

“TERRORISTS OR TAGS”? CONTESTED IDENTITIES IN MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF MILITANTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Militancy is a global phenomenon. In Nigeria, militants have been given various names that have been highly contested, along political, social and religious lines. Ranging from the Niger Delta Militants (henceforth NDM) to the Boko Haram Insurgents (henceforth BHI), the issue of linguistic labeling in the media in relation to militants activities has been a serious one. Amidst these competing voices, there is the need to critically evaluate the various labels associated with militants as seen in the media. Through the application of the Socio-Political Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), as espoused by Allan Bells, this paper explicates the growing importance of CDA and its socio-political concern to revealing inequalities of power as a standard approach to media texts. This approach to CDA tends to link text analysis of news stories to media production processes and the role of the audience and opines that Critical Discourse analysts are interested in both details of the text itself and the broader social, political, and cultural functions of media discourse to determine other layers of meaning. The paper focuses on the analysis of news because CDA is an important approach to studying media texts, especially in crises situations. The paper examines the extent to which the discourse of media labeling has affected the overall discourse of insurgent activities as reported in the Nigerian print media. This is because discourses of identity formation are interactive pursuit even between opposing groups. By explicating media reports of Vanguard and Daily Trust newspapers in Nigeria on the subject of militancy, the overlap and divergence between the two discourses will emerge. Analyzing the integration of, and distancing from, aspects of the government discourse in opposition materials allows the militants' view of their identity to be contrasted and compared with that of the Nigerian government's position. The emerging comparison demonstrates clearly whether the ostensible linguistic labeling of the militants is aimed at weakening their projected identity or a ploy to polarize their ranks to the JTF advantage.

Introduction

The level of violence unleashed by militants has become a nation-wide concern in Nigeria. On a daily basis the media run and re-run pictures of dramatic acts of violence carried out by this group of people. Such graphical illustrations of pictorials are always scary. Nigeria can now be compared to countries where terrorist groups operate freely, plan sophisticated attacks and stockpile weapons. The federal government, with the support of the international community, has launched many initiatives to combat the threat posed by the perpetrators of these crimes. Indeed, considerable amount of money and political capital have been invested in new and continuing programmes to enhance security and contain the threat of militants. This paper critically examines the tagging of perpetrators of violence in the Nigerian media to see whether those

choices of words are limiting or aggravating the crises. Our argument is based on Chilwa's (2011:78) observation that the word "terrorism" has no universally legal binding definition since the concept may itself be controversial as it is often used by state authorities to delegitimize political brutality and potentially legitimize the state's own use of armed forces against opponents. From this position, we observe that the most common definition of the word "terrorism" refers to those violent acts which are intended to create fear or "terror", perpetrated for religious, political or ideological goals.

Theoretical underling and methodological framework

The theoretical approach adopted in this study is the Critical Discourse Analytical approach of Allan Bells which is a reaction to the mainstream CDA. Allan Bells (1995) maps out the approaches made in the study of media language and discourse from, first, Critical Linguistics (CL) and then Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). His position is that CDA foundations are derived from classical rhetoric, pragmatics, text linguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics and reflect the growing interdisciplinarity in research between the humanities and the social sciences. This therefore means that Ideology and power underpin applications of CDA to issues relating to gender, class, and ethnicity and also to more general discussions about media discourses relating to politics or the economy. Bells opines that depending on the discipline background of the researcher, the methodologies may differ, with both large empirical studies found as well as small, focused qualitative case studies. His position is that the dominant paradigms of media language research have tended to produce critical evaluations of the power of the media to influence and even to subordinate their audiences. He opines that much of the work on media language, CDA has been undertaken on the news and is concerned with uncovering its underlying ideologies. He states that this work targets for special attention social problems like discrimination and prejudice citing van Dijk's 1991 work on (racism) as a paradigm.

