Galtung's Peace Journalism in the Framing of Blasphemy: A Study of Selected Nigerian Dailies

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Abstract

From astute researchers to casual observers, there seems to be a consensus of concern that media coverage of conflicts, whether local or international, aids and abets escalation. Some even think it leads to precipitation where the conflict does not exist – as a result of emphasis on differences, whipping up tension and deployment of inciting language. This motivated the pioneer peace researcher, Johann Galtung, to develop the concept of peace journalism (PJ) – in opposition to the traditional war journalism. Using quantitative content analysis, framing and political economy as methodological and theoretical frameworks, this study adopted his model as a template of gauging how Nigerian national dailies (Daily Trust and The Punch) fare in framing the recurrent cases of blasphemy in the country. The result reveals that the newspapers as a whole toe the line of peace journalism (66%) as opposed to war journalism (34%). The two categories compete closely in The Punch - (52%) and (48%) for peace and war journalism respectively. This is interpreted as effects of market forces and training as solution-prone PJ does not naturally succumb to sensationalism which easily skyrockets the sales of the papers. It is therefore recommended that peace should be prioritized over profit for the volatility of the polity. This can be facilitated by training of journalists on conflict-sensitivity as enshrined in PJ tenets. Also, development challenges in the country need equally to be tackled for sustainable peace.

Keywords: *Peace, Conflict, Profit, Peace journalism, Blasphemy*

Introduction

In Nigerian context, just as it is in the global arena, there has never been a phenomenon that is so much taken for granted when it is prevalent, and so badly sought after but consistently proved to be elusive than "peace" – that serenity that characterizes the total absence of violence, cordiality in social intercourse, and the presence of justice in the polity (Galtung, 2013a). Its disappearance in the horizon has triggered the survival instinct in humans more than before. But the academic discourse on peace is closely tied to that of development so much so that the dictum among stakeholders is 'there is no peace without development, there is no development without peace…' (Eliasson, 2013, p.1).

With endemic poverty, increasing inflation and population, massive corruption, surging banditry, insurgency and secessionist agitation, inter alia, Nigerian polity

seems overstressed, consequently giving rise to communal clashes and ethno-religious tension both within and without. These provide a steady diet for media to feast on (Folarin, 1998). The journalists, their editors and proprietors, being the by-product of this socio-political milieu (Baran & Davis, 2009), approach these issues with primordial lenses which becloud principles of factuality, fairness, and detachment. This worsens not only tension but creates hopelessness. Hence whether it is in coverage of herdsmen-farmers clashes, Boko Haram crises, blasphemy controversies, Indigenous People of Biafra, Niger Delta and Odua People Congress violent attacks, or the recurrent ethno-religious conflict in Kaduna, Kano, Plateau or some states in Northeast, the feeling is generally the same, namely that of exacerbation than mitigation (Adamu 2017; Mu'azu & Ibrahim, 2016; Unaegbu, 2016; Umar, 2009; Abdu & Alabi, 2009; Wakili, 2009; Igwe, 2009; John & Olaniyi, 2009). It is from this perspective that this research investigated the coverage of three cases of blasphemy in northern Nigeria to ascertain whether there is a paradigm shift in the traditional mode of framing conflicts by Nigerian press.

Media and Blasphemy in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country where the predominant inhabitants profess faith in one form of religion or another. This in 2004 fetched it the title of the most religious nation on earth based on poll (BBC, 2004). For reasons largely described as political and economic, the media and politicians (the two being symbiotically related) have sustained the projection of the country and its peoples along binary fault lines – the Christian South versus the Muslim North, the educated, civilized Igbo/Yoruba versus 'uneducated, fundamentalist, power-thirsty' Hausa-Fulani. Discussions on conflicts and politics are therefore largely tailored along the polarity. But as Ogunlesi (2015) rightly pointed out in a *New York Times* article, there is more to this than what meets the eye. The Yorubas of the Southwest, for example, are almost evenly divided between Islam and Christianity, with the followers of traditional religion interspersed (Paden, 2015). And there are quite many instances of intermarriages among the followers of the organized religions especially among the prominent members of the ethnic group. Although the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria are predominantly Catholic Christians, there is a growing number of Muslim and Protestant communities, just as there are sizable Christian communities in all the 'core' Northern states. Even though interethnic and interreligious conflicts are more regular, intra-ethnoreligious ones also exist but hardly receive media attention/hype as the other.

