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Critical terrorism studies and postcolonialism: constructing ungoverned spaces in counter-terrorism discourse in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a neglected question in ongoing debates about counter-terrorism efforts in Nigeria: How is Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy discursively framed? The article argues, in part, that Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy is essentially a *political* activity which contributes to the production of a specific Nigerian identity by designating north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin as "ungoverned" spaces. This construction of identity through geography, though, has important implications for policy, identity and security in Nigeria, and beyond. This study of Nigeria, I also argue, presents an opportunity for a much-needed conversation between CTS and postcolonialism for broadening knowledge on discourses around (counter-)terrorism. Drawing upon the concept of space in postcolonial scholarship, this article demonstrates how the relationship between geography, identity and subjectivity offers a broader framework for articulating continuing, and recent, discourses of counter-terrorism. It demonstrates how Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse reproduces, and transforms, well-known Euro-centric and state-centred discourses which intersect with colonial and imperialistic ideas (and practices). In doing so, the article makes two notable contributions: first, it provides a sustained focus on official articulations of counter-terrorism in Nigeria by examining important primary data. Second, in mobilizing the concept of space in postcolonialism, it facilitates crucial theoretical reflections within (critical) terrorism studies.

Introduction

In Nigeria, a range of policies and practices around counter-terrorism has emerged since 2009, in response – and as responses – to problems of terrorism in north-eastern Nigeria. Though much work has been done to explore counter-terrorism strategies and initiatives in Nigeria, there is (still) very little research around the framing of Nigeria's counter-terrorism approach and the implications thereof. This is relevant not least because any evaluation of the target, ends and success of Nigeria's counter-terrorism approach only makes sense in the context of some reflection about its composition and what ramifications this holds for policy, security, and beyond. Such a focus, too, I argue, permits an important dialogic project – one that pulls together Critical Terrorism Studies and post-colonialism to broaden knowledge about (counter-)terrorism by exploring the complexities embedded within this evolving counter-terrorism discourse in Nigeria.

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Much ink has been spilled in analysing the problem of terrorism in Nigeria and identifying appropriate context-specific counter-terrorism responses. The predominant use of "hard" approaches, including military force and anti-terrorism legislation, on the one hand, has been described as necessary for national security and public safety (Onapajo 2017; Oyewole 2013). On the other hand, there are a growing number of studies emphasising the need for "softer" measures (Ugwueze and Onuoha 2020; Mbagwu and Mavalla 2016; Eji 2016). These interventions mostly highlight the importance of certain longstanding structural problems, such as poverty and marginalisation, as root causes of terrorism in Nigeria. While recognising the contribution of this literature, which broadly seeks to identify appropriate forms of counter-terrorism in the Nigerian context, there are other (under-explored) questions that should be considered. Accordingly, this article asks the following questions: how is Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy framed discursively, especially in relation to identity? And, relatedly, what are the implications of this for security in Nigeria, and beyond?

Moving away from the problem-solving orientation identifiable in the above scholarship, this article approaches Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy as a *political* activity of identity construction (Jackson 2005). Put otherwise, this article argues that official articulations about counter-terrorism in Nigeria contribute to the production of a unique Nigerian identity – mostly underpinned by notions of democracy and progress – which is often positioned against the threats posed by certain counterparts (including terrorist groups, and ungoverned spaces). This identity is specifically re-invoked by designating particular spaces in north-east Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB hereafter) as "ungoverned" or under-governed. Such constructions of identity through geographical resources, though, has important ramifications for policy, citizenship, peoples and communities in Nigeria, as well as for ongoing collaborations in the LCB. It also highlights crucial complexities surrounding identity in the Nigerian context which potentially broadens knowledge of counter-terrorism discourses and practices.

To make this argument, I draw upon relevant claims about (counter-)terrorism developed within Critical Terrorism Studies (see, Jackson 2007) especially regarding the construction of identity and relationship between knowledge/power in counter-terrorism discourses and practices, bringing these into conversation with the conceptualisation of space in Postcolonial literature. As a note of caution, however, it is expedient to emphasise that CTS, as understood here, entails a broad collection of critical treatments underpinned by a broad commitment to reflexivity in respect to the study of terrorism and political violence.[1] Thus, I dispense quickly with the false dualism of "critical" and "orthodox" strands often expressed within terrorism studies (Horgan and Boyle 2008). That said, continuing discussions and theoretical reflections within CTS have remained insulated within a seemingly Eurocentric and post-9/11 orbit, with few contributions from postcolonial studies (Barnard-Wills and Moore 2010).

