

CONFLICT SENSITIVE JOURNALISM AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AS A BRIDGE TO INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The media is widely acclaimed and rightly so to wield enormous powers in dousing or escalating tension in conflict situations. In other words, whatever position the media assumes in conflict situations is a product of choice particularly on the part of the journalists whose mandate it is to report conflicts as they unfold. In this era of heightened ethno-religious and socio-cultural intolerance, mostly occasioned by incompatible goals and values, the media can play fundamental roles in facilitating constructive civic dialogue that promotes inter-cultural value awareness for a peaceful co-existence. However, to what extent the journalists and the media have lived up to this mandate remains a subject of scholarly investigations. This paper therefore, attempts exploring the nexus and to bridge the gap between intercultural dialogue and conflict-sensitive reporting. Anchored on Conflict and Framing theories, the paper established among others, that the conflict-sensitive journalist remains the rallying point in reconciling inter-cultural conflicting goals and values by making deliberate and conscientious efforts to construct such narratives that better bring the parties in conflict to the point of dialogue, build greater sense of awareness, conviviality in multiculturalism and by extension, foster mutual understanding. The conflict-sensitive journalist through self-reflection, therefore, helps to avoid stereotypes, prejudices, and the escalation of unstable situations. With this, multi-cultural people are better equipped to balance unity and solidarity with tolerance in diversity for sustainable development.*

KEYWORDS: Conflict-sensitive Journalism; Intercultural Dialogue; Framing; Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Setting the Scene

After the events of early 1960s in the Nigeria's history that precipitated into full scale civil war in 1967, the Nigerian nation, with more than 300 distinct ethnic groups, has co-existed but not without deep-seated mutual suspicion among the various ethnic groups. Several policies and programmes were thereafter, put in place as a strategy to give every ethnic group a sense of belonging, promote equity and fairness in civil service; enhance cultural exchange and literacy among the ethnic components in the country and ultimately, foster national unity in the diversities. Among the programmes and policies are the Federal Character, Federal Cultural Festivals, Indigenous Languages in the schools' Curriculum and the National Youth Service Corpse etc. These programmes notwithstanding, several ethnic groups have continuously risen in agitation against perceived marginalization, oppression and in extreme cases, clamoured for separation due to some irreconcilable differences both in cultural and religious practices. Gesiya Angaye (Cited in Jimoh, 2013), further buttressed this point by stating that the divisive interplay of politics, ethnicity, culture and religion in the country has led to rising nationalism

and militancy of various multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nationalities and movements, seeking self-determination, local autonomy, separate identity and true federalism by engaging in violence with manifold loss of lives and property, investment opportunities, and threat to human security.

The peak of the above scenario is exemplified by the recent events in the country such as the demand by the Indigenous People of Biafra for a referendum that will grant full independence to Biafra – mostly Igbo people of South-East Nigeria and the subsequent “quit notice order” issued to the Igbo residents in the Northern part of Nigeria by the Coalition of Northern Youth Organizations in what was popularly known as the Kaduna Declaration of June 6, 2017; increased spate of attacks by the Fulani Herders/cattle rearers and reprisal attacks by local farmers and vice versa occasioned by struggles over grazing and farming land respectively; the calls from every quarter of Nigeria for the total restructuring of the country. The Fulani herders’ killings and the quit notice among other culminated events have amplified the seemingly dormant tensions especially that, which preceded the 2015 general elections with many observers predicting that the nation’s disintegration was imminent. It becomes a matter of concern that notwithstanding the role of the mass media as agent of unity, integration and socialization, the agitations and rate of various forms of conflicts in recent times seem to be in the increase. Media’s roles in brokering peace in the face of these agitations appear inadequate and at the same time, not fully explored in academic literature in Nigeria, particularly from news media and conflict reporting perspectives even though peace studies have become an important contemporary field in many parts of the world (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2011). More so, the concept of intercultural dialogue which has been adopted internationally as a new paradigm in international relations – in part through the launching of the Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2001 appears not have been entrenched or well utilized in Nigeria.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted in 2001, recognizing cultural diversity as a common heritage of humanity as well as the potential of intercultural dialogue. It introduced a global agenda in which the concept of dialogue became a priority principle in the relations between civilizations, cultures and peoples. The global agenda sought to elaborate common ethical standards as a means for addressing threats to peace and security. This commitment underlined that intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are necessary for the advancement of human rights. These frameworks, underscore the importance of the use of information and communication to ensure that different cultures have the space to freely express themselves – on their own terms. This is vital to advancing mutual understanding among peoples and between cultures. The media as documented have the ability to facilitate this intercultural dialogue. By challenging prevailing attitudes and assumptions concerning the many “others” in our world, the media can move beyond scripted stereotypes, stripping away the ignorance that breeds mistrust and suspicion, thus promoting a tolerance and acceptance of difference that values diversity as an opportunity for understanding (Alliance of Civilizations, 2006).

To identify suitable measures for de-escalating conflict and encouraging constructive action, this paper focuses on the interconnectedness of conflict-sensitive journalism and intercultural dialogue in mediating conflict and how this can be applied by the Nigerian media. This by extension will add to the existing literature in redirecting the journalists’ (Nigerian) attention to the conflict-sensitive principles of self-reflexivity; greater involvement, integration and accommodation of multi-cultural values in reporting conflicts, as well as encouraging greater

awareness and mutual respect for cultures within their editorial practices and routines. Beginning with a review of the major concepts under study, the paper argues that the media are indispensable tools for expressing opinions and views and of making these accessible for other communities. In this sense media remain a platform of intercultural dialogue and therefore a crucial arena for challenging prevailing attitudes regarding the “others ” and a powerful arena for dousing tensions and brokering peace among people. The paper therefore, draws conclusion based on this analysis.

