



International Journal of Political Science and Public Administration

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

A Discourse-Historical Recontextualization of the Boko Haram Crises as a Representation of Ethnic Violence, Clashes and Armed Struggle

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Article Info

Volume 1, Issue 3, December 2021

Received : 25 July 2021

Accepted : 19 November 2021

Published : 05 December 2021

doi: [10.51483/IJPSPA.1.3.2021.1-9](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJPSPA.1.3.2021.1-9)

Abstract

Ethnic violence in Nigeria has set Muslim against Christian and neighbor against neighbor. For extremist groups like Boko Haram, it is a holy war. For many Nigerians, it is part of a senseless fight for survival in a society where economic and political corruption is rampant. In Nigeria's national politics, Christian anxieties about Muslim domination of the national political space and the accompanying fear that politically dominant Muslims would use their privileged perch to Islamize national institutions and impose Islamic Sharia law on non-Muslims is a major issue. Muslims, especially those from Northern Nigeria, for their part, have sought to fend off what they regard as unbridled Westernization and have sporadically sought refuge in parochial religious reforms. In this study, we try to recontextualise the Boko Haram crises from a linguistic historical view point. Data for the study were sourced from online media of two media outfits: *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The study reveals prevalence of ethnic clashes emanating from the projection of religious ideology.

Keywords: *Recontextualization, Boko Haram, Ethnic Violence, Clashes, Armed Struggle*

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1. Introduction

It has been observed over time that the mismanagement of national resources and misrule by multi-ethnic and multi-religious coalitions of successive rulers since independence have impoverished and denied opportunities to the majority of Nigerians. As a result, religious rhetoric blaming members of other religious communities and proposals for religious reform as a solution to society's ills have found a voice among the masses. This genuine, if misplaced, quest for a religious utopia has given some opportunistic political gladiators an excuse to curry legitimacy through politicized appeals to piety and religious enthusiasm.

The desperate advancement of religious solutions to socioeconomic and political problems has deepened social fissures and spawned extremist and violent insurgencies such as the on-going Boko Haram Islamist terrorist campaign, which has killed and maimed Christians and Muslims alike. The adoption of the Sharia legal system by a swing of Northern Nigerian Muslim-majority states between 2000 and 2002 was the highpoint of this new politicization of religion. Once Sharia was introduced, it only added to the fear of Christians that they would be persecuted and their freedoms, guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution, curtailed. Christian communities in the affected states protested, their protests

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stoked by the rhetoric of Christian politicians and leaders. Clashes between Christian and Muslim communities with a history of peaceful cohabitation followed, in which thousands of people were killed, property destroyed, and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Most scholarly works have focused on crises reports from a linguistic view point. Ebim (2021) argues that “Insurgency and militancy in Nigeria keep escalating at an astronomical rate. It has been observed that the Nigerian media conceptualize the perpetrators of insurgency as Boko Haram and are domiciled in the northern part of the country whereas those who engage in militancy (militant activities) are referred to as “militants” and they are domiciled in the south-southern part of the country.” And often times, the insurgents themselves have proven to be very difficult to deal with by the security operatives as Ebim’s works have consistently tried to prove. According to him “The Boko Haram sect has constituted a serious menace not only to the Nigerian society, but to the entire West African sub-region. The leadership of the organization ranging from the late Mohammed Yusuf to the “late” Abubakar Shekau has proved to be highly illusive to the Nigerian security network”

