliated to al-Qaeda” (2012). Doyle also noted that some Boko Haram members trained with Somalia’s al-Shabaab and also “share funds and explosive materials” (2012). Additionally, a report by the American Foreign Policy Council (AFPC) argues that Boko Haram

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<sup>41</sup> Boko Haram’s links with these groups, especially with ISIS remain anecdotal without many substantiated claims in print and online media.

<sup>42</sup> These declarations have mainly been expressed through the group’s online propaganda. In one video, released in November 2012, Abubakar Shekau showed support for “the ongoing jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Libya and Mali” (Agbiboa, 2014:409).

uses tactics that are similar to those of the Taliban. These commonalities often relate to the religio-political objectives of the radical groups, organisational and operational similarities, their fundamental ideologies, as well as the styles and magnitude of their violent attacks. Perhaps another reason why Boko Haram is said to fall under international jihadist movements is due to the research that places radical Islamic groups in Nigeria under the support of “sympathetic organizations and hostile governments across the Middle East, North Africa, and Saudi Arabia” which have been providing financial and logistical support as well as training from the 1970s until today (2014:89).<sup>43</sup>

Some of these countries that the sect is said to be connected to are Somalia, Libya, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria Sudan and Afghanistan (AFPC, 2013:6; Siegle, 2013:81). Even so, these simplified and generic speculations and narratives used to make connections between these groups undermine the historical, cultural and ideological nuances that exist independently in each group.<sup>44</sup> In relation to this, local observers in Nigeria as well as reports and research on the group have distinguished differences that divide the group into three factions. The locals have differentiated between “a Kogi Boko Haram, Kanuri Boko Haram, and Hausa Boko Haram” (Agbiboa, 2013:149). Academic reports also split the group into three, “one that remains moderate and welcomes an end to the violence; another that wants a peace agreement; and a third that refuses to negotiate and wants to implement strict sharia law across Nigeria” (Forest, 2012). Similarly, researchers have observed that there are “separate factions within the group which disagree about tactics and strategic directions, competing at times for attention and followers” (Agbiboa, 2014:405).<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the Boko Haram led and promoted by Shekau is the one that has been chosen for this study, because of the amount of international media attention it has received.

## **5.8 Contradictions in the Relationship between Boko Haram’s Ideology, Objectives and Actions**

There are internal nuances that exist between the ideologies and physical actions of Boko Haram. These require any critical analysis to be mindful of how the renewed objectives stated by the group may not necessarily mirror their actions. Moreover, Boko Haram’s performances, movements, behaviours and pragmatic preoccupations give insight into their various objectives that may not be stated but implied. Collier and Sambanis arrived at this “distinction between inferred goals of insurgent or rebel movements” in their attempt to understand and analyse civil wars (2005:xiii). Whether the model is a reliable one in the case of Boko Haram – as the actions of the group are

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<sup>43</sup> These are the same states, organisations, stakeholders and elites that would build “mosques and Qur’anic schools” as well as provide “scholarships for university education and other monetary gifts to radical Islamic groups across Nigeria” (Oyenyi, 2013:17).

<sup>44</sup> These complexities and nuances often relate to “durations, scales and intensities” and multi-dimensional conflict triggers, “ranging from historical animosities and colonial legacies, to factors rooted in the complexity of post-colonial realities, forces of globalisation and global governance” (Omeje, 2005:9).

<sup>45</sup> These complexities and nuances often relate to “durations, scales and intensities” and multi-dimensional conflict triggers, “ranging from historical animosities and colonial legacies, to factors rooted in the complexity of post-colonial realities, forces of globalisation and global governance” (Omeje, 2005:9).

framed as both ethno-religious conflicts and terrorist attacks – is arguable, because of the model's dichotomous interpretation, but it does assist in adding dimension to an analysis of the group's representation by the media.

To date, Boko Haram has admitted responsibility for attacking schools, bombing churches, mosques, government buildings and security forces in a country divided between a predominantly Christian south and a Muslim north. It has been reported in numerous news items that more than 6 000 people have been killed in attacks between 2009 and 2015. The victims include “Christians, Muslims, members of the police and military, university professors, students, and even children” (Oyeniya, 2014:84). Several attempts have been made by the Nigerian government and its military to stop this group from carrying out deadly attacks and terrorising innocent civilians. Boko Haram's attacks include the 15 April 2014 kidnapping of 276 school girls from a remote school in Chibok village, Borno State, who the group first threatened to forcefully marry, then later warned that they would sell them on the black market for \$12 each, after converting them to Islam. This event triggered a number of protests in Nigeria and other parts of the world that erupted against the Nigerian government's failure to rescue the girls. This also ignited a viral social media campaign under the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls on Twitter and Facebook. Consequently, offers of international military assistance poured in from countries such as the United States, Britain, China and France in order to help find these schoolgirls. Despite these efforts, Boko Haram remained in political control, married the school girls to its military fighters who impregnated them, and continued to terrorise innocent people in Nigeria, like kidnapping a group of more than 50 mothers and young women from the same Chibok village, as well as kidnapping some 90 girls and boys a few months after the Chibok kidnapping event. In the same year, Boko Haram “controlled as many as 37 towns and villages in north-eastern Nigeria” specifically terrorising the women and children of these towns, whilst demanding that the government release jailed militants (Ewi, 2015:221). These latter cases did not make headlines in major international news broadcasts, except for the earlier 2011 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja which killed 21 people including diplomats. Following the bomb attack, Boko Haram released an open statement that condemned the United Nations for oppressing Muslims globally with the assistance of the federal government in Nigeria, which they claimed perpetuates the UN agenda (*The Punch*, 2011).

Although it seems Boko Haram's two initial objectives have been blurred by their destructive actions since their leadership by Shekau, it is important to interrogate whether their original objectives could have been realistically achieved through a negotiation with the Nigerian government. The first of the objectives was to restore Islam and Islamic practices amongst Muslims in Nigeria. Allowing for this would be acting outside of Nigeria's constitution which does not allow



for the government to interfere with the functioning, transformations or changes within a religious group (Oyeniya, 2014:85). The second objective was to get the Nigerian state to implement Sharia throughout the country, beyond the twelve northern states, thus abolishing the standing Constitution and democratic system. This objective contradicts the groups demand between 2010 and 2012 to have Christians leave the dominantly Muslim north for the Christian south. This objective thus has its constitutional implications. Besides the secularism clause in the constitution, which limits the government's interference in religious matters, this condition by Boko Haram would contravene "the fundamental rights of other Nigerians in the areas of rights to religious freedom, freedom of association, and lawful assembly" (2014:85-86). Additionally, Lamptey is of the opinion that the sect's version of Sharia is "a bastardized ideology that references Islam . . . [and] aims not to create a functional 'state,' but rather a state of fear and coercion" (Lamptey, 2014). By virtue of this infringement on the rights of others, and from the perspective of the law, it would be unconstitutional for the government to agree to the terms and religious demands proposed by the sect.

Unsurprisingly, this very constitution that protects the entho-religious diversity of people living in Nigeria from being controlled by the radical Islamic demands of Boko Haram, is a constitution that would not have materialised in the way it has without the colonial residue of Western modernity and the impact of globalisation. In other words, these laws that produce the fundamental rights for Nigerians in terms of religion, freedom and civil rights, have been drawn from a normative benchmark based on a Western model of law, morality and rationality that has been made into a globally accepted standard.

Thus, a proposal such as that made by Boko Haram and other similarly inclined radical groups, to have a state constituted by Sharia – which does not follow the universal laws created by the West – becomes an international concern and contestable issue. Meanwhile, Boko Haram has pointed out numerous times how Nigeria's Western educated ruling class, including Muslim political leaders in the north, have become corrupt and "irredeemably tainted by 'Western-style ambitions'" such as democracy (AFPC, 2012:3).<sup>46</sup> After the institutionalisation of democracy in 1999, it was already seen by many northern Muslims as "a by-product of American influence and a ploy that would lead to the marginalization of northern Nigerian Muslims" (2013:3).

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<sup>46</sup> Ironically, this system of democracy also guarantees that a Christian president wins the Nigerian presidency in every election cycle, because the southern voter turnout exceeds that of the north. The only system in place, although unofficial, which allows for a Muslim president to step in every other term is the 'rotational system' (AFPC, 2013:3).

## 5.9 Boko Haram and the Socio-economic Politics of Nigeria

Boko Haram uses religion to mobilise against Western modernity embodied by Nigerian politicians, elites and by structures of the state. The marginalised class of Muslims that have shown support for Boko Haram holds on to the same belief promoted by the sect. This belief derives from a fear that under the neo-colonial, capitalistic and democratic government, which was at one stage led by a Christian President, the Muslims in the north will surely lose their Muslim identity to a ruling government influenced by Western culture and religion. This same government, according to Boko Haram supporters, is to blame for the lack of civil services, infrastructural developments and socio-economic opportunities that were seemingly provided to southerners. What goes missing in this motivating narrative is the fact that, since its independence from Britain, northern elites and politicians have ruled Nigeria half the time. Even so, there have been few empirical signs of development in the sectors of education, healthcare and job creation in the context, where socioeconomic and political problems are rife.

Fundamentalist groups, like Boko Haram, use religion, belief and faith to control the masses and further their religio-political agenda. In a country like Nigeria, the proliferation of churches and mosques are arguably a sign of the “complex and unsuspecting manner [in which] religion preys on socioeconomic and political problems to radicalise the poor” (2014:87). Beyond this dimension of religious institutional support that Boko Haram receives, there was also the revelation from former president Goodluck Jonathan that members of the security operatives as well as “members of the National Assembly and Federal Executive Council” were supporters of Boko Haram (*Premium Times*, 2012).<sup>47</sup> Jonathan believes that the aim of this was to make the country ungovernable under his rule and transfer power back to the hands of the north.

## 5.10 Boko Haram’s Response to Nigerian Elections

Despite the alliances with Boko Haram that were distinguishable amongst the politicians under Jonathan’s presidency, when the 2015 presidential elections came around, history was made as the voting happened “in relatively peaceful and orderly conditions, making it a significant milestone in the electoral history of Africa’s largest democracy” (Ewi, 2015:207).<sup>48</sup> This was not the case in the previous elections in 2011, where Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, condemned the election for having Jonathan as a Christian candidate and even “threatened to disrupt the election”

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<sup>47</sup> Over and above this, the support political elites show resurgent identities of marginalised groups like Boko Haram can be argued to be a form of exploitation for possible future economic and political gain. There have also been suggestions that the support via funding is sentimental as it serves as a form of ‘protection money’ to prevent insurgents from harming the families and businesses of the politicians (Harolds & Babarinde, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> The 28 March 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria were the fifth elections since the reintroduction of democracy in 1999. International observers (EU, UN, US, AU, Commonwealth and other independent organisations) hailed these elections as “credible, transparent, peaceful and orderly” (Ewi, 2015:207).

(2015:219).<sup>49</sup> This threat played out when two bombs were detonated in Maiduguri and Bauchi pre-elections on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, killing at least two people (2015:220). Following the victory of Dr Goodluck Jonathan in the elections, further attacks attributed to Boko Haram militants occurred in parts of northern Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> One of these attacks took place at Jonathan's inauguration in Abuja on 29 May 2011 where explosives were detonated metres away from the president. This is not to say Boko Haram only had a problem with the Nigerian state because it had a Christian as a president. Indeed, Boko Haram's initial uprising occurred in 2009 when Yar'Adua, a Muslim, was still president (Azuatalum, 2014). At the time their anger was not directed at the president but at the government and its institutional law enforcement, which had killed its founding father and nearly 700 of its members. This anger played out for the rest of President Jonathan's term, as analysts theorise that under Shekau, Boko Haram did its best to "disrupt, weaken, and impair Jonathan's administration by doing things that made Jonathan unpopular," citing the kidnapping of the schoolgirls in Chibok, the "bombing [of] the Nigerian Federal Police Headquarters and other high-profile national strategic institutions" (Ewi, 2015:224). This resulted in the public losing faith in President Jonathan's leadership, and in the president giving the Nigerian military a mandate to attack and uproot the sect from all its bases, which would disable Boko Haram from carrying out frequent attacks.

Unsurprisingly, due to Nigeria's unstable socio-political climate since 2012, a number of complex and dynamic factors were at play pre-election in 2015, which made the stakes even higher. Martin Ewi discusses these four factors in an article titled, "Was the Nigerian 2015 presidential election a victory for Boko Haram or for democracy?", and begins with the possible threat posed on security during the election while the government was "battling a pernicious and violent form of terrorism" (2015:207). The second factor was the close contest between the two candidates, as determined by pre-election polls which indicated the likelihood of General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) unseating Dr Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), "which had dominated Nigeria's politics for the past 16 years" since the replacing of military coups (2015:207). The third was the well-established socio-economic inequality and widespread corruption that had angered the masses. The fourth factor was the reality that the two presidential candidates represented "the two arch-rival regions of Nigeria – the North, represented by Buhari, a Muslim, and the South, represented by Jonathan, a Christian" (2015:208). Within this context, Ewi believes that these two candidates coming from two vastly different regions of the

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<sup>49</sup> Not only Boko Haram was unhappy about the election of Goodluck Jonathan. Many northern Muslims in Nigeria saw his win as illegitimate, "arguing that he ignored an informal power-rotation agreement that should have kept a Muslim in power this round"(Johnson, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> The attacks waged by Boko Haram during the 2011 election period are estimated to have been responsible for the most casualties in the time of elections ranging "800 to 1000 deaths and 65 000 to 74 000 people displaced" (Ewi, 2015:220).

Nigerian state brought together contradictions of Nigeria; “zonal politics, minority-majority politics, ethnicity, religion, corruption, and insecurity” (2015:208).

It would be biased to claim that the Nigerian elections in 2015 were completely untouched by chaos, violence and unfairness. Reactionary acts of violence are common during times of election, especially in Africa where there is a relationship between violence or conflict and political instability. Since Boko Haram is not just an ‘ethno-religious group’ but also a political actor, it was considerably active during the time of elections to influence voter decisions, albeit not in extreme levels of violence. Nonetheless, in the cases where such disturbances did occur, the Independent National Electoral Commission (NEC) dealt with them in a timely manner. Moreover, the leaders of the two parties were mature in their campaigning, used “democratic mechanisms” to manage their grievances, and “urged their partisans to be peaceful and follow due process in resolving any electoral injustices” (2015:208, 216). Despite historical precedence, and the fuelled environment in which the elections took place, the NEC managed to keep things under control and ensured that the elections ran successfully. Ultimately, what elevated the 2015 election and subsequent victory above the rest was the fact that an opposition party (APC) won against the long-term ruling party in “open and peaceful elections,” a first in Nigerian history (2015:209).<sup>51</sup>

### **5.11 The Political and Religious Dimensions of Terrorism**

According to a seminal study by Robert Pape, terrorism and suicide attacks are likelier to happen to democratic states than authoritarian or autocratic states, due to liberties that allow for political competition (2003:350). Likewise, scholar Erica Chenoweth asserts that such a democratic environment is an open ground for terrorists to exploit the civil liberties of “free speech, freedom of movement and association, right to privacy, free and independent media, social media,” and of course, political competition (Chenoweth, 2010:27). Similarly, James Piazza argues that, whilst there are multiple factors that may aggravate terrorist activity, “the structure of party politics [is] found to be [a more] significant [predictor] of terrorism” (Piazza, 2009:73). What is implied here is that systems of governance, especially democracy, are flawed in terms of governance and security, and these flaws allow terrorism to thrive.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to this view, Martin Ewi is of the belief that democracy is not to blame for terrorism in Nigeria, as terrorism has existed for several years before the country’s rule by democracy. Ewi blames “procrastination, weak institutions and bad governance” (2015:226).<sup>53</sup> Beyond this, a clear correlation has been made between religious

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<sup>51</sup> What was also a first in these elections was a sitting President accepting defeat in a calm and democratic manner by congratulating his opponent.

<sup>52</sup> Jesse Mugambi, a professor of Philosophy and Religious studies echoes this sentiment when he notes that early 21st century brought with it a phenomenon of “‘terrorist’ and ‘insurgent’ groups in various parts of the world” which expose fundamental flaws in global governance. (Nzwili & Garba, 2012)

<sup>53</sup> Other scholars, like Clapham (2004), Evans (1994) and Collier et al. (2003), similarly put the blame for Africa’s perceived disorder on “the legacy of bad governance” and declining economies that have been the primary predictors of violence and conflict (Evans, 1994:3).

fundamentalism and terrorism, both globally, particularly in the case of Nigeria. Terrorism driven by fundamentally political goals is particularly different from religious terrorism, which, according to Bruce Hoffman, rests on three key hypotheses. The first hypothesis primordialises religious terrorists, describing them as having “anti-modern goals of returning to an idealised version of the past, and are therefore necessarily anti-democratic and anti-progressive” (Juergensmeyer, 2003:230). The hypothesis also states that objectives created by terrorists are often “absolutist, inflexible, unrealistic, devoid of political pragmatism” and work under hostile negotiation (Gunning & Jackson, 2011:371). This first hypothesis is arguably true in the case of Boko Haram, which has shown to be opposed to the modernisation of Islam and the northern Nigerian state, and has rejected all of the Nigerian government’s efforts to negotiate on their demands and instead continues its violent acts on institutions of the state and innocent civilians.

The second hypothesis differentiates the intentions behind the kind of violence used by political or secular terrorist groups from the violence used by religious terrorists. In religious terrorist groups, there is supposedly a transcendental aim behind the violence, which is treated as “a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand” (Hoffman cited in Agbiboa, 2014:402). However, although most Islamic terrorist groups make “use of violence as a means to their ends,” it is important to note that the different groups do not necessarily share the same “origins, motivations, ends and tactics” (Romero, 2007:451). This hypothesis about violence is true for Boko Haram to some extent. That is to say, although often compared to other globally known Islamic extremist groups, Boko Haram’s goals and actions are rooted specifically within the context of Nigeria’s socio-economic inequalities, illiterate northern regions, political instability and corrupt leadership.

The last hypothesis argues that religious terrorist groups are capable of ensuring that the members they recruit remain committed and fanatical in their loyalty to the religious cause. They manage to do this by suspending doubt and convincing members that the “end-justifies-the-means,” which would supposedly be a joyous end in the afterlife (Gunning & Jackson, 2011). This then becomes the psychologically influencing motivating factor that draws the “insecure, alienated and marginalised youth” into these radical movements (Agbiboa, 2014:403). This psychological influence can come in the form of motivations from recruiters, extremist preachers or material from the internet (Hoffman, 2006:224).

The United States Department of Defense (USDD) defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to

intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” (cited in Omale, 2013:96). Within this definition, there are three key elements – violence, fear, and intimidation – and each element produces terror in its victims (2013:96-97). Even so, it is important to consider that because this definition of terrorism has been provided by a department *of* and based *in* the United States, it has already been coloured by economic and political ideologies, influenced by location, and flawed by respective interests and perspectives. Similarly, the British government has its own definition of terrorism, which is arguably, the same as that of the U.S, although the wording is slightly different. It stipulates that terrorism is “the use, or threat, of action which is violent, damaging or disrupting, and is intended to influence the government or intimidate the public and is for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause” (Moten, 2010:37). Both definitions have an implicit bias in that they are offered by superpower states, which, as Moten explains, “do not take into consideration” that even a state can be responsible for violent and terroristic acts “against its own citizens” (2010:37). As such, political definitions of terrorism from the West give the impression that only the ‘other,’ that which does not belong within a state, can commit acts of violence and terror. It further projects the notion that these superpower states, which see themselves at risk of being the victims of terrorist attacks, have the right, and privilege, to label any group – internal or external – that disputes or resists them and their policies as terrorists.<sup>54</sup> This is undeniably the case with the foreign-terrorist list drawn up by the U.S., which “consists largely of Muslim-based organisations” (Onapajo et al., 2012:341).

There are also the academic definitions of terrorism, which are often accused by policymakers of being laden with jargon and too theoretical and complex to apply to practical phenomena. One of these definitions of terrorism was offered by Alex Schmid in 1988, who conceived of it as “an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets” (1988:91). The criticism against academic definitions of terrorism, such as that offered by Schmid, points out that the definitions often aim for “the inclusion of numerous diverse incidents into a data base [of terrorism]” which makes them impractical for utilitarian use (cited in Onapajo et al., 2012:339). Nevertheless, perhaps the definition of terrorism needs to be complex. Most of the definitions offered do not necessarily take into account the historical actions of the state or of political actors that may be catalysts for terror attacks in their own respective rights. This is arguably the case with

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<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it was the US, under the Reagan Administration, that started the ‘War on Terror’ in the 1980s, a time when “the US sponsored several states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, South Africa, Canada and others to finance its terrorist operations abroad” (Moten, 2010:53). It is argued by Muslim academics that the modern wave of terrorism that arose was in response to this “state of terror or state-sponsored terrorism” for which the U.S is responsible (Onapajo et al., 2012:341).

Boko Haram, as the group plays out its reactionary beliefs in conditions historically affected by deprivation in northern Nigeria.

### **5.11.1 Are Boko Haram Members Terrorists?**

This study acknowledges the paradoxically conflicting sources and complex definitions of 'terrorism'. However, this does not take away from the extant literature that has assessed the persistent violence that has been occurring in post-independent Nigeria as entrenched in terrorism. Within this consideration, Nigeria has been the unforgettable location of 'terror-style attacks,' characterised by "assassinations, gruesome murders, indiscriminate bombings, arson attacks, abductions and kidnappings, mass disappearances and other violent acts" apparently meant to "intimidate the population" (Ewi, 2015:218). For this reason, Ewi expands on a terrorism theory by providing four issues that he believes have "shaped, animated and entrenched terrorism" in post-independent Nigeria (2015:219).

The first issue is the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804 - a fundamentalist Muslim empire that aimed to revive Islam by purging it off paganism and ritualistic practices (2015:218).<sup>55</sup> Following this was "the demise of the Caliphate at the dawn of the British colonial administration in 1903" which would soon fuel "rebellion and radicalisation in northern Nigeria" resulting in the known tensions between Christians and Muslims, as well as the rise of radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram (2015:218). Secondly, the competition over resources in the Niger Delta has led to a number of insurgent groups coming out to lay claim to these resources, "including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)" (2015:218). Thirdly, the issue of communal and/or interethnic conflicts also arises as a residue of colonial administration of regions and ethnic groups. Lastly, there is the issue of "herders-farmers conflict" which is prevalent in various parts of Nigeria. According to Ewi, this is due to a combination of factors: "a growing scarcity of natural resources, demographic expansion, climate change and ethnic diversity" (2015:218). These complex circumstances and historical aspects are hardly analysed, let alone reviewed, when an attempt to understand Boko Haram is made in media discourses and frequent reports on the actions of the group locally, much less the causes of global trends in terrorism as a whole. Furthermore, although the group has been the subject of an abundant number of academic research, the focus tends to be placed on the group's internal dynamics that have led to its persistent growth and evolution, whilst only a few scholarly pieces refer to external factors in the country influenced by its history.

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<sup>55</sup> The Sokoto Caliphate was governed by Sharia and was responsible for overthrowing the old Hausa chiefdoms in a jihad because they saw this Hausa government as corrupt (Smith, 1964:165).