Conflict in Perspective

The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 16 – to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (SDGs, 2015) – was articulated possibly in recognition of the increased rate of conflict globally and the need for additional strategies to halt its devastating effect. From the Middle East – Syria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, and Israel to Africa – Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, terrorism and conflicts seem to exacerbate on a daily basis. This by implication suggests the inevitability of conflicts in human societies.

Conflict has been described as inalienably, a part of the human condition that promises good or ill, depending on how it is understood and handled (Satapathy, 2001). Satapathy (2001) further explains that conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether, tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political or other) is engaged in conscious opposition to another identifiable group because the latter is pursuing incompatible goals. Coser (1956) defines conflict as a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals”. Conflict according to Rai (2014), is a conscious competition and competitors become self-conscious rivals, opponents or enemies. It naturally occurs as humans engage in daily social interactions to satisfy different needs. In a society, conflict situations stem from social and economic inequalities, class and caste antagonism, ideological clashes, religious and ethnic fanaticism, regional and lingual chauvinism, racial prejudices, clash of economic interests and intolerance. In external terms, they arise from nations clashing with each other for trade and territory, for markets and resources, for racial and religious supremacy, and for ideological and military domination.

Conflict theorists (Karl Marx, Ludwig Gumplowicz, Lester Ward, Herbert Spencer, Wright Mills, Gene Sharp, Alan Sear) see social conflict among any groups in which it is probable for disparity to exist – racial, gender, religious, political, economic and so on. Conflict theorists claim that disparate groups more often than not have contradictory standards and agendas, causing them to vie in opposition to each other. This steady rivalry between groups is the foundation for the constantly shifting nature of society. However, conflict may, according to some theorists, have a positive social function (Karl Marx). It may be the only means by which an exploited or deprived group can assert its rights (Satapathy, 2001). It is believed that violence or the threat of violence may be essential to create stability and maintain peace, although the goal can also be achieved through non-violent means. Hence, a conflict can be violent or non-violent, fundamental or accidental, manageable or unmanageable.

There are various methods of conflict resolution/management. Every party to a conflict seeks a resolution that best protects its interests. As the second priority in order, where resolution is not possible, an attempt is made to manage the conflict. A conflict can be settled/managed by

legal, organisational or institutional means such as judicial settlement, arbitration, mediation, reconciliation, bargaining and negotiation, peacekeeping and peacemaking. These strategies of conflict settlement/management are non-violent in nature. Violent strategies are generally war, sabotage and disruption of socio-economic-political infrastructure, killings of the targeted group or individuals, and other insurgent activities. But, violent resolution of conflict ends up, more often than not, with the victory of one group and the defeat of its opponent(s). Conflicts of this nature often with ethno-religious configurations have repeatedly occurred and at each occurrence, left disruptive and devastating impacts on the Nigerian political and economic structure. Instances of these multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious conflicts as documented by Bakut and Ejue (2017) since the 1990s include those between the Atyap (Katafs) and Hausas in February and May 1992; Ijaw and Itsekiris in Warri in May 1999; Hausas and Yorubas in Shagamu in July 1999; Hausas and Igbos in Aba in February, 2000; Tivs and Jukun feu; Sectarian violence in many communities such as Kaltungo in September, 2000; Kaduna in 2001; Numan in 2004 as well as the Yelwa-Shendam; Jos; Dogo Nahwa, Ratsa and Zot Massacres; Biye Riyom killings and the myriads of other 'Communal' conflicts in 2003 in virtually all states of the federation including the Federal Capital Territory to date, including the current Boko Haram insurgency (Abolurin, 2010), and the Fulani Herdsmen and farmers' "clashes". Traces of these conflicts still subsist especially in those tribal communities perhaps, partly due to how they were reported and framed in the media among other factors. The parties in conflict stand better chances of understanding each other if the broad dimensions and root causes of their conflicts are brought to their knowledge; a key role the mass media stand to perform in the overall conflict resolution process. In most other cases, however, conflict resolution takes the form of problem-solving by the process of mutual satisfaction of social needs, viz., identity, recognition, participation and control, redistributive justice, security, etc. This constitutes a 'win-win' resolution of conflict and remains the most efficient and effective conflict resolution strategy as all parties see reasons to discontinue hostilities and embrace peace satisfactorily.

Typologies of Conflict

Singh (2014) highlights three typologies of conflicts to explain their causes. These are: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. Primordialism stems from ancient hatreds between ethnic groups based on religious, racial and/or regional differences. While instrumentalism holds that conflict is driven by power and wealth seeking elites actively manipulating ethnic identities (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Constructivism on the other hand holds that ethnicity is a socially constructed identity and as such, dynamic, amenable and changeable (Yang, 2000). Constructivists operate on the ontological assumption that actors are shaped by the socio-cultural milieu in which they live (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). These typologies largely explain the fact that conflicts are either 'manufactured' (instrumentalist view); an inevitable 'outcome' or 'product' of history and social structures/processes (constructivist view); or an 'inborn' and 'inherited' human trait (primordialist view); if not a product of all these three variables (Singh, 2014, p.15). Given the multi-layered, complex phenomenon that conflict is, it therefore, becomes very difficult if not completely null to attribute or attach a given conflict exclusively to a particular cause while eliminating other potential, underlying variables. Chirot (2001) argues along these lines as he points that it is theoretically difficult to explain why some conflicts "turn genocidal" while others are seen as "moderate and move towards resolution" (Chirot, 2001). Hence, Conflict theory advocates a comprehensive and holistic investigation of a given conflict in order to broaden the perspectives therein for commensurate actions towards its resolution.

