

Objectivity in Reporting Conflict and Violence in Multi- Ethnic Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of objectivity is a highly contested phenomenon in mass media practice, particularly in a multi- ethnic- society such as Nigeria. Objectivity in journalism has remained a victim of conflictual conceptualization and definitional pluralism globally. While some media scholars, professionals and the society see objectivity as an impossible task in the mass media practice, others see it as an inevitable tenet of the principle of journalism. Objective journalism attempts to present complete report that is not coloured by the opinion of the reporter, the requirement of government, the excessive control of media owners as well as the idiosyncrasy of the editors. This study, anchored on framing theory of the mass media questioned the much touted media objectivity in journalistic reportage particularly in multi-ethnic Nigeria. Terms considered germane for this study include: nature and forms of conflict and violence, causes of conflict and violence in Nigeria, conflict and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic society as well as objectivity question in conflict and violence reportage in multi-ethnic Nigeria. While the paper noted the importance of fairness, objectivity and neutrality in mass media reportage, it however, concludes that during conflict and violence reportage, objectivity is likely not possible and recommends that journalists should embrace media credibility based on truthfulness instead of chasing elusive objectivity.

Key Words: Conflict And Violence, Multi-Ethnic Setting, Journalism Practice, Objectivity, Ethnic Nationalities

Introduction

Objectivity, fairness and neutrality are the fulcrum of the principles of journalism globally. Objectivity requires that journalists should play by the rules of the game through the exhibition of a high sense of professionalism in their reportage. Since the business of journalism is primarily news gathering and dissemination to the general public, conflict and violence becomes an ample opportunity for them to professionally demonstrate their trade. This is why Nwankpa, (2015) states that covering conflict and violence is a media fare that can task the best of professional journalists. Corroborating this view, Owolabi (2017), while citing Siebert (1963), affirms that one of the major tenets of social responsibility theory is that the media should accept to give priority to news reporting through professional standard of truth, accuracy, fairness and objectivity. It is the opinion of Siebert that journalists' report should reflect the plurality of the society and

avoid actions that may engender conflict, violence and general breakdown of law and order. This is a nuclear task for Nigerian journalists because the country's political system is characterized by tensions that usually come as a result of socio-political, economic and religious distrust among its various ethnic nationalities. Journalists in Nigeria belong to any of these ethnic nationalities with diverse cultural beliefs, religion and political inclinations and, therefore, are sometimes tempted to bend news and information to suit their ethno-cultural beliefs, religion and political affinity during conflict and violence reportage. Aligning with this submission, Danaan (2017:87) notes that reporting ethnic diversity is complex, especially when content providers or those who manage the media share the membership of a given social group. He emphasized that the output of Nigerian journalists reflects this diversity, as their ethnic and religious identities are entrenched,

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(p.87). While supporting this view, Kempf (2002) argues that the way in which the media operate particularly when reporting on conflicts, war and violence often causes them to support those societal beliefs that maintain and escalate intractable conflicts. According to him, this is because journalists usually share the beliefs of the society to which they belong especially those beliefs which enable the society to cope with conflict. He stressed further that the plural nature of Nigerian society has engineered journalists' framing of news that creates borders along ethnic and religion. Supporting this view, Pate (2015) comments that this happens because peoples' words are conditioned to receive and interpret information from the ethnic, religion or other primordial sentiments.

During conflict and violence, information come in different directions, some truth, or half-truth and some totally false. The media is expected to provide the public with up-to-date, accurate, balanced and neutral situation report that will guide the society to make informed decision. Succinctly put, the media is expected to be objective in their reportage. Because the mass media is saddled with the responsibility of satisfying the information need of the public, a high degree of objectivity is required from them. The question therefore, is how objective has the media been in this regard particularly when reporting conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic society? It is against this backdrop that this paper looks into the objectivity question in reporting conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic Nigeria.