On the matter of representative research, a number of academic works on the current situational crisis in Nigeria are always keen to note how the country is Africa's largest oil producer, rating it as the fourth fastest growing economy. They also point out how socio-economic ills such as poverty, corruption, exploitative politicians, unemployment and a violent populace hold the nation back despite its oil wealth (Rintoul, 2012; Okeke, 2012; Hansen & Musa, 2013; Okonofua, 2013). Post-colonial states are often defined by these factors because, according to Kenneth Omeje in "Conflicts in West Africa," the forces at play are those of contemporary globalisation, imperial supervision and governance, which make up the international environment where these less privileged states exist (2005). It is not uncommon for some post-colonial critics to take on the position that the exploitative system of capitalism, as a colonial birth-right, is the contemporary root cause of corruption and mass misery in Nigeria from which insurgencies like Boko Haram emerge. Indeed, Nigerian analyst Chris Ngwodo has argued that Boko Haram is in fact "a symptom of decades of failed government and elite delinquency finally ripening into social chaos" (Dearin, 2011). This colonial residue has arguably produced a denationalised state with an array of sub-national identities – religious, ethnic and cultural – tousling for the power to be heard and to have their different needs met by the state, thus resulting in conflict and violence.

### **5.12 Contradiction in Boko Haram Identity**

Broadly disseminated media, scholarly writing and even Nigerian officials have often portrayed the Boko Haram group and its leader as poor, uneducated, uncivilised, irrational and violent, among several other dehumanizing descriptions (Francis, 2011; Yusha'u, 2012; Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho & Onapajo, 2012; *India Times*, 2014). It strains believability that global reportage claims the people to be illiterate, whilst, on the contrary, the group has demonstrated a wide-ranging and proficient use of technology, such as the internet, vehicles, cell-phones, and sophisticated machinery to propagate their message (Abubakar, 2012:99; Pham, 2012:7). Perhaps the contradiction between how the group defines itself through its anti-Western ideology and the way it represents itself through its arguably 'terrorist' actions is one of the factors that has influenced the international fear over Boko Haram's global agenda.

Boko Haram's primary antagonists are "'infidel' Christians, secular Muslims and government officials, and religious leaders" who have publically expressed a disagreement with the group's ideology and methods (AFPC, 2013:6). However, threats to the U.S government and leaders do tend to come up during Shekau's video recorded statements that are publicly available on YouTube. One of the reasons for Boko Haram's representational contradiction does seem to be the advantage that the sect has gained over the years in recruiting the northern youth educated through institutions



using the Western education model. These youths seem to be easy targets as they struggle to find employment as easily as the youth living in the south of Nigeria (Salkida, 2005). Ultimately, even though the educated northern youth has been taught to compete in the modern and globalised world, it is without the opportunities and avenues to do so, thus being left vulnerable and eager to join “militant, anti-systematic organizations such as Boko Haram” which offer them shelter, food and sustenance (2005). There is, however, an irony that emerges from the group’s recruitment of youth that is learned in Western education, and by implication, technology, which Boko Haram so fervently denounce in sermons.

### **5.13 Global Responses to Boko Haram Insurgency**

Some analysts and experts of political conflicts and the violent situation in Nigeria expect the international community to respond promptly by looking at the crimes of Boko Haram as war crimes against humanity and international law. However, others who are aware of international politics and alliances think Nigeria should not accept international intervention especially that of the U.S., which may have its own agendas. Up until the abduction of the schoolgirls, “Nigeria had been reluctant to accept foreign help [from Britain and the U.S.] in the fight against Boko Haram” (Pham cited in *India Times*, 2014). In this instance, there was growing suspicion that “the main objective of the U.S. policy in Nigeria [was less] connected to their concerns about [the] Nigerian girls that [were] kidnapped, but looking for a pretext to further entrench themselves in the internal politics of Nigeria,” and to thus acquire intelligence about the exportation of natural resources (Woronzuk, 2014). This suspicion was arguably flawed since the U.S. government was offering up to a \$7 million reward for information leading to the arrest of Boko Haram’s leader Shekau, even before the April 15 kidnapping of the Chibok girls. This was because the U.S. had already labelled Shekau as “a specially designated global terrorist” (*India Times*, 2014). However, Shekau’s “global terrorist” status must be considered in the context of Nigeria’s value to the West. Although Boko Haram has not attacked “the predominantly Christian oil-producing zones of southern Nigeria, including Lagos and port Harcourt, or in any of the three countries that border Borno State – Niger, Chad and Cameroon,” the sect is still considered an international threat with a global reach. Arguably, this ‘global reach’ may be symbolic language used to define the southern part of Nigeria that is well industrialised, Westernised and oil-rich, and which may well come under threat. In this line of argument, what is suggested then is the obvious presence of larger, more formidable international interests in the southern part of the country, a region that supplies rich resources to the U.S., unlike the insignificant northern region.

Jideofor Adibe – one of the few Nigerian analysts who has written extensively on Boko Haram – argues that the “Nigerian government has a vested interest in presenting Boko Haram as having such an international linkage” for three reasons (2013:13). Firstly, to attract international sympathy and assistance from European countries and the paranoid U.S. Secondly, to link Boko Haram to Al-Qaeda in order to ‘save-face’ for Nigerian government’s inability to contain the group and its terrorist activities. Thirdly, “by linking the group to Al-Qaeda, the government may hope to use innuendos and name-dropping of US involvement to frighten the sect and help to pressure it to the negotiating table” (Jideofor, 2013:13-14). In contrast to this view, observers like Chief Horsfall who was former Director of General State Security Services in Nigeria, believe that Nigeria and the African continent as a whole are capable of handling this crisis, without a need for external forces to intervene. Of the two counterterrorism approaches that appear in literature – coercion and conciliation – Chief Horsfall is arguably in support of the conciliatory approach to resolve Nigeria’s crisis. This would require the state to either “address the root cause of terrorism, thereby decreasing the legitimacy of the terrorist claims and the traction for its cause” or to “forestall future crises by negotiating with terrorists” (Miller, 2007:333). However, this non-aggressive response is often criticised for its failure to stop the problem, since it is seen to “concede to terrorist demands . . . thus encouraging terrorists” (Benjamin, 2008:13). Indeed, when former President Jonathan took this approach to deal with Boko Haram’s violence, the group and its stakeholders refused to reconcile with the state as it did not release a number of the group’s arrested members or stop the killing of Boko Haram members.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, in 2012 President Jonathan still expressed that he was open to more talks and negotiation with the sect, despite the previous difficulties. Due to what Shekau considered an insincerity from Jonathan’s government, Boko Haram rejected any further calls for dialogue and vowed to continue its campaign to Islamise the state. The group “launched two back-to-back attacks in Northern Nigeria” near the end of 2012 which burnt down 13 villages, “killed close to 120 people and freed over 100 prison inmates” (Agbibo, 2014:412). When no mutually beneficial negotiation was reached, Boko Haram kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok village. On the other hand, proponents of the coercive approach to terrorism look to the state to use any means of physical force – assassinations, missile strikes, invasions, state terror – in order “to injure or kill terrorists or their supporters” (Miller, 2007:323). The logic is that if the state mutually incites fear towards the terrorists by responding with militarised violence, it will “create a reputation for punishing terrorists and will discourage future acts of terrorism” (Agbibo, 2014:410). The Nigerian

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<sup>56</sup> These negotiations between Boko Haram and the state began in 2011 with the then-president, Olusegun Obasanjo. The president agreed to meet with the group secretly in Maiduguri and listen to their demands. These demands included an end to the killing and arresting of the sect’s members, “payments of compensation to families of sect members killed by security personnel, and the prosecution of the policemen responsible for the killing of group leader Mohammed Yusuf” (cited in Agbibo, 2014:411).

military during President Jonathan's rule incited a number of counter-attacks on the sect. These were responsible for brutality, vandalism and the death of many civilians, which the armed forces denied.

The Nigerian military during President Jonathan's rule incited a number of counter-attacks on the sect. These were responsible for brutality, vandalism and the death of many civilians, which the armed forces denied. The Nigerian government, under the newly elected president, Muhammadu Buhari, has also made use of this tactic, in an attempt to disarm Boko Haram militants by attacking their bases. Other commentators and opponents are of the pessimistic opinion that not even local militarisation will solve the problem and neither will "the intervention of security experts and troops from Western imperialist countries" since this only "increases opposition to the government and leads to cycles of violence" (Agbiboa, 2014:411). Within this context, the question that lingers is: what is outlined, the problem may lie in the refusal to acknowledge Nigeria's past and come to an understanding of why it is currently as it is. Often the blame is placed in the errors of the present and not the complex consequences and legacies of the past. With that said, Agbiboa argues that a long-term strategy to handle Jihadist groups would be to "address the sources of human insecurity in the region" which would involve the federal government undertaking "a grass-roots socio-economic empowerment program aimed at employment generation and human security" (2014:415). This comes from the belief that if the government handles the state of socio-economic underdevelopment and poor security in any country, radically extremist groups like Islam fundamentalists would be deprived of avenues to recruit members for their jihad and thus fail to grow to make any massive impact. Similarly, scholar Nathaniel Manni maintains that if Nigerian government made an effort to deal with politico-economic corruption and improved human rights, then even sympathisers of Boko Haram would not have much reason to continue supporting the ideology and actions of the sect (2012:44). The three academic/scholarly articles that have been chosen for critical analysis in the following chapter also share these perspectives and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6 An Analysis of Academic Articles on Boko Haram by African Scholars

This section will conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of three scholarly articles from three different institutional publications in Africa. This approach to analysis acknowledges that the work produced through academic research does not occur in isolation, nor can it be read in an empty setting. Rather, it belongs to a real, observable world with intertwining contexts and complexities. Despite this, the knowledge and representation of and about uniquely African issues appearing in such texts is not a reflection of reality but rather a product of discourse. According to Fairclough's theory, discourse contributes to the construction of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning (cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:67). The analysis of the scholarly articles will therefore consider these discourse constructions, as they often manifest in implicit discriminations and reductive generalisations about the subjects examined. Additionally, key elements of postcolonial theory (history, culture, language) will be examined in the form of a transversal analysis, or what Fairclough terms *interdiscursivity*, to contextualise the overlapping discourses in the selected articles.

#### 6.1 Critical Discourse Analysis as Method

The CDA method used to examine the scholarly articles will work on three different levels adapted from Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. As much as Fairclough's method might be criticised for its fixed language meanings and signifiers, with some relative adaptation, it can still assist in examining discourse on Boko Haram in context. The first level of the analysis considers the socio-political and historical context of the texts; an analysis informed by themes in postcolonial theory and by an examination of prevalent themes in each article. This comes from the recognition that material conditions and situational contexts are a crucial part of analysis for a phenomenon like Boko Haram. Secondly, the analysis will assess the discursive practices that are responsible for constructing the meaning of the text by evaluating the socio-political context and focus of the writers' bodies of work and the respective, independent publications. Lastly, on the textual level, the analysis will examine the use of schemas and language as a social practice in relation to the discourse that produces it. In the first instance, the examination of schemas recognises that schemas function as modifies of explicit assertions to communicate information that conforms to pre-conceived, usually inaccurate, ideas. In the second instance, the examination of language will consider how the writers create implicit and explicit meanings in their representation of Boko Haram and African conflicts. The section will argue the ways in which Boko Haram's identity and acts are framed by discourse through the use of assumptions and presuppositions, ambiguities and omissions. Examination on this textual level goes beyond a linguistic analysis of text that is often

used by critical linguistics to analyse Literature. Rather, the analysis of formal textual features by the academic writers connects their articles to the first level of analysis that is informed by Nigeria's politico-historical context. These three levels of analysis will function as the techniques and tools used to conduct the CDA. This triad method of analysis aims to draw attention to the reductive, redundant and misleading discourses that inform the scholarly works that introduce Boko Haram to a geographically and culturally diverse audience of readers and act as sources of foundational knowledge on African conflicts.

## **6.2 Selection of Articles for Analysis**

The majority of writings on Boko Haram from scholars came from the 2012 year, around a time when the group was at the peak of its resurgence in the previous year. These books, journal publications and academic presentations aimed to give either a historical or a contemporary context for the sect's origin, goals, mission, affiliations and actions, in attempts to understand its 'violent' cause. For this reason, the three scholarly articles that have been selected were published in 2012 by journal publications from different countries. Nigerian academics wrote the articles selected for analysis; this is in order to examine how academics belonging to the country where the sect originates portrayed Boko Haram. What is observable from the work produced by these academics is their tendency to reproduce the same narratives as academics from North American and European countries, despite existing under different material conditions to the West. This indicates the depths of the colonial influence on Nigeria's written history and education, as expanded on in chapters 3 and 4.

The keyword 'Boko Haram' was used to perform the search on academic databases like *EBSCOhost*, *JStor*, and *Taylor & Francis*. Journal articles with titles that were relevant to the themes of the project were considered. For a quick selection, the ones with abstracts that provided information that was sufficient for an analysis were selected. The journal articles all attempt to understand the Boko Haram sect, where it comes from and what its mission seems to be. This explains why the article titles from two of the chosen papers are posed as questions. The selected articles, based on the titles, also seem to show a nuanced awareness of Nigeria's problem and manifestations of the problem. The selected scholarly articles are:

Article 1: "The Boko Haram Uprising and Insecurity in Nigeria: Intelligence Failure or Bad Governance?" (May 2012) by Odomovo S. Afeno in the *Conflict Trends* publication (Addendum A1)

Article 2: “Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria” (April 2012) by Aliyu Odamah Musa in the *Journal of African Media Studies* publication (Addendum A2)

Article 3: “Boko Haram and the Recurring Bomb Attacks in Nigeria: Attempt to Impose Religious Ideology through Terrorism?” (Feb 2012) by Ali Yusufu Bagaji, Moses Shaibu Etila, Elijah E. Ogbadu, and Jafa’aru Garbu Sule in the *Cross-Cultural Communication* publication (Addendum A3)

### **6.3 Writer Profiles and Publication Backgrounds**

In CDA it is important to consider how the study of discourse involves an assessment of culture, society, nationality and global relations. This is even more necessary in the processes of text production, where one has to consider the socio-political background of a writer and the respective publication, as well as the overarching themes, concepts and contexts that are prevalent in the works produced by writers, since no production of discourse occurs in a vacuum. The following section provides a brief background into the historical profiles of the writers and publications of the three articles.

Article 1: “The Boko Haram Uprising and Insecurity in Nigeria: Intelligence Failure or Bad Governance?”

Odomovo Afeno, a Masters graduate in Political Science, specialises in Public Administration, Public Policy and Security Studies, topics for which he has written several journal articles and conference papers. Afeno has a published book titled, *Corruption and Service Delivery: administrative corruption and public service delivery in Nigeria* (2012) in which he examines how the administrative corruption in Nigeria has impacted the function of service delivery in providing “education, health, water, electricity and other infrastructure facilities” (2012:11). Before 2014 he was the Junior Research Fellow at the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nigeria).

Some of the articles published by Afeno that deal with similar themes as this dissertation include:

- “Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria” (2014). In this article, Afeno argues that Nigeria’s counter-insurgency initiatives have been responsible for human rights violations due to the violence they enact on the country’s civilians they are supposed to protect. Traces of this perspective are apparent in Article 1 by Afeno where he argues that the strategies used by Nigeria’s military security forces are not effective in dealing with the country’s complex human insecurity problems.
- “New Security Threats, Unilateral Use of Force and the International Legal Order, Military and Strategic Affairs” (2013). This article mentions the 9/11 attacks in order to begin a

discussion about the global threat of terrorism and the security challenges this has posed for the international community. Afeno argues that there needs to be a revision of the international legal framework to make considerations for the intensity of these threats in the ‘age of terror’ where there has been an extreme use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This perspective highlights Afeno’s topical authority when it comes to issues relating to local and international security threats posed by terrorist organisations, which links to the selected research themes of security challenges and global terrorism.

- “The Exploitation of Civilians by Peacekeeping Soldiers in Africa: The Motivation of Perpetrators and the Vulnerability of Victims” (2012). Published by the same journal that Article 1 appears, the title of this article pretty much explains its focus. The article reveals that, “the rights of the civilian population are often violated by those presumed to be responsible for their protection” (2012:49). Additionally, the peacekeeping soldiers reported for these violations belong to trusted organisations working in Africa, such as “the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Economic community of West African States (ECOWAS)” (Afeno, 2012:50).

The titles and content of Afeno’s work reveals that he tackles themes of terrorism, security challenges, Human Rights Laws, International Policy Affairs, Nigeria’s political and security problems, violence and conflict, corruption and service delivery, all in the Nigerian context. This affords the author a distinct level of authority when it comes to writing on African problems within their situational context. This also reveals the level of knowledge and awareness of the complexity the author has the potential to show, but fails to, in his work on Boko Haram, which this chapter will analyse. Some of these themes covered by Afeno speak to the focus of the *Conflict Trends* magazine publication that published Article 1. The magazine was launched by ACCORD in 1998. ACCORD stands for the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, which, according to its home website, is “a South Africa-based civil society organisation working throughout Africa to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent” (ACCORD, n.d.). The magazine published by ACCORD analyses and reports on current and emerging African conflict trends and their resolutions. According to the website, the magazine is “widely accessed and used by policy makers, academics and conflict resolution practitioners in Africa and beyond” (ACCORD, n.d.). This makes the article chosen from the magazine an important source for information regarding the history and origin of the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as its impact on the security structures in Nigeria.

## Article 2: “Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria”

Odamah Musa is an independent researcher who holds a Ph.D. in War and Peace Studies. According to his online academic profile, he regularly participates in “discussions on politics and governance as well as conflict and conflict resolution” and appears in panel discussions on radio and TV channels like Al-Jazeera (Scholar Town, n.d.). His key research areas are, Boko Haram and conflicts in Africa, U.N. and International Peace Keeping, terrorism, identity politics, media and religious conflicts.

Musa has six published scholarly articles written about Nigeria, including:

- “Enemy Framing and the Politics of Reporting Religious Conflicts in the Nigerian Press” (2013) co-authored with Neil Ferguson. This article examines how “enemy images and stereotypes are created in the journalistic process; how they shape attitudes, and stoke hatred with the possibility of fuelling/amplifying sectarian violence” using examples of religious groups from the Nigerian context (2013:7). This gives a clear indication that the author is aware of media’s antagonistic representation and framing of certain ethno-religious groups and their conflicts. This makes for an interesting look at how objective is his own writing on the Boko Haram insurgency, in the way he describes the sect and its actions.
- “The Role of Political, Socio-economic Factors and the Media in Nigeria’s Inter-Religious Conflict” (2011). This article compares conflict reports between northern and southern newspapers and reveals that “the newspapers are regionally, ethnically, and religiously inclined” with reports that are “biased and sometimes inflammatory” (2011:2). This article examines factors that the author uses again in Article 2, indicating that he has an informed understanding of how political and socio-economic factors would be necessary to analyse Boko Haram. These factors also appear as prevalent themes in this dissertation.
- “Reporting Religion and Enemy Images in the Nigerian press” (2010). Similar to the article on enemy framing, this article looks at how newspaper publications in Nigeria are platforms for “promoting religious disharmony” by “creating stereotypes” that amplify the crisis of religious conflicts (2010:21). Interestingly, stereotypes in the form of schemas and insinuations appear in an analysis of Article 2. A relevant subsection later in the analysis will expand further on these features.

Article 2 appears in the *Journal of African Media Studies* (JAMS), an interdisciplinary journal that provides a platform for debate about the historical and contemporary elements of media and communication in Africa. The April 2012 issue that published Article 2 contains other thematically similar articles, like “Media and the War on Terror in Africa” and “Nigeria as a Country of Interest



in Terrorism’: Newspaper framing of Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Underwear Bomber.” The inclusion of these other articles relating to African conflicts in this journal issue give an idea of the climate of political insecurity faced by African states in the years preceding 2012. This is why the selected scholarly articles covering Boko Haram during the 2012 year are so significant to this research study, precisely because the sect was the cause for such political insecurity in Nigeria in particular.

Article 3: “Boko Haram and the Recurring Bomb Attacks in Nigeria: Attempt to Impose Religious Ideology through Terrorism?”

The third article has four authors, all coming from different fields. The first is Ali Bagaji, an academic with a doctorate in Ethno-Political Studies and a Masters in Politics (Conflict Resolution). Out of the four authors, Bagaji is the only one who belongs to an academic field that relates to the topic covered by Article 3. Most articles Bagaji has published are co-authored. However, those he has written alone include:

- “The Tangibility of Indivisible Territory: Nigeria and Biafra War, 1967-1970” (2010)
- “Growing Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Challenge of ‘One Nigeria’: Politics of State Building in a Multiethnic Society, 1960-2010” (2010).
- “An Analysis of the Military Handling of the Nigerian Economy” (2003)

The themes covered by Bagaji in most of his work are, violent conflict in Nigeria, Ethnic conflicts in Africa, development in Nigeria, government and public administration. This background in writing on African conflicts gives the writer authoritative credibility on the topic of Boko Haram in the article selected for analysis.

The second author is Moses Etila, an academic who belongs to the Department of Public Administration, at Kogi State Polytechnic, Nigeria. Etila appears as a co-author in most available journal articles by him on the web. Some of these are:

- “Normative Approaches to Ethnic Recognition and Accommodation: Their Applicability to the Nigerian Experience” (2012)
- “An Investigation of Causal Relationship Between Fiscal Deficits, Economic Growth and Money Supply in Nigeria (1970-2009)” (2012), co-authored.
- “The Scramble for Lugard House: Ethnic Identity Politics and Recurring Tensions in Kogi State, Nigeria” (2012)

Etila covers some themes that are similar to those found in Bagaji’s work. Etila focuses mainly on ethnicity, economy and Nigerian politics. The advantage with having Etila and others as co-writers for Article 3 is that they write from a Nigerian perspective, since all of their published work is specific to Nigeria’s context. Interestingly, even from this perspective the writers reductively frame

the Boko Haram insurgency as a terrorist threat imposing religious ideology. In later paragraphs, the terrorism approach is examined under the subheading, Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism.

The third author, Elijah Ogbadu, belongs to the Department of Business Administration in Kogi State University, Nigeria. Article 3 is the only one that Ogbadu has co-authored dealing with themes that relate to this research. His other works are reflective of the department he studied in. These include:

- “An Assessment of the Influence of Advertisement on Patronage of Beauty Care Products in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria” (2012)
- “Profitability Through Effective Management of Materials” (2009)
- “Motivational Factors Influencing Adoption of Motor Cycle Business in Igala Land of Kogi State” (2010), co-authored.

There is little to no available information on the academic career of the last author, Jafa’aru Suie, on the web. Suie only has one other record of a published article, which he has co-authored with two others, including Elita. This article is called:

- “An Investigation of Causal Relationship between Fiscal Deficits, Economic Growth and Money Supply in Nigeria (1970-2009)” (2010).

Article 3 appears in *Cross-Cultural Communication*, a social sciences journal presented by The Canadian Academy of Oriental and Occidental Culture. According to its website, the purpose of the journal is to “provide critical perspective of the intercultural as a foundation on which to build solutions to worldwide political, economic, workplace, social, gender, ethnic, environmental and other forms of problem” (CSCanada, n.d.). The global terrorist angle taken by authors of Article 3 may then be an attempt at a ‘worldwide intercultural’ approach to the Boko Haram problem, in accordance with the purpose of the publication journal.

#### **6.4 An Overview of Representation in Selected Articles**

The first article, by Afeno, looks at the security challenges faced by the Nigerian state because of Boko Haram and argues that the state’s inability to manage this problem “raises important questions about the effectiveness of governance and security agencies in the country” (2012:36). The title of the article immediately makes it clear that it is questioning the intelligence and governance of Nigeria by examining how these two entities have responded to the insecurity problem that has been worsened by Boko Haram. Afeno’s definition of human security is broad and complex, and takes into consideration not only external threats but also “devastating internal disturbances, starvation,

diseases, homelessness, environmental degradation and socio-economic injustices” which impede human development (2012:37). Afeno thus explains that ‘human security’ is the recognition that sustainable security means ensuring basic human needs are satisfied. According to Afeno, a secure society must work to “promote a viable economic system while at the same time working towards ending physical and structural violence by eliminating socioeconomic discriminations” (2012:37).