Studies undertaken in CDA are designed with an emancipatory purpose; that is, they have a socio-political agenda intended to shed light on issues of power and domination. Thus, it should not be surprising to see so much CDA focus on the news because News is not considered as some neutral image of the real world but as a product of news gathering and news making. In other words, news is the end result of a number of processes, including organizational policies and preferences that set the news agenda and selection and judgments about relative importance and significance. It is thus a representational discourse made by converting the raw data from a variety of sources, including eyewitness accounts, interviews, and media releases, into stories within the context of technical constraints like production deadlines, and in accordance with the news values of the time. News values or the set of criteria used to determine newsworthiness and hence whether or not an item is likely to appear as news, act as a filtering mechanism or gate-keeping device for what is reported. The study of the news has always been at the forefront of media discourse research. The construction and selection of the news and its concentration on negative events, together with its connection to powerful institutions and commercial market imperatives, have proved compelling for language researchers, especially those who are interested in critical approaches to ideology, and have stimulated media and language use.

However, media language has been studied at other levels beyond journalistic practices, media production processes, and textual analysis. The traditional distinction between news and entertainment has transferred into analytic approaches, with linguists and discourse analysts using conventional, language-focused, empirical methods on news texts, especially on news content, news values, and ideals of objectivity. This has left theorists from other fields like

sociology, cultural studies, and feminism to supply much of the insight into the entertainment side of media output. It is from these traditions that studies about consumption, popular taste, the politics of the everyday, and notions of pleasure and resistance have been undertaken. A major contribution here has been insights from reception studies into reading practices and how readers or audiences negotiate meaning and respond to various media texts such as soap operas and women's magazines, as well as news programs. These are questions that usually lie outside traditional language or discourse analysis. Audience research has been the mainstay of media and cultural studies research as researchers endeavour to find out how audiences make sense of media texts.

Relevant literature on linguistic tagging in the media

Most studies have been carried out on the issue of linguistic labeling or "tagging" in the media. This is because, when the media functions or operates objectively and with a deep sense of integrity, it ensures the institutionalization of an informed society that respects individual freedom and rights. But, there has to be a democratic state to provide the framework for stability and enjoyment of such rights. For instance, during the Libyan uprising in the Middle East, the media referred to the Libyan opposition Army as '*The Libyan Peoples' Army*' while the original Libyan Army was called "*Gaddafi Army*" as (Sa'id Haddat 2012: 6) observes, *the Gadhafi army which was already dwindling opened fire on the protesters in a protest which was ignited on the 16th of February, 2011 causing the Libyan peoples Amy to respond*. Again the Security Department of the Libyan Army was renamed after the last son of Gadhafi, Khamis who headed the outfit. It was called "*Khamis Brigade*" rather than the original name "*Libyan Brigade*" when the war broke out all in a bit to legitimize the actions of the opposition. Again, in the Syrian war, the opposition Army has been tagged '*The Free Syrian Army*' while the country's Army is now called '*Al-Assad Army*' thus legitimizing the rebels' actions. Also, during the June 12 struggle in Nigeria, some people and media organizations referred to the process as a '*Yoruba Affair*' to further kill the agitation for the actualization of the annulled presidential election in Nigeria; an Editorial of *The Nation newspaper* attests to this "whereas the editorial of the Nigerian tribune reduced June 12 to a purely Yoruba affair...*Nigerians were angry about the annulment but the real protests were at the south west...so IBB robbed the whole nation it soon became a south west affair (July 23 2008)*).

Chiluwa (2011b: back page) refers to this process as linguistic labeling as he posits: *This pattern of labeling which is often viewed as capable of causing further disaffection and conflict produced a highly negative characterization of the key players in the crisis*. These are instances where the role of the media can make or mar the collective interest of the people depending on its perception of the crisis. More so, Adolf Hitler was said to have used the media to create hatred for Jews (Thompson, 1994:5) during the WWII, while Rwanda's Radio Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTLM) was alleged to have urged listeners "to kill Tutsis" or what it called "the cockroaches" (Des Forges, 1999). In the Balkans, broadcasters polarized local communities to the point where, violence became an acceptable tool for addressing grievances (Thompson, 1994:7). In the case of Rwanda, the media was said to have been used to guide the perpetrators of the genocide towards their victims. The media may also incite violence through manipulative, negative presentation of facts that create the impression that the situation is worsening. This type of reporting more often than not provides a justification for people or groups to take decisive action, including violence (Frohardt & Temin, 2003).