Conflict theory can be used to explain the media's influence on audiences in reconciling the various typologies of conflicts by looking at who controls the media and how such control influences what the media feed the members of the public. The vast majority of media are owned and controlled by society's elite (or bourgeoisie in conflict theory terminology) (Ragasa, 2014). For this reason, the media are tools of those in power to further their agenda which is to keep the poor divided and ineffective. According to conflict theory, the poor (proletariat) will continue to be exploited until they revolt together and overthrow the rich who profit at the poor's expense. Knight (2012) explains that due to the slant power dynamics in favour of the elites in the society, the uninformed audiences are less media-literate and are likely more easily influenced by the media. Advertisement and propaganda therefore become easy ploy to manipulate and economically exploit the gullible audiences by the elite class and at the same time while veiling the hegemonic undercurrent in the media content they consume (Knight (2012). Based on this point of view, conflict theory argues that the mass media simply reflect, and often even exacerbate the many conflicts and class dichotomies within different groups in our society. Therefore, as opposed to the functionalists, conflict theorists believe that the mass media serve to reinforce the distance and discord between genders, different races and ethnicities and social classes, rather than promoting social harmony (Singh, 2014) in conflict situations. Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) had more than two decades ago explained the position of media in conflict reporting this way, "the power of the media in warfare is formidable. It can be a mediator or an interpreter or even a facilitator of conflict; if only by editing away facts that do not fit the demands of air time or print space". During conflict, the media assume a central role because citizens are dependent on the media to provide timely, credible and comprehensive information of distant events. And journalists act as the communicative agents to provide the information. This aligns with the perspective of the media significance in shaping public opinion through provision of cognitive knowledge. For as McCombs & Shaw (1972) argued that the ability to affect public perception and knowledge among individuals is one of the most important aspects of the power of mass communication, which is intensified by the process of framing news. The consistency or otherwise of all of these assumptions according to literature however, really depends on the media framing of conflict issues and the use or adoption by the media of journalism principles that are known to be used for managing conflict.

Many assessment of media's role in reporting conflict/violent conflict situations in literature documents two strands of dominant arguments- Media as a perpetuator of conflict or agent of peace in one hand and in the other hand as a crucial vehicle in informing publics about conflicts, and influencing their perceptions and behaviour. All these as argued by scholars depend on the framing and agenda setting of the media, which is evident in the way the news media report and cover conflict and violent conflict. Lynch & Galtung (2010) emphasize that if the agenda of media is non-violence and the framing is peace-oriented aimed to reduce the conflict and support the rapprochement, it can de-escalate the violence and influence the public opinion towards resolving conflict. This paper argues in sync with this suggestion that Nigerian media through a deliberate and proactive inclusion of conflict sensitive journalism principle and the use of the media as a means for intercultural dialogue could de-escalate the major ethno-religious, socio-political and economic conflicts ravaging different parts of Nigeria. Many scholars (see, Dunu & Okafor, 2017; Chilwa, 2014; and Pate, 2003) of course have pointed to the need for the adoption of conflict sensitive journalism by the Nigerian media since they see it as a challenge facing the Nigerian media in adequately reporting conflict. None however, has as at yet, looked at the adoption of conflict sensitive and Intercultural dialogue by the media as possible panacea to the reorientation of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria and in this way reduce conflict. This is the focus and contribution of this paper.

Despite Singh's (2014) typologies of conflicts, whether taken from the constructivists or primordialists' points of view, scholars have maintained that there are peaceful and creative ways of dealing with them except when such conflicts are deliberately politically instigated by influential elites in the society as argued by the instrumentalists (Chirot & Seligman, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2001). Thus, Mouffe (2000) proposed the idea of "agonistic pluralism"; an idea that underscores the importance of constructing or representing the opponent "'them' in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an 'adversary' whose ideas are opposed, and whose right to hold and defend those ideas are recognised, even respected" (pp.14-15). Mouffe's idea of agonistic pluralism supports the notion of public sphere where even conflicting views are welcomed and constructively debated. At the centre of the dialogue in public sphere, is the mass media coordinating the broad-based narratives accommodating the views of all parties in conflict equally and neutrally. This could douse pent up tensions and aggressions resulting in non-violent outcomes. These innovative and evolving conflict prevention measures such as those espoused by Mouffe are vital as they encompass the necessary ingredients to curb the deadly trend of intra-state conflicts – ranging from territorial disputes, competition for natural resources, and ethnic and religious intolerance – that have ravaged the country since independence and which have only added to the existing perplexities surrounding group conflicts and resulting in more deaths, destruction, and displacement than any other type of conflict in the world today (Chirot & Seligman, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2001). Mouffe's idea of agonistic pluralism is also somehow related to the tenets of the conflict sensitive journalism which is the new paradigm in conflict sensitive reporting globally.

Contextualizing Conflict Sensitive Journalism

Conflict-sensitive journalism otherwise known as peace journalism is the new paradigm of conflict reporting as advocated by scholars. It is the deliberate use of journalism to promote a culture of peace in conflicts by taking an advocacy, interpretative approach, that concentrate on story frames that highlight peace initiatives; tone down ethnic and religious differences, prevent further conflict, focus on the structure of society; and promote conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation (Galtung, 1986, 1998). Principally, peace journalism aligns with the assumptions of conflict theory which recognizes that conflict exists in all communities but does not regard violence as the natural consequence/outcome or end point of conflict. This new way of conflict reporting (though fraught with controversies that have limited its wide acceptance chiefly due to its perceived affinity to journalism of attachment or engaged journalism (Bell, 1998) as opposed to the traditional journalism of detachment or objective reporting), has in recent times been advocated as a major approach in de-escalating conflict and the better means of reporting conflict in conflict torn zones such as Nigeria. For instance, the conflicts in the North-East, South-South and South-East geopolitical zones as a result of Boko Haram insurgency and Fulani/Herdsmen menace, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) uprising respectively particularly exemplify the unabated rise in conflict and have necessitated a need for an intensified advocacies and capacity building among journalists to frame conflict narratives in ways that will bring the parties in conflict to the dialogue table.