Postcolonialism, on the other hand, is approached here as involving "a range of ideas and problematisations around major areas in contemporary social and political theory of particular relevance to Africa, and beyond" (Abrahamsen 2003). This article focuses specifically on the conceptualisation of space in postcolonialism, and argues that the relationship between discourse, space, identity and subjectivity has much to offer to knowledge about counter-terrorism in Nigeria and terrorism research more generally. Thus, CTS and postcolonialism could benefit from a much closer (and needed) relationship that possibly enables work in this area to move beyond recycled discourses about

counter-terrorism – including neo-orientalist and Islamophobic ones – which often fail to account for broader, deeper and far-reaching trajectories of colonial or imperialistic discourses (Khan 2021).

The article makes two notable contributions: First, it contributes, empirically, to scholarship on counter-terrorism in Nigeria by exploring official discourse of counter-terrorism drawing upon a range of primary data, including important texts yet to receive adequate academic engagement (such as The Buhari Plan for the North-East). Secondly, in drawing upon the concept of space in postcolonialism, the article facilitates theoretical reflections in (critical) terrorism studies, highlighting the possibility for (increased) collaboration between CTS and postcolonial studies to broaden knowledge on (counter-)terrorism.

The rest of this article is organised as follows: In the next section I explore briefly analyses of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria to situate my intervention in this article. The following section presents the conceptual framework developed herein, through outlining the commitments, contribution, and gap within CTS, and through elaborating on the conceptualisation of space in Postcolonial literature. Following on from this, I outline the methods used in the article, including the coding and analysis of texts that emerged from fieldwork undertaken in Abuja, Nigeria. This is followed by the examination of constructions of "ungoverned" spaces within Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse alongside certain important implications of this construction. The article concludes with a broad reflection on the possible synergy between CTS and postcolonial studies going forward.

Terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria

The ongoing conflict between the Nigerian state and terrorist groups in the north-east since 2009 is typically linked to confrontations between the Nigerian police and the "Nigerian Taliban" or Yusufiyya group which led to the execution of about 800 members of the Yusufiyya group, as well as its leader, Muhammed Yusuf (Comolli 2015; Loimeier 2012; Thurston 2014). Since then, terrorist activities carried out by Boko Haram and other splinter groups such as An-saru or the Islamic State of West African Province more recently, have been framed within official discourse – and beyond – as posing the "most significant threat to Nigeria" (NACTEST 2016, 14). This conflict, though, extends beyond Nigeria's territorial boundaries and includes areas in the LCB and other parts of West, Central, and North Africa. The abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, which drew global attention and condemnation of Boko Haram's activities, is perhaps one of the groups' most notable attacks, though not necessarily its deadliest. Socio-political and socio-economic issues have been described as key factors responsible for terrorism in north-eastern Nigeria (Magrin and de Montclos 2018). Other factors, with a slightly more historical focus, include the lasting impacts of British colonial rule in Nigeria which introduced a modern bureaucratic state system often deemed to be incompatible with pre-exiting traditional and/or Islamic systems (Akinola 2015).

The Nigerian federal government has notably responded to the problem of terrorism in various ways, including through the promulgation of anti-terrorism legislation, designing policies to mitigate such threats and their root causes, and of course, through military intervention. The promulgation of the anti-terrorism law in 2011 (revised 2013), for example, was described "as a clear indication of the decisiveness of the government to deal with any individual or group who have decided to challenge the sovereignty of the

nation" (NACTEST 2016, 20). Moreover, criminalising terrorist acts has often been criticised for its narrowness and inability to address the root causes of terrorism in Nigeria (Mbagwu and Mavalla 2016). In 2014, a National Counter-terrorism Strategy was rolled out to offer a "holistic strategy" that addresses the root causes of terrorism and, at the same time, provide for the disrupting of terrorist violence through other means, inclusive of military force (NACTEST 2016, 6). The Policy and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, elaborated in 2017, also planks Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts for countering "faith-based terrorism" through various population-focused and de-radicalisation strategies (NACTEST 2016, 37).

The above discussion illuminates the range of approaches used by the Nigerian federal government, as well as the link between counter-terrorism and other policy concerns such as social cohesion, integration and poverty alleviation deemed related to terrorism, whether directly or otherwise. Much of the literature on counter-terrorism in Nigeria, though, is driven by a problem-solving aspiration to pin down the causes of terrorism to a range of factors and identify appropriate responses (Akinola 2015; Ugwueze and Onuoha 2020). These accounts often take for granted a set of (con-tested) claims about terrorism, including regarding the link between Islamic extre-mism, poverty and terrorist violence in the Nigerian context (and beyond) (Stohl 2012). As pointed above, debates about appropriate forms of counter-terrorism in Nigeria have been extensively discussed in the existing scholarship, which is commonly positioned between "hard" and "soft" approaches (Ugwueze and Onuoha 2020). Contra to these perspectives and concern, however, this article is interested in how Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy is framed especially in relation to identity and space, and what implications this entails for security in Nigeria, and beyond.

