

**Between Low Road and High Road of Conflict Reporting: Exploring Peace  
Journalism Potentials for Conflict Transformation in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

This research examines the relationship between news media, conflicts and terrorism to explore novel methods of reporting conflict and terrorism that could promote peace, national security and counter terrorism. It draws on news value literature and principles of peace journalism to analyse data from focus group discussions with journalists and evaluate perceptions of journalists on current methods of reporting conflict so as to identify peace journalism ideals and other novel methods for reporting conflict and terrorism that can become avenues for transforming conflicts and promoting peace. It also attempts to provoke as well as suggest kinds of training required by journalists to report conflict and terrorism in ways that will promote peace, national security, and counter terrorism. Findings suggest that current methods for reporting conflict and terrorism have a tendency to escalate conflicts because most journalists are enmeshed in influences of ethnicity, religion, party politics and ownership, as well as corruption. These influences often result in extreme professional irresponsibility and excessive jaundiced reporting of conflicts and terrorism. We conclude that only the adoption of peace journalism through regimented training can help transform conflicts and promote peace and development in Nigeria.

**Key Words: peace journalism, war journalism, conflicts and terrorism, journalism practice, Nigeria journalism**

**Introduction**

In what way the news media decide news to be published and broadcast is a function of several interlocking factors or news values. Caple and Bednarek (2016, p. 438) say these are “the values that establish the worth of an event to be reported as news” and facilitate the exercise of news judgement by journalists and editors and guide their decisions about which events are newsworthy and which are not. Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in their famous theory of news values are reputed to be the first to identify 12 factors or a

set of news values for assessing the news worth “of an event: threshold, frequency, unexpectedness, unambiguity, relevance, consonance, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and negativity” (Abubakar, 2020, p. 282). Other scholars like Brighton and Foy (2007:5-6) followed with their own set of news values such as “relevance, topicality, composition, expectation, unusualness, worth, and external influences” albeit largely consolidation Galtung and Ruge’s novel values. Harcup and O’Neill (2017, p. 13) strengthened the count with more factors including “exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visually, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, news organisation’s agenda”. Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) added the concepts of “deviance and social significance” whose elements, they said are “importance, impact, consequences and interest” and that “newsworthiness is highest when an event has both intense deviance and intense social significance” (p. 8).

Generally speaking, bad news is often more newsworthy than good news and conflict more newsworthy than peace (Beckett, 2016) and it is indisputable “that the media feeds on violence” (Lumbaca and Gray, 2011, p. 52). Invariably, media representations of violence including stories of war, crime, violence, terrorists’ attacks, social discord are newsworthy because human beings are naturally interested in conflict (Rogers, 2021 September 1). Soroka (2015, May 25) suggests that human beings “may neurologically or physiologically” be inclined to concentrating “on negative information because the potential costs of negative information far outweigh the potential benefits of positive information”. Thus, media, in many cases, rely on sensational and dramatic activities of terrorists like bombings, hijackings, destruction and bloodshed often as stimulus to boost audience and readership figures (Nacos, 2016). Consequently, most news broadcasts and publications are dominated by conflicts and violence and these have become the basis for news media obsession with coverage of terrorists’ activities (Weimann, 2012; Nacos, 2016).

Media’s obsessive coverage of terrorist activities has thus created a widely accepted belief of a symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorists since both rely on each other in an association that seems reciprocally beneficial for both terrorists and media organizations. (Nacos, 2006) captures this symbiosis perhaps most aptly:

...terrorist strikes provide what the contemporary media crave most—drama, shock, tragedy, and grief, the ideal ingredients of human interest stories. As a result, terrorists get precisely what they need: massive publicity and the opportunity to showcase their ability to strike against even the strongest nation states (p. 1).

UNESCO says “media economy, largely based on a competitive race to attract audiences, incentivises this symbiotic relationship between terrorists and the press” (Jean-Paul, 2017, p. 11). This apparent symbiosis has spawned scholarly concern about the role of the news media in conflict and terrorism. Some scholars believe “the media are major contributing factors to violence” and think of media as perpetrators of conflict hence they “effectively serve as publicity and propaganda platform for terrorists and their narratives, their causes, their goals” (Nacos, 2016, pp. 30-31 & 175). As a consequence, many scholars are not satisfied with the current methods of reporting conflicts and terrorism. They blame journalists and the media for propagating terrorism (Weimann, 2012) by reporting conflicts from war-journalism perspectives that facilitate terrorist groups’ objectives. Some of these scholars have suggested ‘media blackout’, that news media be ‘muzzled’ or “closed down” (Jean-Paul, 2017:21; see also Harris, 2016, July 28) on terrorist attacks as a solution to reducing their visibility and desired impact.