The article is relevant to this research project’s themes of socio-economic inequalities and injustices, political/governance issues, ethnoreligious identities and security challenges that will be analysed in later paragraphs. The first claim Afeno makes is that Boko Haram is merely “a product of the resurgence in Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria” (2012:35). Media reports on Boko Haram generally classify the group as Islamic fundamentalists – just like other international extremist groups – with a global agenda to destroy the West and the U.S., as will be seen in the analysis of media reports in Chapter 7. Afeno later expands on his initial claim, adding that Boko Haram’s attacks on the state are “the consequence of the failure of successive governments in Nigeria to sincerely address human development and other pressing national issues” (2012:41). This assertion is arguably more nuanced than the first as it takes into consideration the history of political leadership in Nigeria along with issues of “corruption, poverty, unemployment and all forms of socio-political and economic exclusion,” in order to contextualise the challenge of Boko Haram beyond the label of Islamic fundamentalism (2012:41). There is a reoccurring use of language descriptions of Boko Haram as perpetrators of a “chain of religious violence,” “violent conflicts” and “deadly attacks” throughout the article. This language of violence used in a formal academic discourse arguably feeds the larger narrative that seeks to erase complex meanings and dire material realities informed by a violent colonial past. That is to say, the extensive use of brutish language to describe the actions of Boko Haram, beyond arousing feelings of fear and/or anger in the reader, also works to silence the socio-political concerns and ideologies that constitute the sect’s identity. This erasure is in itself a form of violence, albeit a linguistic one. These types of grotesque language descriptions thus contribute to the collective discourse about Boko Haram.

The second article, by Musa, examines the factors that have aided the emergence and resilience of the Boko Haram sect. It considers the political and socio-economic issues that Nigeria has dealt with from the early 1980s, mainly attributed to the Maitatsine, a “radical Islamist group” which attempted to “impose an Islamic ideology on a multi-religious country” (Musa, 2012:112). Additionally, the writer comments on how new media is used by Boko Haram to their advantage, even though the group “denounce[s] western civilization including technology” (2012:114). The significance of analysing this scholarly text is because its two main topics directly relate to the themes of this research study. Firstly, just as Musa’s work observes political and socio-economic

issues to be “the causes of the Boko Haram violence” (2012:114), Chapter 5 of this research study examines these influential factors. Secondly, Musa’s look at new media as a vehicle for escalating “Boko Haram’s terror campaign” (2012:114) speaks to the contradictions in the group’s identity as addressed earlier in the previous chapter.

The first line sets the tone for the rest of Musa’s article. He starts by stating, “Between 18 and 19 December 1980 a radical Islamist group unleashed a major mayhem in the commercial city of Kano,” a reference to the Maitatsine group (2012:112). Like numerous early academic research into Boko Haram, Musa compares Boko Haram to the Maitatsine group that was most active in the late 19790s and early 80s under its leader Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa whose leadership Musa likens to that of Yusuf. In order to deal with the Boko Haram sect, the writer recommends that the economic situation of Nigerian citizens be improved, by the creation of job opportunities and free enrolment in schools to occupy the youth. This is a common recommendation by academic writing on Boko Haram as a security and development problem.

The third article represents Boko Haram as a terrorist group attempting to “impose religious ideology” on a secular Nigerian state (Bagaji, et al., 2012:33). The title of the journal piece already implicitly suggests that Boko Haram’s “reoccurring bomb attacks” can be seen as acts of terrorism (2012:33). The authors of the article reveal that by 2012, there was still an ‘insufficiently’ explored gap linking the “dynamics of terrorism” with “Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria” (2012:33). The authors also provide a background for several other ‘Islamic terrorist groups’ that have attempted to ‘impose’ their religious ideologies, and how these have threatened the “security and political stability of the country” (2012:34). The relevance of the article to this research is the terrorism perspective that the authors take in order to understand Boko Haram’s identity and its goals. This can be seen in the comparison of the group to the Maitatsine in terms of its objectives and philosophy, whilst its strategic and action-based methods are compared to the Taliban (2012:33). Even though, at the time this was published, the authors were contributing to a gap that had not yet been explored, the terrorism angle has been extensively covered since. The angle tends to do an injustice to understanding the complexities represented by Boko Haram’s struggle, usually by making comparative reductions between the sect and several other national and global Islamic radical groups. The writers of the article contribute to the commonly accepted knowledge of framing Boko Haram as a religious terrorist group similar to others that have come before, such as the Maitatsine and Taliban. Forgivably, at the time of writing the piece, this view on the Boko Haram uprising had not been widely examined. The writers recommend that Nigerian government join forces with the experienced “international community” in order to address the Boko Haram

problem (2012:37). Similar to Musa's advice, the writers see education as playing a key role in ensuring that the youth in the country are not easily manipulated and corrupted by Boko Haram recruitment.

## 6.5 Situational Context of Selected Articles

As with all forms of academic writing, real-world phenomena – whether social, political, economic, ecological or technological – inform and influence the production of research articles. Similar to journalism, academic research is not immune to the influences of a particular time and place in the history of significant events. For this reason, this section briefly covers the significant events that took place in late 2010, 2011 and early 2012, prior to when the selected articles were published. These events are not only referred to in the articles selected for analysis but they also give us a situational context of Boko Haram's activities that informs the arguments of the articles.

According to several news reports, in the month of September 2010 Boko Haram made their way to the Bauchi jail in northern Nigeria where they freed an estimated 721 prisoners, of which 105 were suspected members of the sect. On December 2010, under the new leadership of Shekau, the sect bombed Jos, a predominantly Christian population in central Nigeria, killing over 80 people. From 2011, the first of the three most publicised events was the bombings in northern Nigeria, May 29, during the inaugural event of President Jonathan, where 15 people died with an estimated 40 injured in Abuja and Bauchi, after Boko Haram exploded bombs in several northern towns (UPI, 2011). Mid-year 2011, six people died in a bombing of police headquarters in Abuja and, two months later, the United Nations headquarters experienced a similar attack. This second attack on the U.N. headquarters, which was mentioned in the previous chapter on Boko Haram, received the most international attention. Reports claim that 18 people died and over a dozen that injured (The Guardian, 2012). However, other publications, such as the *New York Times*, reported that the car bomb explosion near the U.N killed 21 people and injured 60 (Nossiter, 2011).

The third event that gained the most attention was the Christmas Eve shootings at churches in Maiduguri and Potiskum. *CNN* reported on the gunmen that opened fire at a Christmas Eve church service killing, 12 people and setting the one church building on fire (CNN, 2012). *The Guardian* reported on a second explosion that targeted a church in Jos (The Guardian writer, 2012). Although Boko Haram did not claim responsibility for the attacks, police officials suspected the group because they had bombed and opened fire on “at least 18 churches across eight northern and central states since 2010” (CNN Staff, 2012). However, according to an interview that the Boko Haram spokesperson had with *The Daily Trust*, *USA Today* reported that the sect *did* claim responsibility for the attacks (2011). Besides the most publicised events, in November of 2011, several Nigerian

local news sites reported that more bombings and shooting attacks took place in Damaturu and Potiskum in Yobe state, mainly targeting police facilities. Additionally, in the same month, “two suicide bombers [blew] themselves up outside military headquarters in Maiduguri” (The Guardian, 2012).

In early January 2012, Boko Haram leader, Shekau, published a video defending his killing of Christians and explaining that their attacks were a retaliation for the events that happened in Jos where Christians killed and ate Muslims (Nairaland Nigerian Forums, 2012). This video was referring to the event where bombings by Boko Haram in Kano killed nearly 180 people, according to several news reports (The Guardian, 2012). Article 3, which calls Boko Haram ‘terrorists,’ was published a month after this event. A few months after this there were bombings in Kaduna on April 8. Kaduna is an area that has experienced its fair share of religious conflicts as it “lies on the dividing line between Nigeria’s largely Christian south and Muslim north” (BBC Africa, 2012). *Associated Press* reported that 38 people died after a bomb was “detonated by a suicide bomber on busy road” (The Guardian, 2012). The article states that “Boko Haram is waging an increasingly bloody fight against security agencies and the public,” as the group remains the suspects of the bombings (AP, 2012). Selected Articles 1 and 2 were published in April and May, respectively, after these major events.

## **6.6 Analysis of Prevalent Themes in Selected Articles that Mirror Research Themes**

The three selected journal articles are analysed using a qualitative coding method to examine how often and in what context particular research themes appeared within the texts. The initial formulation of these themes was done during the proposal writing process, and additions, omissions and corrections occurred during the writing of the first four chapters. The books, journals and reports studied guided this process. By the time the writing of Chapter 6 began, seven themes had been chosen that assisted in the selection of scholarly articles for analysis. These are: African conflicts; Ethno-religious identities; Socio-economic issues/inequalities/injustices; Political/governance problems; National Security challenges; Islamic fundamentalism/radicalism/jihad; and Terrorism/terrorists.

A qualitative coding method revealed that four of these themes dominated the scholarly articles selected for analysis. This section will evaluate the relevance and impact of these themes within their respective contexts, considering how they are used and what they may represent. The four chosen themes have been paired in relation to their contextual similarities, and will appear as subheadings under which an analysis of each article will be provided.

## **Theme 1: Political/Governance Problems and National Security Challenges**

Of the three articles, Afeno's has the most concentrated attention on the security challenges faced by the Nigerian government and its intelligence agencies, which still persist today. I will argue that this thematic concentration is flawed in terms of the Western universalist approach Afeno uses to define Nigeria's problems relating to security threats. In his introduction, Afeno reveals that Nigeria has "witnessed a number of security challenges" since 1999, when the state changed to democratic rule (2012:35). A selection of these challenges includes "militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, political assassinations, arms proliferation, piracy and ethno-religious conflicts" which have resulted in a decline in internal security (2012:35). In this account, Afeno exposes Nigeria as a country riddled with a multitude of problems that have been a threat to the effective functioning of the state for over a decade. Arguably, Afeno's approach to problematizing the 'effective functioning' of the state is indicative of liberal Euro-American constructions of good political governance, which is not without its own exploitative flaws, as described in Chapter 4. Honing in on the major challenge, Afeno states that "the Boko Haram uprising stands out" as the most dangerous threat to Nigeria's security (2012:35). The premise of Afeno's argument is that socio-economic discriminations are rife in Nigeria's northern states and are thus "likely to create security threats by encouraging conflict" that the state continuously fails to handle due to its governing 'weakness' since 1999 (2012:36). The author measures this weakness by the government's inability to employ effective counter-terrorism strategies and create legislation and policies to address the situation. Interestingly, in an article published two years later, which was mentioned earlier in the overview of Afeno's collection of works, he argues that Nigeria's counter-insurgency initiatives fail to protect civilians and instead violate human rights. Theoretically, a counter-terrorism approach to insurgencies is a simplistic and narrow lens that tends to ignore the historical context in which Nigeria's multiple identities, socio-economic inequalities and lived realities were shaped and re-shaped (see Mamdani, 1996; Hoogvelt, 1997). However, Afeno's article does consider socio-economic challenges as driving factors of the problem of insecurity. Additionally, Afeno sees the weakness of the Nigerian government as apparent from the "controversies and violent reactions that followed the outcome of the [2007 general] elections" where politicians had been responsible for unethical and coercive behaviour against opponents during the election run-up (2012:37).

Conversely, when the government *does* deploy police, military and security forces to protect citizens of the state, they "use excessive force to arrest, detain, and possibly even kill anyone" in order to control the security threats, which consequently worsens the situation for frightened civilians (2012:40). Afeno's take on the themes of political problems and security challenges is thus

written from the perspective of academic research that focuses on issues of politics, security and policy in order to analyse conflict triggers. The flaw in this approach comes from the universalised theoretical framework it borrows from, which belongs to the Western canon of Political Sciences and Conflict Resolution discourse. Such an approach does not consider the backlash effects of imposing a neoliberal and democratised form of governance on post-colonial African states. This perspective is expanded on further in later paragraphs, which examine the idea of ‘weak’ states and ‘good governance’ that appear in Afeno’s article.

In relation to the themes of Political/Governance Problems and National Security Challenges, Musa’s article takes a closer look at “the changing political and socio-economic situations” in Nigeria since the early 1980s and the ways in which the “standard of living continued to deteriorate” (2012:111). Musa makes reference to the number of attacks that the ‘radical Islamist’ Maitatsine group was responsible for between 1980 and 1985, resulting in the destruction of “property worth several millions of dollars” in one year alone (2012:111). According to Musa, the Boko Haram sect re-emerged in 2009 as the ‘Nigerian Taliban’ with traits and ideals similar to the Maitatsine sect “in their manner of emergence, operation and enabling situations” which were “imported from neighbouring countries” (2012:113-115). Musa argues that these radical groups were spreading a ‘version of Islam’ that defied the country’s democratic constitution that values “freedom of worship/belief” (2012:115). However, Musa does not clarify what version of Islam these radical groups follow, leaving room for uncertainty and speculation, which often feeds into the Islamophobia phenomenon.

On the theme of political problems, one of the interviewees in Musa’s phenomenological study, a Nigerian living in the U.K., claims that since the north of Nigeria produces more presidents than any other region, it is in the interest of the political leaders to ensure that the masses are “kept illiterate and poor so that they can manipulate them” (2012:115). Instead of investigating this claim, Musa concludes that the “northern political class” ensure that “people are not given education while poverty is made rampant” (2012:15). There is therefore a visible informational gap in the author’s exploration of the two research themes, where he relies on the subjective word of his interviewees, and a comparative narrative between the journey of Maitatsine’s Marwa and Boko Haram’s Yusuf, in order to formulate conclusions about the motives behind the Boko Haram sect.

Echoing the sentiments of the two other authors, Bagaji and his co-writers assert that Nigeria’s “socio-economic, security and political stability [...] is constantly under threat” due to the ethno-religious conflicts of the past two decades (2012:34). According to the writers, non-state terrorism, is often linked to factors like the unequal “allocation or distribution of public resources, poverty,



and political frustration” (2012:37). The writers reveal that some people have blamed “the unhealthy contest for political offices and manipulation of the youths” for Boko Haram attacks, since they believe that the political class want to “wreck vengeance in order to destabilise the political system” (2012:39). Beyond this, Nigerians are displeased with the way in which their government has handled the ‘menace’ of Boko Haram (2012:39). The use of the word menace as an alternative to ‘threat’ generally denotes ill, unwanted and immoral behaviour that society shuns. Boko Haram are therefore depicted here as the unwanted, the outliers, the rebels. In earlier paragraphs, the writers claim that Nigeria’s “inherent unsettled political and economic environment” is a “chaotic situation” that the sect has further aggravated (2012:33). Calling the state of the nation inherently unsettled and chaotic speaks to the pathological language often used to describe tragedies/conflicts that befall African states. This reveals the writers’ own influence by Eurocentric presuppositions when it comes to writing about African conflicts.

Continuing with this trend, the writers declare that Boko Haram “has infected the North-Central,” and like cancer “is spreading to Southern Nigeria” (2012:33). This comparison to cancer, which is biologically hereditary rather than infectious/contagious, is noteworthy. When cancer does ‘spread’ as metastatic cancer, it is usually within an already-infected body and spreads to other internal organs. The authors might then be comparing Nigeria to a body, with the northern state being an organ infected by the cancer that is Boko Haram, which may soon ‘spread to the south.’ Cancer is usually inherited and lies benign before it becomes malignant and poses a fatal threat. Therefore, what the authors arguably infer is that Nigeria’s role as the host of the cancerous Boko Haram is expected as most African states inherit this pathology. This pathology would similarly apply with other violent groups that Nigeria has encountered internally in the past. A postcolonial reading of this language reveals its influence by the Hegelian interpretation of history, expanded on in Chapter 2, where Africa is ruled by nature, and reason is absent. Olufemi Taiwo, appearing in Chapter 2, captured this well when she explained that, according to Hegel, nature in Africa “rules in its blindest fury in [the] form of famine, or the continual recrudescence or persistence of disease and pestilences of unknown origins and severe repercussions (Taiwo, 1998:5). Bagaji and his co-writers describing the northern state of Nigeria as infected by a cancer is thus a common language in journalistic and scholarly reports on African problems, even in contemporary texts.

## **Theme 2: Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism**

Afeno’s article introduces Boko Haram as “a product of the resurgence in Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria” in the context of the threat it poses by “unleashing terror on Nigerians,

particularly Christians, and government establishments” (2012:35). This is arguably a reductionist introduction because it frames the sect through the parochial lens of a religious terrorist organisation, a descriptive profile that was problematized in Chapter 5 due to the nuances in Boko Haram’s identity and objectives. The author explains that the 1999 introduction of the Sharia legal system in northern Nigerian cities, like Kano, Kaduna and Jos, resulted in ethno-religious conflicts “between the mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani majority and Christian minority groups” (2012:36). Beyond this, Afeno makes no attempt to inspect the complex historical factors that play into conflicts that are simply described as ‘ethno-religious,’ which this study has well assessed earlier in Chapter 3. This disregard reveals a clear injustice in multiple academic efforts that produce research work that supposedly provides insight and context to a complex phenomenon like Boko Haram and the political state of Nigeria.

In Article 2, Musa attempts to “explain the emergence of the extremists Islamist Boko Haram sect” through an analysis of the factors that have motivated its rise in northern Nigeria (2012:111). A brief historical backdrop of the Maitatsine sect, which attempted to “impose Islamic ideology on a multi-religious country... [through] a series of violent religious disturbances,” assists this analysis (2012:111-112). Musa quotes Kukah (1993), who refers to this version of Islamic doctrine as a warped “mishmash of theological absurdities [bordering] on sorcery” (cited in Musa, 2012:111). Again, no attempt is made to detail the ways in which the Islam practiced by radical groups differs from that followed by the majority of the Muslim population, not only in Nigeria but across the world. Instead, to differentiate it, Musa chooses to quote an author who uses an uninformative, ridiculing and Othering-type of language to describe a religious ideology ascribed to Islam. This undifferentiated framing of Islam by the trusted, knowledge-producing field of academic research perpetuates the reductive idea that Islam is a completely violent and uncivilised religion. This is despite significant and available knowledge, covered in Chapter 5, that radical Islamic groups represent just two smaller fundamentalist branches in Islam and that the majority of Sunni Islamic followers do not follow or encourage the actions of these radical groups.

Comparing the late Maitatsine leader, Marwa, and Boko Haram founder, Yusuf, Musa claims that both these men “went to Chad and Niger Republic to study the Qur’an” (2012:112). While they were doing their Qur’anic studies, they “developed radical views that were abhorrent to Westernization and modernization” before returning to Nigeria and importing these ‘extremist ideas’ in order to establish their own respective sects (2012:112). Therefore, according to Musa, the ‘ultimate goal’ of both the sects, was to “spread radical ideas, alien to mainstream Islam [...] by means of violence” (2012:115). Referring to the majority of nonviolent Muslims as belonging to

'mainstream Islam' is the only attempt made by the author to suggest that the radical goals of groups like Boko Haram are 'alien' to the Muslim population. However, the use of the term 'alien' further works to delegitimise the nuanced goals of the sect that are beyond religious extremism and are, in fact, the result of a dissatisfaction with political leaders, persistent economic inequalities and corrupt government practices. According to Musa, the 'campaign of terror' by Boko Haram gains followers through the manipulation of people using Nigeria's weak economic situation to win them over. The purpose of this is to, first, attack the state, and secondly, use religion to set Muslims against Christians. What Musa omits from this conflict are the instances where Christians have also targeted Muslims, with bombings and arson attacks on churches (Walker, 2012). Furthermore, Muslims have also suffered due to the actions of Boko Haram. The polarization of the conflict that Musa has constructed where Christians are victims and Muslims are the perpetrators is, therefore, a false representation that reduces the conflicts to religious prejudices.

Terrorism is the overarching theme and focus in Article 3 by Bagaji and his co-authors, and Boko Haram is at the centre of the analysis. The authors state that, despite the Nigerian National Assembly passing the 2011 Anti-Terrorism Bill that allows the state to arrest those responsible for terrorism related offences, Boko Haram attacks did not decrease; instead, they may spread to the Nigerian south. The authors claim that, in the context of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria, other scholars had not sufficiently explored the 'dynamics of terrorism' in the time before the article was published. Since the 1980s, "Nigeria has been engulfed in uncountable religious crises" and the authors list over 15 of these that have been "attempts at imposing a religious ideology" (2012:34). This explanation does well to provide a backdrop to Nigeria's history when it comes to religious conflicts. Although the authors give no further detail to contextualise these conflicts, they do reveal that the state has dealt with materially similar issues in the past, and that Boko Haram is not a phenomenon that materialised in a vacuum or out of a global terrorist trend.

The authors provide a description for acts of terrorism noting that its main aim is to create the greatest possible publicity through acts of violence and thus draw "the attention of the local populace, the government and the world to their cause" (2012:35). The targets chosen by terrorists usually symbolise the structures, institutions and members they oppose. According to the authors, the terrorists "do not see their act as evil" since they believe they are fighting for a greater cause, by whatever means necessary (2012:35). Later on, the authors assume the voice of radical groups and state that these groups believe that "the moral decadence and evil in the society" is linked to the adoption of Western civilisation and that "in order to curb such evil, an Islamic society must be entrenched by destroying modern political institutions and infrastructures" (2012:37). In all these

instances, 'evil' is an interesting word choice, especially since the subject is religious terrorism. This brings into question the religious and moral beliefs of the writers and the ways in which they may influence the angle of the article.

A few lines later, after listing a number of terrorist attacks in European countries, the authors describe terrorism as a "ravaging fire for many societies" (2012:36). The language of a 'ravaging fire' underpins theologically Christian imageries since, Biblically, such a place describes hell. In this instance, the voice of the authors is seemingly religiously inclined towards prejudice against the actions of Boko Haram, which they have defined as Islamic radicalism. On the other hand, this language could simply be a use of nature metaphors since, in the abstract the authors described Nigeria as having been "stormed by large scale and unimaginable bomb attacks by the Boko Haram movement" (2012:33). By common description, storms are natural and bombs are not. However, both these phenomena have the potential of causing utter destruction and great loss. The word 'unimaginable' used to compound this metaphor further emphasises the intense impact of Boko Haram attacks for the reader. The implications of this use of nature imagery arguably speaks back to Hegel's interpretation of African history from his work on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1991) where nature and its climatically harsh elements dominates Africa disallowing intellectual progress and historical development.

The writers of Article 3 explain that, since terrorist attacks have impacted "great countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom in 2001 and 2005," there is the possibility of a bleak future where "our societies are among the battle fields and our people among the targets" (2012:36). It is not clear which societies the writers are referring to, as or who is included and who is excluded from "our people." One can only assume that this dire prediction of the future includes people who are members of the terrorist organisations, however, not as part of the victimised group. This implication creates an Othering of disenfranchised groups that resort to joining radical sects in order to flee their socio-economic plight. The mention of 'great countries' that represent global superpowers makes this Othering even more apparent. These countries are often considered places where valuable lives exist due to the global media attention they receive whenever they are victims of tragedies. The authors give further examples of terrorist attacks in other, mostly Western countries, such as the Bali bombing in 2002, the Middle School attack in Russia, the 2004 bombing of a rail station in Spain, and the 2005 transit system attacks in London (2012:36). This is why the use of the U.S. and U.K. as examples of future battlefields for terrorist attacks is so significant. Moreover, by comparison, the authors state that the Nigerian government has not done nearly enough to curb the Boko Haram problem, unlike the "serious response" that other international nations have had to terrorist attacks (2012:39).