Works of literary artistes have also tried to uncover the menace of criminality in the Nigerian society. For instance, Niyi Osundare’s poem titled: “Blues for the New Senate King” as explicated by Ebim (2021) focuses on the avaricious nature of a typical Nigerian politician. Ebim observes that “The study aims at explicating the issues raised in the poem to emphasize the crucial information about Nigerian leaders. The analysis divulges that the poem exposes certain national issues in Nigeria which are very germane to the development of the democratic process. It also reveals that Osundare’s aim is to bring about social reformation in the society. The implication of this study is that it has contributed to the field of stylistics by illustrating the interface between literary and linguistic features in poetic forms that advocate a positive approach to the style of governance in the Nigerian society”. All of these works help to point a direction on research on the activities of militants, insurgents as fall outs of misgovernance in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this study we adopt the discourse historical analysis which as a cross-disciplinary field, may be approached from at least two different directions. The first approach involves an application of discourse analysis to language history. It is the study of discourse forms, functions, or structures—that is, whatever is encompassed by discourse analysis—in earlier periods of a language. The attention of the discourse analyst is focused on historical stages of a language, yet the emphasis remains on discourse structure.

The advantage of such an approach is that it may more satisfactorily explain the functions of many features of older texts. Note, however, that this approach is essentially synchronic, since it involves an analysis, albeit a discourse-oriented one, of a language at a particular stage in its development. Within such an approach, there are two possible steps, one mapping form to function (the explication of the discourse functions of particular historical forms) and the other mapping function to form (the identification of historical forms which are exponents of particular discourse functions) (Jacobs and Jucker, 1995).

The second approach involves an application of discourse analysis to historical linguistics. It is the study of “discourse-pragmatic factors” in language change or of the discourse motivations behind diachronic changes, whether phonological, morphological, syntactic, or semantic. The attention of the historical linguist is focused on discourse matters, yet the emphasis remains on language change. It should be noted that a consideration of discourse factors in certain kinds of diachronic change, such as word order change, is not recent, and an interest in discourse-driven or influenced change can now be seen as almost commonplace. Such an approach has the advantage of providing elucidation of certain changes and a fuller understanding of diachronic processes of change. It may be termed discourse-oriented historical linguistics. An extension of this approach (dating back to Givón 1979a) involves the study of how an element functioning on the discourse level comes to function on the morphosyntactic or semantic level. A third approach, though less well developed than the others, is more truly interdisciplinary, involving a synthesis of discourse and diachrony. It involves a study of the changes in discourse marking, functions, and structures over time. That is, discourse structure is treated on a par with phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structure as something which changes and develops over time, so that one might legitimately talk of discours(al) change as well as, for example, phonological change. This approach may be termed diachronic(ally oriented) discourse analysis. The remainder of the chapter will examine these three approaches.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

The focus here is to describe how the media has been able to use linguistic particles to represent the crises as well as the major actors. For instance the data below captures vividly casualty rate in the crises:

Sixteen soldiers and 150 suspected insurgents have been killed during a military operation targeting a Boko Haram camp in Borno State, the Army headquarters said in Abuja yesterday. Nine other soldiers are still missing following the clash at Kafiya Forest, Army spokesman Brigadier General Attahiru Ibrahim told Daily Trust.

EXTRACT A1

In the above extract, the report states the number of soldiers killed and the number of members of the Boko Haram sect in the clash. Though the report did not say specifically whether the number of insurgents killed are actually members of the Boko Haram sect but preferred to use the word “suspected” to hide the real message in the report. Despite the intention to hide the message, readers are made to understand that the clash took place in the den of the sect members through the use of the word “camp” to state the context of the occurrence of the skirmish. To further give authenticity to the report, the spokesman for the military Brigadier General Attahiru Ibrahim was quoted to have reported the incident the day after the occurrence as if there was something to be hidden. In the next paragraph from the same report, we are told why the incident was not reported immediately it happened:

The incident happened on Thursday, but authorities confirmed the casualty figures only yesterday following a story on the Internet that gave a much higher death toll. An earlier announcement made by the 7 Division of the Nigerian Army on Saturday said “several” insurgents were killed but made no mention of military casualties in the incident. Brig-Gen Ibrahim told Daily Trust yesterday that on September 12, troops from the Maiduguri-based 7 Division embarked on aggressive patrol around the forest and launched an assault on a Boko Haram camp.

EXTRACT A2.