But other scholars feel that news blackout of terrorist activities in the media “would be counterproductive” since it is likely to “stimulate fears that the threat is greater than it actually is” and probably “undermine confidence in the government's commitment to democratic principles and openness to public scrutiny” (Rabe 1980, Abstract). Besides, Lumbaca and Gray (2011) say “limiting access ... is wrong and that the public deserves to know what is taking place throughout the world” (p. 52). As the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe argues, ...terrorism should not affect freedom of expression and information in the media as one of the essential foundations of any democratic society. This freedom includes the right to be informed of matters of general interest, including terrorist acts and threats, and the replies thereto by the State and international organizations ((Jean-Paul, 2017, p. 15).

Correspondingly, instead of news media blackout as response for the emphasis on violent aspects in reporting conflict and terrorist activities, this research seeks to review current war journalism oriented methods of reporting conflict and terrorist activities in order to establish how the ideals of peace journalism, advanced by Lynch and Galtung (2010) can change overall news reporting of conflict and terrorism into a possibility for promoting peace, national security, and counter terrorism. The central question of this research, therefore, is how can the ideals of peace journalism be translated into professional practice of news reporting of conflict and terrorism? This research therefore engages journalists in critical participatory action research to review current methods of reporting conflict/terrorist activities and articulate peace journalism and other novel reporting methods that could help promote peace, national security, and counter terrorism.

The primary aim of this research project is to review current war journalism-oriented news reporting methods, indicted by scholars as aiding terrorist activities, with the aim of articulating novel methods of reporting conflict and terrorism that could promote peace, national security and counter terrorism. To achieve this aim, a focus group discussion with journalists is adopted to articulate peace journalism reporting methods that could help promote peace and counter terrorism in Nigeria. Specific objectives include:

1. To evaluate perceptions of journalists on current methods of reporting conflict and terrorism in the news media.
2. To identify peace journalism and other novel methods for reporting conflict and terrorism that can become avenues for promoting peace and transforming conflicts.
3. To suggest kinds of training required by journalists to report conflict and terrorism in ways that will promote peace, national security, and counter terrorism.

### **Literature Review**

News media coverage of conflict, including terrorism and war, is grounded in the idea of conflict as a news value. As Griffin notes in 2010, “conflict is routinely considered to have maximum ‘news value’ and is, in fact, explicitly recognized in journalism textbooks as a primary criterion for defining news” (p. 9). Conflict as a news value thrives on elements of negativity, unusualness, impact, oddity, novelty, controversy, sensationalism, conflict, etc which are inexorably attractive to the media. The media are particularly infatuated when the conflict is violent and this seems to explain the basis for news media’s obsession with coverage of war, crime, extreme violence and terrorists’ activities (Weimann, 2012; Nacos, 2016). Thus, the media are dependent on terrorism because terrorism has an inherent news value and this has created a situation which compels many scholars to describe the relationship between the news media and events like war, crime, violent conflicts, terrorism and terrorists as ‘symbiotic’. The symbiosis

suggests a relationship of mutual dependence beneficial for both terrorist and media organisations. Whereas “terrorist strikes provide what the contemporary media crave most—drama, shock, tragedy, and grief...” the media provide terrorists with “massive publicity” (Nacos, 2006, p. 1) and the media rip-off from this relationship by expanding their audience, boosting ratings and circulation, and maximizing their advertising revenues and profits.

But this symbiotic relationship has generated many scholarly arguments. First, scholars accuse media of being accessories after the fact of terrorism for giving terrorists undeserved publicity to achieve their propaganda objectives, fame, and ideological influence thereby promoting and abetting terrorist groups and terrorist operations (Lumbaca & Gray, 2011; Ashbaugh, 2013; Nacos, 2016; Rudoy, 2017). Second, scholars note that by amplifying the effects of terrorism with sensational descriptions and graphic images of death and destruction and other shocking acts of terrorism, media invariably contribute to more terrorist attacks (Jetter, 2017; Jetter and Walker, 2018). Perhaps this justifies Iqbal’s argument in 2017 that “the problem does not lie in why the media covers terrorism but lies in how the media covers terrorism?” (p. 449). Lynch and Galtung (2010) call this dominant kind of conflict reporting “war journalism: conflicts are seen as good versus evil, and the score is kept with body counts” (google.com/books, overview).