Although the focal point here is the issue of perspective of news reporting and presentation as a discourse and power control strategy in media reports; the position of this study

is that such discourses are judgmental and could fan the embers of political acrimony and lead to further break down of law and order. Both local and international media in Rwanda were said to have failed to report on the impact of the conflict as early as 1990 while local media ignored to report on massacres of political dissents and those suspected to be Tutsi sympathizers (Des Forges, 1999). The role of the media in the Rwandan genocide was in great disrepute of the legal and moral principles of Journalism and human rights. By instigating a genocide campaign, the media turned into a dangerous weapon for its prosecution. Its international counterpart failed to monitor escalating killings and rather pictured the crisis as a civil strife between the Tutsi and Hutus (Chaon, 2007:161).

Such tendencies are revealed in the Darfur conflict in Southern Sudan. Since 2003, local (Arab media) is alleged to have passively dealt with atrocities committed. The conflict in Darfur has been framed as an '*Arab war*', a line quickly adopted in the local media. Authorities were accused of using *Radio Television Libre des Milles Collines* RTLM and Radio Rwanda broadcasters to spur and direct killings where Tutsis were hiding (Kamilindi, 2007:136). *Radio Television Libre des Milles Collines* (RTLM) transcripts presented as evidence in the Arusha Tribunal show how broadcasters used hate speech on air and rendered the minority Tutsis vulnerable to the attacks. Thompson (2007) has argued that '*media spurs conflict in society by making derogatory remarks based on ethnic differences, race, colour, and sex*'. In Rwanda like the Balkans, media messages were designed to sharpen ethnic and political sensitivities. Thompson writing on the Yugoslavian war notes that the media was saturated with intensified propaganda to mobilize the population and make war thinkable, let alone inevitable (Thompson, 1994:1). These examples highlight the precarious role of the media in vulnerable society. In such circumstances the media can be viewed as "a double edged sword". They can be weapons of war and conflict or can uphold prospects for peace. In the hands of totalitarian interests, the media can be a dangerous device. It can be used to spread misinformation and manipulate public sentiments.

Choice of data

Data for this analysis were elicited from two Nigerian newspapers: *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. Altogether, four extracts were taken from each of the newspapers for the analysis. In terms of the sampling technique, the study made use of the purposive method of data collection. Data gathering was based on the knowledge of the crises and the reportage by the media outfits adopted by the media practitioners and the data so chosen ensured that the texts fit the specific purpose. The choice of these data ensures that a broad opinion of all the respondents, actively involved in the aspect of study, are obtained and analyzed.

Data presentation

The approach to the analysis is based on the fact that media practitioners are at liberty to choose the words they use in labeling perpetrators of crises and that CDA is capable of checkmating those perceived excesses to ensure that there is a balance in terms of media reportage and the representation of people in the media. From this position, the paper sets out to identify the perceived "unpalatable" linguistic labels of the "militants" and analyze the relationship of the major actors and the media in relation to the management of the crises from a linguistic point of view. Media depictions of militancy in Nigeria tend to bear traits of perceived bias either on the side of the militants or the JTF thus giving rise to certain reactions that tend to jeopardize the efforts of both the militants and the JTF. The necessities of the moments and the "genuine" representation of issues however, tend to regulate the choice of language adopted by

the media. This paper therefore is an attempt to explicate those labels portrayed in the media that tend to be “offensive” to the militants and “acceptable” to the JTF.