From this prism of 'extraordinary human potpourri' (Maier, 2000, p.xx), incidents of blasphemy generate intense debate and controversy in the media landscape. Whether through court ruling or violent conflict, incidents of blasphemy stoops to the bizarre and sensational which the media never waver from for particularly its economic benefit. When, for instance, as recently as August 2020 a court in Kano sentenced one singer, Yahaya Aminu Sherrif, to death by hanging for blaspheming prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), this researcher was online as the news broke; hence, he began to monitor readers' comments in the newspapers. In no time, within few minutes actually, hundreds of comments were garnered and still pouring in to the pages of the *Daily Trust, Punch, Daily Nigerian,* and the like. The same thing happened in September 2019 when Zamfara State governor, incensed by how pages of the Holy Qur'an were intermittently found in toilets and sewages of public places, threatened to promulgate law with maximum penalty to curb the recurrence (The *Punch,* September 29, 2019). This was also the case in July 2018 when military men had to be invited to cordon off Nigerian Law School (Lagos campus) due to simmering tension over allegation of blasphemy involving students.

Mostly media relate with blasphemy in two ways: 1, as a source of news; 2, in 'protection' and 'promotion' of freedom of expression whence it courts controversy by attacking sacred figures maliciously. To this category belongs the incidents of Danish cartoons in 2006, *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015, and, locally, that of *Thisday* newspaper in 2002. All these are pointers to the unsettled issues of national question and peaceful coexistence locally and globally. Although these incidents mostly pit the secular against religious or toe Muslim-Christian divide, recent cases as they occur in Kano are suggestive of increasing intra-religious tension – Muslims charged and convicted with blaspheming Islam. These bring to mind Edward Said's notion of 'clash of definitions'.

Specifically, this research explores peace journalism variables in Nigeria's *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* in relation to the framing of the three cases of blasphemy that took place between May and August 2016. The first occurred on May 27th when a stick-carrying mob lynched one Methodus Emmanuel in Niger State for alleged discourteous comment against the Prophet online. The second took place in Kano when a 70-year old trader was beaten to death by a mob on 2nd June over the same allegation. The last claimed eight lives in Zamfara on 22nd August when some students fought in Abdu Gusau Polytechnic, Talata-Mafara – a fight from

which the blasphemy controversy emanated and the subsequent arson that claimed those lives (Egbujo, 2016; Onwuka, 2016; Premium Times, 2016).

Peace Journalism: Conceptual and Empirical Review of Literature

The idea of peace journalism, it can be argued, emanated from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) classical essay on news values which revealed that journalists' nose for news primarily sniffs issues and event where the elite (people or nation) are at the center and more attracted to the weird and negative than otherwise. In rethinking a paradigm shift, arguably, the thesis and antithesis of peace journalism were literally born.

Developed by the Norwegian sociologist, mathematician and pioneer peace researcher, Johann Galtung in the 1970s (Hanitzsch, 2007), peace journalism draws attention to the journalistic convention of war coverage which is typically zero sum, constricted in time and space, elite-oriented and reactive in nature. It deflects concerns to context, invisible effects and people in conflict formation and more nuance in coverage. This is partly realizable through engagement with issues rather than events and firm grasp of different dimension of violence – not just physical. In other words, it targets the understanding of the reporters and their editors on conflict formation and broadens their horizons thus for the inclusion of variables that would nip in the bud or facilitate peaceful resolution of violent conflicts (Galtung 2013b; Galtung, 2006; Mare, 2017; Hanitzsch, 2007; Lynch, 2007; Hackett, 2006; Tehranian, 2002; McGoldrick & Lynch; 2000; Irvan, 2006; Peleg, 2007, etc.). According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2009), 'Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict' (p. 256). With similar teleological concerns, other scholars have equally developed (largely by paraphrasing) more attributes which complement the cause of the original PJ model. These include Majid Tehranian (2002) ten commandments of peace journalism, El-nawawi and Powers' (2008) 11-point typology of conciliatory media, Ross Howard's (2003) 9-point checklist for conflict-sensitive journalism, McGoldrick and Lynch's (2000) 17-point dos and don'ts of peace journalism, and Irvan's (2006) 5 principles of PJ-inclined news gathering as well as 6 others for news writing. However, Galtung's schema, presented below, appears apt and terse in capturing the crux of both types of journalism – peace and war:

Peace/Conflict Journalism	**War/Violence Journalism**
I.PEACE/CONFLICT-ORIENTATED - Explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues - General "win, win" orientation - Open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture - Making conflicts transparent - Giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding - See conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity - Humanisation of all sides; more so the worse the weapon - Proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs - Focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/ culture)	I. WAR/VIOLENCE ORIENTATED - Focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win) war - General zero-sum orientation - Closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone - Making wars opaque/secret - "Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice for "us" - See "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war - Dehumanisation of "them"; more so the worse the weapon - Reactive: waiting for violence before reporting - Focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)
II. TRUTH-ORIENTATED - Expose untruths on all sides / uncover all cover-ups	II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTATED - Expose "their" untruths / help "our" cover-ups/lies
III. PEOPLE-ORIENTATED - Focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to voiceless - Give name to all evil-doers - Focus on people peace-makers	III. ELITE ORIENTATED - Focus on "our" suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece - Give name to their evil-doers - Focus on elite peace-makers
IV. SOLUTION ORIENTATED - Peace = non-violence + creativity - Highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war - Focus on structure, culture, the peaceful society - Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation	IV. VICTORY ORIENTATED - Peace = victory + ceasefire - Conceal peace initiative, before victory is at hand - Focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society - Leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again

In a latter work (Galtung, 2013b), he refers to war journalism as a 'low road' of exploring conflict and likens it to sport reporting where the focus is on who *wins* between two contenders. PJ, on the other hand, is creative, transformative and expansive for opportunities and solutions – the 'high road' of examining conflict, which is, according to him, akin to health journalism in covering not only symptoms but causes and remedies. But for scholars like Kempf (2008), Hackett (2006) and Wolsfeld (in Elnawawi & Powers, 2008), the current Western model of journalism operational in most parts of the world is inimical to peace due to its obsession with drama, tension, and simplification for largely political and economic reasons. There must be some structural adjustment for peace journalism to work effectively in practice. Tehranian (2002) too raised the same concern and advanced the introduction of institution like the World Bank to facilitate the emergence and maturation of PJ – far from the entanglement of political and economic elites. To academic, Thomas Hanitzsch (2004) and ex-BBC journalist, David Loyn (2007), PJ's call for attachment to peace undermines the time-honored principles of objectivity, and is just a call for a better journalism by another name (see Ross Howard (2009) for a balance between PJ and objectivity tenet). Moreover, journalistic objectivity is discredited as an elusive/utopian virtue in professional practice. George Orwell (1970) and Donald McDonald (in Okoye, 2007) say it is impracticable. Tumber and Prentoulis (2003, p.216) say it is 'an impossible goal'. Williams (2003, p.177) says it is 'all pretence', while Sam Anderson (1989, p.308) adds that it is 'a preposterous conceit'. Of recent, the conclusion drawn by Media Signals, a London-based media monitoring organization, after empirically examining media reportage of conflicts across the globe, is that no media outlet is a neutral purveyor of information. Other scholars similarly pointed out that the concept of objectivity crept into media practice not out of altruistic concern for public good but as a market strategy. It is, in other words, a child of capitalistic force (Kperogi, 2013). However, the bottom-line is, one ventures to submit, if truth and objectivity are so important virtues for journalists to adhere to religiously, peace is equally a sine qua non for the practitioner to consider cognizant of the realities of violent conflicts facing societies across the globe. After all, this proposal for PJ can find justification in the teleological aspect of media ethics (Bukar, 2018) and normative aspect – social responsibility – of communication theory (Irvan, 2006).