Consequently, these war journalism-oriented methods of reporting conflicts and terrorism appear sympathetic to the ultimate long-term goal of the terrorist groups, hence many scholars suggest that media simply not pay any attention to terrorist acts and refrain from reporting them as kerbing virulent publicity would result in a decline in violent attacks and terrorists would be unable to reach their objectives (Hoffman, 2006). Hoffman (2006) for instance argues that without the media’s coverage, these acts’ impact is arguably wasted and may remain just narrowed to the immediate victim(s) of the attack, rather than spread to wider ‘target audience’ at whom the terrorists’ violence is actually aimed. Since terrorists will achieve their goals only when they have adequate amount of media publicity, former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1985, July 15) says, "we must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend".

But instead of news media blackout as an alternative to war journalism, Johan Galtung proposes an approach to journalism he calls ‘peace journalism’ (Hällgren, 2012). Peace journalism, he argues, is a movement “from war/violence journalism toward peace/conflict journalism through an exploration of some compromise or eclectic in-between positions” (Galtung, 2006, p. 1). Galtung provides a table of ideas and principles or ‘pointers’ to distinguish war/violence journalism from peace/conflict journalism. In war/violence journalism, conflict is often removed from its greater context and represented as a exclusive game between two players with a clear differentiation between 'us' and 'them' and with dehumanization of ‘the them’. War/violence journalism highlights mostly the visible effects of war and is often reactive. It is also propaganda-oriented and worried about revealing the falsehoods and secrets of 'the other' while shielding those of its 'own' in cover-ups. War/violence journalism is elite-oriented as well, because it gives credence only to the powerful elite and is victory-oriented because it focuses on victory and hardly explores other alternatives. Peace/conflict journalism on the other hand, seeks to explore the causes, consequences, issues, goals and motives behind the conflict not as an isolated event but one rooted in historical and cultural background or context. Reporting is proactive and strives to reduce or prevent violence by making conflict transparent to facilitate understanding and promote empathy between and among. Peace

journalism is truth-oriented and also people-oriented and exposes lies and evil-doers, unravels cover-ups on all sides and gives voice to grass root peace-makers. Peace journalism is solution-oriented and empathizes creativity in conflict resolution without one side winning and the other side losing thus seeking other points of view and enabling reconciliation processes.

Johan Galtung furthermore defines war/violence journalism as “the low road” and peace/conflict journalism as “the high road”:

The low road, dominant in the media, sees a conflict as a battle...The parties, usually reduced to two, are combatants in a struggle to impose their goals. The reporting model is that of a military command: who advances, who capitulates short of their goals; losses are counted in terms of numbers killed or wounded and material damage...War journalism has sports journalism, and court journalism, as models. The high road, the road of peace journalism, would focus on conflict transformation...a challenge to the world...a clear opportunity for human progress...to find new ways (of) transforming the conflict creatively so that the opportunities take the upper hand – without violence” (Galtung, 1998, pp. 1-2).

Essentially, peace journalism describes a method of reporting conflict that provokes non-violent solutions among a people. According to Lynch (2015; 2017), peace journalism involves conscious efforts by editors and reporters ‘about what to report, and how to report’ it so as to create opportunities for the whole society to think and to embrace non-violent responses to conflict. Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick add that peace journalism “uses the insights of conflict analysis and transformation to update the concepts of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting...and builds an awareness of nonviolence and creativity into the practical job of everyday editing and reporting” (Youngblood 2017, December).

Lynch and McGoldrick, like Johan Galtung, also compares ‘peace journalism’ to ‘war and violence journalism’. The latter they say, is characterised by ‘us vs. them’ where the ‘them’ are demons, it spreads propaganda, it is victory-oriented, it is reactive and elite oriented, and it focuses only on visible effects of violence. But peace journalism is proactive and shifts emphasis from reporting that sensationalises visible effects of violence, increases propaganda, demonise one side or the other using biased language to reporting that informs and humanises both sides of a conflict and discusses positive solutions. Peace Journalism aims to improve the prospects for peace by the choices editors and reporters make, including how they construct and organise stories, how they choose which words to use towards creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and supportive of peace initiatives while giving peacemakers a voice and making peace moves and non-violent explanations more visible and viable. Youngblood (2017, December) says, peace journalism emphasizes the need to avoid language that victimizes (devastated, destitute, defenseless); language that is imprecise and emotive (tragedy, massacre, systematic); language that demonizes (vicious, cruel, barbaric); and language that imprecisely labels (terrorist, extremist, fanatic, fundamentalist). Peace journalism equally avoids reporting conflict as if it is a zero-sum game with one winner and one loser along with reporting only the violent and ‘horror’ acts of conflict and the reporting of ‘claims as though they are facts’.