Nature and form of conflict and violence in Nigeria

Since the origin of human race, conflicts have become ingredients that make life interesting, competitive and challenging (Gardner 2001). Conflict and violence come as a result of disagreement between two or more people opposing each other and struggling to dominate or take control over issue(s) to the disadvantage of the other. This submission corroborates the view of Coser (1969), cited in Owolabi (2017:98) which described conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, wielding of power and authorities at

the expense of the opponent" (p.98). Linking conflict to ethnicity, Achimugu, Ata-Agboni and Aliyu (2013:68), averred that ethnicity is a phenomenon in form and conflictual in nature and content such that people while agreeing with statement from different ethnic groups see each other as competitors in the quest for resource rather than compatriots. They explained further that this can only exist within a plural political state such as Nigeria with over four hundred languages, (p.68). The description of Achimugu et al shows that it is the relationship between the diverse ethnic groups with their varying socio-cultural, political and religious inclinations that produce ethnicity which is the source of conflict and violence. It is in recognition of this opinion that Owen-Ibie (2002:79) classified conflict into two different categories: manifest and latent conflict. He sees manifest conflict as an expression of grievances which if not well managed will metamorphose into full scale conflict that can degenerate into destructive violence. Latent conflict according to him may come as a result of under-current and subtle strained relationship and misunderstanding. But whether it is manifest or latent, Ibie submits that conflict may be ethnic, religious, communal as well as political. With his submission which classified conflict into four major categories, it is imperative to identify some of the several conflicts Nigeria has witnessed and the categories they fall into which include but not limited to: Kano 1980/1985 (religious/ethnic conflict), Kaduna 2002 Miss world (religious/ethnic conflict), Zangon Kataf 1992 market relocation (political conflict), Plateau 2010 (inter-religious/communal conflict), Ijaw/Itshekiri 1997-1992 (ethnic/ communal conflict), Ife /Modakeke 2001 identity recognition and inheritance (ethnic/communal conflict), Agulere/Umuleri 1933-1999 (communal conflict), Niger Delta 2004 -2019 (political conflict), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) 2012 -2019 (political conflict), Ezza/Eziulo 2016 (communal conflict), Fulani Herdsmen 2015 till date (political and religious conflict).

These among other conflicts have caused the country not only unquantifiable loss of lives and property but continued to threaten the corporate co-existence of the nation. The manner in which journalists report these conflicts contribute to either quelling the crises or exacerbating them.

On the issue of violence, Shaibu and Babatunde (2015), say that violence is as old as man and it is inevitable in any human environment. While stating that the nature of violence differs from society to society, they affirmed that it comes in shapes and in sizes. Violence could be natural or man-made, religious, ethnic rivalry, crime, insurgency and other forms of tragic occurrences that affects natural order of the society. World Health Organization (2002: 58) in describing violence explained that it is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation”, (p. 58). Violence comes when conflict keeps recurring and the issues in question are not addressed through the means of dialogue, the parties concerned may result to violence as an option.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on framing theory of the mass media. Framing is an analytical technique from social psychology that is used to explain the roles of the mass media in defining and refining issues for the general public. It refers to how the media package news and information and present them to the public. Framing theory, propounded by Gregory Bateson in (1972), cited in Odunlami (2017), highlights certain events or issues and place them within a particular context in order to encourage or discourage certain interpretations from the public. This means that through framing, the media exercises a selective influence over how people view reality. Describing the logic and imperative of framing, Odunlami (2017:187) contends that framing as a natural human phenomenon is derived from man’s tendency to selectively choose or decide what portion or quantum of

information, facts or details to present when narrating a story to the public, (p. 187). Buttressing the concept of framing further, McQuail (2005), argues that framing as regards news is done in agreement with some hidden structure of meanings through which the audience is prompted to see the world in a similar manner as the journalists do. To frame according to Entman (1993) is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recombination for the item described. When these are professionally and effectively done, Kostadinova and Dimitrova (2012) affirm that framing sways peoples’ understanding, sentiments, and outlooks towards issues and events in the societies.

Framing theory is therefore, considered most suitable to this study because journalists could easily use it to change reality by framing news and information in such a way that the general public are made to see the structure of meaning in the angle of the journalist by swaying peoples’ understanding, sentiments and outlook towards such issues and events as Kostadinova and Dimitrova observed. Journalists could use framing to change public perception and interpretation of conflict and violence situation depending on the angle the journalist is coming from which usually is tinted towards ethnic, political and religious affinity of the reporter. Journalists do this in order to encourage or discourage certain interpretation from the general public. This made objectivity, most of the time, impossible particularly during conflict and violence reportage. These are some of the attributes of framing theory that made it most suitable for this study.

