

Discourse Analysis of Media Representations of Terrorism in East African Press: A Case Study of Westgate Shopping Mall Attack in Nairobi, Kenya

Elochukwu Nweke¹, BilunyPuot²

Department of Psychology, Girne American University, North Cyprus

Department of Finance, Girne American University, North Cyprus

Abstracts: *The post-colonial Africa has witnessed so many political crises such as civil wars, rebellions and terrorist activities. Most of which have been to propagate religious ideologies or to gain political attention. Media invariably have been a tool to achieve these feet. Terrorists use media to gain public attention, sympathy and to affect political change. Media reports of terrorism may depend on the conception and perception of the term, which is influenced by the media organization. This study analysed the coverage of Westgate shopping mall terrorist attack in Nairobi, Kenya by some East African newspapers publications from September 21, 2013 till date which have different ideological perspectives and explanations. Significant differences were found in the coverage of the attack, the subsequent reports and how the usage of some text and photo to portray terror and its significance. Some newspapers cited more of the political global factors that may have led to many terrorist acts and offered more text to alleviate fear from the populace while others emphasized more on the socio-political and religious impact on terrorism and reported the act more colourful and sensational in terms of violence, sorrow, anxiety, tears, panic, fear, and deaths.*

Keywords: Media, Representations, Ideologies, Terrorism attack

1. Introduction

Religion, dogmatic nationalistic ideologies, territorial claims and natural resources have caused most of the world's major conflicts but unlike most nations in the west, the African continent did not voluntarily choose the formation of their various states and territorial boundaries. The colonial nations and imperialist powers demarcated the continent as deem fit to perpetuate their cultural, political and economic agendas. Most of which have plagued the continent with perpetual conflicts and acrimony. Their colonial rules left African continent in so many territorial claims and disputes. The end of colonialism in Africa ushered in a new dimension to political crisis. The post-colonial Africa has witnessed so many political crises. Most have been civil wars, rebellions and terrorist activities. The aggrieved factions seeking to advance their cause through the media, terrorists engage in press and public relations' activities. Terrorists often utilize media to propagate their manifestos, statements of responsibility and even to publicise their heinous activities. Kamat (2012) asserts that "Communication needs of the society must be met for the existence of the society". One of the Mass Medias' main roles is to adequately provide current or on-going events to its audience. The media tried to serve this human surveillance need for communication by providing information regarding events that occurred in the vicinity. The media dictate how and which information worthy of public audience. As in this case that Schlesinger (1983), argued that public are in more need of information when they perceived that their safety is in jeopardy. The media become an indispensable way of getting information during crisis such as terrorist attack. So both the terrorists and the public utilise media to satisfy certain needs.

A group of terrorist attacked and took hostages, most of them women and children in Westgate shopping mall in

Nairobi, Kenya. The incidence took place on 21st of September 2013, and lasted till 24th September. The hostages were held at gunpoint under appalling and degrading conditions deprived of basic necessities, and with bombs strapped over their heads. When the incidence was over, some of the hostages had escaped, but about 67 people died and many others were injured seriously. Al shabaab Islamist terrorist group claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack was covered extensively by several media agencies which made videos of the incident and broadcasted live event of the hostage crises and the fighting between terrorists and the Kenyan troops. Media outlet have provided information for several terrorist attacks, to the public the media provide them with the means to know what is going on in their environment while terrorist use media to actively propagate the terrorist propagandas.

This study investigates the coverage of Westgate shopping mall terrorist attack from selected East African newspapers. The main aim of the paper is to discourse analyse the differences in reporting terrorist attack from East African newspapers using captions, news stories and photographs.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Elkind (2007) asserts that media is a very important agent of socialization which our socio -cognitive development rely upon. Our understanding of the reality can be influenced by the way the media structure the information they feed the masses. Gamson & Modigliani (1989) argued that public opinion and issue salience can be greatly influenced by the way media construct their news texts or captions. The ideologies, attribution, and predispositions of the media institutions may affect how they formulate and propagate media messages. So it is imperative to study how the metaphors, catchphrases, and text used in the media reflect

their ideologies of the media institutions and influence people's perception of the news.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions for this study are (1) how does the ideological differences of media institutions influence how they report terrorist activities? (2) What differences exist among East African newspapers in the coverage of Westgate shopping mall terrorist attack in Kenya?