Peace journalism enthuse the contributions of media to ethno-political conflicts, war and peace building. Media become actors in conflicts they cover as their decisions on what to include and what to exclude inevitably affect the development of a conflict. By focusing

on the violent and the sensational, and on the visible images of violence, death and destruction, media tend to increase fear and misery over and above wellbeing of victims, and may heighten tensions and deepen divisions and differences between and among the parties involved in the conflict and can fuel backlash and counter-violence. In reporting conflicts therefore, the media either consciously or unconsciously play negative roles in fuelling and provoking conflicts or can play constructive roles of preventing and resolving conflicts hence, contributing to peace building. In Nigeria, with its ethnic and cultural diversities, media are known to be biased, unfair, sensational and irresponsible in coverage and reporting (Soola, 2009; Onuegbu, 2012; Basorun, 2015) of crises situations. Media in Nigeria are understood to distort and colour conflicts with ethnic preconceptions, promote deleterious labels about groups and individuals, inflame passions, and even instigate and sustain violent conflicts (Pate, 2011; Omenugha, 2013; Pate & Dauda, 2015; Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Ciboh, 2017). Now that Nigeria has literally become endemic with violent extremism and ambles uneasily towards 2023 elections, this research hopes to collect constructive and viable proposals from journalists/conflict reporters on practical strategies and news reporting methods that can change current war journalism oriented methods of reporting conflict and terrorist activities into a viable mechanism for peace building and promotion of national security.

### **Research Methodology**

Given that conflict and terrorism have negative impact on economic growth and development of the country, this study reviews current methods of reporting conflicts and terrorism in order to develop alternative methods which could help promote peaceful resolution of conflicts and contribute to national security and development.

Data for the research is gathered using the Critical Participatory Action Research method with focus group discussion as instrument for collection of data. Critical participatory action research is a method of “research which involves all relevant parties” (both the researchers and other stakeholders) “in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it” (Wadsworth, 1998:10). Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 277) say “it involves learning about the real, material, concrete, and particular practices of particular people in particular places... its focus on changing particular practitioners’ particular practices”. In the context of this research, participatory action research is most suitable because it will help both researchers/journalists to actively and collectively review the current methods of reporting conflicts and terrorism (which are problematic) in order to develop alternative methods, which could help promote peaceful resolution of conflicts and contribute to national security and counter terrorism.

The aim of this participatory action research is to communally make sense of issues and experiences requiring action for change or improvement. This study therefore employs focus group discussions to engage journalists and investigate current methods of reporting conflict and terrorism in Nigeria in order to improve them for present and future practice. Defined by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005: 887) as “collective conversations or group interviews”, focus groups are a socially orientated process that “capitalise on communication” among “research participants in order to generate data” (Kitzinger, 1995 in MacDonald, C. 2012:41).

A series of focus group discussions with reporters and editors from Nigeria Union of Journalists, notable printed media and broadcast news channels in Nigeria— which are the main conduits of publicity for conflicts in Nigeria. A total of 16 journalists were purposefully sampled to participate in the research. Generally, a small number of persons is considered to be more facilitative of an environment for ideal communication among

participants, and the smaller the number, the greater the potential for useful data to be generated. The main qualifying criterion for sampling was being a journalist with an experience of covering conflicts and terrorism in Nigeria. Journalists were sampled from AIT, Channels, NTA, News Central TV, BBC Pidgin, Punch, Arise News, NUJ, Tribune and TVC for the study. The participants were recruited through e-mails, and through the help of contacts who had worked in the past with the authors in Abuja. Their experiences in journalism range from nine to 23 years, but their experience of covering conflict ranges from 2 to 13 years. The focus groups were conducted in Abuja on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 in two groups—named here as “Focus Group 1” (containing seven participants), “Focus Group 2” (nine participants). Data collected from the focus group discussions are analysed qualitatively identifying major themes sought from interaction with these groups.