From EXTRACT A2 we see the reason why it was necessary for the military to hide the outcome of the operation from the masses even though it was reported in an online media outfit. The actual number of casualties was not released but the military preferred to use the word “several” to divert the attention of the people from the total number of people killed. In that same report, the word “several” was meant to hide the true message and thereby cover up the casualty figures. Again, the total number of soldiers killed in the operation was downplayed. Rather than use the linguistic term known to the masses with regards to military operations, the military hid under the cover of such terms as: troops from the Maiduguri-based 7 Division embarked on aggressive patrol around the forest and launched an assault to legitimize their operation. These terms point to the fact that an operation took place and because it was “aggressive” blood was shed which also means that the shedding of blood was not on only one side of the divide but on both the Boko Haram and the Nigerian military. But the reason why the military choose to hide their own casualty figure is to give victory to it and portray the Boko Haram sect as a group that is losing the war. As if under compulsion, the military rather belatedly revealed how the operation was carried out and the number of casualties recorded:

“During the assault, we killed over 150 insurgents and we lost an officer and 15 soldiers, with about nine soldiers missing in action,” he said. Ibrahim added that during the clash a Boko Haram commander named Abba Goroma, who had a N10 million bounty on his head, was killed. He said the camp was well-fortified with anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft guns mounted on vehicles. The Army spokesman denied a report on the Internet yesterday that said up to 40 soldiers were killed and 65 others missing after an ambush by insurgents. EXTRACT A3.

The use of the word “killed” over 150 insurgents reveals the legality and the privilege the military has to take away lives at will. When juxtaposing the two words “killed” and the use of the word “lost” when it comes to the soldiers who were killed by the insurgents, it shows how language is used to downplay on certain occasions to give legitimacy to whatever act that is perpetrated. When it involves a military person the linguistic term is “lost” but when it involves a member of the Boko Haram sect the word “killed” is freely used with impunity. Although an online media outfit had claimed that 40 soldiers were killed and 65 others missing, the military was quick to deny and rubbish such insinuations saying they were mere figments of the media’s imagination. The report however confirmed the killing of one of the leaders of the sect Abba Goroma whose head was a bounty of N10 million naira. As if responding to the reportage, the subsequent report gives another linguistic term to the mode of taking life by the Boko Haram sect. the extract below testifies to this:

Gunmen suspected to be members of the Boko Haram sect have between last Saturday and Sunday killed at least 52 people in Mafa and Konduga local government areas of Borno State, locals and hospital sources said. Our correspondents gathered that at Ngom, a border settlement between Mafa and Konduga local government along the Gamboru-Ngala road, the insurgents reportedly invaded the village and slaughtered 12 people at night on Saturday. EXTRACT A4

There is no consistency in the use of the term. In the first line the term killed was used but in the subsequent line, the reporter preferred to use the term “slaughter” to demonstrate the process of killing. The use of the word “invaded” is

military-like but when placed side by side with the word “slaughter” it is aimed at portraying the insurgents as cannibals and butchers who take delight in snuffing life off humans. To slaughter is to kill animals for celebration or for a particular ritual but when the insurgents deviate from killing and take refuge in slaughtering, they then put on the garment of cannibalism and ritualism. What is confusing is why the use of “kill” in the first line and the preference for “slaughter” in the next line. The reporter’s intention is clear: to paint the insurgents in bad light and tell the whole world their Gestapo style of carrying out their mayhem without recourse to the sanctity of human life. Extract D45 below lays credence to the heinous crime where even medical experts testified to the atrocious acts of the insurgents:

Locals said about 40 people were also slaughtered at Mandarari and Malari communities of Konduga local government, along the Maiduguri-Bama road. It was gathered that the attackers dressed in military and police uniforms stormed the villages in four-wheel drive trucks and motorcycles. Witnesses said many people sustained injuries and scores of houses set ablaze by the attackers in all the affected villages. A source at the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH) confirmed that 26 people who sustained various degrees of injuries are now receiving treatment at the hospital. EXTRACT A5.