Causes of conflict and violence in multi-ethnic Nigeria

Conflict and violence has taken a front burner in Nigerian socio-political, religion and economic lexicon. Aligning with this submission, Adetoye and Omilusi, (2015), assert that since the emergence of democracy in 1999, not less than one hundred politically,

ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts have occurred in Nigeria. Some of the causes of these conflicts and violence in Nigeria are: amalgamation, favouritism, corruption/inept leadership, resource control, marginalization, religious intolerance etc.

Amalgamation: In 1914, Lord Lugard, then British Colonial governor brought the Northern and Southern protectorate together against the wishes of the people. Confirming this submission Adetola (2019), citing Late Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1948), stated that:

Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their background, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite, (p.18).

The statement of Balewa shows that the socio-political, ethnic and religious divides which polarized Nigeria and has continued to breed conflict and violence is inherent in her formative years since 1948. Similarly, while criticizing the self-motivated administrative methodology of Lugard, Coleman (1958: 194, Nnoli and Okwudiba 1980: 113), cited in Jacob (2012), stated that the system not only reinforced ethnic divisions, it complicated the task of welding diverse elements into Nigerian nation. This not only heightened tension but also introduced needless socio-political, economic and religious competitive rivalry, suspicion, hatred, lack of trust, discrimination and other forms of divisive instinct that polarized the country along ethnic, political and religious lines which resultant effect is continued conflict and violence.

Favouritism: This is a preferential treatment, meted to undeserving person or group of persons on the basis of ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. Supporting this postulation, Adetola (2019) submits that the various feeling of cheating, exploitations and manipulations by the component units have been a contentious reason for very sharp divisions among the component ethnic groups

in Nigeria. According to him, it is usually the action of somebody favouring their relatives, friends especially in appointing them to good positions, award of contracts or citing and/or relocation of government owned institutions, organizations and parastatals to a particular geographical location based on ethnicity, religion or political colouration. This is a source of conflict and violence in Nigeria because the area or ethnic nationalities who are denied their legitimate rights naturally takes to protest which invariably results to conflict and violence.

Corruption/inept leadership: Corruption and unqualified leaders have impoverished Nigeria and denied majority several opportunities for growth and development. This led to several agitations by the citizenry. There is inequality in the way federal positions and allocation of infrastructural projects are shared among the federating states in Nigeria. Though government established Federal Character Commission in order to create a sense of balance in the sharing of appointment and projects, corruption and inept leadership has made this noble idea unworkable. The failure of government in this regard made ethnic, regional protest and agitation to persist with its accompanying conflict and violence.

Resource control agitation from the Niger Delta region: There is no doubting the fact that Niger Delta has remained the economic nerve centre of Nigeria. The region provides a huge portion of the revenue used by federal government to run Nigerian economy. Laying credence to this claim, Nwankwo (2015) argues that the revenue allocation formula adopted by the Nigerian Government does not reflect the interest of the people in Niger-Delta region where over 80 per cent of the national resources is generated. This evidence shows that the region has continued to suffer untold hardship and deprivation in terms of socio-political and economic equation in the country. Destruction of their ecological system and environmental degradation rank top among the problems confronting Niger Delta region. Confirming this opinion, United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UNDP) and United Nations Environment

Programme (UNEP) (2015, p. 11) writes that the Niger-Delta region has remained impoverished, polluted and under-employed. Buttressing this submission, Amujo, Laninhun, Otubanjo and Ajala (2012, p.267) stressed that both the Nigerian state and some oil corporations failed to shoulder the cost of negative externalities in the region, rather they pushed them to the helpless people of the Niger Delta; and when the people of the region could not cope with the decimating and destructive costs of the negative externalities, they revolted against the state and some oil corporations in the region. In conforming to this assertion, Nwankwo (2015, p. 384) infers that resource control has been the basis of many unending conflicts in the Niger-Delta region.

Marginalization: As stated inter – alia, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic plural society with different socio-cultural beliefs, religion and political ideologies. These paved way for the continued cry of marginalization. The marginalization of some ethnic groups that make up the federating unit is one of the causes of a seemingly perpetual ethnic conflict and violence in Nigeria. People fighting for ethnic nationalities have emerged in the recent time such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East, Oduduwa People’s Congress (OPC) in the South – West, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in the South – South and Arewa Consultative Forum in the North.