#### Journalists’ perceptions of current methods of reporting conflict and terrorism

Most participants of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) acknowledged that ‘current methods of reporting conflict and terrorism actually escalate conflicts’. In particular, they decried use of sensational ‘newspaper headlines for the past ten years...is more about selling the paper... to grab the attention of the public ... but at the end of the day, it somehow backfires’. They admit that sometimes the ‘intention of course is not to escalate the problem but inadvertently that is what it does’ and so they resolve ‘yes, it is really important to change...It is really time to change that’.

This discovery reflect what Iyorkyaa, Bo and Tine (2020: Abstract) found that sensationalism is often expressed in headlines and body of stories “through use of exaggerated claims, use of dramatic appeal, misleading headlines, opinionated statements and wrong choice of words”. Their position echoes Illah, Ogwo and Asemah’s (2012:8) conclusion that “sensational journalism is prominent in Nigerian journalism”, that “media sensationalism is on the increase and is affecting journalism profession in Nigeria” and also that “sensationalism has become a style that is used by the media, especially the print media to draw readers’ attention to newspaper pages with a view to increasing patronage”.

Most participants of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) recognized respect for truth and for right of the public to truth as the first duty of journalists pointing out that “media have the responsibility to tell the truth” and “if the current reportage of conflicts and terrorism is emphasizing the truth in a fair, balanced, objective manner... it can...enhance peace building (FGD1Participant 3, February 15, 2022). Their convictions boost peace journalism’s support for “the truth as an ethical expectation of journalists to report truthfully the facts they encounter” (Mapudzi & Mpofu, 2019:68) for all sides.As Galtung, (2017, January 2) reasoned, “peace journalism stands for truth as opposed to propaganda and lies” and “the truth aspect in peace journalism holds for all sides” and gives voice to all. Peace journalism therefore pursues a commitment of professional journalism to factual reporting that can prompt and enable society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict. Peace journalism subsequently provokes how conflict reporting can play a constructive role in resolving conflicts supposedly with implications to reforming professional journalism for progressive social change.

In reporting conflicts however, FGD participants confessed that ‘it may not be easy to report exactly what is truth’because ‘for many of the leading private media, particularly those owned by politicians in power, profit is the basis for which they were established’ and ‘profit can only come when they get attention from the readers and that kind of

reportage may be sensational and catchy for the readers'. Pate and Dauda (2015: 222) discovered this tendency of the media almost a decade ago, that, in Nigeria, many media organizations "in their desire to sell copies and attract viewers and listeners often violate journalistic ethics through 'colourful, unique and unexpected' stories which may have negative consequences on the society". In conflict stories particularly, Bilgen (2012 Jul 22) argues that media's bias and obsession with sensationalism to attract sales vastly amplifies conflicts and "may help terrorists get the upper hand in using media" as tools to "create an atmosphere and politics of fear, and ripe conditions for propaganda".

Nonetheless, most participants strongly under-scored their commitment to national interest, the necessity to balance truth with national interest as the guiding principle of reporting conflicts in Nigeria. As the journalists insist, 'we may report what actually transpired but sometimes, the national interest should come first' for 'a path where you are telling the truth the way it is' there is 'a path where you are also considering national security, national interest and...trying to build that peace'. But in same breadth, FGD participants appear doubtful whether balancing reports on conflicts with national interest will ever be attained because of many factors including 'the reporter's knowledge, his capacity, his environment, access to the crime scene...what is the organization he/she works for'. The reporters claim, for instance, that attaining a balanced report to national interest is very difficult because 'when a reporter from a government media talks about patriotism and national interest', his counterpart in the private sector is projecting personal interest and that of his organization, how his paper will make money at the detriment of the national interest. In this dilemma, Ogbonna, Okunade, Okafo, and Ayobolu (2020) admit, national interest really becomes a worrisome issue that can hardly be handled easily because national interest is a nebulous and gyratory concept around which a horde of dominant individual, collective, class, ethnic and regional interests in a state oscillate, and all these are influenced by economic interest of those with power who wants to decide truth. Indeed, in a plural-ethnic society like Nigeria where wrong mix of racial, ethnic, religious and political considerations are usually linked to every policy formulation and implementation process, Owolabi and Akanni (2020) say, national interest is subjective and difficult to determine and it is only normal that journalists have moral and professional dilemma and are usually polarized based on ownership position and other factors especially in reporting such issues as conflicts.