The use of certain lexical items in extract A5 above paints a horrifying picture of the level of assault launched by the insurgents. Words such as “slaughtered” “attackers” “military and police uniforms” “sustained injuries” “scores” “houses set ablaze” all tend to demonstrate the existence of danger. Even though the attackers are not in any position to adorn the uniform of security operatives, they are presented here by the reporter as people who came into the community disguised in security attire to unleash terror on the people. And as the reporter presents the story, the medical experts even laid credence to the level of carnage that was carried out leading to the death of scores of innocent people. As the insurgency rages on, the nation’s leadership seemed not to be prepared for such eventualities as the then president posits *inter alia*:

President Goodluck Jonathan says the activities of the Boko Haram sect and its tactics of terror took the nation by surprise. Jonathan was speaking at the State House in Abuja late Tuesday night during the breaking of Ramadan fast with Muslim members of the diplomatic community. The president regretted that attacks by the sect had resulted in the death of innocent Nigerians including security operatives. EXTRACT A6.

This position taken by the number one citizen of the country shows a level of helplessness as encapsulated in the report. His reference to such utterances as “tactics of terror took the nation by surprise” even in the presence of members of the “diplomatic community” during an official event portrays the then president as one in need of help by any means. This is substantiated in the expression “The president regretted that attacks by the sect had resulted in the death of innocent Nigerians including security operatives”. If the security experts who are entrusted with the responsibility of securing as well as protecting lives and properties are killed at will by a sect as exemplified in that report, then the then president’s expression was more of a lamentation.

EMOTIONS RUN HIGH AS ARMY BURIES 15 SOLDIERS: It was all tears at the National Military Cemetery, Abuja yesterday when the remains of fourteen soldiers killed by Boko Haram insurgents and another in the peace-keeping mission in Dafur, Sudan were buried. Hundreds of mourners at the cemetery including relations, ministers and top military officers could not hold back their tears at the funeral. Fourteen soldiers including two majors were killed by insurgents in North East region following the declaration of state of emergency there while one soldier was killed while serving under the United Nations Mission in Dafur (UNAMID). EXTRACT A7.

Several mourners openly cried of sorrow when a girl of about six years, Hauwa’u Usman walked slowly to the chief of army staff, Lt General Azubuike Ihejirika to collect the national colors covering the coffin of her father Corporal Salisu Sadauki. More people even wept when 4-year old Jacob Daniel was handed over the flag on the coffin of Trooper Kantoma Daniel. EXTRACT A8.

The atmosphere in the cemetery in the course of burying the security operatives as presented in the above extracts is more worrisome. There is gloom and mourning brought about by the presence of certain persons at the scene of the burial. The use of such words as “tears” “National Military Cemetery”, “fourteen soldiers killed by Boko Haram insurgents” “mourners” “funeral” in extract A7 paints the insurgents as heartless and brutal people who take delight in destroying lives at will not minding who is involved. The report paints a graphic picture of teenagers who have been rendered fatherless by the heartless and brutal insurgents such utterances as in extract A8: Several mourners openly cried of sorrow when a girl of about 6 years, Hauwa’u Usman walked slowly to the chief of army staff, Lt General Azubuike Ihejirika to collect the national colours covering the coffin of her father Corporal Salisu Sadauki. More people even wept when 4-year old Jacob Daniel was handed over the flag on the coffin of Trooper Kantoma Daniel. This picture appeals to the most heartless being in such a gathering. The mere sight of a girl of about six years, Hauwa’u Usman walked

slowly as if she was expected to run or smile or rush to embrace the leadership of the Armed Forces even at the funeral of her father. The representation of this scenario is mainly to appeal to emotions, draw sympathy to those who lose their loved ones and give the security the impetus to persist in the fight to flush out the insurgents. This became clear as a four year old was said to have been handed the national flag used in covering his father's coffin.