Religious intolerance: Religious intolerance between Christians and Moslems is one of the key causes of ethnic conflict and violence in Nigeria. Religion has polarized the nation. It is on this premise that Reynal-Querol, (2002) and Otsby (2008) argue that ethnic and religion are usually at the centre of societal divisions, polarization and conflicts in many countries of the world. Leaders in the country do not see Nigeria as one except for political gains and deprivations. Example is the Boko Haram terrorist organization that sprang up denouncing western education and culture and the recent suspicion of Fulani Herdsmen killing Christians and Muslims

alike which are products of religious intolerance.

Conflict and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic setting

Conflict and violence are media fare for journalists because they are irresistible source of news. In the words of Awofadeju, Taiwo, Akinrosoye, Philip and Adeagbo (2015:10), conflicts generate news and serve as the pillar upon which news reports stand. Identifying with this view, Oso, (2017:27), submits that there is a struggle for media space by protagonists and antagonists in a conflict situation because all sides believe that they need the media to convey information as well as to influence public opinion and build support (p.27). Ajilore and Akarue (2015) while aligning with the submission of Oso avers that media and violence have always constituted an explosive mix. Because journalists are constantly in search of credible news and report, conflict and violence avail them this unique opportunity of news gathering and reporting. Commenting in the same vein, William (1975), cited in Owolabi (2017:97) established that conflict situation is where journalists dramatize their trade.

Reporting conflict and violence requires the best of journalistic professionalism. Evidence have shown that most of the news and reports in both print and electronic that made Newspaper headlines and merit repeat broadcast in the radio and television are predominantly conflict and violence news. Reporting it is not only tasking, energy sapping and risky but also requires a high level of professionalism. This is because conflict and violence not only fray nerves, it also sets emotions high and running in that if not carefully and professionally reported canacerbate conflict and violence which more often than not, snowballs into crisis and sometimes, a full blown war. This caution becomes imperative because with the bloodletting, sorrow and grief that are associated with conflict and violence, there is the tendency for journalists to get emotional while reporting it. Corroborating this assertion, Nwankpa (2015) infers that when emotions becloud the sense of judgment of

journalists, personal bias can get in the way of the news. According to him, beyond emotions, a lot of other factors come to play during conflict and violence reporting which inadvertently limits journalistic objectivity such as socio-cultural and political inclinations, religious affinity, ethnicity, ownership interest, personal deprivations, unfriendly combatants and natives, fear of personal safety, restriction of information etc. Commenting in support of this submission, Pate (2002), identified certain characteristics that are noticeable from journalistic reportage of conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic society to include: discriminatory reporting, out of context reporting, imbalance report, making generalized but unsubstantiated claim, spreading of rumor, use of hate language, un-objective and bias reporting and disallowing plurality of voice and idea in reporting. Citing Zandberg and Neiger, (2005), Oso (2017:86) submits that in such a scenario journalists are often caught up between serving the interests of their professional community one of which must give way for the other. The observations of Pate and Oso are true reflection of journalists' reportage of conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

Relatedly, during conflict and violence, government is always conscious of what the media reportage should look like in order to avoid report that will acerbate the situation. Because of this, the media is constantly censored by government due to some unavoidable security implications which usually handicapped the journalists and weigh heavily on their professional ethnics. As a result, press freedom is removed, reports are censored and information distorted. In this circumstance, objectivity is affected. All these can task journalistic objectivity and throw up a very important question as: "Is journalistic objectivity possible when reporting conflict and violence in a multi- ethnic society"?

Objectivity question in conflict and violence reportage in multi- ethnic Nigeria

The issue of journalistic objectivity is a highly contested phenomenon in mass media practice. Media scholars, professionals and the society are sharply divided on whether or not

objectivity is possible in journalism particularly during conflict and violence reportage. While some see it as an impossible task in journalism practice given to the nature of man; others see it as an inevitable tenet in journalistic rendition in the context of news gathering and dissemination. Aligning with this view, Alemoh and Ishima (2015:181) submit that some have argued that journalist objectivity is untenable and simply utopia while others believe it is an ideal that journalists should aspire to achieve. Making more clarifications on the journalistic objectivity debate, Lichtenberg (2000) and Frost (2007) categorized the objectivity debate into three forms: those who believe that objectivity is possible; those who believe that it is impossible and those who believe that journalistic objectivity is not desirable. Establishing reasons for these categorization, Ajilore, Ojomo and Ige (2012) affirm that no other operational element of journalism has been the subject of heated political and academic debate as objectivity.