The several other polarising factors, participants of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) admit 'we must understand', are 'ethnicity and religion' and they 'are critical components of decision making at all levels' especially in reporting conflicts and such issues 'because where ethnicity will come to play, religion will come to play'. One participant was emphatic that 'if you take a census or do an analysis of five newspapers, you will realize that there is always a slant to how conflict is reported:

Paper A is looking at regional religious, perspective, Paper B is looking at it from regional political perspective, Paper C will take three of these factors together religion, politics, region and add the fourth economy to it, and per chance there is a fifth paper that looks at what exactly is the root cause of such a conflict. So basically, most times where we work as journalists also influences how we report conflicts, our personal biases affect how we report conflict, our religion, so most times is not about national interest (FGD2 Participant 1, February 16, 2022).

In contemporary Nigeria, Focus Group Discussants claim that major influence on conflict reporting comes from politics 'before religion and tribe even though they are all tied together'. But Sáenz, Embrick, & Rodríguez, (2015) are resolute that ethnic, religious and regional identities produce most severe competitions among Nigeria's ethnic groups especially



around the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. Oboh (2016) emphasised the point when he bemoaned Nigeria press' ineffectiveness in providing sufficient and appropriate information capable of solving the problem of ethnicity in the Nigerian politics hence the media usually become weapons of hostility, conflict and bitter tensions.

Apart from ethnicity, religion and party politics, almost all FGD participants agreed that the influence coming from money weighs down many journalists and actually affects how conflicts are reported. Most of the journalists believed that 'if journalists are well paid, it will cut down the level of corruption' as many will 'become more committed and patriotic'. They said the desire to resist brown envelope is there but then if 'you now work in an organization that they are not paying your salary, they are not giving you transport', where 'they will tell you to use the popularity of the brand to make money, are you now trying to tell me that you will go to that place and not collect money'? This revelation is confirmation of the increasing levels of corruption affecting journalism practice in Nigeria (Kundum, 2013). Unsatisfactory working conditions, salaries, training and equipment are often cited among key factors that inhibit professional journalism from limiting corruption and strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria (Yusha'u, 2009; Ojebode, 2013). As Chris Isiguzo, a National President of Nigeria Union of Journalists once moaned, "if a professional is economically imperiled, you don't expect him to abide by ethical codes and rules. You attack the economy of a journalist when you don't pay him, as at when due..." (Oyewole, 2021 October 12).

Apart from these myriad influences, journalists oftentimes wittingly or not, shirk in their professional responsibility and inadvertently 'add up to...the problems of conflict reporting in Nigeria'. FGD participants acknowledged that they 'lack capacity in terms of understanding the dynamics of conflict sensitive-reporting' which forces them to 'operate within what we know and what resources available to us in that regards'. Worse still, they argued, 'journalism in Nigeria...is gradually becoming an all-comers affair...and our controlling bodies have been found wanting in area' of regulating who practices journalism. Admittedly, one ethical challenge practitioners have had to regularly struggle with is the presence of 'quacks' which not only characterises journalism profession in Nigeria as 'an all-comers-affair' (Owhoko, April 27, 2020) but also affects the standard of journalism practice and reporting of conflicts and terrorism.

#### Peace journalism and new methods for reporting conflict and terrorism

Focus Group participants were unanimous that improvement on methods of reporting conflicts and promoting peace in Nigeria should start from the media organisations, from the owners, gatekeepers, and the managers who actually control the processes of news production. They strongly advocated for 'organizational policy' and the 'strengthening of gatekeeping systems' to make conflict reports professional and objective because 'media organizations have the duty to set-up editorial policies to include checks and balances that control jamming influences on whatever they report'. Journalists also suggested that reporters must allow 'multiple sources' and 'let more voices be heard' by 'letting those affected tell their stories' and let people draw whatever conclusion everybody wants to draw' because, very often, "media persons merely respond to statements of politicians, ethnic champions, religious zealots and other interested party rather than initiate their own independent inquiries about specific social conflict" (Pate and Dauda, 2015: 220). The journalists added that reporting all details of a conflict could help spread panic so 'it is also important to be sensitive when reporting, in the sense that where casualties are involved, no need to mention numbers and 'be telling people that 10 people died'. They

seem to agree with peace journalism approaches of emphasizing the invisible effects of violence instead of focusing on visible effects of war as casualties and damage to property. As Youngblood (2017) affirms, “peace journalism provides depth and context, rather than just superficial and sensational ‘blow by blow’ accounts of violence and conflict”.