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Terrorism Overview, Causes and Types

Miller (1982), described terror as an action that aims at political changes by using violence randomly and systematically against innocent people. Terror is also viewed as the violence of a person or a group that in favour of or against the socio-political status quo or their threats to use violence. Their actions are aimed at spreading fear and agitation to their first hand victims and to frighten off the masses as well. Through these heinous acts, the masses aimed by the terror are to accept the political demands (Tugwel, 1984). Terrorist organizations perpetuate different actions by means of their organized and articulate units in the cities or rural areas. They use strategies such as laying an ambush, attacking, street action, raiding, robbing the weapon and ammunition warehouses, freeing captured prisoners, occupying somewhere, striking and boycotting, killing and kidnapping someone and the sabotages of the current order. Through these actions, terrorists encourage their partisans, they show their strengths and they try to scare those that oppose them.

Although the terrorist actions vary, they have some common features (Miller, 1982): firstly they are usually based on random and symbolic violence, secondly they fail to make a distinction between the civil and non-civil as a legitimate target, thirdly they choose the civil as victims while acting against the state, and lastly they use the media in order to announce their problem to the public. Terrorist activities are one of the issues that pose serious threat to the security and peace of most nations nowadays. Mullins (1997) stated that the reasons behind the resort to terrorist acts by most groups include the following, total wars are very expensive and the opponents of war lose a lot both economically and socially, terrorism is much more effective when it is compared with the war in terms of the costs, some countries support the terror and they can hide themselves, terrorism can be used both for changing the power and for the secondary aims such as creating economic and political instability, terrorists can declare their problems to the broader masses as a result of developments in communication technologies. Historically we have witnessed many terrorist activities, they can be named as criminal, discriminative, ethnical, revolutionary, factional, organizational, regional, and state supported. Social scientists have categorized terror in different dimensions in terms of their organization types or actions. Terrorist actions can be divided into four categories; terror beyond the nation, international terror, the terror in the country and the state terror (Mullins 1997). If the terrorist action affects not only the victims of that action or a certain

nation but also the international community, it is called the terror beyond the nation. Many of the skyjacking action overlap with the definition of the terror beyond the nation. The terrorism appears as a result of the efforts of a country to weaken another country in terms of military, political and economic ways by supporting a terrorist group or organisation is called international terrorism. In the terror in the country, the target of the terror is the citizen of a nation. Governments that rule its own citizens in the borders of a country by forcing are called the state terror. If it is due to ideological point of view that leads to terrorist action, it is called revolutionary or nationalist terror, if a region or a group is aimed to have left from the state that they are connected, it can be talked about differentiating, dividing or ethnic terror. As it can be seen, terror can be given different names according to its categories. However, the violence and fear experience by the victims and society on one hand and the desire of the terrorists to announce their demands and to propagandize by means of media on the other hand is the hallmark of terror. Although the terrorist actions vary in terms of their aims, organization types, their ethnic, religious or ideological root, they have some common features. First of all, all the terrorist action seeks public attention, to propagandize, to make their voices heard by the people and they utilize the media to accomplish them. Secondly, all terrorists' actions are considered illegal. They fight against the constitutional and social order, institutions and organizations. Although they mostly believe that they are considered right by the people they claim to fight for not the existing political system. Finally, the actions of the terrorists manifest the group inability to represent their agenda in a politically and legally platforms. So their activities are born from the notion that they are treated unjustly by the current political system and they need to be heard. So terrorist's actions are form of political communication.