Similarly, Nwankpa (2015), citing Merrill, (2002), aligns with this view when he posits that journalism trainers, practitioners and society are divided on whether journalistic objectivity is feasible given the fact that reporters are not mindless, soulless automations who roam about without values, opinions and preferences, simply soaking up reality and spouting it out completely. In the same vein, postmodernism theorist, Baudrillard (1994) cited in Ajilore et al (2012: 47), was categorical and blunt while articulating his line of thought on the objectivity debate when he stated that there is no objective reality. According to him, all there is are the images we get through our points of view. It was entrenched in his argument that an observer brings along his personal feelings, beliefs, past experience, orientations and idiosyncrasies that mediate and colour what he observes and how he explains it. He emphasized further that there is no way people can totally set aside their humanness to see and understand the world as it really is, (p.g.47). Similarly, Nwankpa (2015), in supporting this view cited Christiane Amanpour of BBC, which argues

that when reporting conflict and violence, objectivity is unrealistic and as a result, there is no need for it in conflict situation (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrisiane_Amanpour). Furthermore, while establishing that journalist objectivity is impossible during conflict and violence reportage, Ukiwo (2017), warned that there are conflict entrepreneurs and actors who deliberately manipulate communications to cause maximum harm on the targets of their aggressive mobilizations. These submissions lay credence to the fact that as human, journalists have where their interests and preferences go to and as such are naturally inclined to bias and favouritism during conflicts and violence reportage which make their report un-objective.

However, Denis and Merrill (2002), writing in support of objectivity in journalistic practice, identified three distinct principal characteristics of objectivity as follows: separating fact from opinion, presenting of an emotionally detached view of the news, and striving for fairness and balance - giving both sides an opportunity to reply in a way that provides full information to the audience. Corroborating the support of Denis and Merrill on journalistic objectivity, Mencher (1983), argues that objective journalism attempts to present complete report that is not coloured by the opinion of the reporter or the requirements of the prevailing government. These contradictions and dichotomies among media scholars, professionals and society at large, made journalistic objectivity become a victim of not only definitional pluralism but also a conflictual conceptualization.

Juxtaposing the constraints of journalists during conflict and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic society and the much touted journalistic objectivity in media reportage, one is tempted to ask how practicable is objective reportage particularly in conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria? Reacting to this dilemma of journalists in this situation, Eti (2009) observes that it is hard to talk about conflict without engaging the emotions of the discussants due to the humanitarian implications, especially when a conflict gets violent. It could be observed from this submission that in certain

circumstances, journalistic objectivity is not possible. Whenever this happens, what Martin Bell of BBC calls “journalism of attachment”, where reporters become participants instead of witnesses and chroniclers of events usually play out. Furthering his believe on the impossibility of journalistic objectivity, Bell rules out the possibility of objectivity in war reporting. He posits that objectivity cannot stop the suffering and massacre of innocent civilians. The dilemma of journalists in conflict and violence reporting was further compounded by Goretti (2007) when, irrespective of Bells position as well as other scholars and professionals on the impossibility of journalistic objectivity, opines that objectivity should be maintained. He prefers that journalists should otherwise fall into the ‘propaganda trap’ by not exposing the real interest of the parties involved or the true face of the war.

Taking a critical look at the emotional and psychological trauma journalists covering conflict and violence go through, which usually leave them in the state of dilemma, Richhiardi (1993), cited in Nwankpa (2011), revealed the testimony of Roy Gutman in Serb detention camp and Bosnia war in 1992 that during war and violence reporting, some issues are not equally balanced and does not give the impression that for every argument on one side, there is an equal one on the other. Roy maintained that “fairness doctrine” does not apply equally to victims and perpetrators. NikGowing, one of the renowned authorities on media and conflict reporting, while supporting Gutman’s testimony said that he sees no shame in reporters who, having suffered unspeakable horrors alongside fellow human beings, align their emotions and resentments with these victims and then write vividly about them. (<http://www.wilsoncentre.org/subsites/cpds/pubs/media/medm.htm>). This is why Nwankpa (2015), in citing Christiane Amanpour of BBC, argued that when reporting conflict and violence, objectivity is unrealistic and as a result, there is no need for it in conflict situation (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrisiane_Amanpour).