FGD participants were also concerned about use of language, that ‘journalists should be aware of the deployment and use of appropriate language’ including what Lynch and McGoldrick, (2005) classify as rough use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people; demonising adjectives and labels; and making an opinion or claim seem like an established fact. They also said conflict reporting ‘should not create Goliath and David’ and conflict stories ‘should not be about the victor and the vanquished’ which Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2019:24) say “reinforces an ‘us versus them’ mentality”. By making the right choices, Mare, (2019: 6) says, editors and reporters can “create an atmosphere conducive to peace and supportive of peace initiatives and peacemakers, without compromising the basic principles of quality journalism”. More importantly, FGD participants stressed, ‘journalists should not take sides, but should ‘look at all sides, choosing what to report and what not to report, taking into cognisance what the issues are, looking at the issues carefully, and listening to all parties involved and then making our choices’. This finding agrees more or less with Howard’s (2009:15) argument that conflict-sensitive-journalists must apply “conflict analysis” and search “for new voices and new ideas about the conflict” and must try to resolve conflicts by looking “closely at all sides”, and taking “no sides”, but is engaging “in the search for solutions”.

Additionally, FGD participants reasoned, journalists ‘should try as much as possible to understand the conflict to the best of their abilities’ so as to ‘be on a safe track to a better conflict management in our reporting’. By ‘understanding the conflict, one of the participants said, they meant an analysis of the conflict, that ‘analysing the conflict will help’ them ‘understand what may have caused the conflict, how long the conflict may have lingered, who are the parties to the conflict and what are the involving interests’ so as to ‘help in better reporting that will also help in de-escalating the conflict’. Their proposition, according to Mapudzi & Mpofu (2019:68), encourages peace journalism advocacy for framing stories in ways which encourage “investigating the underlying causes of conflicts, analysing the conflicts”, as well as reporting them in certain ways which, Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) say create opportunities for the whole society to consider and adopt non-violent answers to conflict.

#### Kinds of training required by journalists to report conflict and terrorism

Focus Group participants felt strongly about ‘the issue of training’ arguing that because ‘conflicts and security are very specialized’ and ‘it is high time the Nigeria media houses begin to see that’ journalists ‘get that kind of specialized training’. Their convictions justify Southern African journalists’ recommendations that “training on conflict sensitive reporting is needed” and “continuous media training...is essential to ensure high ethical standards, balanced and fair reporting of conflicts” (Moyo, 2019: 20). They suggest also that ‘conflict reporting should be compulsory for all journalism students’ and offer overall journalism education and training to ‘expose inexperienced students to the reality of a conflict beat so that they will know what to do’ in real life situations. they also said training in ‘peace and conflict resolution studies should be added’, which UNESCO (Howard, 2009:13) says, “builds the capacity of journalists to explore and analyse the dynamics of violent conflict” including “conflict resolution possibilities for the community” and an awareness “of the influence their reporting can have on inflaming or moderating violent conflict”.

But better still, Focus Group participants said, institutions should ‘broaden the mind of journalists to the various aspect of life, touching on governance, the economy and political aspect of the nation’ including courses on language and civic education to build patriotism’. More importantly, they reasoned, students should be taught research and documentation, and fact-checking’. UNESCO (Lloyd & Howard, 2005:81) says “this type of training model is participatory and experiential” and teaches journalists “how to question and investigate - especially when they're reporting violent situations”. Participants suggested that media organizations in Nigeria should have what is called ‘Impact Training’ to teach students and reporters alike about their ‘safety, on need to be skilled in survival skills’ and ‘how to protect themselves’. Their recommendation comes in the context of UNESCO’s (2017) universal call on journalism education institutions to develop curricula on training in safety that can provide opportunity for students in journalism to acquire life - saving skills and assist them in adopting proper planning for dangerous assignments. Lloyd and Howard (2005:75) say such training “is also about creating a culture of risk awareness in all aspects of journalism - whether in war zones, investigative reporting or reporting events in the streets”.

Above all, Focus Group participants emphasised, journalists should be grounded and ‘guided by the ethics of the profession’ and ‘ethics must be enforced to help de-corrupt some already corrupt minds’, and also help in ‘building the character, since we know that character, the integrity matter’. Training in “the core values of ethical journalism are more important than ever today”, White (2017, August 27) agrees, because “a commitment to ethics is essential to build public trust as we fight for quality and democracy in the media in the digital age”. The importance of ethics in journalism has never been more critical now that Chan-Meetoo (2013:5) say “we live and interact in a highly mediated global system” hence it is imperative to “be armed with the necessary skills and mechanisms to process, report and represent information along ethical lines” and push for greater responsible reporting. FGD participants suggest that grounding and enforcement of ethics should be backed with what ‘in the BBC, we call mentorship’ to help develop students’ perspective on what they should expect when they get out of the classroom’. Mentoring in journalism, Fulton (2013, Jun. 29) admits, is an important part of a journalist’s early part of learning and on-going development which can be a valuable way to help journalists develop their reporting skills, and make newsrooms more inclusive by sharing best practices and fresh ideas. They also emphasized the importance of ‘internship with good supervision from the university and ‘orientation’ for ‘students to be properly guided even before they graduate’. Journalism internships are regularly scheduled training opportunities for students to extend their education beyond the classroom and gain valuable real-world experience under an assigned a journalist mentor, usually leading professionals in the industry, to provide advice and guidance.