## **6.7 Analysing Ambiguities, Exclusions and Assumptions to Reveal Reductionist Representations**

Linguistic tools such as ambiguities, exclusions, insinuations, and emotive language in the form of stereotypes and hyperboles can be used in CDA in order to examine how power and ideology works in the production of texts. In this section, these tools offer an insight into the discursive structures of the scholarly texts and the socio-political effects of their use. Furthermore, analysing the use of these tools exposes hidden meanings and helps to create an awareness about the misinformation, misinterpretation, and reductionist perspectives exercised by the scholarly writers. Within the analysis, ambiguities will refer to vagueness and uncertainty in the statements made by the authors that may sometimes carry a double meaning. The effectiveness of ambiguities in academic texts is that they can function as suggestive statements that the reader is expected to interpret using information that may have appeared earlier in the text. By doing so, the reader's interpretation can reinforce the dominant ideas that are prevalent in the text.

Exclusions in the analysis will focus on the contextual information that is omitted by the authors, which would otherwise provide a detailed and complex understanding of the Boko Haram situation. As much as the analysis deals with representation, exclusion also extends to important elements of the Boko Haram insurgency that the authors do not represent. Exclusion is an effective tool used by academic writers, because it is assumed that an academic text would include all relevant material for the benefit of research. However, the exclusion of some information assists in framing the writers' sometimes-predetermined arguments.

A look at assumptions in the analysis reveals certain ideas postured by the authors, which are not wholly explicit but imply something about the subject that is spoken of. Assumptions used by the authors are often borrowed from pre-existing ideas about the subject that are then reinforced to appear as common truths. The analysis will also include a study of assumptions that come in the form of predictions and insinuations. On the one hand, the writers of the three articles make use of bleak predictions in relation to the future impact of Boko Haram for Nigeria and the world. On the other hand, insinuations highlight the present perceptions about the sect and its global terrorist affiliations. The effectiveness of assumptions, together with the specific predictions and insinuations, is that they have the power of constructing a particular identity for Boko Haram, which is hardly ever interrogated or contested.

## Article 1: “The Boko Haram Uprising and Insecurity in Nigeria: Intelligence Failure or Bad Governance?”

This article appears in a magazine-styled journal and thus contains a number of pictures throughout. For instance, before the article’s introduction there is a picture of a mass funeral for the victims of the 2011 Christmas day church bombing, for which Boko Haram claimed responsibility. Each page that follows has an image, separately showing, a group of captured Boko Haram members, a community of Nigerians striking over poverty and unemployment, “unemployed and disgruntled youth” in arms, and Nigeria’s military and police forces. These pictures are far from random, as they mirror the issues that the article tackles. The article is broken up into short paragraphs, in between these paragraphs are subheadings and headline highlights. The three headline highlights are gripping, offer an insight into the main claims made by the writer and speak to the tone of the article.

The first headline reads, “The consequent decline in internal security and the reactions it has elicited from the state raises important questions about the effectiveness of governance and security agencies in the country” (Afenso, 2012:36). This decline in internal security is a reference to the Boko Haram uprising that began in July 2009. The second highlight, which expands on the first claims, “The Boko Haram uprising is not only a security issue. It has also exposed the weakness of governance in the countries like the United States, Britain, China and France that contributed military assistance to help find the Chibok girls that were kidnapped and to further hunt down the Boko Haram members responsible did not return any results. However, this failure on their part is never recalled or considered when the Nigerian government is criticised and measured as weak for not capturing Boko Haram and eliminating the problem. Notably, the use of the word ‘weak’ often appears in Eurocentric criticisms of African states and leadership.

Afenso’s assimilation of the language used by the West to analyse the political situation in Nigeria fails to challenge the ways in which African states are continuously positioned as failing, dysfunctional and capable of collapse, while African societies are perceived as delinquent, uncivilised and Other. Moreover, Afenso describes Nigerian governance and intelligence as bad, weak and a failure. The use of this kind of language is arguably a colonial residue revealing a period when a plethora of work by European academic writers compared the political and economic functioning of African states to North American and West European states. The conclusion reached by most of these writers was of the weakness and inability of African states to lead themselves, due to the “alleged deviancy of African societies to promote and justify their political and economic domination by Western states and other international actors” (Hill, 2007:139). However, it would be

uncritical to disregard the fact that African states do deal with problems pertaining to ruthless dictatorships, corrupt political leaders and the inefficient use of local resources by the leaders to develop their respective countries in the era of neoliberal capitalism. These, and several other contemporary factors, affect the functioning of African states, as observed by both local (Nigerian) and international analysts. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the colonial conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries influenced the factors that have prevailed since post-independence. A number of academics have indicated that the socio-economic systems, political configurations and principles that were advanced during the colonial period in African states were later oppositional to the development of a functionally democratic governance (Ki-Zerbo, 1996; Chabal, 1992; Amin, 1990; Ekeh, 1975; Turok, 1987; Rodney, 1972).<sup>57</sup>

The last highlight recommends, “A secure society must promote a viable economic system while at the same time working towards ending physical and structural violence by eliminating socio-economic discriminations” (2012:41). The reason why Nigeria has not been able to achieve this is, according to Afeno, due to “the failure of successive governments in Nigeria to sincerely address human development and other pressing national issues” (2012:41). The writer acknowledges that the former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, shared these views regarding the failure of Nigeria’s governance during a visit to the country in 2009. Afeno’s recommendations about the “state of insecurity” can be summarised by his endorsement of “inclusive democracy and good governance,” which the administrative and political leadership of the country would have to follow. It would be useful for this analysis to examine from where the notion of ‘good governance’ is derived, and what it means in the context of African states, if it can apply at all. A paper by Said Adejumobi, titled “Africa and the Challenges of Democracy and Good Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” explains that the use of the concept “‘good governance’ in recent times came from the World Bank” (2000:3). This came from the belief that the reason the market economic reform policies recommended by the World Bank failed when introduced in African states was due to a lack of good governance. These policies refer to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (ASPs) that were resisted by a number of political leaders in Africa who, according to the World Bank, serve their own interests and do not hold themselves accountable for their country’s development problems (World Bank, 1989:60-61).

According to the World Bank, the only way to rectify this failure of African states and practice good governance is through institution building, “the shrinking of the state and engendering support for non-state actors (Civil Society)” (Adejumobi, 2000:3). However, as Ademoji argues, this

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<sup>57</sup> These references are cited in Said Adejumobi’s “Africa and the Challenges of Democracy and Good Governance in the 21st Century” (2000), which appears prominently in the paragraph that follows.

version of good governance certified by the World Bank and similar global entities is under the condition of unethical and contradictory measures. Firstly, the improved SAPs that the Bank wished to implement would encourage “ruthless repression and dismemberment” of civil society, intrude on social security and welfare, and promote a decline in “public morale and fraud with depressing low wages and salaries of public servants,” as a number of authors between 1991 and 1998 revealed (2000:4). SAPs also “reduce the capacity of the state to control and tighten rules governing Government-corporate relations” (2000:4). The second reason why the World Bank’s project of good governance is questionable is that, just like the I.M.F, it is there to enable the proper functioning of the political environment for the neoliberal market, which is not necessarily for the benefit of the African people, but is rather in the interest of neoliberal capital (Rudebeck & Tornquist, 1996:8). With all that said, the Western-centric normative benchmark of democracy, ‘good governance’ and a “viable economic system” (2012:39) that Afeno concludes with as a solution to Nigeria’s insecurity problem encourages all the contemporary Western values that the Boko Haram sect reject. The fact that they are belligerently opposed to the neoliberal and globalist agenda of the West in African states is arguably one of the many reasons that Boko Haram has been added to the global list of terrorist groups.

As mentioned earlier, Afeno’s article details the “series of ethno-religious and resource-based conflicts” that began threatening Nigeria’s security from 1999, the year when Sharia was introduced in Zamfara state and soon adopted in twelve other northern states (2012:38). According to Afeno, the consequence of this was violent clashes between “mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani majority and Christian minority groups” (2012:38). What Afeno fails to mention is how Nigeria also returned to civil rule in 1999 breeding a class of political leaders who began corrupting public funds and not fulfilling the socio-economic needs of the disadvantaged. If this is taken into account, the conflicts that occurred in 1999 and on were not only religiously motivated but were also responses to other socio-economic and political changes in Nigeria.

The author concludes the article by stating that the Nigerian state has done little to tackle the issues of “poverty, unemployment and all forms of socio-economic exclusions” which have influence Boko Haram attacks (2012:41). In the second article, Musa similarly concludes that these factors of economic injustice allow Boko Haram to manipulate Nigerian people. What both these authors fail to reveal is that the other reason Boko Haram’s recruitment has been successful is because the militant group also provides “education, basic services and informal-sector jobs to its supporters most of whom are marginalised people with little education” (Mustapha, 2012). These are services that the writers accuse the Nigerian government of not providing, and yet there is a lack of acknowledgement of the ways in which Boko Haram members fill in this gap for disadvantaged



groups that feel neglected by the government. By excluding this detail in the Boko Haram narrative, the writers fall prey to reductive representations of the group propagated by Western news reports that do not speak to the deep, multi-dimensional complexity of conflicts in the African context.

Article 2: “Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria”

Musa introduces his article with a historical backdrop of the Maitatsine, “a radical Islamist group [that] unleashed major mayhem” in the 1980s (2012:112). He follows this by tracing the history and radical Islamic journey of the sect’s founder, Muhammadu Marwa, which is then compared to that of Yusuf’s journey over a decade later. The article highlights “the striking similarities between the Maitatsine and the Boko Haram sect in their manner of emergence, operations and enabling situations” as far as their traditional Islamic beliefs are concerned (2012:113). What the author fails to identify is the specific Islamic group that the two sects belong to, which – as discussed earlier in the previous chapter – is the Salafi/Wahhabist movement that falls under the Sunni Islam branch. The exclusion of this detail exposes a failure to reveal that most radical Islamic groups that are considered “violent terrorist” fall under a smaller Jihadist category of the Salafi-Wahhabist movement. The two larger categories are Purists, who do not concern themselves with politics, and Activists, who get involved in politics (Alexandria & Amman, 2015). There is thus a level of reductionism from scholars when groups like Boko Haram are described under the broad banner of Islam, and are only further distinguished by the terms ‘radical’ and ‘fundamentalist’ without being placed in their appropriate religious and ideological contexts.

Musa’s research is a phenomenological study involving interviews with local Nigerians and others living abroad in the U.K. A number of the interviewees argue that Boko Haram’s transformation is baffling because “people without any Western education cannot be so efficient in using new media” or “in making and detonating bombs” (2012:121). The author thus concludes that “despite not having proper western education” the Boko Haram sect have managed to handle their “violent campaign professionally” (2012:121-122). These claims suggest two reductive insinuations held by the author. The first comes from the belief that institutionalised Western education is the only way to access the knowledge needed in a technologically advanced era. Beyond this, there is no further attempt by the author to investigate the alternatives to the rhetoric that places Western education as the primary source of modern, ‘advanced’ knowledge. An examination of these alternatives would arguably give an insight into the educational history and operations of Boko Haram members. This would go beyond the oversold narrative of street children, unemployed youth, the impoverished and uneducated lower class being easy targets for recruitment, which has often resulted in Boko Haram members being represented as uneducated, uncivilised and irrational. The second insinuation is

apparent in the author's suggestion that Boko Haram handled their "violent campaign professionally" because they were seemingly more literate in their use of Western technologies than previous reports assumed. The implication of this view is that, although Boko Haram is considered uncivilised and aggressively violent by nature, their professional attacks – attributed to their exposure to Western technologies – give them a recognisable edge of sophistication. This view is underpinned by the common Hegelian association made between the West and advanced civilisations, wherein psychologically positive characteristics of logic, rationality, intelligence and innovation originate from Western civilisations before they are taught to, or adopted by, the Other. In this instance, the 'professional' handling of a violent campaign implies that Boko Haram has adopted the sophistication of the West through their use of advanced technologies.

### Article 3: Boko Haram and the Recurring Bomb Attacks in Nigeria: Attempt to Impose Religious Ideology through Terrorism?

The angle taken by Bagaji and his co-writers is a focus on the religious terrorist element present within Boko Haram's ideology and actions. The writers provide a foundation for their analysis by centring the significance of religion in the Nigerian context, to expose its influence on the country's politics and to position it as a primal factor in terrorist insurgencies. They note that even "political offices are calculated on the basis of religious affiliation" which often influences voting behaviour (2012:34). This implies that the way in which political leaders handle religious hostilities and conflicts is a major determinant of how well the state governs and how effective it is in dealing with a uniquely Nigerian problem. However, what the writers fail to represent is that beyond religion and ideology, socio-economic injustices and deprivation are drivers of extremism against the state. This is not unique to Nigeria's situation, but has also been found – in a 2014 study by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) – to apply to the radicalisation in Somalia, wherein Somali's who were former al-Shabaab fighters explained their reasons for joining the sect (Abdile, 2014). Likewise, the ISS has studied the reasons behind radicalisation in Kenya and France revealing similar results for why locals join sects like al-Shabaab and ISIS.

The authors of Article 3 make comparisons and links between Boko Haram and other Salafist Muslim groups like the former Maitatsine movement, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda. The links made between Boko Haram and global terrorist groups draw attention away from the deeply rooted, local Nigerian problems of corrupt politicians and socio-economic inequalities in the north to which Boko Haram is also a reaction. Political leaders also seem to use this tactic in order to displace their responsibility. Former President Goodluck Jonathan labelled Boko Haram as a threat that is "part of

a global jihadist movement” (Louw-Vaudran, 2015).<sup>58</sup> In line with this view, Nigeria’s national security responded to the Boko Haram insurgency with repression, militancy and extrajudicial means, negating the complexity of the insecurity in the country, which Musa highlighted in the second article.

The authors often fail to substantiate made claims by expanding on their premises. In the context of Nigeria’s countless crises, the writers reveal that “many have thus challenged the capability of the Nigerian state to defend its own citizens and territorial integrity” (2012:34). This provides little information regarding from whom these challenges come. Again, when locating the places for the potential presence of terrorism, the writers state that it occurs in “ordinary institutions as well as in unusual situations,” and do not expand from there by naming these ‘unusual situations’ (2012:35). Later, the authors claim that Yusuf used “his membership in other fundamentalist groups” to prepare himself for his leadership role in the Boko Haram movement (2012:38). Besides the Taliban, which is mentioned in earlier paragraphs, the writers mention no other fundamentalist groups that Yusuf was part of before his own self-driven, “radical and provocative preaching” (2012:38). These gaps in the claims made by the authors signify an assumptive writing style used throughout the scholarly piece. This is even more apparent in the following statements:

There is an account that linked the leader of Boko Haram to the Taliban or Afghanistan, but he severed the relationship. Well, the reason why Yusuf Mohammed may have decided to sever his ties with the Taliban – if in fact, he actually did- could have been informed not by his opposition to their extremist tendencies, but rather by his desire to realise his long-term dream of reform, which, perhaps, was being slowed down by others who were not as passionate as he was.

(Bagaji, et al., 2012:38)

...it could be that the Boko Haram modelled itself after the Taliban simply to acknowledge its source of inspiration. It could also be that it was meant to attract sympathy and support from the Taliban or related groups. Viewed from another perspective, it could also be that the links actually exist.

(Bagaji, et al., 2012:38)

The recurrent use of ‘could be’s’ reveal a modality where the degree of certitude is low and the credibility of the authors’ authority on the subject is questionable. These examples clearly fall under speculative theorising where the authors create links from assumptions that are accepted as truths.

A similar trend can be observed in Musa’s article in reference to Yusuf’s past:

In the case of Muhammad Yusuf, it is helpful to recall that he dropped out of secondary school and became more committed to Islamic education in neighbouring Chad and Niger Republic. Moreover, he became exposed to radical ideas, which he returned to Nigeria to spread by attacking the authorities, whose actions and inactions might have played a role in his failure to acquire western education.

(Musa, 2012:121)

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<sup>58</sup> Another example of an African leader linking a terror from his own country to a global terrorist organisation is Mali president, Ibrihim Boubacar Keïta, who was “seen marching alongside French President François Hollande at the symbolic march of over 40 world leaders in Paris on Sunday 11 January, following the recent terror attacks in the French capital” (Louw-Vaudran, 2015).

In this instance, Musa suggests that Yusuf's gripe was with authorities who, by virtue of representing an institution based on Western principals, were to blame for his inability to "acquire Western education," leading to his formation of an anti-Western extremist group. This is merely speculation as the author provides no source to substantiate this claim, apart from noting that Yusuf "reached out to people in impoverished parts" of Nigeria upon his return (2012:121).

On a different note, using Walter (1972) and Danibo (2009) as references, Bagaji and his co-authors note that conventional Western socio-political thought usually defines 'systems of terror' as 'abnormal' under political processes and conditions that are considered 'normal' (2012:35). By pointing this out, the writers have made a significant statement. This is because, what falls outside the Western prescribed paradigm of understanding is often misconceived as uniquely 'exotic' and 'abnormal' because of how little it is understood. International news reports often paint Boko Haram in the same mysterious light because they struggle to understand Nigeria's context. These same reports do not provide a historical backdrop of similar circumstances of conflict and radicalism from Nigeria's past, or investigate what factors are responsible for these. Consequently, the portrayal of the Boko Haram phenomenon is often that of an individual case of 'terrorism' that has been influenced by the global trend of fundamentalist, extremist groups that continue to 'attack' or pose a threat to Western states. Correlatively, when 'terrorism' is not used to describe the Boko Haram sect, it is often substituted with 'activists' or 'Jihadist', as noted by Harmon (2000) and Ojukwu (2011) (cited in Bagaji, et al.,2012:36). In the language of the West 'Jihad' is synonymous with the violent Other, in relation to the threat to Western states. Furthermore, the use of the word 'Jihad' is often reductionist, functioning as a schema to accommodate the prescriptions Western knowledge has attached to it, such as "Islamic terrorists" and "anti-Western extremism." As mentioned previously, this reductionism leaves out information that clarifies that Jihadists belong to a particularly small Salafist branch of Islam that does not speak to the beliefs of the majority Muslim population. Additionally, this reductionism often motivates or reinforces Islamophobia that is prevalent in the U.S. and European states.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

This chapter performed a critical discourse analysis through various levels of discussion and analysis; from a broad contextualisation of authors, publications, situational contexts and socio-political influences, to a thematic selection of significant topical discourses, framing and representation for examination. As the moments of critical analysis and interrogation have shown, even scholarly research on Boko Haram produced by African authors is constructed under the lens or gaze of a Euro-American libertarian framework. This framework has the authors attributing the actions of Boko Haram to a supposedly common pathology of violence, dysfunction and bad

governance in African states, with an insufficient historical contextualisation of colonial and post-colonial factors that have acted as catalysts for the unstable socio-political climate and identity-based conflicts in Nigeria. This framing is most apparent in the discursive strategies – assumptions and presumptions, ambiguities and omissions – the authors used to promote their arguments. The insufficiency of African scholarly research work to appropriately capture these dynamic complexities, demonstrates a reoccurring trend in research on African conflicts to negate the relationship between the continent’s ‘dark’ past with its flickering present. Moreover, this results in a failure to consider the ‘victims’ of the colonial past (Nigerian citizens, including Boko Haram) who are not necessarily the direct ‘perpetrators’ of the post-colonial present, as the lines and motivations between the past and present have been blurred by ethno-religious identities as well as socio-cultural and politico-economic material factors.

## CHAPTER 7

### 7 An Analysis of Boko Haram's Representation by Selected Euro-American and African Print Media Publications

Despite Africa being a continent known for its abundantly rich history, socio-political and economic struggles and accomplishments, as well as a diverse amalgamation of ethno-cultural identities, it still remains packaged reductively by ancient myths and modern misrepresentations. In the eyes of the rest of the world, Africa remains bound to the image of the global 'Other' despite the research, study and exploration that has been done to understand and reimagine the continent and its people. In their introductory chapter to *Reframing Contemporary Africa: Politics, Culture and Society in the Global Era*, Peri Soyinka-Airewele and Rita Kiki Edozie attempt to determine some of the possible reasons for what they describe as a "persisting ignorance" in the way Africa has been historically framed (2010:4). The authors argue that these reasons are rooted in "notions of European racial, social, technological, economic, and cultural exceptionalism," the dominant legacies left over from the imperial conquest, as well as the "continuing dynamics of global power and interests" that have shaped the "ideologies, political economies, and linguistic methods used in imagining and defining the African continent" (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie:2010:4-5). This chapter will take a closer look at how these 'dynamics of global power and interests' have informed media production and its expression and narration of African stories, before delving into an analysis of articles selected from globally leading news publications. The analysis will examine print media's colonialist representations of Islam and Nigeria, with respect to Boko Haram, in order to reveal the reductionist discourse promulgated by internationally renowned publications in comparison to the complex narratives that make up Nigeria's history, as well as the negated complexities of Boko Haram.

#### 7.1 Development of Broadcasting Media in Africa

Broadcasting in Africa as it currently exists would not have been developed and standardised in the way it is without the influence of Western societies and models, which express themselves in the universalised values, attitudes and practices apparent in African newspapers, radio and television programming (Nyamnjoh, 2005:43).<sup>59</sup> This influence includes the presence of Anglo-Saxon and Latin Press cultures are reflected in the journalistic styles used by African media practitioners who have married these colonial influences "with African values [such as tolerance and interdependence] to produce a melting pot of media cultures" (2005:39). Despite this seemingly positive influence of the West on broadcast productions and media values adopted by African

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<sup>59</sup> In *Africa's Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging* (2005), Nyamnjoh points to Britain, France and the USA as "colonial and/or economic powers" that have been instrumental in shaping the methodological look and feel of broadcasting in Africa and the rest of the world (2005:43).

broadcasters, concern arose during the 1960s and 1970s that “the United States and a few other First World nations dominated media to their advantage” (Straubhaar, 2010:261). This domination expressed itself in a number of ideas that were promoted by the United States media: “that there should be a relatively free flow of news and cultural products (television, movies, music, advertisements), that entertainment was a primary function of media, and that commercially operated media would benefit most countries’ development” (2010:261). This meant that the structure of international mass media allowed the flow of information to come predominantly from First World countries and target the ‘other’ countries from the rest of the world. A number of studies have observed that the flow of news had largely been a one-way process “controlled by the four large news agencies (AP, UPI, Agence France Presse, and Reuters)” feeding the broadcasting stations in the rest of the world (2010:262).

Straubhaar notes that there has been an attempt to explain the reason for this one-way flow of media information using two distinct bodies of theory. The first is Dependency theory, as mentioned here before, in relation to the precarious socio-economic situation in which Third World or developing countries seem to find themselves. The theory is termed Cultural Dependence in the media context. It focuses particular attention on “the ideological role of media as part of the cultural superstructure that results from the economic relations of dependency” (2010:262). The way in which the global core capitalise on the information and content that it broadcasts to the Third World is arguably a form of controlling hegemony. This is intended to keep the people of the developing nations at ease with the dependent relationship that they have with the industrialized Western world that exploits them and their economy. Those who hold power in the First World nations “compete to use media and other cultural or informational structures to set a dominant ideology” (Gramsci, 1971). However, this theory is incomplete due its negation of the audience. Because the theory prioritizes media structures and economic factors, it does little to consider how an audience interacts with media text and content (Straubhaar, 2010:262). Admittedly, this is a simplistic version of Cultural Dependency theory. More sophisticated and complex versions of this theory exist which recognise that even within a dependency context, there is room for developing nations to grow and create their own cultural content.<sup>60</sup> Nigeria is the most vibrant example of this, with a booming film industry that has reached international status, described under the cultural and regional specific genre of Nollywood. Additionally, Nigeria’s print and publication industry produces its own local content written by writers and journalist coming out of the African continent. For this reason, although the Cultural Dependency theory of development may fit Nigeria’s historical narrative, it does not adequately describe its contemporary reality, as far as media control is concerned.