A number of empirical researches have been conducted to ascertain media's role in conflicts, local and international, using Galtung's PJ schema as parameter of measuring inclination to peace in particularly the press. These include Iqbal and

Hussain (2017) on sectarian crises in Pakistan; Saygin (2016) on refugees in Turkish newspapers; Siraj (2007) on India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir; Steien (2008) on the Danish cartoons controversy in Norwegian newspapers; Raza, Jan, Sultan and Aziz (2012) on the framing of 'War on Terror' in Pakistan; Ersoy (2010) on conflicts in Cyprus; Shehu (2014) on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, among several others. With the exception of Raza et al. and Iqbal and Hussein, all of these researchers found war journalism indicators to be overwhelmingly higher in the press coverage of the respective conflicts.

Shehu's (2014) study, for instance, after examining four Nigerian national dailies (*Daily Trust, Leadership, Vanguard and Punch newspapers*) in respect of Boko Haram insurgency coverage, found that '[w]hile war frames got the total frequencies of 1239, peace frames got only 470 in all the four sampled newspapers.' Buttressing this submission are the findings of Unaegbu (2016) in respect of the same crisis (Boko Haram) coverage by the Nigerian press where, out of the 105 articles she analysed, only 26.6% came from the people in the affected communities – in comparison to 63.8% from government officials and military sources. This implies elite-orientedness as against people's – bringing home the elitist nature of the medium. For similar findings on the coverage of IPOB agitation using the same criteria, see Odii and Ngene (2017); on ethno-religious crises in Jos, see Adisa (in Bello & Ayodele, 2018). Adamu (2017) also arrived at the same conclusion of war journalism-inclination in her study of reportage of farmer-herdsmen conflict in Jos. Using parameters other than PJ/WJ as Adamu and Unaegbu, Jimoh and Abdul-Hameed (2017); Ibrahim and Jimoh (2017) also found Nigerian press framing of Niger Delta conflict, IPOB agitations and Ese Oruru/Yunusa Yellow's controversy quite inimical to peace building and national interest. Similarly, other scholars explored ethno-religious conflicts in Kano, Plateau and Kaduna states, OPC mayhem, etc. using yardsticks other than Galtung but arrived at the same conclusion of indictment (Umar, 2009; Abdu & Alabi, 2009; Wakili, 2009; Igwe, 2009; John & Olaniyi, 2009). To be fair, in few others the coverage glided to conflict-sensitive journalism (see Ayoola & Olaosun, 2014; Ngige, Badekale, & HammanJoda, 2016; and Ita, Idiong, & Ita, 2017).

In sum, Adekunle (2014) concludes that "the pattern of media reports of crises in Nigeria is out of the context of peace journalism. A majority of the practitioners take propaganda, stereotype and biased reports for peace journalism thereby promoting crises rather than peace" (p. 1).

Theoretical Framework

Framing theory undergird this research's theoretical focus. This is because Goffman's framing, in particular, deals with the issues of selection, emphasis, inclusion and exclusion of words, images and themes in a given text often with the intent of promoting a certain viewpoint (peace or conflict, in our context), suggesting cues for action or passing moral judgment (McQuail, 2010; Baran & Davis, 2009; Entman, 1993). The culture, which nurtures audience's predisposition to certain opinion and emotion, is very influential in framing communication (Azlan, in Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013). Newspapers succumb to their audience's predisposition and bolster it for mainly economic reasons (Chiang & Knight, 2008). This, therefore, informs the ethnic and regional leaning of Nigeria's mainstream newspapers (Aliagan, 2015), hence the significance of political economy in their analysis. The intent here is to see how the respective newspapers are interested in promoting peaceful coexistence and national cohesion rather than provincialism and parochialism for market expediency.

Methodological Framework

This essay is concerned with the analysis of documented information; hence, content analysis and coding sheet were used as the method and the instrument of collecting data respectively (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). On the other hand, pie charts and simple descriptive statistics were used in presenting and interpreting data. A census of 306 editions (from 1st May to 30th September, 2016) was taken from *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* to retrieve the articles on the incidents of 'blasphemy' in northern Nigeria. The months were purposefully selected because it is within this span that the incidents occurred, and a census becomes necessary so as not to miss out any article on these intermittent cases of blasphemy.