The new paradigm as advocated is perceived as the ideal approach to handling conflicts given the high level of complexities and sophistications associated with today's conflict situations. However, the advocacy according to Lynch (1998) portends no radical departure from contemporary journalism practice; rather it requires particularly from the journalists a subtle

shift in sourcing and narrative choice: a shift toward citizens and away from elite spokespeople, toward the value of peace rather than the adrenalin rush of conflict, toward mutual benefits rather than unilateral victory. This entails that the journalists through framing makes deliberate and conscientious efforts to present conflict narratives in such languages that rather than demonize, persuade, inform, and educate the audiences on the broad dimensions and dynamics of the conflict while not leaving them out in favour of the elites as news sources; giving them a sense of responsibility and guiding them positively to take decisions that will result in conflict resolutions. It is in direct dissonance with the war-oriented journalism which constructs binaries between a gloating evil and a suffering victim often in a competitive zero-sum game (Galtung 2002; Lynch, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 1997c) and mostly framed in victimizing and demonizing languages in favour of a particular party in the conflict reported (Bratic, et al., 2008).

However, how this new journalistic responsibility is performed in the context of Nigerian conflict situations has been widely debated. Hence, some scholars (Dunu, 2017; Mogeckwu, 2011; Aslam, 2013; and Pate, 2003) have observed that the war-oriented journalism dominates in Nigerian journalism with most journalists focusing on that which divides rather than what unites the various conflicting parties. For instance, Aliagan (2009) corroborated this observation by asserting that “one newspaper columnist in the *Guardian* went as far as calling for war against all Northerners in Lagos, from beggars to gatemen, cleaners, and gardeners because they were the apostles and soldiers of the new jihad” (Guardian, July, 2009). Adisa (2012) tagged this type of reportage by Guardian as a clear hate message, with ethnic colouration, the type that apparently instigated Rwanda ethnic war in 1994. The same brand of journalism that Akinfeleye (2003) called “socially irresponsible” journalism. Similarly, newspaper reportages of the Biafra, Niger Delta Conflicts as well as other conflicts in Nigeria according to scholars had focused on violence, war, kidnapping, ethnic and religious differences, while the main issues of underdevelopment, exploitation and marginalization, often attributed as the root causes of the conflicts, were relegated to the background (Ramadhan, 2013; Chiluwa, 2011). This nature of reportage lacks the basic ingredient of broad-based narratives that accommodate the voices and views of all parties to the conflicts thus creates room for escalation of the conflicts. And even the reports in themselves are marred by inconsistencies as a result of inaccurate and uninvestigated reports (Hassan, 2012; Okoro and Okechukwu, 2012; Aliyu, 2011 and Umaru, 2011) and sensationalism (Okoli, 2011; Aka, 2011; Obor, 2011).

A Snapshot at Media Handling of Ethno-religious and Intercultural Conflicts in Nigeria

The patterns of media reporting of conflicts in Nigeria have generated serious controversies in the academia. Unfortunately, the media have been largely accused of fanning the embers of violent conflicts. The reason according to Takwa, (2017) being that media constituencies exist in almost all countries, and the ownership also defines the level of sensitivity and protection of regional issues (p.13). Scholars have essentially given full attention to some ethno-religious and political conflicts that have plagued Nigeria as a nation. In retrospect, a study by Kurawa (2000) and Pate (2003) reveal how the Nigerian media escalate tensions and promote diversity along ethno-religious lines in the country through their reports. Using the Guardian article of March 2000: “...for the first time since 1966, the Jihadists will be confronted by a determined Southern army... to teach the Northern troublemakers a lesson once and for all,” (Reuben Abati, *The Guardian*, March 31, 2000), they illustrate how the media ostensibly frame the ‘other’ through labeling – “determined Southern Army” and “Northern Troublemakers”.

Similar reports read thus: “Kaduna boils again, three churches burnt,” (*The Guardian*, October 7, 2001). “Plateau is the only predominantly Christian state in the north and they are not happy about this,” (*Punch*, September 10, 2001). “Wild, Wild North: Bin Laden’s men unleash terror in Kano,” (*The News*, vol. 17, October 29, 2001). “Ex head of state and governor behind Jos mayhem” (*The Sunday Tribune*, September, 2009). “De-Mallamisation of the Ports Authority,” (Ochereome Nnanna, *The Post Express*, September 12, 2001). “...Whether they like it or not, we will not allow any Muslim to be president of Nigeria again. I am declaring this as President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)” (Dr Sunday Mbang, in *This Day*, Monday, July 31, 2000, p4.). These news articles apparently emphasized the dichotomies along religious and ethnic blocs between the predominantly Southern Christians and Northern Muslims. The physical violence associated with the conflicts was emphasized, while particularly whipping up religious sentiments as a campaign weapon to gain political advantage. Issue-based narratives are downplayed thereby creating broader avenue for hate, division, and by extension heightened tension that escalates violence between the Christian and Muslim blocs in Northern Nigeria. Others employed name-calling and denigrating comments like ‘...the poor Northern bandits’ fallen entity nickname Nigeria...’ (Ezekiel Okeke, *The Guardian*, June 9, 2017, p.15); ‘...it’s obvious that Nigeria is an animal farm and certain animals are born with privileges...’ (Anthony Oguejiofor, *The Guardian*, June 9, 2017, p.15) in expressing opinions in the recent quit notice ultimatum by the Coalition of Northern Youths.