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<sup>60</sup> See F.H. Cardoso’s “Associated dependent-development: Theoretical and Practical Implications” appearing in *Authoritarian Brazil* (1973), edited by A. Stephan.

The second theory recognised by Straubhaar is Media Imperialism, which is “Marxist in orientation” and focuses more on the “imbalances of power and media flows” as opposed to the structure of informational dissemination (Boyd-Barret, 1980; Lee, 1980). Although less structural, theorists Boyd-Barret and Lee devised ways of examining levels of media imperialism empirically, which gave room for a number of particular and respectively specific possibilities. Media Imperialism states that, theoretically, there exists “an unbalanced set of relationships between countries in the sphere of media” and this is unique to the context of each country, even within the African continent (Boyd-Barret, 1980:51). In contrast to the “dichotomous state of dependency or dominance” that is theorised by Cultural Dependency, Media Imperialism theory recognises that a variety of unequal power relationships can exist within a state which can influence the information and content produced by the media at the local level (1980:52). Arguably, this speaks to Nigeria’s current media context where the socio-economic and political rhetoric that is passed through news media broadcasters is sometimes influenced either by the agenda of the ruling government and its political elites or by powerful voices from the West.

Print and broadcast media alike are often accused of being biased in the reportage of Boko Haram events. David Volman, director of the African Security Research Project in Washington DC, says, “Africa is only covered by the media when there is some disaster or outbreak of violence, which is then portrayed in a racist manner as the natural consequences of the primitive and bestial nature of the African people” (Sharife, 2012:23). According to Khadij Sharife’s *New African* article entitled “Whose Reality Are We Living In?”, Africa was historically “reported only as it affected the European nations that had African colonies - Portugal, Spain, Britain, Italy, etc.” (Sharife, 2012:23). In the 1960s, as these colonies became ‘independent’, most of the former colonial powers lost interest except for spectacular events, and evidently, the situation has not changed in the contemporary context of America’s interest in the situation in Nigeria. Furthermore, Volman draws attention to the fact that these disasters are discussed without any reference to “the role that the US, or former colonial powers like the UK and France, play in creating these problems” (2012:23).

Muhammad Yusha’u expands on this by stating that global journalism has faced a great deal of criticism in recent years for compromising quality and publishing stories as they come from newswire services or other news sources without checking the facts or placing the stories in proper context (2012:92). This lack of historical and contextual nuance on the part of international journalists writing African stories will be examined in the articles chosen for analysis near the end of this chapter.



## 7.2 The Active/Passive Role of Africa in Knowledge Creation

Structuralism is a theory utilised to analyse the continent recognises its complexities about Africa. The theory shows how Africa stands as a “system of interrelated parts linking internal and external components” connected to the rest of the globe, how the structural economics of its states function under dependency, and how all these factors intersect and provide an insight into why the continent may be in crisis (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:22). On the other hand, post-structuralism looks at how the very concept of the “self” as part of an identity cannot be read under singular descriptions, as the self is a “product of conflicted and contradictory identities, including race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and age” (2010:23). This applies to how post-structuralism analyses the meanings and purposes of texts, arguing that these cannot be based on singular interpretations when an audience is actively involved in the consumption of texts. Thus, a reader is responsible for constructing the meaning of texts with existing knowledge and theoretical arguments that are discordant or contradictory, which often leads to a production of new meanings (2010:23). This also applies to the handling of methodologies or intellectual inquiries that produce work on discourses about African societies, their socio-political identities, their exploited land and resources, and the devaluing of their culture and identities.

In contrast to this perspective that assigns value to post-structuralism to better understand African complexities, poet and writer Niyi Osundare is of the belief that ‘post’ theories such as postmodernism and postcolonialism, which fall under Western post-structuralist theories “have demonstrated little to no adequacy in the apprehension, analysis and articulation of African writing and its long and troubled context” (2002:54). This means that the modes and methods used by the West in their analysis of writing belonging to Africa “disregard the deeper reaches of referentiality” that are necessary to arrive at an understanding of African people (2002:54). Although there may be some valid points to this argument, Osundare does exactly what he insists on rejecting. He pushes the essentialist perspective that homogenises the African continent and excludes it from the narrative of the rest of the globe by virtue of claiming that theories derived from the cannon of Western knowledge cannot possibly articulate the peculiarities of the African people or the work of literature they produce. Fair enough, like other African scholars, this resistance to theoretically organised ‘post’ devices is really a rejection of “the notion of a grand ‘master theory’ of the post-colonies emerging from celebrated Western centres” (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:24). In this sense, exercising caution is necessary in the use of ‘post’ theories to understand and analyse complex African issues. As far as Mamdani, Osundare and Achebe are concerned, there are inescapable dichotomies and binaries in the scholarly work of those who interrogate literary readings coming out of Africa, which often fall under the ‘historical blindness’ which continues to

perpetuate “the notion of an African Otherness” (Soyinka-Airewele et al., 2010:24). This is understandable inasmuch as the concepts of the colony and the colonised cannot be defined or understood without the distinct and dualistic reference to the imperial coloniser.

### 7.3 Representation in Global Media Studies

In this dissertation, ‘representation’ is used with the ideas expanded on by Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie in mind, in that it “allows a gap between how we see things and how, potentially, they might be” (2010:6). Furthermore, within this use of representation, there is a distinguishable separation between an act or an experience and the way it is formulated or spoken of, and thus ‘representation’ speaks to this gap as it tries to fill it in. It is arguable that ‘representation’ is subject to a meaning created by an interpretation that can stem from various ideologies, contexts and perspectives. Thus, the knowledge and representation of and about Africa is not a reflection of reality but rather a product of discourse. Moreover, representations are undeniably tied to some form of power or authority to ‘speak on behalf of’, ‘represent the views of’, or widely publicize a formulated perspective. Once they have formed part of ideologies, representations have the propensity to “harden into objects” and exist visibly in the world as “looks, pictures, films, advertisements, fashion” and so on (2010:7). The power and authority that inform them also influence these objects.

The question of what informs the perspective of the authorities that formulate representations of and about Africa is an important one. Martin and Clifford state that “... representations of Africa generally tell us far less about those who are being represented than they do about the preoccupations and prejudices of those engaged in the act of representing” (cited in Grinker & Steiner, 1997:xxvi). These prejudices reveal the preoccupation that the rest of the globe has with negative generalisations about Africa, which journalists often accept in the pessimistic narratives that inform the understanding we have of the continent. An example of this, as suggested by Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie, is the kind of cover stories and surveys found in publications such as *Financial Times*, *Der Spiegel* or *Time*. These are often “built upon falsehoods and factual errors” which continue the trend of “approximations, generalisations, [and] even illiteracy” that journalists and academics indulge in frequently when it comes to Africa (2010:12).<sup>61</sup> In contrast to this trend of reportage, Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie reveal that when it comes to social phenomena and political movements, they have witnessed, “the determination of people at the grassroots level to engage in the political arena, at any cost, in order to bring about some positive changes” (cited in Monga, 1996:39). This dissertation aims to study Boko Haram using the approach Edozie took when he reconstructed the Rwandan genocide “in its proper political and regional contexts” through

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<sup>61</sup> Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie continue to argue that the so-called ‘experts on Africa’ who are responsible for these inaccuracies and misrepresentations hardly stir any controversy or protest, nor do their rebuttals damage “their professional reputations” (2010:12).

a particular and all-encompassing analysis of the difficulties surrounding “national ethnicities, democracy, and conflict” in relation to how the genocide affected neighbouring Burundi (Soyinka & Edozie, 2010:13).<sup>62</sup> The need for this kind of approach speaks to the importance of exposing, exploring and reflecting on the nuances that are deeply inherent to all phenomena that take place in Africa, but which the media cover narrowly and sporadically.

Author and critic Ngugi Wa Thiong’o writes on a “mental universe” that has been “imposed on Africa” and claims that there is a particularly constructed way in which Africans have been taught to think of themselves, which has, until present day, limited their acquirement of a liberated mind-set (Thiong’o, 1993).<sup>63</sup> Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie capture this well when they discuss the ‘primitive language’ used in journalistic writings that describe moments, events, phenomena and stories coming out of Africa. Some examples are “plague” to substitute disease, “curse” to substitute the unknowable/supernatural and “wild profusion” in place of nature (2010:14). According to Thiong’o, until Africans learn to revise and reconstruct the immature and primitive identity imposed on them, they will continue to struggle consciously viewing their relationship to themselves as Africans and viewing Africa in relation to the rest of the world. If achieved, this reconstructive journey would lead to a self-definition that comes from within the continent and speaks to the lived experiences and philosophies of the people affected.

### **7.3.1 Reductionism in Representations of Africa**

Scholarly writing is no better at addressing the uncritical perspectives, flawed representations and lack of depth found in journalistic writings on Africa. As Mbembe points out, there is a “false dichotomy” that exists “between the objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of representations” which generally separates the cultural and symbolic from the economic and material (2001:6). That is to say, in the process of thinking and writing about African societies and their history, rarely is the critical philosophical perspective used or taken seriously by local or international scholars. Instead, the preferred news reporting approach is often reductionist and hardly throws any “intelligible light on fundamental problems touching on the nature of social reality in Africa” (2001:6). Arguably, the problem comes from the narrow context that Western-based scholars are limited to when the need to challenge the errors, generalisations and misrepresentations of Africa arises (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:14). This follows the

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<sup>62</sup> Contrary to this nuanced perspective, that pays attention to languages, religion, ethnicities and political affiliations as factors that intertwine when there is a breakout of conflict, other journalists have instead represented such conflicts as pathologies or plagues. This is apparent in the case of a *Newsweek* article reporting on the first Liberian civil war, under a piece titled “Africa: The Curse of Tribal War” (See Campbell, 1997:57).

<sup>63</sup> According to Thiong’o this mental construction was achieved through colonial education, where “geography, history, languages, names and all the gods of Europe became the centre of the academic universe of the African child” (1993:130). Similarly, “racism as a doctrine,” which had previously resided within the pages of books authored by the West, was now “paraded as academic brilliance in the colonial classroom” (1993:130).

assumption framed by historical and anthropological writing from the West that before European exploitation, colonisation, and imperialism in Africa, there was no recordable history or advancement, and that soon after colonialism ‘ended’, states began to self-destruct. It carries on that even the way countries in Africa are perceived post-colonialism is reduced to simplified characteristics, depictions or single historical moments as seen “in one study of Africa, which featured a continental map” where South Africa was labelled by “apartheid” and Nigeria was classified for its “corruption” (cited in Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie: 2010:14). These reductions do not only “borrow heavily from Western social science discourse,” but also remain uncontested by truthful, grounded explorations of the continent (2010:14). A borrowing from Western systems of thought is also apparent in the slow attempt over many decades by respective governments and/or their political bodies to democratize African states in the post-colonial era. Whether or not this process – implemented uniquely and differently in various states – has had the desired result and appropriate impact on the growth of African nations is questionable. What is needed is a reconstruction of African politics and economy, and this remains the widely felt need amongst political analysts and by academics in the political sciences.

#### **7.4 Othering in Media Frames and Schemas**

The concept of ‘framing’ in Media Studies (media texts and public discourse) falls into the same category of media analysis as representation. Frames can exist as visual and/or textual artefacts or symbolisms that assist in constructing an image, moment or event under a particular lens or perspective (Entman & Rojecki, 2000:49).<sup>64</sup> An example of framing is the way in which media has constructed the ‘Other’ and normalised this signification. According to a critique on racial representation in American media, by Entman and Rojecki, “the Black image in the White mind is acquired primarily through media images and not personal encounters,” (2000). It follows then, that a framing of difference, hierarchy and conflict exists when images that portray the Other (racial, cultural and religious) in relation to whiteness (race and culture) are played out. As stated by Entman and Rojecki, frames, as well as schemas, act as mental shortcuts to “sustain a cognitive economy” (2000:48). Entman and Rojecki describe schemas as “a set of related concepts that allow people to make inferences about new information based on already organized prior knowledge” (2000:48). This allows the media to use language that implicitly creates associations and links. For instance, when the word ‘welfare’ is used, the terms “lazy – black – single mother” are inferred

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<sup>64</sup> Frames are often selective and intentional in their selection of data that either highlights elements in stories, defines problems, diagnoses causes, makes moral judgements or suggests remedies (Entman & Rojecki, 2000:49).

(2000:48).<sup>65</sup> In the case of Islam and Boko Haram, these groups have become synonymous with the terms ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist attacks’. Arguably, Western media has taken the concept of terrorism, then redefined, manifested and attributed it to all events that involve Muslims, which has included branding *Boko Haram* members as ‘demonic terrorists’, pre-occupied with a ‘fanatic religious delirium.’ Thus, it is necessary to examine frames in the way media present reality in the African context.

### **7.5 Power Exercised by Western Media**

An ideological form of control comes from the kind of constructions created to depict images of Islamic fundamentalism in print and visual media. Arguably, those who hold the power control the way in which situations are framed and represented for the general masses to consume. The centrality of language, context and framing of ‘facts’ in stories publicised by the media can be interpreted using Noam Chomsky’s Propaganda Model. Chomsky’s model asserts that, in countries where power is “in the hands of a state bureaucracy,” the mass media is often controlled, censored and in service of the dominant political and economic elites and their interests (1994:15).<sup>66</sup> Although outdated, the use of the Propaganda Model may assist in examining whether the representation of Boko Haram by media publications serves the agenda or bias of the voices in power who control the kind of knowledge propagated to the masses. The premise of this model will be useful in the analysis of media reports later in the chapter. For this reason, it is important to make a distinction between popular news interpreters and intelligencia controlled by media ownership, as both have the access and power to reach out to the masses. Due to the social media processes used in the rich techno-age of free speech and public access to information, anyone can be an informant. This kind of Western media reporting is illustrated in innumerable internet blogs and websites. An example of such is the work of an online of American author, feminist and Islam critic, Phyllis Chesler. Chesler has emphatically insisted on her personal website that “a religious war has been declared against the West” by the ideal of Islamic supremacy, and that many Islamic jihadist are ready to die “in order to ensure that [the American] way of life is destroyed” (Chesler, 2010). Chesler’s highly reductive view is not an isolated case.

Edward Said’s analysis of such inflammatory media productions arguably places Chesler in the role of a sense-maker who writes “with the authority of a nation” since she is reproducing existing Islamophobic ideology “with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute

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<sup>65</sup> Similarly, at the global level, Africa is often associated with tribes, safari and traditional/customary lifestyles despite empirical evidence of “African global trade, networks, growing industry, and extremely large, bustling cities where socioeconomic activities far exceed those of many small-scale Western cities” (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:18).

<sup>66</sup> The Propaganda Model reveals five filters used to construct news for mainstream media. These are namely, 1) the Size, Ownership and Profit orientation of mass media, 2) Advertisers that provide funding, 3) Sources that extra information for reporters, 4) “Flak” or negative responses to media, and 5) the Anti-communism agenda (Chomsky, 1994:15)

force” (2006:307).<sup>67</sup> Likewise, as an Islamic writer of *Times* notes, Islam’s Sharia is “routinely discussed in connection to violence, inhumane punishments, anti-Western sentiment and oppression of women” (Lampzey, 2014). This is a representation that often obscures and silences the voices of those who considers themselves Muslims but are opposed to this version of Sharia reported by the media. Furthermore, such ideologically biased constructions can potentially become political proselytization that are removed from the rationalist proclamations about the objectivity, fairness and impartiality of journalism. For instance, Chesler asserts: “Not all Muslims are terrorists; but these days, all terrorists seem to be Muslims” (2010). This is a popular Western view that often overpowers the counter-voices that proclaim Islam is a religion of peace and harmony, which is in no way well-represented by Boko Haram and its proponents. Notably, these voices from Islamic defenders, like Chief Albert Korubo Horsfall, and renowned Islamic scholar, Sheikh Bilal Philips, are not on the same media platform as Chesler and thus remain marginalised in their defence of Islam against radical sects like Boko Haram. This is a testimony to the power held by the Western elites who either own media corporations or have access to resources and other aspects of socio-political and economic capital such as wealth, social status, income, education, and policy.

### **7.5.1 The Function of Power in the Global Media Context**

Assuming that the broader audience that consumes media information, is critically conscious and can dismiss constructed frames, structures of observation that limit the views of an audience still exist. That is, as Grinker and Steiner note, “when we look *at* something we always, necessarily, look *from* somewhere else” (1997:282). This is a framing in itself that has been informed by existing structures of observation which proves that “pure vision is an illusion” (Grinker & Steiner, 1997:282). The very process of writing and representing Boko Haram by the media has been aimed at depicting powerful imagery arising out of the socio-political drama caused by the group which is, arguably, not always completely accurate. Ultimately, there is little attempt to navigate the source of the economic and political problems as they primarily manifest themselves in the living, seemingly mundane, conditions of Nigerian society. Moreover, what is prevalent from the reporting of Nigeria’s current situation is a misinformation and even a regulated understanding of history that could – if allowed – serve as a framework to form a better comprehension of the ongoing discourses surrounding these so-called ethno-religious conflicts. Dependency Theorists point to the historical and structural problem of exploitative relationships between the former coloniser countries of the ‘global core’ – mainly North America and Europe – and the formerly colonised and currently

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<sup>67</sup> In his later work on Orientalism, Said stated, “there has been an intense focus on Muslims and Islam in the American and Western media, most of it characterized by [...] highly exaggerated stereotyping” (2003: xi).

marginalised countries of the ‘Other’ – Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:20). In this relationship based on dependency, the marginalised countries remain subservient and dependent on those that exist as global superpowers, as well as with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, as along with “trade prescriptions that entombed African countries in a rising spiral of social, economic, and political crises” (2010:20). Moreover, the economies of most African states remain lopsided since they “revolve around the production and export of one or two agricultural and natural resources” which further worsens the economic crisis and political turmoil in these states (cf. Mamdani, 1996; Hoogvelt, 1997). It is for this reason that inequalities will continue to remain between the global core which exercises powers of globalisation and imperial supervision over the global Other, and where the gaze on Africa will always be framed by conflicts and under-development.<sup>68</sup>

## 7.6 Religious Fundamentalism in a Globalised World

Writing on *Globalisation and Pedagogy*, Richard Edwards and Robin Usher explain the way in which religious fundamentalism is an “assertion of heterogeneity” in the face of a globalised world that supports homogeneity and the cross-pollination of diverse global identities (2008:23). As Turner similarly argues, religious fundamentalism in the contemporary era is not only an attempt to secure a form of concentrated control within a global functioning system, but is also a “cultural defence of modernity against postmodernity” (1994:78). This analysis has some value in examining the ways in which Boko Haram has represented itself and its ideologies to the media. Indeed, the original founder and leader of the group, Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf, expressed a strict Islamic identity that the group was fighting to preserve. He claimed that the very existence of this identity was being threatened by Western modernity explicit in the so-called ‘excesses of globalisation’ he saw growing in Islamic societies in northern Nigeria. In agreement with Yusuf, Edwards and Usher argue that “fundamentalists are opposed to a globalised culture based on secularism, consumerism and modernisation,” even though the universal vision that their community of believers work towards achieving would not be possible if the world was not globalised (2008:23). In fact, Islamic fundamentalism has been described by some scholars as an example of ‘global citizenship’ as it “articulates itself within, and not in opposition to, processes of globalization” (Khatib, 2010:279; Thussu, 2010).<sup>69</sup> The obvious paradox here is that, although Boko Haram sets up Islamic identity in opposition to globalising forces, Islam is a religion that, due to its principals and Sharia, also

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<sup>68</sup> Besides Walter Rodney’s book on *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), there have been other texts based on research by James Blaut (1992) and Inikori. These texts account for the several ways in which “Africa was proceeding along the lines of growth similar to those Europe followed before the violent reversals caused by slavery displacement and colonialism” (cited in Soyinka-Airewele & Edozie, 2010:22).

<sup>69</sup> I use the term ‘globalisation’ here with Stuart Hall’s definition in mind. According to Hall, globalisation is constituted of processes that operate on a global scale, cutting across national boundaries, “integrating and connecting communities and organisations in new space-time combinations” that allow for privileged citizens of the world to be interconnected (1992:299).

functions as a philosophy or way of living that takes on its own worldview, which it considers worthy of universalising. With the aim of doing this, Islamic groups continue to “promote themselves effectively through the use of new technologies” (2008:23). Islamic fundamentalist movements have effectively used the internet as a means to define, present and expand their cause within the global context. Additionally, Turner notes that, over and against a globalised consumer culture of pluralism and diversity, Islam has been able to self-thematise as a religion that is “a self-reflective global system of cultural identity” (1994:90).

This thematic conceptualisation means that for Muslims, the global spread of their religion functions more as a culturally homogenising tactic of advancement. This view of religious fundamentalism can be applied to ISIS’s representation by global media in its recruitment of European and North American youth using the Internet. These young people have, in the cases reported by the media, acted as suicide bombers and military fighters. The dynamic created by this form of religious fundamentalism is that of the – us/them (other) binary which draws “a firm boundary between the believer and non-believer” in a universal context (Turner, 1994:91). It also follows that those on the side of the non-believer or ‘other’ side of the binary may be able to cross over by converting to Islam fundamentalism, as has been the case with the Western-located youth recruited by ISIS. For this reason, and since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, Islamic fundamentalism “has been invoked as a threat to globalization,” a terrorist force that challenges fluid identities (Khatib, 2010:280).<sup>71</sup> However, in the case of Boko Haram, the group has made it clear from the beginning that its actions are concentrated on the expansion of Sharia in northern Nigeria alone, and that the socio-politics they are concerned with are those that affect the Islamic North. Therefore, although Islam fundamentalism can be argued to be a reaction and a response to globalisation, the way in which Boko Haram has represented itself, and what it has done to destabilise the Nigerian state, speaks to its goals at the local level.<sup>70</sup> Within this context, Edwards and Usher note the importance of location in the power exercised by radical fundamentalist groups. Location, or the ground on which the religious group’s identity exists, provides a foundation from which power can simultaneously be exercised and challenged with little need for mobility (2008:136). Thus, even at this local level, the way in which radical Islamic sects assert their group identity may still be seen as “a prime method of competing for power and influence in the global system” (Beyer, 1994:4). This speaks to Boko Haram’s contentions against what they see as Nigeria’s corrupt governance and unfair distribution of political power between

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<sup>70</sup> Scholars who are aware of the controversy caused by Islam fundamentalism being synonymous with terrorism have even proposed that the term be avoided all together as it has become “a psychological scapegoat for those who refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for the real international and intercultural problems” (Tehrani, 2000:217).



northern and southern Nigeria.<sup>71</sup> It also speaks to the kind of ‘essentialist’ identity that the group has, due to its reaction to unjust political realities under the guise of Islam fundamentalism. Due to this ‘essentialist’ nature, those writing about Boko Haram’s identity tend to depict it as pathological. With all the religious, political and representational themes that have been explored in the previous paragraphs for context, it is now fitting to go into the analysis of print media reports on Boko Haram.