2.2 Terrorists' Propagandas as tool for Political Communication

Most terrorist actions aim at drawing the attention of those in the power in order to pursue its action and to reach its goals using violence and fear. In these sense, terrorism is a kind of political communication or avenue of making political statement. One of the main reasons why the terrorists use violence is that they regard themselves excluded from the political processes thereby resorting to terrorism to be heard. Opinions that cannot be expressed legally normally take place initially in the media by its actions. Aftermath, it becomes agenda of the public opinion which utilize the opportunity to announce its intent to the public and to the political powers. The terrorist nefarious activities often leave scores of victims. The victims who are terrorized, killed, wounded, handicapped and kidnapped are only the means they utilized to portray their message and seek attention from the political actors. They utilize violence, as a medium, to send their intended messages. So in this kind of communication, the actions of the terrorists constitute the message in the political discourse. When the verbal communication ends between the political power and the terrorists, terrorism seem becomes another type of communication. The terrorists strongly need to show that the country is weak and perpetrate acts of injustice. When terrorist organizations are formed, they have to do tactical

terrorist actions in order to find the new members and finance which flourish their continuity. Partaking in violence agenda even with a negative image is better for a terrorist organization than never seen or never heard (Tugwel, 1984). The main objective of most terror attacks is not doing an action but to be heard by a vast audience. In this sense, the action done is an instrument for affecting the public opinion which the media help to achieve. Today, terrorists increased their effects due to the media and they can make their voice heard by the mass easier. "Indeed the action done by the terrorist is not important alone" as Weiman & Brosius (1989) stated. "However, this action gains great importance when it is announced to the mass by means of the media". The media is exploited by the politicians and terrorists by creating sensational events which the media will be tempted or obliged to broadcast. The terrorists know that their struggle is a propaganda fight. For them, physical attacks should support the propaganda fight but should never be in the ultimate objective. Television camera and other media tools serve greatly propagate the propaganda aims of the terrorists (Martin, 1990).

2.3 The determinants of Newsworthiness of Terrorist Activities

Terrorist actions have great newsworthiness for the media all over the world. Terrorist acts usually attract worldwide attention and condemnation so most media organization cannot exclude the news about terror. Hoge, (1982) stated that there are two main reasons why the news reports about terrorist actions are newsworthy for the media: firstly is the great interest of the audience to the images and news stories about terrorist actions. The second reason is that these kinds of events are indispensably newsworthy for the media since they provide images and the news content. Indeed it is worth to make news about terror in many dimensions. Because terror is unusual, different, dramatic, and includes violence and bloodshed, develops in time, takes place in strategic places, and it is paid attention politically. Considering all these reasons together, the news reports about terror attract the vast audience (Hoge, 1982). Also the fierce competition among the media organizations may not allow them to withhold the broadcasting or publishing of terrorist activities even if they want to. Disseminating terrorist actions as the news is the responsibility and the duty of the media. Additionally, it is also a requirement of fulfilling individuals' right and freedom of getting news. In most democratic societies, the presses are allowed constitutionally to broadcast terrorist activities. However the media cannot use this legal guarantee, as the results will be against the society. On the contrary, the media is expected to release the terror news to the audience as part of their duty and social responsibility. The problem is that how media will release the terror news without encouraging the terror and without being an instrument to propagate the agenda of the terrorists (Hoffman, 2006). Releasing the terror news sensationally in the newspapers or dramatizing the threats and the demands of terrorists is the weakness of the media. On the other hand, if the media curses the terrorists directly, this confuses the public opinion and it may cause some groups feels sympathy to the activists. Media critics argued that the aim of the terrorists is to take the attention of media and to be seen in media, the important thing for terrorists is not how they are

shown in the media but how long they are shown, the terrorists actions are given much more importance than they deserve by the media and the way how the media shows the terrorist actions causes the others to try the similar techniques. Although it is difficult to show concrete evidence to prove these declarations but they cannot be ignored entirely. We cannot argue that terrorist actions are not an indispensable source of news for the media, because the correspondents need the news as well as the terrorists needs the media. But when it is considered that the main aim of the terrorist is to be included in the news activities and to announce their matters to the public, what can be done to curtail it? It is a widely accepted notion that free press involuntary becomes an instrument to propagate terrorist agendas. This has reasons born from the structure, ideology and the style of the media.