Obviously it is clear from these submissions that certain circumstance can

make journalistic objectivity to be shoved aside in mass media reportage of conflict and violence particularly in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. Prominent among these circumstances is when a reporter is a party to the conflict and violence he/she is covering. For example, one may be tempted to ask how much journalistic objectivity is expected of a journalist from the Niger Delta who has suffered from the untold hardship and hazardous effect of oil exploration and the neglect by both the government, oil companies and selected few notable individuals in the community; a reporter who has had his/her kith or kin as casualties due to conflict and violence from ethnicity, religion or regional dispersion. Eti (2009) puts it more succinctly when he asks: “how does a journalist stay detached when the land that is hit by oil spillage is his? Or when his roof gets leaking from acid rain that is the direct impact of environmental pollution, a situation caused by the activities of the oil industry? Similarly, how does a journalist from Borno, Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna, Taraba and lately Katsina states etc remain patriotic in their reportage of conflict and violence when they are witnesses to the constant killings of their people and wanton destruction of their property/farmland by suspected Herdsmen with the alleged lackadaisical attitude of government in bringing the perpetrators to book? How do you want journalists not to report conflict and violence accurately in ethnic, socio - cultural and religious crisis where many people were killed, houses burnt and property destroyed in the name of avoidance of escalation of the crisis when the journalist have incontrovertible evidences that the forces government sent to quell the violent crisis between the two opposing ethnic nationalities are siding one against the other and the journalist belong to the side of the victim?

The expectation of government and the protagonist of journalistic objectivity in this regard is that the media must not report accurately and factually any news that will reveal the massacre of people and wanton destruction of life and property during conflict and violence in order to avoid the escalation of such crisis. This is unprofessional because

professionalism in journalistic reportage means that the media must report the news sincerely, honestly – not hiding the truth. Playing down the truth under the guise of not wanting the crisis to escalate even when one ethnic nationality is cruelly and clandestinely sided against the other on the account of political, socio – cultural, ethnic as well as religious affinity among others is on its own “a journalistic un-objectivity”.

These postulations and explanations established that media objectivity is usually depleted by the interest of the media operators. Supporting this opinion, Bratic and Schirch (2007), cited in Nwankpa (2015) assert that the perspectives of those who run the media shape stories they cover. He further affirmed that the media shape what we see and hear about conflicts and violence. According to him, when personal preferences, opinions, bias, and interests of journalists and media owners interfere with what is covered and how it is covered, credibility of media reports are in doubt. Embedded journalists also face a critical challenge of objectivity when covering conflict and violence in a polarized ethnic society. Journalists are embedded when they are specifically and deliberately assigned with forces that government sent to quell crisis or troops at a war zone. This is done in order to control the media. Nwankpa(2015) in supporting this view stated that during the 2003 US –led war in Iraq, Pentagon’s tactic of embedding reporters with the military was widely regarded as an attempt to control media coverage. Corroborating this postulation, Eti (2009:96) states that journalistic objectivity is further compromised through embedding. Buttressing this submission further, he infers that:

The journalists not only merely observed their subjects, but lived their lives and shared their experiences, and those experiences were of such emotional intensity that the form of prose which the journalists use to take the reader into that experience – ‘I was there’ form – provided not only a window to the reader, but also

a door for partiality irrespective of any desire to remain the detached professional outsider, (pg.96).

In these circumstances, objectivity could easily be compromised. This is because journalists may be afraid to do critical and authentic reports on the side that provided the escorts.