Critical terrorism studies: commitments, contribution and gap

The dissatisfaction with several prevailing claims about terrorism – some of which were identified above – and the need to challenge contemporary (post-9/11) counter-terrorism practices broadly informs CTS research agenda. Jarvis (2009), in this regard, argues for such "space for critical engagement(s) around the normative and analytical commitment underpinning terrorism studies." Re-constituting and re-shaping terrorism studies to expand its scope, focus and commitments, as Jarvis (2009) notes, can be organised around two useful points: broadening and deepening.

Broadening, on the one hand, reflect various attempts to expand our understandings and knowledge about terrorism beyond particular forms of violence and/or actors, and approaching terrorism as contingently (re)produced rather than self-evident or objective. On the other hand, deepening entails thinking more critically about how terrorism is constructed, and the knowledge-power nexus underpinning such processes. Jackson (2007) elaborates a similar perspective concerning the "dominance of orthodox interna-tional relations approaches, the lack of interdisciplinarity, a-historicity, the issue of state terrorism, and the overly problem-solving perspective of much of terrorism studies." Along this line of critique, Jackson (2005) describes counter-terrorism as a "special political discourse [and institutional practices] with its own assumptions, rhetorical tropes, narra-tives, and meanings." This view permits, to some extent at least, my exploring of official representations of counter-terrorism in Nigeria.

However, the lack of contextual and theoretical depth with regard to wider discourses, temporalities and geographies of violence, including those of postcolonial societies, poses a significant drawback (Dixit and Stump 2011; Gunning 2007). CTS is often described as constituting a diverse collection of studies that commonly includes minimal or post-foundationalist approaches and broadly shares a commitment to reflexivity and pluralism (Dixit and Stump 2011). Jackson et al. (2011, 38), for example, note that "an important consequence of CTS epistemological commitment is an opening of the broader intellectual project of studying terrorism to new questions and topics, as well as methods and approaches." Yet, there is a notable lack of contribution from postcolonial approaches to its research project which is, somewhat, surprising not least because many cases of terrorist violence occur in the global South, and much of recent counter-terrorism discourses and practices reflect wider colonial discourses (Khan 2021). To illustrate this gap briefly, I examined and coded articles published in the *Critical Studies on Terrorism* journal between 2009– 2020 specifically delineated, geographically, to the global South. A total sample of 54 articles was examined and, of these, 51 contribute to CTS research agenda, whether implicitly or otherwise. Much of these, though, focus on the Middle East (n = 24), including case studies on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iraq (see, Feyyaz 2016; Nazir 2010). Overall, four studies draw upon concepts and ideas from Postcolonial studies, in this sample (see Grzegorczyk 2018; Managhan 2016; Wyszomierski 2015; Barnard-Wills and Moore 2010).

This sparse engagement with concepts and ideas from postcolonial work was (also) observed by Barnard-Wills and Moore (2010), arguing that there is a dearth of understanding of the cultures, context and evolution of terrorism within postcolonial societies in (critical) terrorism studies. As such they argued for increased interaction and engagement with ideas from – and about – the global South in (critical) terrorism studies and international relations more widely. Though these observations – and charge – were expressed in their work published in 2010 (2 years after the *Critical Studies on Terrorism* Journal published its first issue), this nagging gap persists. This, in part, informs my concern and intervention in this article. The lack of engagement with, and contribution from, postcolonial approaches may facilitate the re-production of dominant (Western-centric) discourses of counter-terrorism, including those developed or invoked by researchers working within so-called critical frameworks, leading to the universalising of – potentially harmful – security practices. This limitation of CTS notwithstanding, I argue, provides an opportunity for theoretical reflection and building connections, one that enhances the "the potential for fruitful engagement in the areas of power and representation, and perspectives/critiques of modernity" (Darby and Paolini 1994).

As much as CTS seeks to contribute to broadening and deepening knowledge(s) around (counter-)terrorism, postcolonialism, I argue, extends this research enterprise in at least two significant ways: first, is by enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the complex histories, relationships and interconnections embedded in, and reinforced through, counter-terrorism discourses and practices. Second, and relatedly, it moves CTS beyond its narrow entrapment in post-9/11 counter-discourse by providing other temporalities that account for earlier, recent, and continuing discourses of (counter-)terrorism. Doing so, I suggest, facilitates the recognition and study of other forms of violence including those associated with colonialism and/or imperialism, which remain outside

the purview of terrorism discourse. This is also in line with various call to recognise issues of race and racism (Abu-Bakare 2020; Groothuis 2020), gender and sexuality in analysis of terrorism and counter-terrorism (Sjoberg 2015).