## **7.7 Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Reports on Boko Haram**

This section will employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological approach to analysing media reports and stories on Boko Haram from three different publications. Using critical discourse analysis places a text within a historical framework and the analysis goes beyond the use of language, extending to other contextual factors, such as culture, society and ideology, that help to provide proper understanding of the text (Meyer, 2001:13). A Foucauldian analysis of knowledge and power will be suitable to apply a fine-grained analysis of discourse and text entailed in writings on Boko Haram. Furthermore, using a transversal analysis again, this study will examine key elements of postcolonial theory including history, power relations within various contexts, language, culture and the complex identity of post-independent nations.

### **7.7.1 Critical Discourse Analysis as Method**

A postcolonial critique fits in critical discourse analysis as a method because it focuses on a number of discursive factors that will be useful to this study. The first factor is language, often used to construct meaning, create a complex *worlding* of ideas and communicate information. Jørgensen and Phillips define language as “a machine that generates and as a result constitutes the social world..., social identities and social relations” (2002:9). An analysis of the use of frames and schemas will be useful in this regard, in the ways in which these tools construct meaning for readers through sharing selective information. The second factor is the element of truth and meaning which is, according to Foucault, produced by systems of power and knowledge in society (Foucault, 1980). Foucault’s view of power extends to how one social group can exercise dominance over another. Through the CDA approach, this section will examine the subordination and misrepresentation of one social group by common institutional powers to reveal the ways in which history, ideological systems and the contemporary context of socio-political institutions inform these unequal power relations, especially in Nigeria’s case. The last discursive factor of CDA used

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<sup>71</sup> Counter arguments to this often place Boko Haram in affiliation with al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, and thus intimately linked to the arising global jihad against the West. In this sense, although experienced locally by people of Nigeria, Boko Haram also has the dimension of being a global movement as it aligns with similar radical Islamic fundamentalist movements that have been mentioned in this dissertation.

here focuses on identity and representation, which is constructed largely by discursive practices of the Western world, as apparent in widely disseminated media texts. As with the analysis of scholarly texts in Chapter 6, this analysis will examine how identities are framed and represented through the linguistic usage of presuppositions, omission, assumptions and hyperboles.

### **7.7.2 Selection of Articles for Analysis**

Three online news pieces have been selected for analysis, two from American news publications and one from a Nigerian online newspaper. To make this selection, Boko Haram was typed into the search bar of prominent continental (African) and international online news sites and the results were filtered manually to show news pieces published between 2013 and 2015. Those with grabbing headlines and introductions with themes relevant to the research project were read and selected for analysis. These are:

Article 1: “A Jihadist’s Face Taunts from the Shadows” (May, 2014) by Adam Nossiter of the *New York Times* (Addendum B1),

Article 2: “5 Facts that Explain the Threat from Nigeria’s Boko Haram” (Jan, 2015) by Ian Bremmer of *TIME* magazine (Addendum B2), and

Article 3: “Enter, the Boko Haram State?” (Nov, 2014) by Segun Ayobulu of *The Nation* (Addendum B3).

### **7.7.3 Writer Profiles and Publication Backgrounds**

#### Article 1

*New York Times* (NYT) reporter, Adam Nossiter, is the author of two history books, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (1994), and *The Algeria Hotel: France, Memory and the Second World War* (2001) both of which received the New York Times Notable Book award. Besides being a NYT reporter, Nossiter has also worked as a journalist for *The Associated Press*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *St. Petersburg Times* and *The Anniston Star* (Pomona College, 2013). At the NYT, Nossiter is the West and Central Africa bureau chief, responsible for covering news “from more than 25 countries in West and Central Africa, from Algiers to Brazzaville” (Reporters info, 2016). Nossiter has written most of the stories published by NYT on Boko Haram, whilst others appearing on the NYT site are sourced from *The Associated Press*, an American multinational non-profit news agency in New York City. Thus, Nossiter has the authority of a journalist who has had the experience of writing a plethora of articles based on events happening in Nigeria and its neighbours for years. He has been quoted saying that “the picture that seems closest to the truth comes from ordinary citizens on the street, often encountered at random, and not from high officials, ministers in fancy suits, coup leaders, etc.” (2016). As such, Nossiter’s

writing relies on the sources he quotes to shape his narrative. This gives the impression that it is not the journalist who makes the story, but the people he interviews. Nossiter thus reaches out to the common people on the ground, sourcing information from ordinary citizens and mainly using a narrative style to report the stories. This approach to writing is used in the article chosen here for analysis, as he attempts to reveal to his readers the kind of man Shekau was when he grew up in Maiduguri, by reporting the story from Maiduguri. Nossiter writes from the perspective of a well-known African correspondent (on-site) reporter working for the NYT. In the moments that his voice is prevalent in the piece, Nossiter's writing has elements of sarcasm and condescension that will be discussed later. Other international stories written by Nossiter and published in the NYT, include:

- “After Paris Attacks, a Darker Mood Toward Islam Emerges in France,” Nov 2015. This piece focuses on how the Paris government has considered harsher security measures since the Charlie Hebdo attacks.
- “African Leaders Are Mute, even as Their People Die at Sea,” April 2015. In this article, Nossiter's introduction declares, “Their citizens are drowning by the hundreds, along with Syrians and Afghans. But there has been barely an anguished word from the continent's leaders.”
- “Boko Haram, and Massacres Ruled by Whim,” Feb 2015. This article begins in a similar narrative style as the one chosen for analysis: “They came in the dead of night, their faces covered, riding on motorcycles and in pickup trucks, shouting ‘Allahu akbar’ and firing their weapons.”

These story headlines reveal the kind of themes Nossiter is preoccupied with and, beyond these, articles Nossiter has published from 2014-2016 have generally covered Syria, ISIS, migrants, and militancy. These international themes are not foreign to the NYT audience, since the NYT also publishes stories coming out of Nigeria in particular. Around the time the selected article for analysis was published, in early 2014, NYT was also covering Nigeria's world cup performance, reports and updates on the Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping - #BringBackOurGirls, the ‘terrorist war’ incited by Boko Haram/Islamist militants, the rise of radical Islam extremism, as well as Nigeria's sometimes dwindling and, other times, rising economy. As an American daily newspaper since 1851, the NYT is ranked as the second most liberal paper in the U.S, after *The Wall Street Journal* (Groseclose, 2004). The political stance of the NYT is contestable. In 2012, William Black, an economics professor published a column in *The Huffington Post* characterising the newspaper as “far right ... on financial issues” and biased in its reports and profiles of foreign leaders (Black, 2012).

## Article 2

Ian Bremmer writes for *TIME* magazine as a columnist and editor, where he reports on geopolitics and assesses global political risks – a field in foreign affairs of which he has academic expertise. This is because Bremmer is an American political scientist who is “the president and founder of Eurasia Group, the leading global political risk research and consulting firm” (Eurasia Group website). This field of interest is well apparent from the kind of pieces that Bremmer has written for *TIME* magazine, including:

- “These 5 Facts Explain Why Europe Is Ground Zero for Terrorism,” March 2016. The article includes subheadings like, ‘Europe as recruitment base,’ which situates Belgium and France as home to the most radicalised Muslim neighbourhoods; ‘Refugee crisis in Europe,’ in which Bremmer claims the crisis to be a golden opportunity for ISIS to bring about a civilisation war between Islam and the West; and ‘ISIS fracturing European Unity,’ which argues that ISIS’s strategy is to destabilise European society as a whole.
- “These 5 Facts Explain Why We Need the United Nations,” September 2015. This was written to honour the UN’s 70th birthday and includes subheadings like, ‘Protecting Global Health’ (e.g. UNICEF and WHO), ‘Aiding Refugees’, and ‘Preventing Wars’
- “These are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World’s Only Superpower,” May 2015. Bremmer explains here that “a ‘superpower’ is a country that wields enough military, political and economic might to convince nations in all parts of the world to do things they otherwise wouldn’t.” His list of 5 reasons include: ‘Economics are better quality and higher GDP than China’, ‘Military’ (since the U.S spends more than China on its military), ‘Political influence’ (because the U.S. pays foreign aid to needy countries), ‘Strong institutions and law’, and ‘Innovation’ (since eight out of nine large tech companies are based in the US).

As can be seen above, the general topics covered by Bremmer’s articles in *TIME* magazine between 2015 and 2016 have been American, Chinese and UK politics and financial markets, foreign policy and relations, ISIS, geopolitics and global political/financial risks.<sup>72</sup> When Bremmer covers these themes, he provides a brief and ‘comprehensive’ list of information, based on ‘facts’ sourced from a variety of online sources. He thus frames big/breaking news stories as chewable bites for *TIME*’s target audience by linking and intertextualising major news events and giving an overall meaning or prediction using his expertise.

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<sup>72</sup> Despite the political themes covered by *TIME* reporters, the news magazine’s political stance is unclear. The only certainty is its secular disposition. However, it has been labelled as leftist by some political analytic researchers, while other observers from the world of journalism have noted that it has “become more and more liberal throughout the 2010s” (Gray, 2013; All Sides, 2016)

The brevity of style that is exercised by Bremmer is a staple for most online news pieces published in *TIME*. This is because the publication's original ad slogan, from the time it was first published in print during the 1920s, was "Take Time – It's Brief." For this reason, this American weekly's main target audience is "well educated people in professional jobs" consisting of "25 million readers worldwide" (Matsa, 2012). Five million of these *TIME* readers are outside the U.S., and rightly so – the publication covers stories from Europe, Africa, and Asia. The stories coming out of Nigeria around the same time as Bremmer's piece was published, early to mid-2015, focused on the Ebola scare, political challenges of the Nigerian presidency, Nigerian election violence, Nigerian military's struggle to fight Boko Haram, and the election win by Muhammadu Buhari. In the article selected for analysis, Bremmer writes for American readers who read international stories and who would be interested in better understanding the situation/threat facing Nigeria. Bremmer writes this piece from the perspective of an observer skilled in international situational/political assessments as the president of the Eurasia Group. For this reason, there is an assumption of power and authority from Bremmer in this piece, since his expertise appear in *TIME*, which has an audience of over 20 million American readers. The authority of the article comes from the trusted news publications that Bremmer sources his information from, such as: *Foreign Policy*, *CNN*, *al-Jazeera*, *Washington Post*, *the Guardian*, *The Economist*, and so on.

### Article 3

Segun Ayobolu, a columnist at *The Nation*, was once a Special Adviser to Governor Babatunde Fashola on Information and Strategy (Vanguard, 2009). Ayobolu thus worked under the Nigerian state government for ten years before resigning due to health reasons (Vanguard, 2009). Ayobolu writes from a local (Nigerian) political commentator perspective for a working class, educated Nigerian audience. Some of the pieces written by Ayobolu for *The Nation* include:

- "Bring Back Our Country," May 2014. In the introductory paragraph of the piece, Ayobolu declares that Boko Haram fanatics "strive to sunder the bonds that bind people together. They labour to sacrifice human love and solidarity on the altar of a blood guzzling deity."
- "Nigeria: A Crisis of Structure or Values?" March 2014. Within the piece, Ayobolu purports that Nigeria seems to remain 'great' only superficially, by virtue of its population size and land mass, whilst for the most part, the country suffers from a "chronic state fragility bordering on catastrophic state collapse."
- "Money is Thicker than Blood," August 2016. The commentary piece starts, "One of the prevalent myths and conventional wisdoms of contemporary public discourse in Nigeria is that the root causes of the country's ingrained maladies are essentially ethno-cultural..." Ayobolu continues, arguing that "underlying this thesis is the notion that blood ties, linguistic affinity and cultural affiliation should be the lowest common factors informing

territorial delimitation in a restructured Nigeria.” In his conclusion, he argues that in fact none of these

cultural identity-driven factors matter, only the pursuit and attainment of money does to the Nigerian elite.

Ayobolu’s work for the Lagos based publication generally comes in the form of columns or critical commentary pieces on politics within the Nigerian context, with topics ranging from democracy and development to criticism of former president Goodluck Jonathan and other political elites. According to a 2009 survey by a number of organisations in Nigeria’s publishing industry, *The Nation* is rated as the second most read newspaper in Nigeria. When it comes to reporting on Boko Haram, the daily news publication pays particular attention to the fight put up by the Air Force, Security Forces and Nigerian military to defeat and disarm the group, as well as the promises made by the president to deal with Boko Haram. There are also reports on the attacks by Boko Haram in the different towns in northern Nigeria. Around the time of Ayobolu’s published commentary, late 2014, *The Nation* was also providing updates on Boko Haram attacks, reporting on the World Cup and worker strikes in the year of 2014, covering entertainment news and reporting on the good work of some politicians. In contrast, Ayobolu’s contributions to the publication are often unapologetically opinionated, and persuasive, with a left-leaning bias. The ‘assumption of authority’ from the writer can be said to come from the kind of dramatic claims about the state that he makes. An example of this is, when referring to a disturbance at the National Assembly, Ayobolu asserts: “This was a veritable terrorist attack on the judiciary ... akin to Boko Haram-type bombing of the National Assembly by the police” (paragraph 9). The fact that this political commentary piece in a national newspaper – which indicts a number of politicians, including the then-president Goodluck Jonathan – was approved by *The Nation* editors indicates the respect afforded to the works written by Ayobolu. Moreover, this arguably exposes a level of power and authority held by Ayobolu under the democratic guise of Free Press and Free Speech.

#### **7.7.4 An Overview of Representation in Selected Articles**

The *New York Times* article presents a backstory of the current Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, by providing information on where he grew up, went to school, what influenced his Islamic fundamentalist beliefs, and how he ended up as the leader of Boko Haram. Beyond this, the piece compares the Boko Haram of the past with the current one, in terms of how it has been influenced by its leadership and how it has transformed in its physical and ideological nature. Contrary to popular assumption, the writer claims that the Boko Haram from a decade ago was just as ‘hard line’ in its ideology as it is now. As an example of this, the writer mentions that Yusuf, Boko

Haram's original founder, had a reputation as a "firebrand Islamic preacher critical of the government and so-called Western education" who had a passion for Islamic militancy (Nossiter, 2014). Nossiter is largely guided by quotes sourced from interviews. Unlike the usual background news pieces from *The Guardian*, *BBC*, *CNN* and *NBC* that cover Boko Haram's history, the piece by Nossiter provides a different angle to writing about Boko Haram, by offering an insight into the early childhood of the man behind the radical group – describing Shekau's past life in moments, significant events and encounters with those who knew him – way before his involvement with the Boko Haram sect. As a journalist reporting from West Africa, Nossiter does this through interviews with community members who knew or encountered Abubakar where he grew up in Maiduguri. In one interview, he speaks to Mr. Gubio, a retired civil servant and member of a council who advises the state government. Mr. Gubio, who used to have Shekau clean his house when he was a young Qur'anic student, said he does not believe that the man spoken of in the media and appearing in recorded Boko Haram videos is the Shekau he used to know. Another interviewee, a nurse, also did not believe that the Shekau appearing in Boko Haram videos is the same one she knew in Maiduguri. This feeds into the mysterious representation of Shekau and, by extension, of the group's members. Additionally, Nossiter does not touch on the ethno-religious identity of Boko Haram; nor does he mention the aims of Boko Haram within Nigeria's political context. The sect is reduced to their ideological actions – fighting the modernisation of government and the Westernisation of education. Thus, although Nossiter goes into the background history of Shekau's life in Maiduguri, and how he came to be the successor of a radical group, the intentions or objectives of the group are never expanded on nor explained. Arguably, the assumption from the writer is that the group's objectives are implicit in Shekau's religious history and preoccupations with Islamic fundamentalism. In this case, the readers are open to draw their own conclusions from the revelation of Shekau's past.

The second article, from *TIME* magazine, provides a thematic list of five facts that explain why Boko Haram is a threat to Nigeria in relation to the rest of the world. The article aims to give its American readers a holistic understanding of the problem faced by Nigeria. Bremmer makes a comparison between the gruesomeness of the Charlie Hebdo, Paris attacks, with the Baga attacks of Nigeria, stating that although the former received more social media attention, the attack by Boko Haram was "far bloodier" (Bremmer, 2015). He goes on to say that the social media theme "could just as easily say, 'Je Suis Nigeria'" (2015). The comparison between these two events is analysed under the section 'Coding in Textual Analysis' a few pages below. The relevance of the article to the analysis comes from the fact that it sources its information from a number of popular and

international news sites based outside of New York, where *TIME* is published. For this reason, there are oppositional accounts given by Nigerian government's death-toll reports and the estimates given by several other public and private sources/non-partisan institutions. This shows the vast difference and contradictions in representation by different parties associated with different organizations with different agendas, raising the question of where concrete sources of reliable information can be found? The style of the piece is meant to be short and direct. However, the key issues highlighted as Nigeria's challenges are immensely reductive to Nigeria's very real situation influenced by a number of factors such as high unemployment rates, extreme levels of illiteracy in the north where Boko Haram is most active, corrupt government officials, resource exploitation, and so on. Furthermore, Bremmer blames Nigeria's current challenges on the errors of the present, negating the complex consequences from the colonial and political legacies of the past. The third selected article is a critical political commentary piece published by a Nigerian newspaper, *The Nation*, which helps us examine how Boko Haram is perceived closer to home. There are two main arguments. The first is that the actions of Boko Haram go against the state as they are uncivil, destabilising the 'essence' of humanity for the Nigerian people. This argument is outlined in the first three paragraphs in which the writer condemns Boko Haram before he goes on to make comparisons between Boko Haram and the actions of the Nigerian state's politicians. The second argument contextualises the failure of former President Jonathan's government to deal with Boko Haram, arguing that political members of the state are also part of the problem. In the paragraphs that follow the writer gives examples of the ways in which a particular politician, Ayodele Fayose, has been corrupt and unlawful in his role as governor. Beyond this, in part two of the piece – which is not sub-headed or titled as such but focuses on different issues – the writer deals with other political and policy-related issues that the Nigerian government is arguably handling badly. The piece makes no attempt to give a historical context to Boko Haram, nor does the writer provide any idea as to what Boko Haram's objectives, aims or ideologies are. The focus from the first few paragraphs at the beginning of the piece is on the violent actions of the group, completely removed from any context in relation to their identities or the socio-politics of the country. Thus, Ayobolu writes Boko Haram off as criminals breaking the laws of the state for no rational reason. This is only done to help further his argument which compares a Nigerian governor's weak moral standards to those of Boko Haram.

### **7.7.5 Situational Context and Significance of Selected Articles**

As explained in the previous chapter with the same subheading, an important process of Critical Discourse Analysis is to situate the selected articles within their situational context. This section



takes into account Nigeria's political context and offers a critical reading of thematically relevant news events that contributes to the overall analysis of Boko Haram's representation.

#### Article 1: 'A Jihadist's Face Taunts Nigeria from the Shadows' – Adam Nossiter

The NYT article was published on May 18, 2014, just over a month after the kidnapping of schoolgirls from the Chibok village by Boko Haram. Boko Haram became internationally recognised after the kidnapping and most news broadcasters were reporting on the incident using a similar framework – the global threat of Islam fundamentalism, anti-Western sentiments, and the anti-education narrative. Nossiter's NYT article providing a background history to Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, is arguably a response to this global recognition of the group. Nossiter, known for approaching news events by capturing the voices of ordinary citizens, takes the same angle in this piece to better understand the man behind the radical sect and his motives. In order to construct this narrative, he relies heavily on quotations from people who encountered Shekau in the past. In May, two separate events also happened in Nigeria before the NYT published Nossiter's article. The first was a car bombing in Abuja on the 1st of May, killing 19 civilians. The second happened on the night of 5/6 May with a twin attack in the towns of Gamboru and Ngala in Borno State where an estimated 310 residents were killed within 12 hours. Residents at a night-time market were shot and, houses nearby were set alight. These incidents may have also significantly influenced Nossiter's compilation of his autobiographical piece on Shekau at that particular time. Notably, although the article acts as an exposé to reveal the man behind Boko Haram, it continues to feed into the representation of Abubakar Shekau as a mysteriously dangerous and irrational character who nobody really knows or understands, not even those who claim to have known him in the past. This particular framing of Shekau and Boko Haram's history will be examined and discussed in the section on 'Defining Identities through Naming'.

#### Article 2: "5 Facts That Explain the Threat from Nigeria's Boko Haram" – Ian Bremmer

The 2015 *TIME* article by Bremmer, attempting to explain the Boko Haram threat in Nigeria, also came after the 'Baga massacre,' which occurred between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> of January. During this event, Boko Haram carried out a series of mass attacks and bombings in the town of Baga (state of Borno). According to estimates in the Western media, over 2000 people died in these attacks, whilst media numbers from Nigeria range in the low hundreds. *The Guardian* online newspaper report on this quoted Amnesty International which referred to the attacks as the "deadliest massacre in the history of Boko Haram" (Mark, 2015). Following this kind of reportage, the event received international attention, with international governments and institutions questioning what the Nigerian government was doing to stop Boko Haram. Seen within this context, Bremmer's article is

then a build-up of the problems faced by Nigeria in a summative analysis discussing the election, energy crisis and Boko Haram's killings. The article contributes to the accepted knowledge of Boko Haram as a threat beyond the Nigerian state. It helps to expand on exactly why the sect is a threat from an American, and arguably global, perspective. In the analysis that will follow, I will argue on how the article reinforces simplistic ideas like Boko Haram being 'Islamic terrorists' and Nigeria being too 'weak' to handle it. Similarly, with a subheading like 'Boko Haram vs Ebola,' I will argue how the article strengthens the idea that disease and violence are synonymous with African countries, and how these countries are always seemingly battling these two 'evils'.

### Article 3: 'Enter, the Boko Haram State?' – Segun Ayobolu

In November 2014, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>, there were two separate 'terrorist' attacks in Potiskum, Yobe State involving suicide bombers. The first suicide attack targeted Shia Muslims during a ceremony march (Day of Ashura), killing 15, injuring 50, with five killed by security forces. It is suspected by Nigerian police that Boko Haram was responsible (BBC News, 2014). The second suicide bombing, which killed approximately 46 schoolboys and injured 79 people, happened in a boarding school hall (Government Senior Secondary School) during morning assembly. It was perpetrated by a bomber who was wearing school uniform. In a separate article, Nossiter writes: "Boko Haram is believed to have attacked about 10 schools" in Potiskum alone (Nossiter, 2014). Ayobolu's commentary piece in *The Nation* comes after these events.<sup>73</sup> However, his piece is hardly a commentary on Boko Haram's specific activities that were still fresh in the news at the time, but rather mentions the group's past actions in general in order to make the comparison with Mr. Ayodele Fayose. Fayose was the newly elected governor of the Ekiti state at the time, who had taken over this position in October 2015 (a month before the article was published), from the PhD-educated Kayode Fayemi. The piece comments on- and criticises the flawed ruling decisions and unlawful political and personal history of Fayose. Ayobolu argues how this behaviour by a governor that disrespects law is no different from the anti-democratic and criminal actions of Boko Haram. The commentary goes so far as to say that, just as Boko Haram's kidnaps, kills, bombs and rapes innocent civilians, Mr. Fayose (representing the Nigerian state) kidnaps court processes, rapes the judiciary, and causes the state to self-destruct. While this argument deems the lawlessness incited by Boko Haram as a key motivating influence for the way that the Nigerian state has begun to rule destructively, another commonly accepted analysis is that Boko Haram has managed to remain undefeated for so long *because* the Nigerian state itself is not well equipped, nor is the

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<sup>73</sup> Three days after Ayobolu's article appeared in *The Nation*, two girls who were suicide bombers killed over 45 people in a crowded Maiduguri market, Borno State. On 28 Nov, there were bombings in Kano at the Central Mosque where two suicide bombers blew themselves up with gunmen firing at those who tried to escape. This attack killed 120 people and injured 260 (Aljazeera, 2014). According to security officials, Boko Haram members are the main suspects.

leadership skilled to deal with the problem. All these dimensions of the Nigerian situation that are alluded to by Ayobolu's commentary will be examined and unpacked.