Another potent issue that make journalistic objectivity impossible in conflict and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria is the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the nation. Nigeria has over four hundred ethnic nationalities with diverse languages, culture and religion, Achimugu, et al (2013). This naturally created cultural, linguistic and religious problems for journalists reporting conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic Nigeria. The complex dynamics of socio-linguistic, cultural and religious problems involved in this situational reportage limits the knowledge of the journalists in conflict and violence reporting and impedes media participation in peace building and de-escalation of crisis in the country. This has greatly hampered their professional conduct in conflict and violence reportage because of limited journalistic intelligibility in conflict and violence reporting occasioned by socio-linguistic, cultural and religious barrier. Merrill (2002), cited in Adejola and Bello (2014) in supporting this opinion notes that aside being limited in their objectivity by weakness of language, journalists are also conditioned by experience, intelligence, circumstance, environment, physical state, education etc. They infer that, so much as they try to be unprejudiced, balanced, thorough and honest, they simply cannot be.

Parachute journalism is another stumbling block to journalistic objectivity in conflicts and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic society. Wooten (1994), cited in Musa and Yusha'u (2016), described parachute journalism as one of those short notice, short term assignments that suddenly land a reporter in the thick of a crisis with little time for reflection. Expatiating further on this view, Ricchiardi (2006), gave example on how during Israel Hezbollah confrontation of 2006,

many journalists were frenziedly parachuted to cover the conflict. He established that while the parachuted journalists were struggling with logistics, those based in the Middle East were methodologically gathering news, monitoring developments, analyzing the situation and almost precisely predicting the possibilities. He notes that this was because of their depth knowledge of the conflict and the terrain that enhanced their effectiveness, adding that for editors to get the sort of result they presume journalists covering such crisis to produced, the journalists need to have a deep understanding of what underlies the conflict which can hardly be achieved by parachuting them into the conflict.

Ownership interference is another condition that impedes journalistic objectivity in conflict and violence reportage. The mass media is owned by politicians or individual political partisans and political cleavages that belong to one ethnic nationality or the other and practice certain religion. Because they owe and control the media through merger, outright buy out, ownership of the highest share, advert patronage etc, they directly or indirectly influence the report of journalist to their favour. Journalists are under obligation to obey their dictates in terms of news gathering and dissemination as "he, who pays the piper, dictates the tune". By so doing, news and information are distorted; issues that matter to the society are replaced with parochial interest and sensationalized gossip of the privileged few and objectivity thrown into the oblivion. Supporting this view, Hinchey (2006) cited in Baran (2009:15) posits that:

Changes in media ownership have been swift and staggering. Over the past two decades the number of major media companies fell by more than half; most of the survivors are controlled by few media conglomerates. As media outlets continue to be gobbled up by these giants, the market place of ideas shrinks. News and independent voices are stifled.

And the companies that remain are under little obligation to provide reliable quality journalism. Stories that matter deeply to the country's well-being have been replaced by sensationalized murders and celebrity gossip, p. 15).

The above quotation confirms that the mass media is truly under the control and management of the privileged few in the society. News and information dissemination has been reduced to the manipulations and influence of these cliques who owe and control the media outfit. It therefore goes to say that ownership and control has made journalistic objectivity in mass media reportage impossible. The journalists are under obligation to provide news and disseminate information to the society based on the socio-cultural, political, ethnic as well as religious interest of the media owners and those that control them. This poses objectivity question to journalists reporting conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria where interest and opinions are divided on the base line of socio-political, cultural and religious dispersion.

Conclusion

The debate over journalistic objectivity particularly in conflict and violence reportage is not ending any time soon. The subject of objectivity will remain relevant in both academic and professional discourse as a reflection of the dynamic nature of society and parties to the issues at stake. Media scholars, practitioners and critiques will continue to dwell in it as long as the phenomenon lasts. As seen in the few cases mentioned in this study, ethical and social responsibility requirements should usually goad journalists towards objectivity in their reportage. However, this study has revealed some critical elements which usually impede journalistic objectivity particularly in conflict and violence reporting in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria. Such elements include but not limited to: personal preferences, opinions, bias, interests of journalists and media owners, embedded

journalism, government censorship, multi-lingual/multi-cultural microcosm, parachute journalism, etc. These ostensibly queried the much touted concept of media objectivity and thus put journalists in a seemingly perpetual dilemma while reporting conflict and violence in a multi-ethnic Nigeria.

Although there is no consensus opinion on journalistic objectivity in this regard, conflict and violence reportage must be seen to conform to certain professional and ethical standards which will contribute to unity and national integration. To this end, journalists should endeavor to increase their level of journalistic intelligibility, professionalism and embrace media credibility based on truthfulness instead of elusive objectivity.

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