The use of minors in crises reportage is more symbolic than ever: to draw the attention of the world to the level of destruction carried by rendering so many young people homeless and without bread winners. By extension this also shows how married women were being turned into widows as a result of the insurgent activities. Extract A9 below vividly captures the depiction of insurgency as deployed through linguistic resources in the media:

Six Killed as Blast, Gun Fire Hit Kano: Six people were killed and six others injured in Kano last night when explosives went off at a relaxation spot in the Sabon Gari area, state police commissioner Musa Daura said. The explosions were followed by gunshots, Daura said, according to a news alert sent by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). Witnesses told Daily Trust that many people were believed to be hurt after four explosions targeted a church and a number of drinking joints in two congested parts of Sabon Gari. EXTRACT A9.

The extract A9 is a sharp deviation from what obtains in a place of relaxation. The extract is a demonstration of how ironic, certain situations can be when it comes to crises situations. The headline did not reveal the context, venue and manner in which the incident took place. It just left the message hanging by simply stating the number of people killed and generalizing the place of the occurrence as if the entire Kano is one small village: Six Killed as Blast, Gun Fire Hit Kano. But a closer look at the body of the story reveals something deeper and more destructive. The incident shows how a place that ordinarily should be for relaxation had been turned into a slaughter house where humans were killed like animals at will. To worsen the situation the explosions were even targeted at a church not the relaxation spot. To say that: The explosions were followed by gunshots...many people were believed to be hurt after four explosions targeted at a church and a number of drinking joints in two congested parts of Sabon-Gari means that the perpetrators of those acts are not always in a hurry to leave the scene of their attacks but they are people who wait around and ensure that their acts are carried out to the letter.

Apart from ensuring that their mission is accomplished, their targets are always: "church" and "a number of drinking joints" in "congested parts" a depiction of places where people are usually concentrated to carry out their legitimate businesses by trading, relaxing or worshipping. At the initial stage of this insurgency as painted in extract A9 above, it was as if the targets were churches and Christian gatherings. But extract D50 below is more of an irony that even Muslim neighborhoods were "mistakenly" affected by the blasts from their own brothers' guns and bombs. This same extract is a mere irony and "miscalculation" on the part of the perpetrators as presented in this particular report if actually the Muslim prayers were only "disrupted" and not scattered then the process was carefully planned to ensure that a set of people were targeted.

Daily Trust learnt that the impact of the explosion also shook many adjoining neighborhoods and interrupted Muslims prayers in nearby mosques. Another witness at New Road told our reporter that the explosions in the area occurred when a Mercedes Benz car parked close to a church detonated and caught fire, adding that he saw soldiers at the scene and a number of injured people being assisted. It was learnt that some casualties whose limbs were severed as a result of the explosions were seen at Enugu Road, the second scene of the attack. EXTRACT A10

The closeness of the Mercedes Benz to the church which later detonated and caught fire reveals the intentional act carried out by the insurgents and targeted at a select few who are "Them" and not "Us". The eruption of fire from such a car deliberately parked "close to a church" shows how deeply rooted is the spirit of hatred for the "other" the sect has built over time. Also the presence of "soldiers" at the scene shows the level of responsibility the security experts are ready to carry out even in the face of challenges and at the risk of losing their own lives. Ethnic or sect prejudices as enacted in this report by the insurgent members provide a framework which ethnic groups and the whole ethnic situation are perceived and represented in a biased way. Insurgency within this contextual representation is construed as a threat to non-sect members-as a conflict between us and them, between those who belong and those who do not. This is a situation whereby non-sect members just like the Christians are portrayed in this report are seen as those who are not wanted. The problems the Christians are perceived to cause to the sect members are basically ideological: They are seen as a burden on the religious principles guiding their mode of worship. Such prejudices, which are also shared by the media as reported here, tend to draw the attention of the public to such events the stories that are consistent with such opinions. At the same time, deviance and disruption are consistent with prevalent news values. That is, if Christian targets by the insurgents are portrayed in the press, stories that feature such opinions, even implicitly, tend to be published more often than normal, neutral, or positive news stories about them.