### **Conclusion**

Newsworthiness of conflict is the tasty fodder sustaining news media’s extensive coverage of conflicts and terrorism. Stories of war, crime, violence, as well as activities of terrorists like bombings, hijackings, destruction and bloodshed are newsworthy because they typically hold the elements of negativity, unexpectedness, unusualness, conflict, drama, and topicality. News media are interested in these to boost audience and readership figures and profit margins. News media’s obsession with conflict and terrorism gives terrorists ability to exploit media to their own advantage but entangles both in a symbiotic relationship that seems reciprocally beneficial for all of them. This apparently inevitable relationship spawns concern about the role of the news media in coverage of conflict and terrorism. Media inexorably play roles either as perpetrators of

conflict or propagators of terrorism. Allegedly, media promote war journalism-oriented methods of reporting which escalate conflicts and promote terrorism instead of peace journalism methods which create opportunities for societies to consider and value non-violent responses to all forms of conflict. Depending largely on their framing and agenda setting, the media can influence the dynamics and outcomes of conflicts. Typically, media either take an active part in the conflict and shares responsibility for increased violence, or they stay independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence.

In Nigeria, media take an active part in the conflict and generate concerns of bias, unfair, sensational and irresponsible reporting of crises situations. Journalists wrestle daily with the problems of distortion and colouration of conflicts with ethnic preconceptions, of promotion of prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals and often take the blame for inflaming passions and even escalating violent conflicts. The constant struggle to deal with these challenges compels most journalists to violate journalistic ethics and sacred duty to report the facts truthfully. Commonly, the sacred duty of truth telling is jettisoned for personal monetary gains and for and economic benefits of media owners. Journalists treasure the patriotic thought of reporting in the national interest but their patriotism is routinely compromised on ethnicity, religion and party politics of media owners. Unsatisfactory working conditions, irregular salaries, lack of training and equipment worsen corruption and inhibit professional journalism. Also, journalists have to habitually struggle with the ethical challenge of 'quacks' that compromise on standards and portray journalism in Nigeria as 'an all-comers-affair'. Now that Nigeria is a theatre of terrorism, these practices not only affect reporting conflicts and terrorism but also compromise journalists' personal safety and professional integrity.

These findings suggest that while journalists seem weighed down by lack capacity for conflict sensitive-reporting, their proposal for erection of editorial policies and strengthening of gatekeeping systems to moderate excesses in the coverage of conflicts certainly offer professional relief against jamming influences on whatever they report. Journalists' clear adoption of peace journalism approaches including focusing on solutions, reporting on long-term effects, orientating the news on ordinary people instead of elite sources, reporting on all sides, and using precise language instead of demonising adjectives and labels to reinforce an 'us versus them' mentality can help mitigate conflicts and improve the prospects for peace in Nigeria. Their proposition encourages peace journalism advocacy which pays intense attention to the truth and is an ethical expectation of journalists to report truthfully the facts they encounter. This study highlights the significance of news values theory in enhancing our understanding of the symbiotic relationship between media and terrorism. But it also points to the need for integrating elements of peace journalism into university curricula to train prospective journalists to play significant roles in transforming conflicts in Nigeria. Further studies are needed to identify and study specific elements of peace journalism to evaluate their real value in reporting of conflicts and terrorism.

For journalism practice, this study shows that peace journalism brings to journalists a new set of tasks radically different from those presented by traditional reporting of conflicts or war/violence journalism. Conflicts, terrorism and security are very specialized and require specialized training. Peace journalism training is therefore indispensable for high professional standards, balanced and fair reporting and skilful response to conflicts and terrorism. Nigeria journalism curricula need a careful review of journalism programmes that would enable journalism profession to provide clearer

guidance on trendy and universal peace journalism approaches for peace building and promotion of national security in Nigeria.

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