These national dailies were selected because of their ownership and readership. *Daily Trust* is owned by a Hausa, Muslim northerner and the paper primarily targets northern populace despite its national claim. So also is *The Punch* – owned by a Southwestern Yoruba Christian with southerners as its predominant audience (Chiboh, 2017). So it will be interesting to explore these particular papers to ascertain, empirically, how ethno-religious affiliation and economic forces, inter alia, reflect in the content and overall coverage of the issue at stake.

Prior coding scheme was used to code the content of the 53 articles retrieved from both newspapers. A whole article was considered as a unit of analysis wherein the tone, tenor and focus of the piece(s) – what they included and excluded – form the

basis of examination. These units of analysis were classified within the broader category of war and peace journalism detailed in the literature review section, and Galtung's schema provides the dichotomy that served as frames in the content analysis.

These considerations therefore justify the selection of both framing and political economy as theories to undergird the findings of the research.

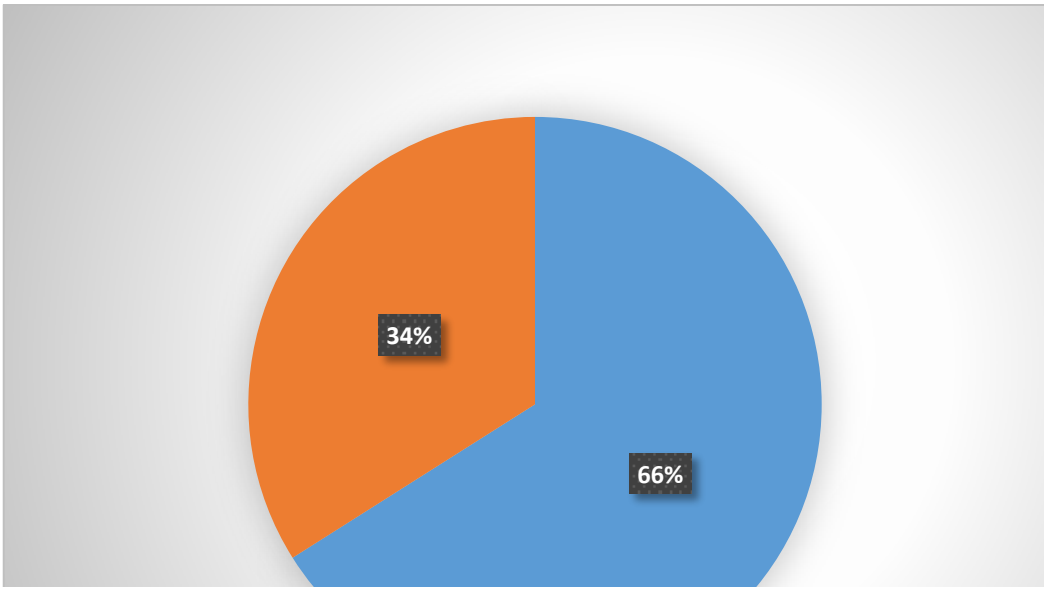
These articles were twice coded at different times by the researcher and Holsti's formula was used to measure intra-coder reliability. The result showed:

$$2\frac{52}{53+53} = .98$$

This high degree of coding agreement indicates that the categories were efficiently defined.