3. Methodology

3.1 Case Study

This study investigates ideological difference in the coverage of Westgate shopping mall terrorist attack from East African newspapers. The main aim of the paper is to critically analyse the ideological differences in reporting terrorist attack from several East African newspapers, using Headlines, news stories and photographs to examine the differences.

3.2 Instrument: Discourse analysis as a method

Discourse analysis is an analysis of textual and inter-textual features of text. The methodological assumptions underlying discourse analysis's approach is "language as social, as meaningful and as always embedded in social context and history" Language is not an isolated phenomenon; language is deeply social, intertwined with social processes and interaction" (Wodak, 1999). Language used to describe events in the news can influence the perception of the events. Van Dijk (1987) considers the news in the press as a specific type of discourse. This implies that gathering, selection, processing or constituting through professional, institutional codes, cultural or ideological. In the production process news does not reflect reality, it is interpreted and interpreting any event involves the beliefs, opinions, hopes and aspirations of those gathering, reporting and publishing the news, and in that process ideology inevitable co-determines what gets reported, when it is reported and how the reporting is done (Thetela, 2001). Van Dijk states "news reports in the press are a member of family of a media text types that need their own structural analysis." Such a structural analysis operates at several levels and dimensions. Obviously, as a form of knowledge use, media texts also display linguistic or grammatical structures of words, words groups, clauses or sentences. The usual phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic descriptions are relevant for these structures. In this regard, coverage of terror was analysed in terms of the headlines, lead words choices, context, and photograph.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Analyses of the Headline News Reports

According to Van Dijk (1985), "Headlines possess very specific thematic function. They usually express the most important topic of the news item".

Sunday monitor newspaper regarded the mall attack as the most important event of the day and they carried the event to the headline. The terrorists were described as the active subjects of the event in their news discourse. *Sunday monitor* stated that "A group of terrorists raided Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya and they took hundreds of people as hostages".

In *Daily Nation*, the terrorist event was not covered alone on the headline. It was reported with another news story in the outline that was related with national politics and religious festivities. In the outline of the news, reading was very difficult by using smaller size of typing below the photograph and by narrowing the space between the lines. This suggests that the newspaper gave much more importance to national politics than the terrorist act. "Kenyans shocked by hostage action at Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi yesterday" described in *Daily Nation* showed a passivity. Besides this, the word terrorist was not used often as it was in other dailies as a term in the news discourse in the first day of the incident. Instead, the terms of activists or the armed men were preferred and in all news reports during the incidence. As Van Dijk claims that lexical choice is an important aspect of news discourse in which opinions may be disguised. Using of gunmen instead terrorists shows different ideological stances, and is softer term than terrorists. The terrorist actions are belittled in this regard.

Sunday Monitor stressed the violence dimension of the event in the news story unlike of *Daily Nation* and also reported the action sensationally. The real meaningful difference among the newspapers was seen in the headlines after the operation. *Daily Nation* used a headline as: "The Westgate attack was terrible and evil, but did any good come from it? Security agencies failed in the face of Westgate Mall attack". After the operation, the sorrow people from Nairobi and the news about the funeral ceremony were reported rather emotionally and sensationally more in *Sunday monitor* than in *Daily Nation*.

Daily Nation: "Failure to detect the terrorist plot, to investigate and stop it was symptomatic of deeper failures of performance and coordination among security agencies, the analysts, some of them in government service". This means that this newspaper constituted the news discourse in a cool tone after the operation like during the event, suggesting the inadequacies of the law enforcements rather than on the terrorists. In *Daily Nation*, the meaning of this terrorist action, how it should be related with the international and local policies, the information that provide the connections between the reasons and the results politically and economically and that provide the real context of the terror were neglected during the event except reporting the

explanations of the leaders of some political parties, the head of religious affair and the heads of some associations.