Postcolonialism and space

Before outlining how space has been articulated in postcolonial work and what this offers to the debate on Nigeria's counter-terrorism approach and terrorism research more generally, it is important to clarify what is understood by postcolonialism, or how it is invoked in this article as it is often (mis)construed as a form of literary or cultural critique with contestations about its core commitments or contribution to developing societies (Dirlik 1994; Ahmad 1995; Williams 1997). Specifically, I approach postcolonialism as involving a set of ideas, concepts and problematisations relevant to social and political situations in the global South, as well as the global North. It is "multiple, diverse and rejects easy generalisations or dichotomies," though it shares a common aim of rethinking and exploring the role of power in the formation of identity and subjectivity (Abrahamsen 2003).

With the above in mind, debates surrounding the concept of space in postcolonial scholarship are frequently (and problematically) parsed into two notions of spatiality: metaphorical and materialist (Teverson and Upstone 2011; Soja 1996). It should be noted, though, that the relationship between geography, identity and subjectivity consistently underpin these notions of spatiality (Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Dalby and Tuathail 1998). Soja (1996), for example, notes that this linkage highlights the significance of the "struggle over geography which extends beyond struggles about soldiers, land, and territory but also about ideas, images and imaginings." Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1978) is typically referred to as one of the earliest works in postcolonial studies that explicitly refers to the notion of space and as such provides a useful entry point into this exploration. The opening section of *Orientalism* explains thus: "we must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made and extended it to geography" (Said 1978, 4). This is because, he continues, "both geographical and cultural regions ... such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made". In another notable work, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994) writes:

> everything about human history is rooted in the earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation, but it has also meant that people have planned to have more territory and therefore must do something about indigenous residents. At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others (1994, 4).

Said's preoccupation in this context defines space, on the one hand, as something tangible (geographical), and as discursively reproduced, on the other hand. Similarly, Mbembe (2003) posits that "space is the 'raw material' of [post-]colonial sovereignty". Adding that, "colonization writes new relations on colonized spaces through territorializing practices such as the production of boundaries and hierarchies, classification of people, extraction of resources, and so on." In *Orientalism reconsidered*, Said moves

towards a less materialist conceptualisation of space, arguing that the "line separating Occident from Orient is less a fact of nature that it is a fact of human production," which he described as "imaginative geography" (1985, 90).

This distinction between material and textual, reflects broader debates in – and indeed criticism of – postcolonialism. Clayton (2003, 343) notes that "one of the pitfalls of postcolonialism is its textualism," often linked to the works of scholars such as Homi Bhabha and Edouard Glissant, among others. Apart from such methodological issues, there are also questions concerning its epistemological grounding in Western philosophy and its (limited) relevance to societies in Africa and the developing world more broadly (Abrahamsen 2003). Without dismissing or accepting these claims, postcolonialism, as clarified above, should not be regarded as a homogenous theory, neither are its major preoccupation and approaches static or unchanging. Thus, I reject the binary between material and textual in the above-discussed formulations of spatiality. Indeed, for Soja, whose work has been influential in this conversation, "space is essentially discursively constituted" (Soja as quoted in Teverson and Upstone 2011). This primarily suggests that geography is always embedded in, and animated through, discourse. As Krishnan (2017) puts it: "space is not merely what the text says, but what the text does." That is, it entails how texts produce specific "imagined geography", linking discourse, geography, identity and subjectivity.

Such a concept of space, I argue, is useful for examining how Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy is framed and the ramifications of this. This implies, in other words, approaching Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy as a discursive activity contributing to the production of identity by designating "ungoverned" spaces in north-east Nigeria and the LCB. It highlights constructions – and contestation – of Nigeria's (colonial) territorial boundary, as well as the intricacies underpinning its identity and the relationship between knowledge and power in the Nigerian context. While Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse reinvigorates common Eurocentric and state-centred narratives, these, however, overlap and highlight other important discourses. Specifically, it highlights wider, colonial and imperialistic ideas and practices inherent within this evolving Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse. Notably, a significant number of studies – in terrorism studies and beyond – have explored counter-terrorism discourses and practices in postcolonial societies and how these specifically link to the expansion of state power, or increasingly permit the reproduction of neo-orientalism (Parashar 2018; Martini 2018). Taking cues from these I highlight pertinent interconnections, similarities and nuances by exploring this case study of Nigeria.

Method and the case

This article examined 12 texts produced by the Nigerian federal executive between 2009 and 2019, most of which emerged from two months (February to April 2020) of fieldwork in Abuja, Nigeria, as well as from online repositories. This includes texts from official databases, press releases, and interviews, which provide clear articulations of state counter-terrorism strategies (See table 1 below). Overall, three criteria were used in making textual selection: (1) texts must provide clear articulation of identity and space; (2) they are publicly read and attended to; and (3) they have formal authority to define the political position of the Nigerian state (Hansen 2006, 73). The coding of these texts

Table 1. Official texts on counter-terrorism in Nigeria.