From extant literature, mass media are set up not only to serve society the needed information, but also to maximize profit. To achieve this profit goal, scholars observe that the media harp on the sordid, bizarre and the most unusual aspect of the events – whether conflict or not – that occur in the society (Pate, 2011). These were adduced as possible explanations to why non-conflict sensitive journalism seems to thrive. Sensationalism therefore, becomes a tool for luring audiences. But as noted by Auwal, (2015), sensationalization of news and bias in its coverage and presentation to the audience by the agencies of mass communication (mass media) can stir up provocative feelings or actions among ethnic and religious groups with different interests and beliefs in the society. Buttressing this point, Eti (2009, p.92) states that “conflict, by its nature, holds a forceful attraction for the mass media.” In the same vein, Owens-Ibie (2002, p.32) states that “the media are naturally attracted to conflict” and most of the media concentrate on bad news (Wilson, 2013, p.14). They are problem focused (Auwal, 2015). The reasons behind the media’s inclination towards conflicts are not far-fetched because as noted by scholars “bad news is good news and this is what sells the paper!” (Auwal, 2015; Pate, 2011; Galtung and Lynch, 2010; Ersoy, 2010; Okigbo, 2015); if it “bleeds”, then it “leads” (Ersoy, 2010). Omenugha (2013, p.6) observes that “in crises situations, headlines are sensationalized to make sales in the Nigerian media.” The author exemplifies thus: “*Boko Haram* strikes Kano, killing two Igbo businessmen” and “How Christian youths killed my driver – Dr. Zainab Kwaru,” to mention a few. Unfortunately, this pattern of reportage further heighten ethnic divisions, hatred and violent outcomes from reprisals especially when not properly managed.

Doki (undated) explains that these scenarios point to the underlying tribalism that has been the motivating factor in conflicts and the media’s subjective coverage. Religious differences alone are not the basis for these violent conflict, the media and parties in the conflict use religion as rallying point for tribal solidarity and propaganda purposes to attract support and assistance from other countries and across boundaries here in Nigeria (Auwal, 2015; Chiluiwa, 2011). Yusuf (2002) observes that two months after the Jos riots, *Tribune* newspaper persisted in its conflict promoting style of reporting. It carried a front-page story attributing the riot to

“Christian girls forced to marry Muslims.” However, the reporter did not cite a single incident of such a forced marriage. As a result of this pattern of media reportage of conflicts which tends to create big chasm between the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and beyond, Auwal (2015) inferred that from Yusuf’s (2002) illustrations of media reports, it is evident that the media really instigate and sustain violent conflicts in Nigeria. In the same vein, Ahmed (2002, p.123) clarifies that “as ethno-religious conflicts engulfed the city of Jos in September (2009), *This Day* newspaper reportedly carried a report that triggered a reprisal attack on Hausa Fulani in the South-Eastern states in its edition of September 10, 2009.” These reports in addition reinforced the idea of selective attention and focus on who constitutes news source for the Nigerian journalists. They reflect the basic elements of war/violence-oriented journalism as explained by Galtung – “voice for us” rather than “voice to all parties”.

The observations above run contrary to Howard’s (2003) assertion that the media through accurate and impartial news reporting can contribute greatly to reducing conflicts as it may not be within its power to end conflicts. But rather than deliberately fostering intercultural dialogues through broad narratives, Enwere (2013) observes that in this era of globalization and its current struggle for power and hegemony, the mass media have adopted the use of Machiavellian principles of ‘double morality’ in reporting domestic and international conflicts. This method according to him has created more discord than collaboration in conflict situations. Another great challenge facing the media is the ascendancy and the use of stereotype and prejudice not only by the conflict actors but also by the media to narrow down the perceptions of the parties, so as to determine the outcome of a given conflict and influence the process of its resolution. This has created psychological wars, fears, anxieties, frustration and hatred that increase the intensity of aggressive behaviours and attitudes, which prolongs the life span of conflicts (Enwere, 2013). The journalists in this instance become purely partisan and abet rather than abate further discord, acrimony and violent conflicts in multi-cultural settings.

Mass Media, Conflict-sensitive Journalism and Intercultural Dialogue: The Nexus

Before an attempt will be made to establish the place of conflict-sensitive journalism in fostering intercultural dialogue, it is imperative to create a cursory understanding of the concept of culture. Culture in its simplest definition, is the unique and peculiar way of life that distinguishes one social group from others. It is the totality of way of life of a people including their spoken languages, signs, dressing, eating, greeting, rites and so on. Melisa, (2008) sees culture as the way in which people “feel, think, and act; that is, the way they understand themselves and the world, realize their happiness and express their moral”. As different social groups abound, so also are the unique distinguishing ways of life that set them apart from others. This brings about the multiplicities and variations in human population. As stated earlier, when there is clash of interests or threat of domination or misperception of one cultural group by another, conflict ensues. However, for the fact that the multiplicities in human society do not suggest isolation and exclusivity, there ought to be a melting point where the multiple cultures converge and interact mutually without one dominating the other. This is where the idea of intercultural dialogue comes in.