Daily Nation was the only newspaper, which devoted its pages to the opinions of the scholars or experts for interpretation and the explanation of the meaning of this event; asking and suggesting how the local and global policies can be affected by this event. Thus, it offers an effort to take the audience towards the unknown answers from the sensitiveness and the fear and terror.

Also the *East African newspapers* emphasised on the failures of the intelligence communities and blame the attack mainly on western countries foreign policies. The paper states "terrorist attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi represents a failure of intelligence-gathering and counter-terrorism operations. In fact, terrorism by non-state actors have quadrupled since America launched the post-9/11 "war on terror." While there were 982 terror acts in 2002, which number had risen to 4,564 in 2012, according to the Global Terrorism Index"

4.2 Analysing Newspaper photographs

The newspaper that supported the news discourse with the most photographs was *Sunday Monitor*; *Daily Nation* used very little photographs in reporting the incidence. However, it seems that there were importance differences using photographs through amount of them, indeed theme of the photographs were very similar of same because all newspapers photographs were captured from the same scene. Yet, *Sunday Monitor* used more photographs that capture fear, pain, and sorrow so on. Families, women and children were main subjects of the photographs. On the one hand, news discourse shows many victims; on the other hand it shows army officers on their duty with weapons. *Daily Nation* captured more military officers trying to rescue the victims. Of course, more pictures of military rescue teams might suggest the points and view of some that militarist solution may have contributed to more deaths.

5. Conclusions

As the study seek to find out the differences in representations of terror in East African newspapers of the coverage Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya on September 2013. Discourse analyses revealed significant difference on how they reported and presented the sad event. Coverage of terror acts does not primarily intend to be a political communication; rather it reports the terrible disaster as it occurs. However, stressing terrific incidents are just what terrorists want to get, news stories depict horrible points and photographs capture pain, fear, panic, and death so on. *Sunday Monitor*, *Daily Nation* and *The East African newspapers* are exceptional newspapers in this matter. They all cover some essays in the other pages that include how this terrorist event should be interpreted in the international affairs and politics. They analyse their essays from political sciences and religious point of view. It means that readers can interpret the event beyond fear or terror. The relationship between press and power can be seen by means of surfacing or neglecting some issues or events. Mixing other cultural events with the terror incidents on headlines at

the first day of the event signify either intent to digress or projecting other intentions or ideologies. All issues or events cannot be covered without ideology. In this regard, to parallel its politics, *Sunday Monitor* covers extensively fear, worry, violence, pain, and tears of the victims and populace prominently. In other words, it reports highly sensational and popular. Because, popularize always get high circulation. In spite of all opportunities provided by technology in today's media including live transmission, the journalists can rarely edit the truth. In these cases, there is a necessity for them to base the news on the accurate description of the people who are in the position of the news source and who first seek their own advantages. One of the most important reasons why the media becomes partial while announcing the terror news is that it has to reflect the views of the government or people in power because, the media releases the news about any terrorist action directly to its audience instead of questioning the views of the government. Basing on the terrorist sources that interpret the events in terms of their own point of views is a problem for the media. Similarly basing on the government sources that make explanations is a big problem for the media as well (Miller, 1982). So regardless of the ideological point of the media institution, which clearly influence their coverage of terrible events like terrorisms, balance and proper editing is required not to aid terrorist in propagating their goals and also limiting politicians from exploiting the situation.

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Author Profile



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Elochukwu G. Nweke studied psychology at Enugu State university of Science and Technology. He received M.Sc. in Applied Social Psychology from Girne American University, Cyprus where he currently



Biluny P. Lampuar received BA in business administration from Kampala International University in 2009. He joined Southern Sudan Beverages Limited as Sales Administrator and later moved on to moved Ethiopian Airlines in Juba. He received his MBA (Financial Management) in 2014 from Girne American University, Cyprus.