Data analysis, discussion and findings

In the data below, the terms *militants*, *vandals*, *bunkerers* and *bunkering* are used restrictively refer to the Niger Delta “agitators” whose region has been reddened with conflict as an offshoot of the Niger-Delta crisis---a product of structural deficiencies inherent in the country and systemic anomalies within its society. The three terms overlap in their meaning relations thus leading to their being grouped together within the same schematic arrangement. The following extracts help to bring out the hidden meaning in the texts in relation to their usages regarding the concepts under focus:

FG LOST 4TRN TO MILITANTS: During the heat of the Niger Delta militancy, the Federal Government lost as much as N4 trillion, former minister of Niger Delta Sam Odey has said: He said this was due to the **dwindled** daily oil **production** which went down to 700 bpd compared with 2.5m bpd being produced now. The former minister spoke during the National Orientation Agency (NOA) stakeholders’ meeting on President Goodluck Jonathan’s mid-term performance from May 2011 to May 2013. He expressed happiness that the controversial East/West road started in his time has now reached 64 per cent completion. **EXTRACT A1.**

NAVY HANDS OVER SIX SUSPECTED OIL THIEVES TO EFCC: Six suspected oil thieves and a vessel, MV SOA from the Nigerian Navy, Naval Base, Warri, Delta State for further investigation and possible prosecution: “According to Lieutenant Commander Francis Okoloagu, the navy ship NNS COBRA, while on patrol July 28, 2013 arrested the suspects on board MT ALLIRIZA BEY and MV SOA *vessels transferring petroleum product suspected to be Automotive Gas Oil to smaller boats offshore Escravos.*” Wilson Uwujaren spokesman of the EFCC said in a statement. **EXTRACT A2**

NIGERIA LOOSING 35 PERCENT POWER GENERATION CAPACITY TO VANDALISM: Nigeria is losing over 35% of her power generation capacity to the activities of vandals, the Minister of Power, Prof. Chinedu Nebo has said. The Minister made this revelation while speaking at the opening ceremony of a two-day Stakeholders Forum on the protection of critical national assets and infrastructure at the International Conference Centre, Abuja on Monday. **EXTRACT A3.**

The three news extracts above share some striking similarities but are cut in the web of linguistic labeling by using three different labels to describe the perpetrators of violence in the Niger Delta region. In EXTRACT A1 there is the consistent use of the noun “*militancy*” and the adjective “*militants*”. While the headline reads “**FG LOST 4TRN TO MILITANTS**” the news over line goes ahead to sustain the linguistic usage by quoting the then minister of the Niger

Delta as saying “During the heat of the Niger Delta militancy, the Federal Government lost as much as N4 trillion”. The then minister was said to have blamed the “dwindling” oil “production” rate to the activities of the “militants” and called for a change of attitude. In EXTRACT A2, there is another use of linguistic particle which tends to portray the *Niger Delta boys* as common criminals as the newspaper states on its headline: “NAVY HANDS OVER SIX SUSPECTED OIL THIEVES TO EFCC”. The reportage here is on outright criminality—a case punishable under the nation’s criminal laws and penal codes hence the need to hand them over to the country’s anti-corruption agency for appropriate prosecution. The news over line goes on to state that: “Six suspected oil thieves and a vessel, MV SOA from the Nigerian Navy, Naval Base, Warri, Delta State for further investigation and possible prosecution”. The role of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commissions in Nigeria is solely to see to resolving issues that bother on corrupt practices and not to prosecute criminalities or militant but because of the involvement of the Naval Vessel in the crime, the EFCC came into the picture to give criminal prosecution to the crime of militancy. It is an irony that government vessels are caught “*transferring petroleum product suspected to be Automotive Gas Oil to smaller boats offshore Escravos*” because these are supposed to be the protectors of the nation’s territorial waters but turned “bandits”. This shows the link between the three extracts continues as the minister spells out in clear terms the counter-productive effects of oil **bunkering** and pipeline vandalism. The position of the minister of power is premised on the fact that the drop in the production capacity of the power ministry leading to inadequate supply of light is as a result of the activities of **vandals**. The context of the location where the utterances were made is very important: “*The Minister made this revelation while speaking at the opening ceremony of a two-day Stakeholders Forum on the protection of critical national assets and infrastructure*”. The implication of this is that the nation’s “critical infrastructure” is at stake and need serious overhaul if the nation is to increase the output of oil production as well as protect the facilities within the Niger Delta region. EXTRACT A4 below is a reaction to the preceding news item on the repercussions of vandalism and bunkering as a legal dimension has been introduced to justify the criminality attached to the conducts of the militants.