Data Presentation and Discussion

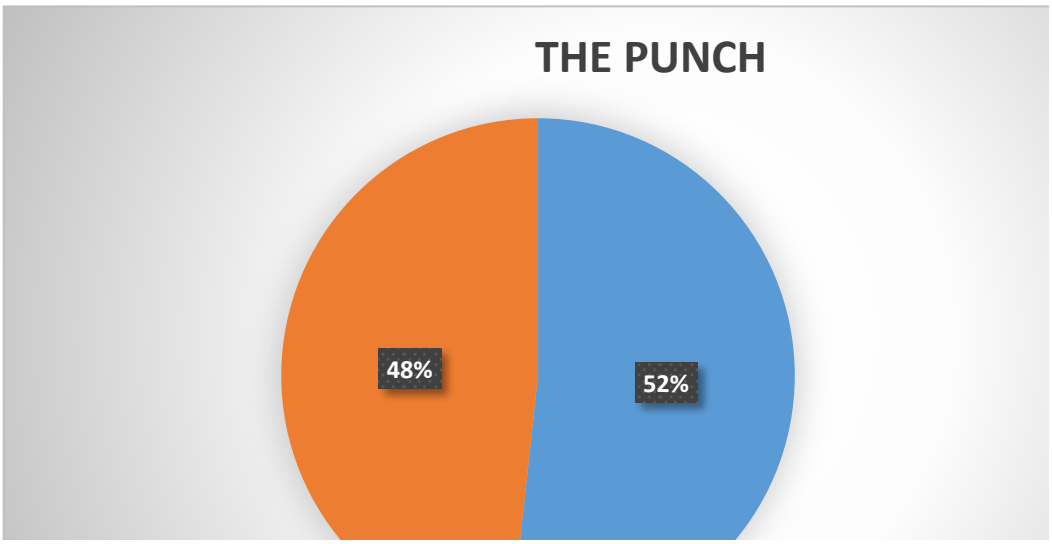
Chart 1 indicating Peace and War Journalism in *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*



The data collected revealed a sum of 53 frames with peace frames having 35 representing 66.0% and war frames 18 representing 34% in the two newspapers. Of the 18 war frames, *The Punch* takes 14 (77.7%), the *Daily Trust* contains 4

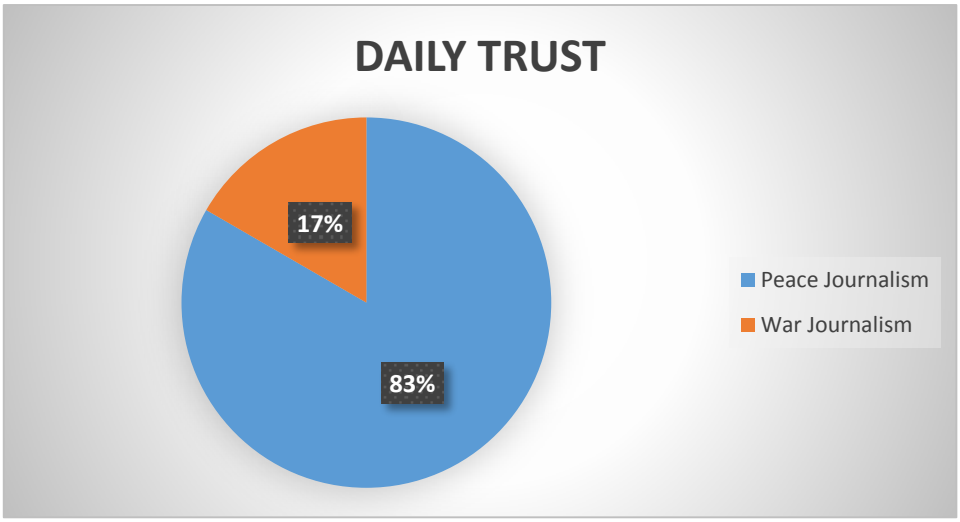
(22.2%) of the total. On a general note, both the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* concentrated on peace rather than war journalism. The *Daily Trust* produced 57.1% of the total peace frames while *The Punch* carried 42.9% of the said frames. However, this does not preclude the conspicuousness of war frames where, particularly in *The Punch*, they compete closely with peace frames – the former 14 (48.2%) and the latter 15 (51.8%). This is illustrated in pie chart 2 below:

Pie chart 2 showing War and Peace Journalism in The Punch



On the other hand, out of the 24 frames produced by the *Daily Trust*, 20 representing 83% are peace journalism inclined while 4 (17%) belong to the war journalism category. This is graphically illustrated in the following pie chart:

Pie chart 3 illustrating War and Peace Journalism in *Daily Trust* newspaper



What the foregoing imply is that the press can be used in the service of peace without violating professional ethics as Peace Journalism scholars (Mare, 2017; Galtung, 2013b; Galtung, 2006; Howard, 2009; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2009; Lynch, 2007; Hackett, 2006; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2005; Tehranian, 2002; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000, among others) theorized, which equally coincided with the findings of such empirical researches as Ngige et al (2016) who surveyed media environment with regard to the coverage of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria, and commended the media for being consistent in relating relevant information to the public and policy-makers, timely criticism and advocacy of practical solutions; Ayoola and Olaosun (2014) who also examined how Nigerian press (*The Nation, The Punch and The Guardian)* handled Boko Haram attacks on Nigerian Police Headquarters and United Nations House in Abuja, concluding that 'contrary to skepticisms about daily newspapers as purveyors of misery and libel, Nigerian national newspapers serve as a source of accurate information and perceptive analysis on Boko Haram…(p.1)'; Raza et al. (2012) who explored two leading Pakistani newspapers (*Daily Nation* and *Business Recorder*) to find out how the 'war on terror' is framed, and concluded that both newspapers were generally more inclined to peaceful resolution of the conflict in their framing – in terms of details, context, language and tone of coverage. They 'condemn and criticize the attacks and destruction (sic) activities of the Taliban in most of their news stories…(and) paid more time, space and focus on the social

and economic impact on people and society whenever the bomb blast or suicide attack occurred' (p.106).

The dominance of peace frames over their antagonists may be a result of sympathy and empathy to the nation which has suffered incalculable visible and invisible damages due to religious or ethno-religious crises. The country is still grappling to contend with the nemesis of Boko Haram which has proven to be one of most deadly terrorists organization world over, causing the deaths of over 30,000 people, destroying property worth $5.9 billion in Borno alone, displacing over 2 million Nigerians and above all worsening suspicion, strangling the remnant of trust and cordial relation among Nigerian citizens of different religious affiliations in addition to the enormous damage done to the country's image internationally (Pate & Idris, 2016). This is besides other frontiers of violent conflict in Niger-Delta, separatist movement in Eastern Nigeria, farmers/herders clashes in North Central, abduction for ransom and a host of other challenges bedeviling the country's progress. So, no patriotic citizen or organization can deliberately add to these national woes. Similarly, this may also be due to the realization by the papers that it is only in relative peace that they can stay in business. For where there is breakdown of law and order accompanied with pandemic violence, it is our survival as humans that will take precedence. Conversely, such coverage may be a corollary of increasing awareness, professionally, of the values, tenets and techniques of conflict-sensitive journalism which is receiving serious attention and advocacy among scholars, practitioners and development workers since the turn of the 21st century.

But the political-economic interests of these newspapers and lack of training in especially language usage and other conflict-sensitive tenets can also be detrimental to peaceful cause as evident in the prevalence of war language and stooping to ethno-religious sentiments, *inter alia*. This has also been proven by numerous previous researches such as Aliagan (2015), Shehu (2014), Okoro and Odeomelam (2013), Pate (2012), Fong (2009), Steien (2008), Siraj (2007), Yusuf (2002), etc.

By and large, the *Daily Trust* has once more distinguished itself as the paragon of peace journalism among Nigerian newspapers for having greater percentage of peace frames; lower percentage of war frames and war language indicators respectively. This coincides with the findings of Shehu (2014), and may be associated to the professional background of the proprietor, managers, editors,

reporters and even columnists. A number of them, including current and the immediate past editors-in-chief, were former BBC journalists, while others like Bala Mohammed are academics-cum-veteran journalists. Another reason may be having been born and brought up in the tinderbox of ethno-religious conflicts (northern Nigeria) which does not distinguish in claiming lives and property; this has obligated the newspaper to be extra-sensitive and solution-prone for the progress of 'its' constituency that is constantly bashed by competitors as the microcosm of backwardness, poverty, illiteracy, child abuse and parasitism, among other negativities.