4. The Boko Haram Case Studies

In reflecting on the operations of the Niger Delta militants, the Boko Haram insurgents were also getting ready to celebrate their one year of the first violent attack that shook the nation. This is captured in extracts A11 & A12 below:

Boko Haram anniversary: Police comb Maiduguri for weapons: Police searched for weapons and residents were on edge in Maiduguri yesterday ahead of the one-year anniversary of a deadly uprising by the Islamic fundamentalists, Boko Haram, with fears they would strike again. A sect leader believed killed appeared on video issuing threats recently, adding to concerns that the militant group was reforming, though local police dismiss the clips as digital mock-ups and insist he is dead. EXTRACT A11.

Extract A11 makes use of certain lexical items as: “searched” “residents were on edge” “deadly uprising by the Islamic fundamentalists” “issuing threats” “reforming” to show the level of tension that is being generated in the northern part of the country. That text states that it was exactly one year since the insurgents launched their first attack in the country and there were fears they were going to celebrate that successful attack by launching a more devastating one. There was therefore the need for adequate preparations to curtail their excesses in case of any eventualities. This preparation came in the form of “searching” for weapons within the environs to forestall any attack. That residents were on edge is a very serious issue because to be on edge means “to be nervous. The use of such an expression goes to show the level of fear that has been instilled in the members of that community at that point in time. This fear as expressed in the report is rather reinforced by the use of the word “Islamic fundamentalists” marking a deviation from the usual use of the word insurgents. Fundamentalism is ideological concept anchored on the fact that everything about a particular group is perfect and cannot be faulted. The journalist’s use of that word connotes a strong believe deeply rooted in religious practices that sees non-members of such a group as “outsiders” while members are “insiders” complementing Van Dijk’s belief in “us” and “them”. Extract A12 paints a picture of the level of preparedness of the Nigerian government to forestall any uprising that may emanate from insurgency:

Authorities have set up night checkpoints and are searching vehicles in a bid to keep weapons from entering the city of Maiduguri—the center of the uprising. A dozen police vans escorted by a siren-blaring armored car have been regularly rumbling through the city streets, but the show of force was halted recently because it rattled residents, a police officer said. This is part of the security strategy because these troublemakers may want to use the cover of night to bring in arms, said a police sergeant at a checkpoint on Friday night, where about a dozen cars waited. Last year uprising began on July 26 and spread to four states, though it was centered in Maiduguri. EXTRACT A12.

There are specific lexical items that capture our attention in the above extract. First the use of Maiduguri as the center of Boko Haram means that the context, base and method of operation of the sect members are centered in that town. Again the use of the word “trouble makers” in place of the either “Islamic fundamentalists” as used in extract A12 or the usual “insurgents” by the media calls for concern on the level of switching from one lexical item to the other in describing the perpetrators of violence in Nigeria. Again we are also told that the level of preparedness to defend the occupants of the town which is supposed to be a sort of relieve to them rather “rattled them” and was “halted”. To “rattle” is to “scare” and to “halt” is to put on hold. These expressions tend to confuse the reader because we are not told whether the “halting” paved the way for “the trouble makers” to have access to the town and unleash terror on the citizenry or it was a temporary or tactical withdrawal to reinstall confidence in the masses that they were not being threatened. The report however went ahead to state the precise date in which the first Boko Haram attack was launched, that date as we observed is captured in this sentence: Last year uprising began on July 26 and spread to four states, though it was centered in Maiduguri. From this utterance, one can observe that Maiduguri is just a base because the crises have already spread to about four states and it is still spreading. That spread was however short-lived as the arrow head of the group was arrested by security operatives as captured in extract A13 below:

Yusuf Boko Haram leader arrested: Leader of the Islamist fanatics, Boko Haram, the radical anti-western education sect has been captured. Mohammed Yusuf had fled Maiduguri during the recent fighting between his followers and the Nigerian military. According to reports, troops stormed the sect’s stronghold overnight, killing many of the sect members and forcing others including the sect leader to flee. But he was reported to have been found hiding in a goat pen at his parents-in-law’s house today. Before Yusuf’s arrest, members of his sect were killed in a gun duel with security forces in Yobe state. EXTRACT A13.