### **7.7.6 Structural layout and Multimedia Analysis – Articles 1 & 2**

Beyond the reporting done in the language of words, signs and symbols, sometimes there is a visual language that also tells the story. Structural page and sentence layouts, and additional features like links, multimedia content in the form of pictures, videos, audios and such, are a significant factor in the construction of online news reports. These factors have the power of framing the meaning of the actual text provided by the writer of the piece. Thus, it is important to include this in a media analysis of representation.

#### Article 1

The NYT article by Nossiter is a long piece, about 2.5 pages' long. The entire article has only one subheading in the middle of the piece, "Five Years of Attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria" which momentarily breaks the narrative given by Nossiter. The information given under the subheading is sourced from "Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project; Global Terrorism Database, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism; IHS Country Risk," and contributed by Eric Schmitt. This use of intertextuality allows Nossiter's article to expand on known/published knowledge about the Boko Haram sect. This short summary of the years of attacks by Boko Haram is dominated by grotesque language, notably the use of the word 'brutal' which will be analysed shortly in this chapter.

"He was the quiet one who walked silently to meet fellow disciples" – the introductory paragraph begins with an element of dramatism and mystery by delaying the reveal of name that the 'he' refers to. The writer describes the unnamed character's preoccupations and some personality traits until the end of the three-line paragraph, where he ends with the reveal, the naming of 'Abubakar Shekau'. This narration arguably seeks to entice the reader by painting Shekau in a curiously enigmatic light, staying true to the article title, which arouses similar enticement into the mystery. The mystery is sustained when the writer only links Shekau to Boko Haram in the third paragraph and reveals him as the man behind the kidnapping of Chibok schoolgirls in the fourth paragraph. This narrative structure, which relies on the delaying of important information, revealing key points one paragraph at a time, does more than hold a reader's attention. Just as the writer reveals in the seventh paragraph that, "[d]efinitive pronouncements about the group are hazardous, since its communications with the outside world are fragmentary and its tactics and motivations remain murky," he similarly takes this cautious approach in his writing style, by avoiding rushed declarations.

An interesting choice of image, taken by one of NYT's photographers, begins Nossiter's article, with the caption, "Nigerian children studying the Quran in the area where Abubakar Shekau, the Boko Haram leader, was once educated." The coloured image is of young boys sitting on the floor reading worn-out books. In the background is a brick wall and minimal lighting graces the room. The picture supposedly puts Shekau's past into context, as does the narrative style used by the author. The big group of young, ordinary looking boys in the picture were being disciplined under the teachings of the Qur'an, just as Shekau once was. Within the narrative piece, Nossiter paints the picture of Shekau as a boy who was also just "a typical Quranic student" until he began to "drift toward militancy and aggression" which frightened his teachers. This draws a subliminal visual association between Shekau as a young boy who became aggressive in his beliefs during his Qur'anic education and the potential for the boys, appearing in the introductory picture, to follow in Shekau's footsteps. By this implication, Nossiter arguably suggests that young boys who are educated under the Qur'anic education may later become a dangerous threat to the society to which they belong.

When Nossiter mentions a video that was released by Boko Haram early on in the piece, a link is provided that opens up to a *YouTube* video, "New Boko Haram video claims to show kidnapped girls," published by the *Storyful* channel under the 'News and Politics' category, on May 12, 2014.<sup>74</sup> Nossiter suggests that Shekau did not appear scared or intimidated by the fact that he is a hunted man, instead he appeared to "glory in the newfound attention." The link to the video assists in proving why the author believes this. The entire video is in Arabic and Hausa with a few English words such as "America" "Israel" "modernism" early on, and then later Shekau lists the words "globalisation" "federalism" "capitalism" and "socialism" consecutively after which he shakes his head vigorously, seeming disgruntled. For U.S. English speakers who make up the majority of readers for *New York Times*, and have little knowledge or understanding of the Arabic and Hausa languages, all they can hold on to are the few English words spoken by Shekau. Earlier in the video Shekau furiously mentions the names of the U.S president, the French president and the then Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, after which he laughs in a ridiculing manner. He also mentions the words Nigeria and Obama later on closely after each other in his speech, a segment articulated in a warning and threatening tone. Since Nossiter does not provide interpretative details of what Shekau actually says in the entirety of the video, apart from providing two quotes, the readers are expected to rely on their own interpretation. This interpretation would not only be informed by the few recognisable English words and names spoken by Shekau but would also come

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<sup>74</sup> The Storyful channel's 'About' page describes itself as a channel that helps submitted videos "get discovered and go viral," with clients ranging from the biggest news outlets such as New York Times, ABC, BBC and so on (Storyful, About)

from the framing of Shekau in Nossiter's narrative text. Thus, the video acts as a visual schema that is suggestive of Shekau's mystery, his hate for Western modernism, political and ideological values, as well as his scout for attention.

What shows after the clip of Shekau speaking is an edited and cut video of teenage girls in Islamic dress reciting scriptures and singing in a group. One of the girls stands up and recites something; she is then asked questions by a man behind the camera who never appears. The girl seems calm and submissive in the video. Two other girls stand up after her and are each asked questions separately. They can be heard mentioning "Allah" a number of times in their responses. The video then shows the whole group of girls again, there is added background music of an Arabic song, sung by a man that plays as the camera pans and zooms in and out on the group of girls sitting down, outdoors under a tree. During the panning, we see that there is a man holding a rifle standing in front of the girls. At the end of the video a message written in white on a lime green background appears. The writing is in Arabic. The Boko Haram logo – an open book at the centre, two east and west facing AK-47 guns at the bottom and a waving black flag above the book – has been edited to appear on the top, right corner of the screen for the entire video. The video is 27:20 minutes long. Most news outlets have interpreted the video as a message to the Nigerian government and the West stating the group's demand for Boko Haram prisoners to be released in exchange for the girls' release. The effectiveness of this in-text link to the video is not made too blatant by Nossiter, as his intention is to show that Shekau looked unperturbed despite being a "hunted man." Indeed, Shekau does seem confident and highly determined in the video. However, beyond the video's purpose as evidence presented by Nossiter, its inclusion in the article compliments the opinions from Nossiter's interviewees who claimed not to recognise the man in the video as the Shekau they once knew. Readers are left even more confused by the enigmatic and unknowable identity of Boko Haram's frontman. A few lines below the mention and link to the video is a picture of Abubakar Shekau, a still from the linked video, with the caption: "A video released last week showed a man who American officials believe is the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau." The picture was sourced from the *Associated Press*, a newswire publication. Interestingly, the videos released by Boko Haram always appear on international news sites before local Nigerian publications post the videos on their online websites.

That is why it initially, seems peculiar that it is "American officials" who identify the man in the video as Shekau until one considers that international broadcasters are the first to air the videos. It is as though the videos are, first and foremost upon release, meant for international news agencies. This is, however, open to debate, since Shekau's videos seem to first address the Nigerian president

and state, before speaking to international presidents. This international broadcasting of Boko Haram videos may also speak to why the group is perceived as a global threat, particularly to America and the Euro-west.

Before the middle of the article is a picture of a crying woman wiping her tears with her bright red hijab. The picture links to a four-minute-long video titled “Boko Haram Kidnapping Tactics Explained,” and sourced from NYT International. The video is a compilation of clips from broadcast news reports that covered Boko Haram attacks in 2013 and 2014. Under the picture, sourced from *Associated Press*, is the caption: “In Nigeria, more than 200 schoolgirls have been held captive since last April. Some background information on the Islamist group that has been trying to topple the country’s government for years”. The information on Boko Haram’s history given under the only subheading in the article has an in-text link to the “spectacular assault on the Bauchi prison” in 2010 in which more than 700 prisoners were freed. Nossiter also wrote this article – a long piece for NYT. The short paragraph appearing under the subheading is an attempt to provide a timeline of Boko Haram’s movements and actions from 2009 to 2012, after the take-over by Shekau.

## Article 2

Ian Bremmer’s, one-page piece for *TIME* opens with a nut paragraph – “How an election, an energy crisis and Boko Haram’s willingness to kill more people than Ebola puts Nigeria’s challenges in context” – which arguably summarises Nigeria’s challenges thematically with reference to the popular news events about Nigeria at the time the article was written. Just like the NYT’s writer, Bremmer also takes the delayed introductory approach where the important information in the sentence is placed right at the end. The writer starts off by mentioning the now-historical Charlie Hebdo attack as a segue into another historical event, Nigeria’s “insurgent savagery.” This is arguably because, as the writer states, the Charlie Hebdo attack received more global attention on social media than the Nigerian event, which is telling of the global level of priority the West holds in relation to Africa. The beginning of the second paragraph reverts this prioritisation, placing the significant information at the start of the sentence by making Boko Haram the subject and establishing one of its aims. However, within this prioritisation, the group is reduced to a mainstream description of an Islamist terrorist group.

The piece is separated under five subheadings, which present the “5 facts” that explain Nigeria’s challenges. The introductory paragraph has an in-text ‘hashtag’ link to a Telegraph UK article, “Paris Charlie Hebdo attack: Je Suis Charlie Hashtag One of Most Popular in Twitter History.” Following this, the author notes that the “insurgent savagery in northeast Nigeria drew much less

international attention” although it was “far bloodier.” This intertextual use of an external online link aims to compare two highly significant events, one happening in Europe, the other in Africa, in order to show the reader the importance of writing about the threat that is Boko Haram.

At the end of each paragraphed fact is a list of various news sources that were cited for the summary. The only source used from “a Nigerian-African perspective” is *Sahara Reporters*. According to its website, *Sahara Reporters* is “an online community of international reporters and social advocates dedicated to bringing you commentaries, features, newsreports.” That a publication based in New York uses mostly American and European news publications and organisations as sources is not unexpected. However, it does expose the plausibility of the one-way media flow theory in which news publications from First World countries dominate news circulation, qualifying as trusted and universally dependable news sources. Of course, there is the problem of the downplaying of events that seems to arise when Nigerian publications rely on state officials to provide facts and information on crimes and attacks by Boko Haram, leading them to produce false figures of deaths and injuries. Thus, one could, ironically, argue that this is one of the main reasons that news reports about African stories are selected from news publications existing outside of Africa.

A picture appears beside the introductory paragraph of Bremmer’s article. It is of a man standing in front of a wall in a profile position with a Keffiyeh (checkered scarf worn by men) around his head and shoulders. The picture that was taken by a NYT photographer, Samuel James, is captioned with, “A member of Boko Haram seen in a suburb of Kano, Nigeria, in 2012.” The man’s face is not visible in the image. Besides Shekau’s face, Boko Haram members remain anonymous and mysterious in the eyes of the media.

### **7.7.7 Coding in Textual Analysis**

The three selected articles are analysed using a qualitative coding method to examine how often and in what context particular key words appeared within the texts. The selection of these key words was done during the proposal writing process, after the completion of the Literature Review which revealed common trends in the language/words used by journalistic and scholarly reports on Boko Haram. The reoccurring nature of these words led to their selection as key words that would be examined in the news reports selected for analysis. The selected key words are:

- Brutal
- Attacks/Bomb
- Violence
- Death/Kill/Blood

- Savage

In the paragraphs that follow, these keywords have been paired or combined to create two subheadings that give an idea of what kind of language appears in the news articles selected for analysis. The coding method I will use here will assist in commenting on the power of language and the way in which it is used primarily to communicate information, yet fundamentally to construct meaning, frame perceptions and feed into mainstream discourse.

### **Theme 1: Brutal Attacks and Violence**

Nossiter's NYT article avoids describing the Boko Haram group as Islamic and does not use any other commonly paired terms like 'terrorist' or 'fundamentalist'. The three times that 'Islamic' appears in the text is in reference to, "the centre for Islamic teaching," and to Yusuf who was an "Islamic preacher" and had a passion for "Islamic militancy." Thus, the term merely works to describe institutions, societal roles and political ideologies. The objectivity of Nossiter's authorship is seemingly established in this regard. Nossiter describes Boko Haram attacks as increased in "frequency and brutality" since 2002. Similarly, he describes the retaliation from the Nigerian security forces as a "brutal crackdown." There is thus an apparent balance in language used to describe the actions of the perpetrators, as well as those of the protectors of the state. This gives the impression that Nossiter is objective in his reporting on some of the fierce encounters that occurred between the two parties. However, this later proves not to be the case as Nossiter's sarcasm takes a number of jabs at Boko Haram, one of which is when he calls the actions of the Nigerian security forces "rounding up and killing young men" as a "kind" response to Boko Haram.

This bias evident Nossiter's writing is also apparent in the occasions where he describes attacks. The article refers to 'attacks' in several instances, from reporting that the sect "attacked a mosque and ... a handful of police stations" to its former leader Yusuf who "attacked schools and government" which, by 2012 became "five years of attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria." This suggests that if the sect has managed to sustain itself and carry out attacks for over five years, then the Nigerian government has not really done enough to stop them. This arguably alludes to the fact that there is something fundamentally lacking in the leadership of those in power, leading to such inadequacies in managing the country's security issues. Notably, Nossiter writes on Boko Haram "re-emerging with sporadic attacks" and the occasion of "Mr. Shekau [who] resurfaced in a video promising new attacks" and yet, the state attacks exercised against the group by Nigeria's state military are never referred to as 'attacks.' When Nossiter mentions what happened to Yusuf once he was arrested, he simply states that the sect founder "was killed in police custody." By using passive voice, Nossiter avoids having to attribute the killing to a subject, leaving no actor present in the sentence to directly blame for the death of Yusuf. These examined instances arguably imply that



only the sect is capable of attacks on institutional structures and civilians, in the same way that the definition of terrorism is only applied to cases where the state is the victim that is under attack by the 'other,' an outlaw of the state. Contrary to this framing of attacks, other news reports reveal that, on a number of occasions, the Nigerian Security Forces and military have been responsible for damaging structures and for killing innocent civilians in their pursuit of Boko Haram. In fact, in 2015 the U.S. government refused to offer Nigeria weapons to fight Boko Haram, due to a number of reports claiming that the Nigerian military was responsible for human rights violations. Moreover, by revealing that the attempts by the Nigerian government to kill Shekau have failed after three false claims of his death, Nossiter further perpetuates the common rhetoric that the government is neither strong enough nor skilled enough to deal with the threat of Boko Haram.

Likewise, Bremmer's short *TIME* piece mentions a number of 'attacks' in reference to the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris and the Boko Haram attacks in Baga. 'Attack' is used to call out the actions of criminal actors against the state, as in Nossiter's piece. Former Nigerian President Jonathan called the Paris event that grabbed the world's attention a "dastardly terrorist attack," interestingly making no comment of similar "atrocities" in his own country, as Bremmer notes. Bremmer's emphasis of the lack of acknowledgment from the president regarding the Baga attacks arguably becomes just another testament of the Nigerian government's inability to effectively deal with its own pressing problems, in the eyes of *TIME*'s American readers. The introductory paragraphs of the piece already imply this with Bremmer referring to Nigeria's government as 'weak' in their response to the problem of the "Islamist terrorist group." Noun phrases that pair 'weak'/'poor'/'bad' with 'governance' in descriptions of the political nature of African states are a common trend traceable in a plethora of news reports and analytical academic pieces on post-independent African states. When this is not stated directly in the text, then it is implied. This is evident in Bremmer's fourth fact on 'Approval and elections' that asks: "Can the February presidential election even be held in Nigeria's three northeastern states?" The effectiveness of this question is that it raises doubts about the organisational capabilities of the country's electoral commission and thus about the leadership of the state. A similar implication exists in *The Nation*'s article wherein Ayobolu makes the exaggerated claim that Boko Haram has a virus of impunity and lawlessness that "has clearly become contagious and the Nigerian state seems to have succumbed to the ultimately self-destructive ailment." Beyond blaming Boko Haram for the flaws and failures of the state, and especially the behaviours of its politicians, Ayobolu is guilty of the pathology of 'bad' governance often linked to African states. This implication can also be seen in his other pieces from *The Nation* such as 'Nigeria: A crisis of structure or values?' quoted under the Writer Profile section where he claims that Nigeria suffers from "chronic state fragility bordering on catastrophic state collapse."

The *TIME* article predicts that we were “likely to see more violence” from Boko Haram before the 2014 elections. Later in the piece, Bremmer makes a comparative note on violence when he reveals that “in 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria killed 800 people.” In this instance, Bremmer compares the past to a present that had not yet occurred, thus laying the foundation for the possibility that the election that was to come should expect similar, if not worse, fatality numbers. Bremmer continues with this comparative style of writing when he rates the deaths linked to Boko Haram higher in comparison to the fatality numbers from the Ebola outbreak. This comparison falls under the subheading, ‘Boko Haram vs. Ebola,’ which represents the third fact, which – according to Bremmer – proves that Boko Haram is a threat. Although a reductionist association, the logic here is that comparing the criminal and deadly actions of Boko Haram to a virus outbreak from the same country signifies the intensity of the problems Nigeria has had to face. Beyond this, through the lens of postcolonial critique, the article arguably reinforces the colonial idea that disease and violence are synonymous with African countries.

Ayobolu’s contribution in *The Nation* typifies Boko Haram’s attacks and violence using ‘bombs’ and ‘bombings’. Thus, the analysis here uses these alternative words as codes to examine their contextual appearance in the text. In the introductory paragraph, Ayobolu proclaims: “[Boko Haram] explode bombs in church, mosque, market, Motor Park or entertainment spot with equal aplomb.” The difference with the phrasing used by Ayobolu in comparison to the ‘attacks’ used by other news publications, is that it practically describes the kind of methods the sect utilises. As examined earlier in the chapter, journalists often use frames and schemas as mental shortcuts to feed the “cognitive economy” of a reader, who makes inferences and associations from the text based on former knowledge. Thus, the writer need not refer to Boko Haram as ‘terrorists’ or point out the irony of their technological advance as a group opposed to modernism and Western technology, since it is already inferred in the group’s explosion of bombs in institutional and economic sectors. That is, the use of ‘bomb’ on five different occasions throughout the piece substitutes the common description of the group as terrorist.

In addition to this, Ayobolu uses a noun phrase, naming the group, “the murderous Boko Haram sect,” an uncommon word association since it does not infer ‘Islamic’ or ‘terrorist’, but rather paints the group as merely criminal. Although this could be a politically correct description of the group, it is also ahistorical and decontextualized and is thus not very useful in describing Boko Haram’s identity. It strips the group of any kind of nuance and, by extension, diminishes the significance of Nigeria’s profoundly complex ethno-religious and political identities that play a major role in the country’s response to “Boko Haram’s serial criminalities”, as Ayobolu defines them. The reductionist and sensationalist proclamations by Ayobolu continue in his insistence that, like Boko

Haram, the Nigerian state “literarily bombs, decimates and devalues critical national institutions.” This unsettling comparison between the type of leadership in the Nigerian state and Boko Haram’s actions is made without much consideration of any other factors of merit that have been mentioned in previous chapters.

### **Theme 2: The Bloody Savagery of Boko Haram Killings**

In the NYT article, Nossiter refers to ‘killing’ seven times, predominantly in reference to actions committed by Boko Haram, and provides a death count in relation to this. After the mention of Boko Haram “killing about 55 people,” the following sentence about the ‘brutal crackdown’ by Nigerian security forces in retaliation is arguably justified. Moreover, right after that sentence, the writer reveals that the group went underground, only to re-emerge with irregular attacks. The construction of the paragraph and the framing of its information does not give readers the chance to sympathise with Boko Haram. A few paragraphs later, Nossiter states that “Nigerian security forces have responded in kind, rounding up and killing young men accused of being Boko Haram members.” The suggestive tone of this statement calls the reader to support the side of the security forces, however unjust their actions are, since during the clash “over 1,500 [people] were killed by Boko Haram and security forces.”

Beyond the explicit bias by Nossiter, there are also three instances in which he ‘others’ the group by using a discriminating form of ‘primitive’ colonial language. Nossiter pronounces that Boko Haram has waged a “bloody and savage war against the Nigerian state,” with “increasingly savage” attacks for over four years, and that this “savage conflict has been carried out under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau.” The uses of ‘bloody’, ‘conflict’ and ‘savage’ in these instances are replete with the dehumanising descriptions about Africa and its people deliberately promulgated by colonial, Eurocentric history. Bremmer’s *TIME* article introduction similarly refers to the Baga attacks as “a surge in insurgent savagery in northeast Nigeria” which was “far bloodier” than the Paris attacks. It is important to note here that the choice of imagery Bremmer uses for the Nigerian attack has a level of visceral grotesqueness and implied bestiality in comparison to the Paris attack. With that said, the descriptions used by Nossiter and Bremmer exist as schemas that hold the implication that Africa is still the ‘Dark Continent’ that is “replete with cannibals, savages, and inferior uncivilised, backward, primitive people, devoid of knowledge and culture and possessing evil traits and desires” (Hoskins, 1992:248). Arguably, the implicit assumption from the author is that since he has represented Boko Haram as categorically bad, further describing the sect’s violent actions as ‘savage’, suggesting an animalistic barbarity, would not be too far-fetched.

### 7.7.8 Reductionism and Distortion in Media Narratives about Boko Haram

An explicit reductionism is apparent in Bremmer subtitle that declares, “Boko Haram’s willingness to kill more people than Ebola puts Nigeria’s challenges in context.” By this comparison, Bremmer sets up a competition between the death counts of Ebola with the victims of Boko Haram’s attacks. Later on, under the subheading ‘Boko Haram vs. Ebola,’ he measures Boko Haram as a bigger threat as it is linked to “10 340 violent deaths” whilst Ebola is believed to have “killed roughly 8, 400 people.” Most of the numbers mentioned here are sourced from multiple references and remain estimates. Bremmer also mentions how well Goodluck Jonathan handled the Ebola crisis, implying that Boko Haram is a crisis he seems to be failing at, which has affected his election numbers. This assumes that the two crises are similar simply because they both cause deaths. There is no complexity offered by this association, beyond a comparison of death estimates.

Ayobolu’s extreme use of hyperboles throughout his critical piece in *The Nation* is also a recognisable form of reductionism. From the onset he pronounces: “They kill. They main. They rape. They kidnap...” This is arguably an exemplar of the overall annunciations made by other articles. The difference is, other articles use less abrasive declarations. Ayobolu has thus condensed into a few words what it takes other publications three paragraphs to write. He continues to dramatically assert that Boko Haram “slaughter human beings in obeisance to an inexplicably blood thirsty deity.” This initially reads as no more than an emotively grim description. A closer look at the reoccurring use of such sacrificial language, such as the “innocent blood ... shed” suggests that the writer believes the god worshipped by Boko Haram expects members to kill as many lives as possible as a gesture of a blood sacrifice. Indeed, it is not the first time that Ayobolu uses such a description. In the article “Bring back our country,” quoted under the Writer Profile section earlier, Ayobolu declares that Boko Haram members “labour to sacrifice human love and solidarity on the altar of a blood guzzling deity.” On the other hand, the ‘brutal’ termination of lives that Ayobolu refers to is an emotively graphic plea for sympathy from the reader. This is the emotionally strong and visceral style of language he uses throughout the piece as he reminds that Boko Haram “rapes... bombs and kills innocent citizens,” as an attempt to emotionally steer the readers into his line of argument. Ultimately, this offers little to no substantial information that provides relevant historical or socio-economic context about the group in relation to its relationship with the Nigerian government. Instead, the writer draws superficial comparisons and illogical connections between the actions of the government and those of the sect.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, such a supposedly analytic commentary piece hardly throws any “intelligible light on fundamental problems touching on the nature of social reality in Africa” (Mbembe, 2001:6). American and European publications are usually accused of this journalistic

ritual but, in this case, it is a Nigeria-based publication that approved the implausible assertions of their political commentator. It is then constructive to return to critic Thiong'o's ideas mentioned earlier and briefly interrogate whether his idea of a 'mental universe' that has been 'imposed on Africa' influencing the ways African see themselves is reasonable if applied to this case? To comment on this, an analysis of what could possibly influence Ayobolu's writing is expanded on a few paragraphs below, under the 'Naming of Boko Haram'.