Text	Site of collection	Method of collection	Total Length	Date Accessed
Nigeria's Counter-terrorism Strategy 2016	Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA)	Available online from: https://ctc.gov.ng/national-counter-terrorism-strategy-2016/.	57 pages	Accessed: 10 May 2018
Nigeria's Security Strategy 2014	ONSA	Available online from: https://ctc.gov.ng/nigerian-national-security-strategy-2014/	97 pages (see pp. 7–13, 16–18 for counter-terrorism)	Accessed: 10 May 2018
Nigeria's Security Strategy 2019	ONSA	Available online from: https://ctc.gov.ng/national-security-strategy-2019/	80 pages (see p. 8, pp. 23–26)	Accessed: 1 April 2020
Counter-Terrorism Centre Strategic Report 2018	ONSA	Available online from: https://ctc.gov.ng/counter-terrorism-centre-strategic-report-2018/	81 pages	Accessed: 1 April 2020
Preventing Violent Extremism in Nigeria: Effective narratives and messaging national workshop report 2017	The British Council	Fieldwork	43 pages	Collected: 10 March 2020
Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism 2017	ONSA	Available online from: https://ctc.gov.ng/pcve-national-framework-and-action-plan/	43 Pages	Accessed: 16 June 2020
The Buhari plan: rebuilding the north east 2016	The British council	Fieldwork	39 pages	Collected: 10 March 2020
Goodluck, J. 2013. Address by the president, commander-in-chief of the armed forces on the federal republic of Nigeria at the General Assembly of the 68th regular session of the United Nations	United Nations	Available online from: https://gadebate.un.org/en/68/nigeria	6 pages	Accessed: 12 June 2020
Goodluck, J. 2014. Address by the president, commander-in-chief of the armed forces on the federal republic of Nigeria at the General Assembly of the 69th regular session of the United Nations	United Nations	Available online from: https://gadebate.un.org/en/69/nigeria	6 pages	Accessed: 12 June 2020
Buhari, M. 2015. Address by the president, commander-in-chief of the armed forces on the federal republic of Nigeria at the General Assembly of the 70th regular session of the United Nations	United Nations	Available online from: https://gadebate.un.org/en/70/nigeria	6 pages	Accessed: 12 June 2020
Goodluck, J. 2015. New Year message.	Channels News	Available online from: https://www.channelstv.com/2015/01/01/full-text-president-goodluck-jonathans-new-year-broadcast/.		Accessed: 15 July 2021
Defence Headquarters, 2016. Nigerian troops clears more Boko Haram enclaves in northern Borno state.	Defence Headquarters	Available online from: https://defenceinfo.mil.ng/nigerian-troops-clears-more-boko-haram-enclaves-in-northern-bornu-state-rescues-195-persons/		Accessed: 15 July 2021

specifically focused on how Nigeria or part thereof, is positioned in relation to certain counterparts within official representations. It analysed, more specifically, how Nigeria's identity is constructed through spatial or geographical resources, in relation to north-east Nigeria and the LCB to identify crucial consequences. The connection between specific discourses and political practices, or social experiences, has increasingly been emphasised in postcolonial work employing discourse analysis to demonstrate its significance especially in speaking to the realities in postcolonial societies (Vaughan 1991; Milliken 1999; Howarth 2005).

As explained above, most terrorist attacks occur in the north-east of Nigeria, which constitutes more than 13% of Nigeria's population and sits at the heart of various transnational or transborder relationships that predate the Nigerian state. Geographically, this region consists of states such as Yobe, Borno, Adamawa, Bauchi, Taraba, and Gombe, sharing boundaries with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republic which together form the Lake Chad Basin. The LCB has increasingly witnessed various forms of insecurity, such as transborder crimes, the smuggling of illegal small arms and light weapons, terrorism, and other human security issues (Tar and Bala 2019). The LCB, as such, has garnered considerable attention in policy and academic circles, particularly given the threats posed by terrorism in this region. The focus of this article, however, is not so much about the sub-regional strategies against terrorism in the LCB. Rather, I examine the ways in which a certain Nigerian identity is discursively produced by designating north-east Nigeria and the LCB as "ungoverned" spaces.

Constructing "ungoverned" spaces in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin

It is worth noting that this notion of "ungoverned spaces" is not new. It is commonly recycled in counter-terrorism discourses especially to problematise so-called weak states or regions as (potential) terrorist sanctuaries (Arsenault and Bacon 2015; Korteweg 2008; Oakley and Proctor 2012). The origin of this idea, however, is frequently traced to the RAND corporation, as well as in speeches offered by U.S presidents and European cabinet ministers (Oakley and Proctor 2012). The rejection of this uniquely Eurocentric discourse in policy and academic debates notwithstanding (Stohl 2008), it remains within the discursive repertoire of state officials in Nigeria, with varied ramifications, as demonstrated in what follows.