Again, the newspaper may be striving to reclaim the reputation and glory of *New Nigerian* during its heydays, which according to Kukah (1993, pp.69-72) 'through its editorials, features and reportage, rose to an enviable position. It became one of the most talked about newspapers from this part of the world…. Its editorial excellence was unchallenged in the whole country…(making) Col. Ojukwu, the leader of Biafran army into giving specific instructions that *New Nigerian* vans were to be allowed free access into the rebel enclave during the war, an opportunity that was not extended to all papers.'

In this way also came the relevance of its *No, thank you* policy which is a stride to inculcate and promote ethical standard in the practice of journalism in a profession seriously bedeviled by ethical violation (note: The *Punch* too has one, similar).

Although Wale Aboderin's Punch was able to put its head slightly above the waters of war frames, it generally stooped lower in peace journalism because of arguable lack of conscious training in the art of conflict-sensitive coverage. That is why in each of the two editorials it produced on the subject-matter, one notices the recurrence of 'terrorist' and 'extremist' at least half-a-dozen time. Belonging to the demonizing category, 'for a journalist to use them is always to take sides', according to McGoldrick and Lynch (2000).

Moreover, the newspaper, particularly its editors, operating along Lagos-Ibadan axis, may not appreciate the implication of such coverage on the socio-psychological and even economic wellbeing of the other. Perhaps it may be a deliberate ploy to accentuate 'we'/'them' polarity especially along religious line, in order to retain its economic hegemony in that domain. Hence the front page screaming banner: "CAN calls emergency meeting over Zamfara, Kaduna

Killing" (*Punch,* Aug. 24, 2016), "Probe Pandogari killings, CAN tells Niger govt." (*Punch*, June 5, 2016), "There is a grand plan to wipe out Christians – CAN General Secretary" (*Punch,* July 17, 2016) etc.

But fairly enough, it is not all grim. *The Punch* has to its credit the only feature in the coverage that reveals the psychological force at work in the process of such mob action which any proactive government can take a cue from and preempt the future recurrence of such violence. More so, one of its columnists, Obo Effanga (*Punch*, June 6, 2016) has extended the net of investigation to find out from learned Muslim friends: 'What amounts to blasphemy of the religion or the Prophet? What is the nature of proof of actual blasphemy thereof and what is the appropriate punishment and how it should be carried out? ...' This bid to understand the Other is the only effort by all columnists who wrote on the topic. Similarly, when Abimbola Adelakun, another *Punch's* columnist, lambasted Presidential media team for reference to Bridget Agbahime's Igboness (the octogenarian trader killed in Kano) in a country desperate for national cohesion (*Punch,* June 3, 2016), it can be interpreted as tacit admonition to *The Punch*'s editors that 'you don't say "…Igbo woman stabbed to death in Kano" (*Punch,* June 3, 2016), rather "Blasphemy: Two in Police net over killing of woman in Kano" (*Daily Trust,* June 4, 2016 – note that even this without inverted commas enclosing blasphemy is a verdict that it was in actuality). From all this, coupled with "True Muslims won't kill Christians – Sani" (*Punch,* July 17, 2016), and the proactive "No Christian died in Zamfara killing – CAN" (*Punch,* Aug. 29, 2016), one gets a succor of some sort that the end of the tunnel is not all doom and gloom.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that blasphemy and related conflicts are recurring abysmal issues in particularly Northern Nigeria. The media feast on them for their newsworthiness or precipitate tension thus under the pretext of promoting or protecting freedom of expression – obviously to maximize visibility, rating and profit, consequently. Just as they (the media) serve as instrument of arousing prejudice, promoting division and worsening conflict, they can equally be a means of conflict transformation, resolution and peace building as several empirical researches, (including this) have indicated. But this cannot be left to chance. It requires conscious training of journalists, their editors and proprietors on conflict-sensitivity and its priority over profit. Principles like those of PJ are not only vital to journalists but to the society at large – only in relative peace do

we survive and live to report. Moreover, journalists, as opposed to what is obtainable in Nigeria, must be adequately remunerated to avoid their entanglement in the web of vested interests. On the other hand, as Muslim youths need to be sensitized on how to properly react to blasphemous provocation, institutions of redress need to be equally rejuvenated to meet up with their mandates. All these are possible through collaboration of various stakeholders.

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