Extract A13 above captures in clear terms the process that led to the arrest of the leader of the sect in his place of abode. Through the use of such words as: “Islamist fanatics”, “the radical anti-western education sect” “fled” “troops stormed the sect’s stronghold overnight, killing many of the sect members and forcing others including the sect leader to flee” “killed” epitomize an atmosphere of “war”, “defeat” and “surrender” which culminated in the arrest of the much

elusive Mohammed Yusuf. Again, there is the introduction of another lexical item in describing the sect; that word is “Islamist fanatics” which denotes a people who hold a strong view about their ideology and belief. But members of this sect brush aside every linguistic label with regards to the group and state clearly what they stand for. According to the acting leader of the sect, Mallam Sanni Umaru, such designations are figments of the media’s imaginations:

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. The sect frowns at Medias’ description of it as the Boko Haram. Instead it prefers to be addressed as the Jamaatu Ahlissunnahliddaawatiwal Jihad, meaning a “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad, (2005:89).

This position when juxtaposed with the various names given to the group, reveal an ideological position taken by the media and that taken by the sect itself thus leading to a clash of interest and ideological beliefs. The expression in the above extract that: troops stormed the sect’s stronghold overnight, killing many of the sect members and forcing others including the sect leader to flee substantiates our initial position that there was defeat, retreat, surrender and arrest. But was this success sustained?

Boko Haram leader handed alive to police, Army insists: The Nigerian army insisted yesterday that it handed over Islamist sect leader, Mohammed Yusuf, alive to the police last week before he was killed under controversial circumstances. Colonel Ben Ahonotu, commander of the operation that led to Yusuf’s capture in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri last Thursday, said the sect leader was interrogated by a senior military officer before the handover. EXTRACT A14.

The headline above says it all—a categorical statement that the leader of the Boko Haram sect who was arrested alive was handed over to the police after a brief interrogation by the military. The military is not entrusted with the responsibility of incarcerating an individual hence the need to hand him over to the appropriate quarters where he was to be kept for further examination. But the above headline is a reaction to the news that the said leader was summarily executed in an extra-judicial manner by the same police that were to see to his safe keep. This also is an irony that a man whose duty is to secure an individual turns out to be the killer of the same person under his custody. To “insist” is to “reaffirm” thus substantiating an earlier position taken. Here the army officer reaffirms his position that the leader of the sect was handed over alive and even went ahead to produce videos of the interrogation before the “official hand over” as he asserts:

I personally arrested Yusuf and handed him over to the police after a short questioning the same day, only to be told that he died in a shootout, Ahonotu told AFP. A senior military officer conducted the interrogation of Mohammed Yusuf, he said without disclosing the identity of the army officer. Police have denied that the Boko Haram sect leader was killed while in their custody, saying he died in crossfire with security forces while trying to escape. Yusuf, 39, was killed after security forces crushed an uprising last week by the self-styled Taliban fundamentalist group in several northern states. EXTRACT A15.