Dialogue on its part according to Doron (n.d) is a process of exchanging information where participants leave the dialogue with a deeper knowledge level and wider frame of reference than when they approached it. It involves the creation of an expandable context for deeper understanding to thrive. Melisa (2008) therefore, describes dialogue as an interaction of

awareness that requires awareness of our own thoughts, assumptions and judgments, and through our thoughts and interacting with others, we nurture awareness and an understanding of the forces that underlie relationship. However, it is important to note that the process of dialogue does not focus on reaching a consensus or compromise, which are qualities of negotiations (Mitias & Al-Jasmin, n.d.) but in building mutual respect through understanding. The kind of dialogue involving different cultures is referred to as intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue according to Menelaou (2013) is “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect”. Opatija Declaration (2003) further explains that intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception. Similarly, Doron (n.d.) observed that intercultural dialogue is a path to conviviality and multiculturalism in which cultures influence each other without destroying themselves or entering into clashes or conflicts. These definitions connote the idea of cultural convergence that further enriches mutual relationship among people irrespective of background. Buttressing this point, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan opined that “Without this dialogue taking place every day among all nations – within and between civilizations, cultures and groups – no peace can be lasting and no prosperity can be secure”. Outlining the value of dialogue between civilizations launched by the United Nations, he stressed that “it helps us draw on the deeper, ancient roots of cultures and civilizations to find what unites us across all boundaries, and ... perhaps most important ... helps us to discern the role of culture and civilization in contemporary conflicts, and so to distinguish propaganda and false history from the real cause of war”. Dialogue between cultures as articulated by the Council of Europe-Intercultural Dialogue, is a fundamental mode of democratic conversation and an antidote to rejection and violence. Its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multi-cultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. It can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. And at the centre of this cultural convergence and interaction is communication playing very fundamental role; as it is only through communication that people of different social backgrounds learn more about each other. Through planned training and/or education, people develop the requisite communicative skills and competence to understand and relate with other people.

The mass media as broad channels of communication remain central in this communicative venture. Their peculiar features of ubiquity and spontaneity make them powerful and formidable tool of connection and unification for multicultural people at the same time. Hence, they remain veritable channels of intercultural dialogue. But how this all-important attributes are harnessed to enrich intercultural awareness, literacy and understanding has largely being on the negative divide. For instance, Akpunonu (2010) points out that the instruments of radio, television, internet, print, though wonderful inventions, can become double-edged sword that is capable of producing war-inducing features, life-denying counter values, images of human hatred that arouse vengeance, violence, disaffection and war and at the same time, can bridge misunderstanding, reconstruct war narratives, misperceptions and foster quick resolution of conflicts. Broadcasting in particular, with its audio-visual characteristics has the power to stir up feelings of anger, fear and insecurity and/or feelings of reassurance, pacification and peace (Auwal, 2015). Similarly, Akpede (2011, p.48) affirms that “journalists have enormous power in their hands. With the stroke of a pen they can bring a warring community or country together, and with the same pen they are capable of bringing about disintegration of a nation”. These

explain the nexus between the media and intercultural dialogue in conflicts. Oso, (2017) rightly observed that all sides in a conflict situation believe that they need the media, not just to convey information but to influence public opinion, build support, mobilize people and resources, and influence public policy, among others. The media also offer publicity and visibility to the antagonists (2017, p.25). Seib, equally opined that “without the news media, war would intrude far less significantly into the public’s consciousness” (Seib, 2013, p.8). Because news is a construction of reality and not a mirror of reality “the news is made, and like any other product, it carries the mark of the technical and organizational structure from which it emerges (Golding & Elliot 1979). The media take conflict reports to the homes of the people and how such reports are constructed can go a long way in shaping the perspectives to the conflict by the audiences.

From the foregoing, it behooves on the conflict-sensitive journalists to choose to refrain from war-inducing reportage to peace journalism. Apparently, lack of sensitivity to cultural differences and nuances can lead journalists to report on conflict in ways that prolong or even exacerbate an unfolding situation. Conflict-sensitive journalists make deliberate attempt to package reports and programmes that build intercultural competencies in people. This lends credence to UNESCO world report that:

Intercultural dialogue is largely dependent on intercultural competencies, defined as the complex of abilities needed to interact appropriately with those who are different from oneself. These abilities are essentially communicative in nature, but they also involve reconfiguring our perspectives and understandings of the world; for it is not so much cultures as people – individuals and groups, with their complexities and multiple allegiances – who are engaged in the process of dialogue’ (UNESCO, 2009, p. 9).

This goes on to suggest that the process of intercultural dialogue begins with understanding oneself first and relating this understanding to the others. With this understanding, one is able to establish the nuances between oneself and others and then define the boundaries of interaction. Thus, people are able to attain heights of mutual respect for and understanding of others based on the understanding they have of themselves and that of others around them. Dialogue becomes a necessary component of building understanding for mutual respect and tolerance among multicultural groups as Hamelink (2004, p.29) suggests that dialogue requires the capacity to listen and to be silent. He further explains that the culture of listening has almost eroded the societies which are “increasingly influenced by visual cultures, filled with ‘talk shows’ and no ‘listen shows’”. Therefore, Hamelink opined that the essence of dialogue could and should be taught in the early stages of people’s lives in school, at home, and through the media. The discourse on intercultural dialogue through the mass media entails treating news media and journalism education as part of that communicative-cultural nexus which can be enlisted in cultivating the kinds of democratic values and practices that can enhance cultural diversity. In this regard, three key normative communicative roles can be identified for intercultural media actors, namely:

- i. Facilitating cultural interactions;
- ii. Unmasking cultural stereotypes and intolerance; and
- iii. Forging a common narrative.