Nigeria's Security Strategy (2014) provides a useful entry point, in that it explicitly refers to north-east Nigeria as ungoverned spaces, in relation to certain preferred (or mainstream) ideas. To defeat terrorism, it writes:

> we cannot leave anyone behind, we cannot have "ungoverned spaces" [in the north east]. It is time we leverage on our democratic processes to increase access to decision making for a majority of our citizens. Inclusive, non-discriminatory, and participatory governance is more likely to detect discontent before it erupts. The goal of politics must be to lift our people out of poverty and provide them with the enabling environment to compete favorably. We are confident that our governance approach to countering insurgency addresses the multiple factors that link peace, security, development, rule of law and respect for human rights. (NSS 2014, 35).

The othering of north-east Nigeria in the above, by rendering it as "ungoverned spaces" in contrast to "our democratic processes" produces a specific Nigerian identity and, at the same time, constructs the trustworthiness and capability of the Nigerian government to

resolve the problem of terrorism. Jonathan (2013) articulates a similar idea in his speech at the 68th UNGA: "terrorism in a few states in the north-east of our country is a challenge to national stability, and we will spare no effort, we will use every resource at our disposal, with due regard for human rights and the rule of law." Such official pronouncements, which often target different audiences including foreign and domestic, ultimately serve in constructing the credibility (and ability) of the Nigerian government in resolving terrorism within its national borders (Parashar and Schulz 2021).

Yet, it designates – and distinguishes – parts of the north-east of Nigeria as sites for terrorist violence which threatens certain democratic values, or a unique Nigerian identity commonly hinged upon the idea of democracy and progress. As Jonathan (2014) stated, for example, "the violent and criminal activities of Boko Haram have continued to pose a threat to Nigeria ... through a wave of terror ... predominantly in the north-east, Boko Haram is attempting to truncate development." Such references to development, as with the above reference to democratic processes, which contingently constitutes Nigeria's identity – reproduced here through spatial descriptor – clearly reinforce Eurocentric and state-centred discourses familiar in terrorism research especially since 9/11, and beyond (Koelble and Lipuma 2008).

The Buhari Plan for the North-East (2016), outlining the Presidential Initiative for this region, provides another useful source of information:

> The failure of leadership and effective institutions to drive the advancement of human capacity from peasant dependence to independence and self-determination has held back the North East region over the years; they are root causes of the current insurgency. The region's states need to achieve a system of government that works for the people and guarantees their welfare and progress. The system should promulgate policies and governmental actions that will boost the socio-economic wellbeing of the populace at large and enhance democratic development. The different elements of good governance to be addressed include accountability and transparency in public administration, eliminating the root causes of corruption, a credible electoral process, the rule of law, working to promote justice through the judiciary, and effective leadership skills to address these and the security challenges in the region. (The Buhari Plan 2016, 31).

Importantly, the above references to the "advancement of human capacity", or the transition from "peasant dependence to self-determination through good governance," again, point to modernisation discourses and the biopolitics of counter-terrorism governance. Duffield (2001), for example, has showed how the linkage of development and security function as a biopolitical configuration through which different populations are rendered vulnerable, and managed in a form that is supportive of certain – Western or/ and state-centric – standards (see also, Aning 2010; Doornbos 2001). The above texts, as we have seen, essentially construct "imagined geographies" by distinguishing north-eastern Nigeria (including Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, and Taraba state) from other (more democratic and progressive) geographical parts of Nigeria (Adesoji 2010; Onuoha 2010; Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014). In other words, Nigeria's identity effectively takes its meaning, in part, from the designation of ungoverned spaces in north-eastern Nigeria.

This de-territorialising discourse, in turn, attempts to fix terrorist violence within such spaces to justify counter-terrorism interventions in so-called terrorist sanctuaries, especially through increased state/military presence to ostensibly provide stability and other

conditions for progress (Elden 2007; Jeffrey 2009). As the Buhari Plan (2016, 31) indicates: "security is the precondition for the return of productive normality in the [north-east] region, through increased military presence to recover territories from the terrorists to ensure the safe return of displaced persons and development." This reflects Bilgin and Morton's (2002) idea of "embedded statism", in which the state is naturalised as the means through which security and development are guaranteed. There are, however, several cases of state repression and violence in the north-east carried out by the Nigerian military (Ugwueze and Onuoha 2020). Moreover, such statist discourse often overlaps with, and reinforces, broader Eurocentric and Islamophobic discourses, including regarding the threats posed by Islamic extremism to democracy and progress (Parashar 2018 Gunning and Jackson 2011).