### **7.7.9 Defining Prominent Identities through Naming**

Naming plays an interesting role in the creation of news reports and the framing of news events by the media. Not only does naming help to centre the subject that is being written about, but the way in which the names are introduced and pronounced by journalists says a lot about the historical and cultural identities that the subject carries or represents. This identity could have easily been attached to the named subject due to its historical background, or chosen by the communal society to which the subject belongs – as in the case of the Boko Haram sect. There are also power relations produced by naming in media texts, sometimes between the writer and subject, other times between the subject and reader. Postcolonial theory has contributed a great deal in this regard, in terms of illuminating how power is exercised through language and discourse. This section will thus provide a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which each of the chosen articles have – through noun phrases, adjectival associations, descriptive pairings, and so on – centred their subjects, and what this naming says about the subject's representation by libertarian media.

#### **Naming Boko Haram**

The only time Nossiter of the NYT refers to Boko Haram as anything besides "the group" is when he describes them as "the radical group that abducted more than 200 girls from a Nigerian village in April." This is a factual, action-based description of the sect. For a writer who has been a reporter on African news stories for NYT for over a decade, and who has written countless pieces on Boko Haram attacks and developments, his description is a modest one. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the description comes from the period in which the article was published – just a month after the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping, an event that was arguably Boko Haram's claim to international fame and recognition. Likewise, Bremmer's *TIME* piece keeps it simple, borrowing from other news sites who similarly define Boko Haram as an 'Islamist terrorist group', a phrase which has become the generally accepted definition of the sect.

By contrast, Ayobolu's commentary piece in *The Nation* does not hold back in using all sorts of indicting noun phrases and descriptions to name Boko Haram. The article begins with an 'othering' and marginalisation of the group as outlaws of the state through the distanced use of 'they' and

'them' in over ten instances throughout the piece. This soon evolves into an outright prosecution of the group as the "malevolent gang" and the "murderous Boko Haram sect," whilst most journalists, like Bremmer of *TIME*, usually settle for referring to Boko Haram as a sect, radical/fundamental extremists, Islamic militants, or terrorists. The effectiveness of the alternative noun phrases used by Ayobolu is that they present the given name as a concrete entity. This is done in such a way that one cannot argue the group is *not* murderous, since no preposition is used to separate the subject from its descriptor. In this sense, 'murderous' is bound much more closely to the group identity. This is unlike the description used in the second paragraph, where Ayobolu claims that "they [Boko Haram] are children of impunity." In this case, one can argue that, no – they are *not* exempt from punishment or wrong doing. Ayobolu describes Boko Haram as "denizens of Thomas Hobbes' state of nature where life is short, nasty, brutish and solitary." Within this context, Ayobolu uses a metaphor comparing the sect to citizens that belong to a state where security is impossible and where it is necessary for 'every man' to be in a state of war, seeking to destroy everyone else's lives. Although Hobbes attributes this war-like behaviour of people to the irrational fear of a gruesome death, Ayobolu suggests that the behaviour exhibited by Boko Haram is out of their certainty that no recourse or punishment will come from their destructive actions. By this suggestion, Ayobolu is of the belief that the Nigerian state and security forces have not demonstrated to have systems in place to deal with Boko Haram's violent acts, thus making them complicit in the damage caused by the sect. This indictment of the Nigerian political leadership is explicit throughout the article as will be shown in later passages.

Since, according to the website, *The Nation* is a publication targeted for "business and political elite, the affluent, the educated, those in leadership positions in all spheres of life," the writer is of the belief that his readers would understand the reference to Hobbes' work. This gives us some insight into the voice of Ayobolu and the power he exercises as a writer of political commentary in the Nigerian context. Ayobolu's elevated use of language, descriptions of Boko Haram members as uncivilised, inhumane and unlawful, as well as his thoughts on Nigerian government's leadership inadequacies, have arguably been borrowed from the Eurocentric field of the social sciences. Moreover, Ayobolu's libertarian views are apparent in his framing of Boko Haram's actions. That is, by declaring that the group wages an "unrelenting war" against good institutions that are built to instil "humane conduct" in society, he exposes his bias in favour of Western institutions that carry Eurocentric values which were upheld in the colonial era. This is explicit in Ayobolu's use of terms like, 'order,' 'discipline,' 'rule of law' and 'civilised humanity.' There is a level of authority and power afforded to Westernised academic knowledge, especially when it is used as "an independent

monitor of power” that holds those “entrusted with its exercise accountable,” as *The Nation*’s ‘About Us’ page reveals. Ayobolu exercises this power not only over his subjects – mainly Boko Haram and elite members of the Nigerian state – but also on his readers as he guides them into the line of his argument. Ironically, the ‘About Us’ page of the publication promises to provide its readers with “credible and dependable information” which will allow them “to be free and self-governing in a democratic society.” The justification for the contradiction between what the newspaper supposedly stands for and what its writer produces would arguably be the fact that Ayobolu’s political pieces fall under the column section of the newspaper, which suggests that the views produced by the writer do not represent those held by the publication.

### **Naming the Boko Haram Leaders and Members**

Abubakar Shekau’s name goes by a number of variations in Nossiter’s NYT piece. He primarily refers to the leader as Mr. Shekau, which, judging by the content of the article, is a sign of professionalism rather than respect. Nossiter reveals that Shekau is a “hunted man” after having been unsuccessfully ‘killed’ by the Nigerian government. The challenge of finding Shekau, as Nossiter submits, has essentially been the fact that the “group’s leadership” is a mystery. The three failed attempts to kill the group’s leadership, which Nigerian authorities presented as a certainty every time, are possibly informed by the idea that since ‘leadership’ was a position of power, if the leader is eliminated, the group would no longer continue to function. However, history has proved – in the resurgence of Boko Haram seven years after the death of its founder – that this is not always an effective strategy, but rather a temporary disarming tactic. Another case in point is when Muhammadu Marwa, the founder and leader of the Maitatsine group, was killed in 1980 and his followers continued promoting his ideas and carrying out attacks until 1985. This emphasis of the failure to kill Shekau may very well be the writer’s way of hinting at the incapability of the Nigerian state to get rid of the problem of Boko Haram completely, due to its historical use of ineffective tactics.

Nossiter describes Shekau as a “typical Quranic student,” in that he would sweep the house of a “retired civil servant and member of council” when he was young and living in Maiduguri. This implies that, Shekau was considered normal by others in his community, who seemingly do not recognise him anymore, especially in his leadership role in Boko Haram. Another layer to this constructed identity of Shekau by the writer through naming, comes in the paragraph that follows where a “younger Shekau then drifted toward Mohammed Yusuf.” The naming of a ‘younger Shekau’ may suggest that he was gullible, naïve and impressionable at the time he ended up joining the founder of Boko Haram. An additional layer is added in the next paragraph where Nossiter

reveals that Shekau then became a ‘lieutenant’, signifying that he soon took on this role after Yusuf’s mentorship, which is also when Boko Haram went out attacking “schools and government.” In contrast to all the names attributed to Shekau, Nossiter simply refers to the original Boko Haram leader as “Mr. Yusuf” and “the sect founder.” An instance that is more revealing than others is describing Yusuf through his reputation as a “firebrand Islamic teacher” in the Maiduguri community. The writer adds that Yusuf “supported himself as a street-side mechanic,” although his real “passion was Islamic militancy.” This shows a contrast between the material reality of Yusuf’s living conditions – having to work to make money and feed himself – and the ideological/spiritual preoccupation with his beliefs, which he ended up dying for. This is arguably the reality for a majority of Northern Nigerians living under impoverished conditions, making the case of Yusuf a microcosm of the society he came from. At the end of the piece, the writer quotes an interviewee who claims that Yusuf was actually ‘afraid’ of Shekau, and that he was the ‘very dangerous’ one who encouraged ‘boys to fight’. The writer’s inclusion of all these complex dimensions into Shekau’s identity does well to further feed into his dark mystery in Western media reports.

The NYT piece is creative in its naming of Boko Haram followers and members. Already in his introductory paragraph, Nossiter refers to the sect’s members gathered to meet with Shekau as his “fellow disciples” and “junior disciple.” This arguably paints Shekau into the Biblical image of a messiah continuing the holy work of his father, which in this case would be Yusuf, Boko Haram’s former leader and mentor to Shekau. Later on, the writer refers to the same group as “fellow militants,” suggesting that a comradeship relationship exists between Shekau and his followers (group members). Correlatively, in *The Nation* Ayobolu calls the group the “Boko Haram hierarchy,” which perhaps suggests that the group has the same organised structure of leadership like that of government, which may be why – as Ayobolu suggests – the group leader can look with aspirations to how the governor works with his fellow statesmen and women to corrupt the state under his rule.

### **Naming of the Nigerian State and its People**

The 2014 NYT piece only gives one alternative name to represent the Nigerian state. In this case, Nossiter refers to Nigerian security forces as “hapless authorities,” pitying their incompetence as a great prison break happened “right under their noses.” Bremmer’s use of the phrase “weak Nigerian government” is one that suggests that the Nigerian government is ill-resourced/equipped to handle Boko Haram. However, there is also the very possible implication, historically traceable through literature on post-colonial African states, that when the article asserts that the government has been weak and struggles to ‘respond’, it is in reference to the calibre of Nigeria’s political leadership over the years. The weakness and struggle implies that the leadership in power is lacking in



something that would otherwise give it strength such as, for instance, strategic and military assistance from the U.S.

Ayobolu's preoccupation in the first few paragraphs of his article in *The Nation* (2014) is the Nigerian people who became victims of the "murderous Boko Haram sect." The writer uses a great deal of emotive language when naming victims of Boko Haram. He refers to the "innocent school girls" that were kidnapped, the "innocent blood" that was shed in attacks, the "valuable lives that were lost," and the "human dignity" disrespected by the sect. All these noun phrase descriptors used by the writer are a blatant attempt to paint a picture of the lives lost undeservingly, in order to get his readers to sympathise with the victims and accept his calumnious language use against Boko Haram. Ayodele Fayose, the governor-elect of the Ekiti state at the time, is linked to Boko Haram as a "worthy comrade-in-impunity" in relation to the sect having been called "children of impunity" by Ayobolu. By creating this damning name that associates the governor with Boko Haram, the writer argues that a motivating factor for Boko Haram's unpunished criminal acts may be because they are aware of Nigerian politicians like Fayose who get away with unlawful behaviour because the state does not act. Nevertheless, there have been a number of times in which Boko Haram has stated that one of its key contestations is how corrupt government officials are in a democratic state, because of their influence by Western values such as capitalism and consumerism. Lastly, Ayobolu describes the people holding leadership positions in Nigerian government as the "fractured political class." This is after the writer has proven, through countless examples of "disrespect of law" by politicians and law officials, that the political class is broken and needs to be restored before a "coherent vision" can even be realised. He describes one of these incidents committed by Fayose's party and Nigerian police as a "veritable terrorist attack" on the judiciary, performed through a "Boko Haram-type bombing" at the National Assembly. Through these exaggerated and overwhelmingly controversial comparisons, Ayobolu frames the Nigerian politicians as criminal and inadequate to rule the state.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a close examination of the representative and discursive frameworks used by online print media publications to write on African stories in general, and Boko Haram as Islamic fundamentalist specifically. Through a CDA, it is apparent that the global leading news publications that were analysed misrepresent, essentialise and reduce both African issues and the Boko Haram insurgency, through the use of discourse influenced by dominant ideologies and legacies of the colonial project. Moreover, the chapter has revealed how the representation of Boko Haram's identity and objectives by these international media texts fail to provide insight into the ways in

which key factors in Nigeria's colonial and post-independence history continue to shape and inform issues of identity-based conflict in Nigeria. Similar to the scholarly work analysed in the previous chapter, this chapter exposed the use of language as an effective device in promulgating Islamophobia, normalising Hegelian interpretations of Africa and its people, as well as illegitimising Nigerian government and politicians.

## CHAPTER 8

### 8 Situating Africa Beyond Euro-American Paradigms

The critical analysis of contemporary online media and scholarly writings about African issues in this study, both from within and outside the continent, has revealed that there are still uncontested myths and fallacies present in writings about Africa. These ‘primitive,’ homogeneous and essentialist narratives of Africa dominate the world of published text, scholarship, art, film, marketing and broadcasting more than any other heterogeneous and nuanced narratives. This framing of African issues, and Boko Haram specifically, within a particularly reductive, Eurocentric lens has resulted in the continuous colonial-type construction of an ontologically and epistemologically unjust history. In this constructed history, John and Jean Camaroff argue that ‘white men’ are responsible for the African identities which “emerged out of a relationship of ‘opposition and inequality’ in which, by historical imperative, Europe stood to Africa as ‘civilisation to nature,’ ‘saviour to victim,’ ‘actor to subject’” (1992:691). To expand on the view of influenced African identities within this context, Mbembe postulates that the Western consciousness is essentially unable to recognise or relate to the body and flesh of the African ‘stranger’ on a theoretical, practical or humane level (Mbembe, 2001:2). By this assertion, Mbembe addresses the underpinned racism that informs the ways in which the majority of Western civilisation views Black and Brown people living in Africa. With that said, there’s an undeniable, inherently Western-centric, injustice entrenched in the ‘Othering’ of Africa and its people, which does not seem to seize no matter how much it is consistently spoken of or written on. Arguably, the difference in the current neo-colonial and neoliberal era of globalisation is that this unjust ‘Othering’ plays out in undefinable micro-aggressive forms, and is normalised in the minds of victims through centuries of structural and systematic oppression and exploitation. Even though this is the widely held belief of African victimhood, what the breath of this study has sought to show – in support of Mbembe’s final analysis – is the danger and insufficiency of reducing African struggles to representation and the assumption that all knowledgeable minds that comprehend these issues can refute representational discourse, and that would be the end of the struggle.

Postcolonial theory and practice, which has been used as the framework of critical approach in this study, is a well-known school of thought that attempts to shed some light on the real conditions of these ‘Othered’ states, which used to be former colonies. The term ‘Postcolonial’ is often interpreted etymologically to imply a time directly after colonialism when a country has gained independence. In relation to this study, Postcolonialism – at the most basic level of interpretation – is an attempt to engage with - and contest - the discourses, power structures, systematic

constructions and racial hierarchies prevalent in the present as a legacy of colonialism (Gilbert & Tompkin, 1996:2). According to Bhabha, postcolonial criticism, in particular, emphasises a politics of ‘cultural difference’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘complexity’ (1992:172). As such, although mistakenly associated with Marxism and Third World theories in its upcoming years, postcolonial theory and studies have shown to incorporate “a diverse range of political perspectives, including [...] versions of progressive humanism and liberalism” (Singh, 1333). Beyond this leftist attachment to politics, on a broader level, postcolonial studies is multidisciplinary in all senses of the word. That is, the discipline has been a way of thinking and interrogation that has changed worldly perspectives taken by a multitude of disciplines including history, philosophy, political science, literature and anthropology.

The ideological and methodological aspect of postcolonial studies often prioritises an intervention into – what Homi Bhabha describes as – the “ideological discourses of modernity that attempts to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” (Bhabha, 1992:171).<sup>75</sup> This intervention can take different forms and approaches, but is essentially driven by the necessity to resist the socio-economic-political and cultural injustices and constructions of imperial colonialism, and rather promote a richer, more complex and humanistic acknowledgement of third world nations. An acknowledgement of this sort would necessarily go beyond revised historical representation of natives, subalterns or the colonised in literature, but also speaks to the socio-economic and political spheres of material reality. Postcolonial scholars view this reality as one constructed by neoliberal Euro-American power structures that are difficult to circumvent, and which can only be deconstructed. This study has worked to critique this postcolonial view of a constructed reality that supposedly encapsulates the complete struggle for Africans, by examining Nigeria’s material reality in contrast to its reduced representation by journalists and scholars alike.

To return the discussion to the African context, it is difficult and nearly impossible to speak of Africa in simple all-encompassing terms, reasons best captured by the writings of Mudimbe. In his preface to *The Idea of Africa*, Mudimbe begins by attempting to simplify the uniqueness of Africa’s reality by noting how the “natural features, cultural characteristics, and, probably, values” of the continent and its civilisations constitute “a totality different from [...] Asia and Europe” (1994:xv). However, even from this point of departure, Mudimbe spends several moments throughout the book grappling with the inescapability of describing the continent without essentialising its features or unknowingly borrowing from ‘the colonial library’ that has framed and ‘invented’ most

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<sup>75</sup> According to Bhabha, the discourse of modernity flattens out complexity by simplifying the “heterogeneity and unevenness of real conditions” and reducing them to simple and ‘natural’ binary structures of opposition – capitalism and socialism; modernisation and underdevelopment, etc. (cited in Neil, 2012:12).

descriptions about the continent and its people (1994:xi). According to Mudimbe, this is a consequence of the perennial silencing of African discourses in some cases, and their conversion into Western epistemologies by ‘conquering Western discourses’ in other cases (1994:xiv). Mudimbe observes that this influence by conceptual systems of the West affect even “the most explicitly ‘Afrocentric’ descriptions” by African analysts (1994:xv). This is due to the way in which Africa is constructed as the ‘Other’ – an observable object that is constantly under an objectifying gaze whenever it has to undergo representation. Thus, the struggle to take on the weight of re-imagining and re-writing the ways in which representative discourse frames Africa is burdened by two common extremes. The first is a situation where representation is informed by the ‘Eurocentric episteme’ which articulates deficiency and absence from Africa. The second extreme is one informed by a reactive Afrocentric articulation of “presence or plenitude as the determinate opposite of the prior Eurocentric representation” (Neil, 2012:131). The problem with these two extremes is not only in their inefficiency to represent Africa appropriately, but mainly in the sheer violence that comes from any project of representation. As Said noted, the process of representation “implies control, it implies accumulation . . . it implies a certain kind of estrangement or disorientation on the part of the one representing” (cited in Viswanathan, 2004:41). Furthermore, the prioritisation of representative discourse as the primer of analysis on African issues remains an insufficient and outdated tool. Such so that Mudimbe’s analysis of an invented Africa by the ‘Eurocentric episteme’ as a fixed determinant for how Africa will always be perceived creates the danger of painting Africans as passive victims to an all-encompassing discourse. That is to say, Mudimbe’s exploration was good enough to show the sheer force and immensity of Western epistemologies over the years, however, fixing his theory to that alone reduces all the struggles that have come from giving a voice to Africa to express itself. The contestation presented by the title and breath of this study examined how even the journalists and academics that are from Africa and write within this material context have played into Africa’s invention – as described by Mudimbe – without correcting or challenging its insufficiencies. In relation to Boko Haram, the contestation thus argues that the reality of materiality within the Nigerian context – as explored in Chapters 4 and 5 – shows how there is not just one fixed and invented idea that defines the problem of African conflicts. As such, by not entering into this dimension of discourse, African writers become part of the representational problem of ‘inventing’ Africa from a foreign lens. In this way, the study has contested not only Boko Haram’s contradictory representations, but also the work of the current producers of knowledge coming from Africa and their failure to move beyond representation and into the discourse of materiality.

From this departure, and since one of the aims of the postcolonial project is to reclaim under-represented histories and provide access and context to the complex life forms of the marginalised, this dissertation has exposed the rich nuances in Nigeria's history and Boko Haram's multi-fold identity. The purpose of such a project has been to re-engage a critical Afro-consciousness reflective of contemporary problems in the African continent, in order to reveal the ways in which – beyond Euro-American sources – even academic voices coming from the African continent fall prey to Western-centric postulations of our own problems. Similarly, although postcolonial studies arguably offers an alternative approach to the formulation of - and writing about - African problems, we must be weary of the limitations of such an approach. That is, in addition to what Mbembe and Mudimbe alluded to regarding the difficulty Africans have to self-recognise, postcolonial sentiments often paint Africans as perpetual victims of their colonial past – with limited agency. In the same breath, as qualified by Mbembe, the tendency of African writers to reduce struggle to historically informed representation gives power to representational discourse that assumes that Africa can be packaged in words and after, becomes that which is ascribed to it. Thus, the findings of this research propose that both journalistic and academic reporting, especially those situated in Africa, need to be aware of and challenge Western paradigms and discourses that function as a normative benchmark and framework for knowledge produced about African issues even beyond postcolonial interpretations. In this sense, the revised theory and practice of situational journalism – taking suggestion into consideration – would arguably resolve the problem of violence in representational frameworks that cover African issues and move deeper and beyond this into concrete/material/every day issues felt differently by people of the land. Because this study seeks to enhance the work of African media studies, this revision of situational journalism should not be without a critical interrogation into the abuse of socio-political power, ethno-religious dominance, and socio-economic inequality, insofar as they are currently enacted, reproduced and normalised through media discourse reporting on Africa.

## Reference List of Academic and Media Articles Analysed in Chapters 6 & 7

### Academic Article 1:

“The Boko Haram Uprising and Insecurity in Nigeria: Intelligence Failure or Bad Governance?” (May 2012) by Odomovo S. Afeno in the *Conflict Trends* publication.

URL: <http://www.accord.org.za/publication/conflict-trends-2012-1/>

### Academic Article 2:

“Socio-economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria” (April 2012) by Aliyu Odamah Musa in the *Journal of African Media Studies* publication.

URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279295305\\_Socio\\_economic\\_incentives\\_new\\_media\\_and\\_the\\_Boko\\_Haram\\_campaign\\_of\\_violence\\_in\\_Northern\\_Nigeria](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279295305_Socio_economic_incentives_new_media_and_the_Boko_Haram_campaign_of_violence_in_Northern_Nigeria)

### Academic Article 3:

“Boko Haram and the Recurring Bomb Attacks in Nigeria: Attempt to Impose Religious Ideology through Terrorism?” (Feb 2012) by Ali Yusufu Bagaji, Moses Shaibu Etila, Elijah E. Ogbadu, and Jafa’aru Garbu Sule in the *Cross-Cultural Communication* publication.

URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020120801.1370>

### Media Article 1:

“A Jihadist’s Face Taunts from the Shadows” (May, 2014) by Adam Nossiter of the *New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/19/world/africa/a-jihadists-face-taunts-nigeria-from-the-shadows.html>

### Media Article 2:

“5 Facts that Explain the Threat from Nigeria’s Boko Haram” (Jan, 2015) by Ian Bremmer of *TIME* magazine. URL: <http://time.com/3666496/5-facts-that-explain-the-threat-from-nigeria-boko-haram/>

### Media Article 3:

“Enter, the Boko Haram State?” (Nov, 2014) by Segun Ayobulu of *The Nation*.

URL: <http://thenationonlineng.net/enter-the-boko-haram-state/>

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