This entails that conflict-sensitive journalists will make deliberate attempt to facilitate cultural interactions through cultural documentaries, cinemas, films etc.; unmask cultural stereotypes which serve to ‘demarcate one group from the alien “other”’. As the UNESCO world report observes, most ‘intercultural tensions are often bound up with conflicts of memory, competing interpretations of past events, and conflicts of values ... Where it has not been excluded by the will to power and domination, dialogue remains the key to unlocking these deep-rooted antagonisms and to pre-empting their often violent political expressions (UNESCO, 2006, pp. 9-10). Here, the news media, using their investigative capacities, are better placed to play a key role in unmasking any stereotypical hindrances to meaningful and effective dialogue. A particularly important role for journalists and journalism educators is to work towards reconciling ‘the recognition of, protection of and respect for cultural particularities with the affirmation and promotion of universally shared values emerging from the interplay of these cultural specificities’ (UNESCO 2006, pp. 9-10).

Fortunately, as argued by UNESCO, (2006) world report, news media and journalism education institutions constitute legitimate ‘places of memory’. As cultural institutions, they can help a society to learn about and remember itself, shaping the understanding of values, customs and tradition to build a sense of community. By forging a common cultural-pluralistic narrative – one which builds bridges between the ‘we’ and the ‘other’ without obliterating or frowning upon differences – they can contribute towards affirming minority presence and agency in society. They can provide an inclusive and democratic platform for every group in society to gain visibility and be heard. By the same token, the media can engender suspicion, fear, discrimination and violence by strengthening stereotypes, fostering inter-group tension and excluding certain groups from public discourse.

In an effort to synthesize existing work on the relationship between media and intercultural dialogue in conflicts, Eytan (2006) argues for a new framework to examine the relationship between media and conflict, suggesting that scholars need to investigate the specific influence that different media can have at each stage of conflict: prevention, management, resolution and reconciliation. Accordingly, at each level of the conflict, media have specific functions and dysfunctions, all of which collectively influence the public attitudes, negotiations and policies that guide the initiation, conduct and resolution of wars. Some of the functions and dysfunctions of media in the four stages of conflict include: awareness, apprehension, learning, mobilization, instigating opposition, perceptions of legitimacy or illegitimacy, confidence building and destruction, dramatization and sensationalizing, and the creation of realistic or high expectations (el-Nawawy & Powers, 2008). Unfortunately, the Nigerian media have fared poorly in the discharge of these functional roles in especially ethno-religious conflicts in the country. Adisa, went further to explain that: This is the ideal which most journalists often ignored but instead resort to the following:

- ❖ Media mostly just follow events. They don’t explain what led to those events.
- ❖ They concentrate on bad news of conflict and are silent on peace process.
- ❖ They are often sensational and emotional in tone.
- ❖ They tend to focus on powerful people, political leaders, the rich and the famous who live in towns and cities as news makers.
- ❖ They often reinforce stereotypes.

- ❖ When telling every story, they not only choose who and what to include inside the frame but who and what to leave out (2012, p.8).

Building Inter-cultural Dialogue through Conflict-sensitive Journalism: ‘Media Framing’ as a Tool

As stated earlier, media framing of intercultural issues have great implication to their development. The choice of words and their organization into news is important especially in reporting on the conflict processes. The media have a great responsibility in choosing the words and setting the agenda for discussion. Kent (2003) gives an example from the Bosnia war on media framing:

‘Media framing’, in essence, the underlying language, key terms, labels and phrases used to describe events, played a critical role in establishing how the actual problem of Bosnia came to be defined, particularly through selection of language and decisions about balancing and what kinds of evidence would be reported. The resultant framing, by obfuscating important issues about responsibility for the war and the manner in which it was conducted, limited potential policy options to ineffectual and inappropriate options (p. 3).

As Entman (1993) stated, “framing in this light plays a major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power – it registers the identity of actors or interests that completed to dominate the text” (p. 55). Another common frame in media is the “otherness” frame. The mass media through a given frame play up and make obvious the ‘otherness’ in others and by extension, deepen possible existing dichotomies. According to First (2001), “examining the representation of Arab citizens as the ‘Other’ in the last decades reveals that they suffer from a ‘double otherness’: “Not only is the Arab citizen a minority in Israeli society, but his nationality and loyalty to the country are questioned” (cited in Neiger and Zandberg, 2004, p. 433). “Otherness frame” further divides rather than unite people, societies and cultures especially in conflict situations. Because of the “otherness frame” and other conflict frames in media, there is an urgent need to develop peace journalism news values in conflict reporting.

Another similar example comes from Aburaiya, Avraham, and Wolfsfeld’s (1998) study, which found that “Arab citizens were given little coverage in Israel’s Hebrew-language media, and that their protest was covered within the frame of ‘security matters and subversive activity’” (cited in Neiger and Zandberg, 2004, p. 433). Most of the people in Israel use this frame in order to perceive Arab citizens. Peace journalism does not advocate, neither do peace journalists accept this one-sided picture; they try to show all sides of the picture, to show how conflict unwillingly causes problems. Similar trend could be observed with the Nigerian journalism in the face of the several ethnic, religious and political crises that have erupted in Nigeria over the years – from the census crisis of 1962, Kano crisis, Biafran Civil war, Jos crisis, Niger Delta Militancy, Boko Haram insurgency and the current Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) uprising. Unfortunately, there is yet to be a comprehensive empirical study chronicling the nature of framing given to these crises and how they relate to the escalation or amelioration of the crises situations in the country.

The elites of society have a significant effect on journalists and their framing; and a lot of research has been conducted to support this thesis. Entman (1993) gives various examples of how elites affect journalist’s frames on certain issues:

...in the pre-war debate over U.S. policy toward Iraq, there was a tacit consensus among U.S. elites not to argue for such options as negotiation between Iraq and Kuwait. The news frame included only two remedies, war now or sanctions now with war (likely) later, while problem definitions, causal analyses, and moral evaluations were homogeneous. Between the selected remedies, however, framing was contested by elites, and news coverage offered different sets of facts and evaluations (p. 55).