This construction of identity and – or through – space is indeed flexible, extending beyond Nigeria's territorial boundary to include countries in the LCB. The NSS (2014, 9) describes the "north-east region as a vast territory with a shared boundary with three countries, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republic, which has a history of sectarian violence." This reference to the vastness of north-east Nigeria and its relationship with other countries and societies in the LCB invokes a particular living colonial past, alongside certain imperialistic practices which blurs into the above-identified Eurocentric and state-centric discourse. As the NSS (2019, 4–5) explicitly indicates: "the relative economic, geographical, and political challenges in some of these countries encourage terrorism, hence we need to monitor events in these countries." The NACTEST (2016) also notes:

> A major security concern within Nigeria is the ease with which persons and goods enter and leave the country through borders, which are inadequately protected. Notwithstanding the provisions of the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement between member states, it is expected that persons entering the country must be duly documented and accounted for. Irrespective of the strength in cross-border cultural affinity, the effect of criminally minded individuals entering the country to perpetrate acts of terrorism is high. This will require establishing joint border patrols with contiguous neighbours and enhancing traditional border security systems. (NACTEST 2016, 22-23).

Similar assumptions about Nigeria's problematic neighbours, region or borders, is outlined in the Counter-terrorism Centre Report (2018, 43–44): "Boko Haram's attacks in the North-east is attributed to use of hard drugs, hence we must control chemical substances beyond materials for explosives but also illicit drug trafficking . . . smuggled into Nigeria due to the porosity of the borders in the north-east." Written in this way, then, terrorism in Nigeria is externalised, inverted and portrayed as a broader sub-regional problem caused by other external problems, including state weakness or failure in the LCB (Abgiboa 2017). More recently, in 2019, the Defence HQ expressed in a press release: "Boko haram is not in control of any inch of Nigeria's territory. They have been pushed to the Tumbus, the Islands within the neighbouring countries of Chad and Niger Republics where they are hibernating and from where they launch attacks" (Defence HQ 2016). This, on the one hand, attempts to fix terrorists/terrorism in specific (external/foreign) spaces and, on the other, reassure Nigerians and other audiences of its territorial integrity or safety.

The consistent mention of Nigeria's territorial borders within this discourse invariably illustrates its construction, flexibility and mobilisation for (national) identity and political practices. This also poses important questions regarding the development of a regional

security complex, as often assumed in most work on counter-terrorism efforts in the LCB (Albert 2017; Tar and Mustapha 2017; Atangana 2018). States within this region, according to much of this literature, share certain similar security problems, such as terrorism, as well as certain regional interests and aims (Tar and Mustapha 2017). According to Tar and Bala (2019), for example, the contextual features that provide ground for terrorism in the LCB are equally attended to by the resurgence of regional security complexes. So far, regional collaboration, especially through the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the MNJTF, has been plagued by various problems including the lack of intelligence sharing among the participating countries, and the difficulty of a borderless counter-insurgency operation (cutting across in Borno state, Nigeria; Diffa in Niger; Kolofata in Cameroon; and around some Lake Chad Islands) (Umoh in Tar and Bala 2019, 93). The consequences of Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse, as discussed below, raise crucial questions about ongoing counter-terrorism strategies and efforts in the LCB and how they integrate with, or upend other national efforts and ambitions (this is, of course, beyond the scope of this current article).

Implications of this discourse

The foregoing discussion illustrates the relationship between geography, identity and subjectivity within Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse. These official representations in general, seek to invent a unique Nigerian identity by designating ungoverned spaces in north-east Nigeria and the LCB. It facilitates the rendering of territories, countries and communities as problematic to provide justification for state intervention in these spaces. Though this evidently reinvigorates certain Eurocentric and state-centric ideas prominent in post-9/11 counter-terrorism discourse, it intersects with other broader discourses of colonialism and imperialism that present a range of implications outlined in what follows.

A first obvious implication is the expansion of state power through military intervention, portrayed as the "precondition for a return to normality", for filling the so-called power vacuum exploited by terrorist groups in north-east Nigeria and the LCB (Taylor 1994). A good illustration here is the counter-insurgency operations codenamed LAFIYA DOLE, in which the military command and control centre was moved to Maiduguri in Borno state, described as "the epicentre of the insurgency" (NSS 2019, 23). There are, however, several reports and allegations of human rights violations and other related freedoms linked to this move (Guardian 2019). Indeed, it is somewhat true, as Bajpai and Parashar (2020) suggest, that African states are caught up in a "postcolonial dilemma". On the one hand, failure to achieve certain global (western) standards – including political stability and development – risks being classified as a failed/fragile/failing state. On the other hand, the use of harsh measures to achieve the required developmental metrics also risks falling into the same category of fragile or failed states.