The opening sentence in extract D58 is a testimony to the argument over the state of health of Mohammed Yusuf before his “execution” as claimed by the police authorities. The use of the first personal singular pronoun “I” and the term “personally” do not need any further investigation to ascertain the authenticity of the claim. Other lexical items lay credence to the claim such as: “short interrogation” “same day” but the porosity of the police argument is decoded in the use of the terms “crushed an uprising” “he died in crossfire with security forces while trying to escape”. The army claims the insurgent leader was arrested and a high profile insurgent of Yusuf’s calibre wouldn’t have been arrested without being handcuffed. The uncertainty in this extract is the unrevealed information about his “trying to escape” from where to where” and if he was handcuffed in both hands and legs how and what was the mode of the escape? Therein lies the hidden ideology behind a news item either from the reporter or from the authorities who are bent on not revealing the truth about an incident that involves those in authorities thus drawing a line between “them” and “us” as espoused by Teun Van Dijk. The extract also reveals another linguistic label with regards to the name of the insurgent group. This time the group is described as “self-styled Taliban fundamentalist group” thus linking it with the Taliban modus operandi when it comes to terrorism since the Taliban are mostly terrorists, the expression above points clearly to the fact that the group this time has grown to the point of being compared with the terrorist group and not the “insurgents” as it was being referred to by the media even though the group has denied such a label (Ebim 2017) and (2021) “Insurgency And Militancy In Nigeria” where more detailed work has been done. The murder or “killing” of the

leader of the sect did not go unchallenged as a human rights group, Access to Justice (AJ) challenged the manner in which Yusuf was killed and called for an inquiry into the incident so as to bring the perpetrators to book.

Boko Haram: AJ seeks suspension of Police officers: To pave way for detail investigation on what led to the summary killing of the leader of Boko Haram sect, Mohammed Yusuf, Access to Justice (AJ) yesterday urged the Police Service Commission to suspend all the police officers involved in the alleged killing. Besides, the organization rejected the probe ordered by the Presidency over the matter, saying it is inadequate and inappropriate. Executive Director of AJ, Mr Joseph Chuma Otteh, who disclosed these at a press briefing in Lagos, advised the federal government to establish a judicial Commission of Inquiry into the killings in Borno, Yobe, Kano and Bauchi states. EXTRACT A16.

From the headline of extract D59 the human rights group demanded a holistic approach to uncovering the circumstances leading to the killing of the insurgent leader. This time, there is a twist to the use of the word as another adjective “summary” is introduced to describe the mode of killing. The group calls for the suspension of the police officers involved in the killing. From this, we can infer that for calling for their suspension, this is taken to mean that the deal was clandestine, carefully planned and involves some other people who were highly placed and that the suspension will lead the officers to expose those behind the killing. For also rejecting the probe panel instituted by the Federal Government it means the group does not have faith in the government of the day. Despite this position, the Federal Government went ahead to institute a commission of inquiry to investigate the murder and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Boko Haram: Yar ’Adua orders probe: following allegations that Mohammed Yusuf, leader of the religious sect, Boko Haram, was hurriedly killed after he was earlier captured alive in order to shield his sponsors who are influential members of the society, President Umaru Yar ’Adua yesterday directed the National Security Adviser (NSA) to carry out a full scale investigation into the matter. The President who described the killing as a serious matter said as a government that insists on the rule of law, the case has to be fully investigated given the controversies surrounding Yusuf’s death. EXTRACT A17.

In extract A17 there is another word used to describe the group this time the word is “religious sect” and the manner of killing is described as “hurriedly” thus trying to reveal the intentional act. Though the rationale behind it is still unknown, the president went ahead to describe the issue as “a serious matter” thus placing it among matters requiring urgent attention. And because the matter is “serious” it has to be “fully investigated” as if other cases were partially investigated in the past. But the presidential fiat is anchored on his belief in the rule of law as reported in the above extract. Whether the “rule of law” was followed to a logical conclusion, is a matter left for posterity to decide.

5. Conclusion

From this analysis, we have noticed language and history are inseparable and that both are intertwined. It therefore shows that the business of the historian stops where that of the linguist begins. Language is capable of recontextualizing the past to reposition the present for the benefit of the future. Discourse and history therefore have a lot to share in common for the sake of posterity.

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Cite this article as: Ebim, Matthew Abua (2021). A Discourse-Historical Recontextualization of the Boko Haram Crises as a Representation of Ethnic Violence, Clashes and Armed Struggle. *International Journal of Political Science and Public Administration*. 1(3), 1-9. doi: 10.51483/IJPSPA.1.3.2021.1-9.