Beyond the influence of the elite class in shaping how the journalists and indeed the mass media frame issues, journalists for several other reasons are sometimes aware of how they frame issues, and vice versa. The reasons according to Edeani, (1994) could be such factors as ownership structure, newspaper policy, education level, knowledge, culture and beliefs could all be important elements that shape media framing of issues. The number of these elements may be increased, but the important point is to understand how issues are framed and how people think about those issues.

Peace journalism has developed the position that journalists, editors or mass media have the power to affect public opinion. It is obvious that the media are efficient in agenda-setting, news framing, gatekeeping and silencing some radical voices in the society. Thus highlighting the basic assumptions of the media effect theories (Agenda-setting, Framing, Gatekeeping and Spiral of Silence) with their common view on public opinion formation and the power of the media to influence people's perceptions of events and possible choices/decisions they make regarding such events. The position of peace journalism is similar to these four theories: it adopts the opinion of the possibility of using this "power" of the media for positive purposes, when wanted. If the media have the power to set the agenda, set the frame, provide dominant discourse and support the status quo, they could use this power in a positive way, especially in conflict situations. This is why peace journalism gives more responsibility to the journalists and editors in conflict zones for helping the peace process.

Media frame from the foregoing is a necessary precursor to either peace or violence mediation in conflict reporting. It can foster peace as much as it can escalate violence in conflicts. Lynch and Galtung (2010, p.18) maintain that 'both violence and peace are texts. Whether they are (newsworthy) events depend on the context'. Lynch further overarches this paradigm to apply to the overall framing of news when he talks about the value of peace journalism being its ability to 'throw up' the stories that are 'unusual to the norm' and that makes the 'good bits of journalism' (Lynch, 2007, p.3). The first implication for journalists therefore, is to make 'peace' a news value. Communication for peace is seen as a subset of communication for development. Similarly, the concern of Peace journalists should not be only to resolve crises but also to guide their reports towards preventing crises and ensuring reconciliation for development.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the nexus and central role the media play in engendering dialogue in intercultural conflicts. All conflicts as observed by Adekunle (2014) do not occur spontaneously but tend to have a history. Nigerian media due to the prominent position they occupy as the fourth estate of the realm, should have a deeper understanding of the existing socio-political and socio-cultural structures, the participants of the conflict as well as the

changes preceding the outbreak of violence. The media can, not only influence society before the conflict by recognizing and properly addressing the issues but also afterwards. Kuusik (2010) emphasizes that Mass Media have the ability to accelerate and magnify fears or reduce them. Nigerian Media therefore need to defuse tensions before they even reach a critical point and keep a critical eye on government, opposition and society. By supplying credible information and reaching a large audience, the media can help in managing conflicts by initiating a platform for dialogue among the parties in conflict. The media according to Santos (n.d) therefore, become one of the optimum tools to model perceptions, behaviours and social constructions, political actions and policies and axiological hierarchies in societies. Beyond the capacity to condition the most immediate perceptions, media actually perpetuate, in the middle and long term, the exchange of symbolic values (Hall, 1973). Because as far as multicultural and intercultural issues are concerned, they work as a way of naming and distinguishing people, creating segments (real, fake, imagined) perspectives about specific stories and regulating the way to perceive them. The media in the words of Nagaraj and Kundu (n.d.) can construct issues, programmes and events that will imbue in the multicultural and multiethnic people especially in conflict the:

- i. Capacity for listening, namely for understanding, and for talking;
- ii. Tolerance;
- iii. Respect for diversity; and
- iv. Ethics (Tornerio and Varis, 2010), for global peace and prosperity.

The deep transformations and developments technology has undergone lately has led to increased speed and outreach abilities of the media, making them almost omnipresent in people's daily lives and causing them to present themselves as the binding mediator between the unbridgeable geographies and realities. Intercultural dialogue is made rather easier to create greater cohesion-building, break barriers and build more bridges across cultural divides and by extension encourage sustainable development if and only if the journalists make efforts to report intercultural conflicts sensitively.

Other Things that can be done

The media are one of the most fertile grounds for deliberate constructive actions that could reach the broad diverse ethnic population of the country and in this way reduce the polarization of the country. In recognition of this vital fact the media through the various regulatory institutions should create a network that will serve to monitor inflammatory media reporting, hate speeches, inaccurate, pejorative and other irresponsible commentaries and incidents and contents capable of causing divisiveness and conflict with recommendations and best practices on how to counteract them. The network should encourage media accountability, enhance alternative interpretation and perspectives to events and provide platform for constructive voices that might otherwise be ignored. The network should produce and regularly disseminate to all media outlets commentaries, documentaries, editorials and other media contents promoting understanding and constructive perspectives on the various issues of contentions and controversies in the country. The purpose would be to help frame the understanding of issues relating to conflict

There is also the need to reduce Nigerian media journalist's intercultural ignorance through face to face encounters and familiarization, as well as through regional exchanges and postings, capacity building skill acquisition.

Media Award: There is need for an all-encompassing national media award to regularly award journalists and media outlets for distinguished contributions to cross-cultural understanding. This network should produce news media awards for contents that are conflict sensitive and peace oriented.

Journalist Training and Retraining: Journalistic training is required to reduce ill-informed intercultural media reports that repeat stereotypes and emphasize extremes. Modules and full programs in training culturally-informed and sensitive reporting should be developed in partnership with organizations such as the Media Diversity Institute and leading international organizations such as the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Panos-Paris, Internews and Press.

Journalism School Curriculum: There is need to respond to the paucity of formal instruction in understanding and reporting conflict and peace studies now in Nigerian journalism schools, by developing specific courses for journalism student training and curriculum development workshops or grants for journalism school faculties in the country.

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