Second, and a related issue, is the biopolitics of managing populations in so-called ungoverned spaces through good governance and development-focused initiatives ostensibly to improve "backward" communities. This, however, renders particular groups, communities, beliefs and practices in north-eastern Nigeria as inherently unsuitable or incongruent with liberal democratic norms. The profiling and targeting of Almajirai Koranic pupils, mostly located in northern Nigeria and often described as terrorist "footsoldiers," is illustrative of this point. The NACTEST (2016, 19) notes that "they are neither

educated nor possess any skill to enable them to integrate into the (mainstream) society." The construction of Almajirai pupils as uneducated or misfits perpetuates an Islamophobic discourse, positioning them as threats to the wider (democratic and progressive) Nigerian society. Abrahamsen (2004) has shown how this discourse of ungoverned spaces links Africa's poor – her dangerous classes, the marginalised, excluded – to international security problems and terrorism. Overall, this could potentially generate a negative image of fear of north-east Nigeria and the LCB, creating hostility and suspicion towards the peoples and communities in these spaces, as well as their beliefs and practices (Zulaika 2009).

Third, this discourse perpetuates certain colonial and imperialist ideas and practices that have potentially troubling ramifications. On the one hand, it attempts to fix Nigeria's colonial boundary through various discursive claims and border control technique which pose relevant consequences for transnational and ethnic affiliations along these largely arbitrary borders. Moreover, this greatly undermines the free movement protocol of ECOWAS and other efforts towards addressing rigid borders (Chukwuma 2020). The NACTEST (2016, 23) indicates that: "all national assets would be harnessed and properly exploited to strengthen and enhance border security." Indeed, Africa's inherited borders have featured prominently in the discussion around decolonisation for different reasons, including the challenges posed to African mobilities and identities (Adotey 2020). Furthermore, this discourse encourages imperialistic practices such as Nigeria's interference in the domestic affairs of its neighbours, which may elicit resistance to Nigeria's hegemony and undermine ongoing collaboration in the LCB. While recognising (the construction of) Nigeria's sovereignty over its territorial borders, this discourse could also encourage – or justify – the intervention of external actors in this region. Bachmann (2008), for example, notes how the Sahel region, which includes countries within the LCB, is represented as ungoverned by U.S. state officials to justify U.S. intervention in the area.

Conclusion: critical terrorism studies and postcolonialism

Having examined the relationship between geography and identity within Nigerian counter-terrorism discourse, I finish in the following section by examining the importance and urgency for increased contribution from postcolonial studies in terrorism research. As discussed above, the link between discourse, geography, identity and subjectivity, as developed in postcolonial studies permits the broadening of knowledge on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Postcolonial theory, more generally, provides useful conceptual tools for exploring and navigating the complexity of identity, and illustrates how knowledge and power work in postcolonial contexts. This relationship between knowledge and power, though, has been given considerable attention within CTS which has contributed significantly to broadening knowledge about terrorism and contemporary counter-terrorism practices. Notably, this includes illustrating the role of representation in the production of terrorist threats often against Western societies, especially since the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 (Jackson 2005; Martini 2018). Building on this contribution in terrorism studies, postcolonialism, and the concepts developed within this scholarship, provides a useful and broader framework for analysing or exploring discourses surrounding terrorism and counter-terrorism.

The notion of space deployed in this article, for example, illustrates constructions of identity through geography, highlighting important linkages, intersections and distinctions between different discourses including Eurocentric, statist, colonial and imperialistic ones. The immense contribution of postcolonial studies to International Relations and security studies has persistently been emphasised and appreciated (Barkawi and Laffey 2006). (Critical) terrorism studies, too, is in a good position to engage more with, and acknowledge, insights from this body of knowledge. Thus, to expand its research agenda beyond, and away from, western-dominant discourses especially those related to 9/11, CTS should engage with ideas and concepts from postcolonial scholarship to explore and identify diverse knowledges and practices related to (counter-)terrorism. This offers two crucial opportunities worth outlining in turn.

First, is the possibility to develop alternative vocabularies for explaining both terrorism and counter-terrorism in different contexts. This is especially relevant in the context of new and emerging frameworks deployed in terrorism research after 9/11, such as "extremism" and "radicalization", which largely reinforce problematic western bias, blindsight and assumptions (Kundnani 2012). Thus, the longue durée of postcolonial interventions increasingly permits the generation of different terminologies and frameworks of analysis than those developed in (critical) terrorism studies. The second entails widening the purview of terrorism research beyond the threats facing western countries to recognise other violences, including colonial and/or imperialist violence, which commonly abide outside the realm of terrorism and counter-terrorism discourse.

Note

1. This study only maps out the over-arching commitment that is generally agreed upon by different scholars working within this research paradigm. See, Jackson et al. (2011). *Terrorism: A critical introduction*; Heath-Kelly (2010). "Critical Terrorism Studies, Critical Theory and the 'naturalistic fallacy'." *Security Dialogue* 41 (3): 235–254; Jarvis, L. 2009. "The spaces and faces of critical terrorism studies." *Security Dialogue* 40 (1): 5–27; Dixit and Stump (2011). "A response to Jones and Smith: it's not as bad as it seems; or, five ways to move Critical Terrorism Studies forward." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34 (6): 501–511.

Disclosure statement

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