OIL THIEVES FACE 21 YEARS IN JAIL: The Federal Government has raised the alarm that Nigeria loses N7billion to oil theft on a daily basis. The National Economic Council (NEC), which disclosed this at its yesterday’s meeting chaired by Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo, consequently resolved that anyone found guilty of crude oil **theft** be sentenced to 21-year imprisonment without option of fine. **EXTRACT A4**

In a federal executive council (FEC) presided over by the president, Goodluck Jonathan the decision taken was a direct legal assault on any conduct considered inimical to the progress of the nation through “vandalism” of oil pipelines. Our interest in the story is the metaphoric use of the word “thieves” to label those who vandalise oil pipelines. The media switches from “bunkerers” to “militants” “criminals” “thieves” to “bandits” etc. and this kind of labeling is judgmental as Chouliaraki and Fairclough assert:

Some representations reflect reality more loyally than others according to some external measure. Such an interpretation is out of line with their definition of truth as a product of a democratic discussion but fits well with their distinction between more or less ideological discourses (2002:198).

According to this interpretation, Chouliaraki and Fairclough *circumscribe relativism*, viewing all representations as socially constructed (a relativist position), but seeing some as more

loyal to reality than others (a non-relativist position). From a social constructionist perspective, the question arises here as to *who* should pass judgment as to which representations are better than others. If the choice of one representation over others is not the product of struggle in a discursive field, there must be someone – such as the researcher – who decides by virtue of their privileged insight. There is no consistency in the issue of linguistic labels when it comes to the issue of militancy reportage in Nigeria and such labels are judgmental. The use of the word “thieves” is closely followed by the word “theft” in the sentence: *anyone found guilty of crude oil theft be sentenced to 21-year imprisonment without option of fine* with the pronouncement making “bunkering” a capital offence which does not carry any form of appeal or option of a fine. As if daring the presidential fiat on the issues of vandalism, security operatives were said to have arrested pipelines “vandals” as stated in the report below:

POLICE ARREST 10 PIPELINE VANDALS: *The Nigeria Police have arrested 10 oil pipeline vandals and recovered 800 units of 50 liters jerry cans filled with stolen oil in Ogun state.* Inspector-General of Police Mohammed Abubakar said this yesterday saying the force was closing in on criminals who have been vandalizing pipelines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) across the country. **EXTRACT A5**

POLICE CAN'T PROSECUTE PIPELINE VANDALS-COURT: The authority of the police to prosecute crimes has again suffered a major blow as a Federal High Court sitting at Lokoja; Kogi State held that the police's power to prosecute pipelines vandals has been transferred to the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). “This means that even if it is the Nigeria Police that apprehended any person suspected to have committed such offence, it is the duty of the police to hand over such suspect to the NSCDC for prosecution.” The case that resulted in the judgment was a one-count charged filed by the police against one Abuh Daniel who was said to have loaded one big storex tank with crude oil without license. **EXTRACT A6**

The headline on EXTRACT A5 runs contrary to the content of the news in terms of the critical appraisal of the lexical items found therein. To “*Arrest 10 Pipeline Vandals*” does not collocate with “*stolen oil*” because vandals destroy but on a closer look at the content we see the same report saying “the force was closing in on criminals who have been vandalizing pipelines”. But EXTRACT A6 tends to nullify the federal government's stance on prosecuting the so called “criminals” “bunkerers” “thieves” “vandals” etc. as we are told that: “*Police Can't Prosecute Pipeline Vandals-Court*”. With this kind of pronouncement from the court, it calls to question who these “criminals” are, if they are not highly placed individuals in the society. On a closer look at the above headline, it looks contradictory and confusing. The content of the news is quite different from the main news. The headline is “sensational” misleading” and intended to call attraction to potential buyers who would want to know why “the police cannot prosecute vandals as said by the courts” only for such a buyer to discover that the prosecutorial powers as reported are not in the Nigerian police but on the National Civil Defence Corps as stated “that the police's power to prosecute pipelines vandals has been transferred to the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). “This means that even if it is the Nigeria Police that apprehended any

person suspected to have committed such offence, it is the duty of the police to hand over such suspect to the NSCDC for prosecution”. This position clearly substantiates van Dijk’s view that:

Headlines are particularly important because, both in production and in the reception of news reports, they subjectively define the most prominent or most relevant information of the news item. They express—sometimes in a biased way—the top of the underlying semantic macrostructure, and at the same time define the situation in the press. Since headlines and leads are often the only information read or memorized, they play an important role in further information processing and possible effects of news (1988:189).

From the above position, it could be opined that headlines are sometimes purposely structured to mislead the reading of the news by attracting potential buyers to the newspaper only for the buyer to discover that the content of that particular news item is quite different from the headlines flashed on the front page of the newspaper. EXTRACT A7 below is a typical example of over generalization in terms of language usage. The headline poses a threat by stating the obvious:

Niger Delta ex-militants threaten to halt oil production: Niger Delta ex-militants, also known as ex-agitators, under the Phase Three Amnesty have threatened to halt oil production in the region.
EXTRACT A7.

As a way of justifying their reportage, the extract above portrays the paper as saying that the Niger Delta militants “*have the capacity*” to “halt” oil production in the entire country. But the switch from “ex-militants” to “*ex-agitators*” is worrisome because the essence is to give sympathy to the perpetrators of violence in the region. If the journalist says they are “*ex-militants*” and they are also known as “*ex-agitators*” then what is the position of the media house because those two labels are direct opposites of what they actually are supposed to be in terms of linguistic usages. The question is if they were undergoing the amnesty programme why would they “halt” oil production? And for what purpose? The process of “halting” production in the entire country does not involve a particular militant group but where others had embraced the amnesty programme, it then becomes difficult for any group to achieve such a goal.

Ex-militant Raises the Alarm over Arms Build-up in Niger Delta: Niger delta militants: Seeks UN, US intervention: An ex-militant in the Niger Delta region, Mr Kennedy West, has warned of a heavy arms build-up in the region, stressing that the area might witness another orgy of violence if immediate steps were not taken. He called on the federal government to urgently embark on another round of disarmament programme in the region to avoid a return to the pre-amnesty era. **EXTRACT A8**

“We want to tell you that the arms in the Niger Delta region are more than what people think. The arms in this region now are two times bigger than what the militants from various camps submitted in 2009, under the amnesty programme. The arms here are two times heavier than what we had here in 2009. **EXTRACT A9**

EXTRACTS A8 and A9 tend to substantiate the position taken in EXTRACT A7 that the militants have the capacity to launch an attack that could “halt” oil production in the country if their activities are not checkmated by the appropriate authorities. A “repentant militant” himself raises the alarm as reported in that headline that it will only take the intervention of the United Nations and the United States to rescue the situation as the arms build-up in the region is “overwhelming”. According to the ex-militant “the area might witness another orgy of violence if immediate steps were not taken”. This is also a wakeup call for those who have gone to sleep believing that because the amnesty programme has been implemented in the Niger Delta region and that because “*the boys*” “*have been settled*” the area is now calm for business as usual. And as the reporter did say in that report that the arms in the region were “two times” bigger than the ones that were recovered during the disarmament programme, it therefore implies that “the reporter’s personal emotion is brought into the reportage to further heighten the tension in the region by calling the attention of all stakeholders into that region and making it a center of attraction. The level of militancy in the region as exhibited by the militants and as reported in the media can be seen as a situation that can go beyond the Niger Delta region. This is exactly the position of the next extracts as we observe that the Atlas Cove jetty in Lagos was under heavy attack by the militants who travelled all the way from their region to the South Western part of the country to unleash terror.

IN a brazen attack that lasted over three hours, conducted outside the boundaries of the Niger Delta, suspected militants yesterday, blew up the receptor pipelines inside the Atlas Cove jetty, effectively crippling the capacity of the facility to receive petroleum products. Admiral Ishaya Ibrahim, the Chief of Naval Staff disclosed that the attack left three naval personnel, including an officer dead, while an eyewitness added that four labourers also lost their lives. **EXTRACT A10**

They (attackers) really took their time. It was as if they had inside information of the operations of the jetty. They also stormed the armoury and carted away available arms and ammunition. After scaring off the security personnel, they proceeded to place dynamites on a critical angle of the pipelines linking the receptor jetty and blew it up, the eyewitness disclosed. When Vanguard visited the area at about 1.30 pm yesterday, the charred remains of the officers including the officer, a Navy Commander, who was said to have assumed duty barely three weeks ago at the Atlas Cove, were spotted on the ground. **EXTRACT A11**

MEND claims responsibility: The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement sent by email to the media, saying its fighters launched an attack on the Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos state overnight, the first in the area since the group began its latest campaign in May. A Receptor pipeline for refined petroleum products at the Atlas Cove Jetty which is responsible for 35% of the nation’s daily consumption of petroleum products was

destroyed by MEND. The depot and loading tankers moored at the facility are currently on MEND claimed. **EXTRACT A12.**

This is a clear indication that militant activities can take place anywhere not minding the region where the militants come from. EXTRACTS A11 & A12 above spell it out clearly that the militants “took” their time in a “brazen” attack that lasted several hours. Meaning; they were not afraid of any form of obstruction from any angle because they felt the security operatives attached to guard those facilities could not pose any challenge to them. The report did say that “they blew up the receptor pipelines inside the Atlas Cove jetty, effectively crippling the capacity of the facility to receive petroleum products”. Since this is the receiving end of petroleum products from the main source which is the Niger Delta region, they (the militants) had to “blow” it up to stop the flow of the petroleum products thus giving credence to the use of the word “halt” in our previous discourse in EXTRACT A7. Our major interest is in the aspect of the report that says “the attack left three naval personnel, including an officer dead, while an eyewitness added that four labourers also lost their lives”. From the foregoing, the spokesman for the Naval base reported the dead of his “men and even emphasized the dead of the “officer” but the dead of “three labourers” was reported by an “eyewitness” who had no business with the modus operandi of the jetty. In a swift reaction to the bombing that took place, the militant group in the Niger Delta region, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, (MEND) was said to have “claimed” responsibility for the attack and even threatened to launch more attacks if their condition was not reversed. The attack paralyzed the flow of the oil products which the report claims accounts for thirty five percent of the nation’s consumption rate.

Militants react

One of the nation’s militant groups rejects the media labeling of its organization. The sect members refute such a label arguing that:

Boko Haram does not in any way mean 'Western Education is a sin' as *the infidel media* continue to portray us. Boko Haram actually means 'Western Civilization' is forbidden. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West...which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not Education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western Education, (89).

The sect frowns at *Medias' description of it as the Boko Haram*. Instead it prefers to be addressed as the Jamaatu Ahlissunnah liddaaw’atiwal Jihad, meaning a "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad. Although the sect’s name has changed over the years, its ideological mission is quite clear: to overthrow the Nigerian state and impose strict Islamic Sharia law in the country. Members of the sect are motivated by the conviction that the Nigerian state is filled with social vices and corruption, thus *‘the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to migrate’ from the morally bankrupt society to a secluded place and establish an ideal Islamic society devoid of political corruption and moral deprivation’* (22). The sect therefore considers non-members as “kuffar” meaning *disbelievers: those who deny the truth* or “fasiqun” which means *wrong-doers*. The height of the crises was December 2011 bombings of a church on Christmas Day, resulting in 41 deaths, and the January 2012 attacks, in which over 200 people were killed. On 7 August 2012, a mass shooting occurred at a Deeper Life Church in Kogi State. Three unidentified gunmen killed 19 people, including the church's

pastor. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the bombing. Up till now the bombings continue and they are widely reported in most of the media houses in Nigeria. This is inclusive of those who escaped being killed due to their participation in the crisis as well as those arrested and remanded in prison custody. The media became targets of the sect:

Bomb blasts hit 2 This Day offices: ABUJA– A loud explosion *rocked* an Abuja area office of ThisDay on Thursday followed by smoke and ambulances headed in the direction of the blast, with injuries reported. Reports have it that the first bomb blast was in the Abuja This Day office in Jabi and was carried out by a suicide bomber who drove into the media house before detonating the bomb hence blowing away the building's roof. Another blast was also reported at the Kaduna This day office according to witnesses. But Mr Yushau Shuaib a National Emergency Management Agency spokesman said the Abuja ThisDay blast "*occurred inside the premises of a national newspaper,*" adding that "*a preliminary investigation seems to indicate that the explosive device was planted somewhere within the premises, not likely a case of suicide bombing.*" **EXTRACT A12.**

As reported above, the head office of This Day newspaper was bombed by the Boko Haram sect which in EXTRACT A13 later claimed responsibility for the bombing for what it termed "*irresponsible*" reportage of its activities by the media outfit. In the data we are told that the explosion "*rocked*" an area office and "*shattered*" the building to frighten the media outfit and cow it into submission. The bombing was reported to have taken place simultaneously in Abuja and Kaduna thus making the act calculated and deliberate. For the fact that "*explosive device was planted somewhere within the premises, not likely a case of suicide bombing*" stands to show that the perpetrators "*had enough time*" to carry out their act without being caught. Security operatives also testified to the happening "*we heard something like that happened, but we don't have the details yet.*" But a spokesman for the National Emergency Management Agency said "*it's true there was an explosion at Jabi (district).*" "*NEMA officials are on the ground,*" "*They are trying to move those injured to the hospitals, but we don't have any information on casualties yet.*" The aim here is to blackmail the media into submission and ensure the activities of the sect "*are reported appropriately*" devoid of journalistic coloration and that is why EXTRACT A14 focuses on the "*changing dynamics*" of the modus operandi of the sect. After the bombing, Boko Haram claimed responsibility and warned of more such attacks. The bombings killed eight people. Boko Haram alleged that the press was not reporting the group accurately. It said the group attacked *This Day* to send a strong message to the media that it would no longer condone reports misrepresenting it in the press, or blaming it for acts it knows nothing about. According to the spokesman for the group Abu Qaqa:

"The media are not a problem to us if they do their jobs professionally without taking sides, each time we say something, it is either changed or downplayed but when our enemy says something even without logical proof, it is blown out of proportion," "We have repeatedly cautioned reporters and media houses to be professional and objective in their reports. This is a war between us and the Government of Nigeria; unfortunately the media have not been objective and fair in their report of the on-

going war, they chose to take side,” "We have just started this new campaign against the media and we will not stop here, we will hit the media hard since they have refused to listen to our plea for them to be fair in their reportage (2012:98) **EXTRACT A14**

It should be noted that since its radical operational metamorphosis in 2009, Boko Haram has undergone a number of significant transformations. When the group started around 2002, it modeled itself after Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. After conflicts between the members of the sect and the Yobe state government over the application of unadulterated sharia, the Yobe State Council initiated efforts to expel the sect from the state. The sect then relocated to Kanama, a remote village near the border with Niger Republic. Goaded by the desire for revenge, the group waged a retaliatory attack on the residences of local government heads, regional officials, and divisional police in Yobe State on 24 December 2004. That attack paved the way for subsequent Boko Haram terrorist campaigns against Nigerian government authorities.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt at carrying a linguistic study of the concept of labeling especially in the media in relation to depictions of insurgent activities in Nigeria. The study opines that labeling in the media is judgmental and is capable of causing disaffection. The study also reveals that language use and the choices made can go a long way to either arrest or aggravate a situation especially in a crises situation or chaotic atmosphere. Critical Discourse Analysis is therefore capable of exposing those subtleties of linguistic usages that are usually hidden.

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