THE POLITICS OF INSECURITY REPORTAGE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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KEYWORDS
Framing, insecurity, media, patriotism, politics

ABSTRACT
Nigeria is faced with different challenges that nearly comatose the security architecture of the country. In the geopolitical North, it started as mere conflict over access to land largely involving herders and farmers. It metamorphosed to gangsterism that was restricted to cattle rustling. The challenge has now snowballed into full-pledged entrepreneurial terrorism where the actors amass wealth through kidnapping, banditry, and other forms of criminal activities. Nowadays, no one is guaranteed of his safety in Nigeria, North in particular. With the use of the Political Economy of Communication, Framing, Social Responsibility, and Agenda Setting Theories, the paper reviewed relevant literature and established how Nigerian media used their organisations to report the phenomenon of insecurity both for and against the country's national interest.The study found that many media outlets, both new and conventional, have over the years engaged inan unethical practice that both exacerbates security challenges as well as threatens Nigeria's corporate existence. It is based on the foregoing that this paper analyses the politics – issues of religion, market, ideology, ethnicity, regionalism, and ownership - that shrouded the coverage of security challenges and the role being played by journalists in fueling or taming the security challenges in Nigeria.This is the major contribution of the paper to the existing literature, as it brought to the fore the character of the media in its reportage of insecurity in Nigeria, and this makes this research unique. Documented literature and participant observationmethods form the basis upon which the paper was constructed. The coverage of insecurity must be married with patriotism to safeguard the sovereignty and corporate existence of Nigeria. It is therefore instructive for Nigerian media to always report insecurity and conflict from a nationalistic perspective, which entails restraint in language use, framing of stories to promote national interest as well as de-escalation of tension.

Introduction

The phenomena of conflict and insecurity are not new to Northern Nigeria. However, since the unfortunate Nigeria's Civil War, Northern states have been witnessing different types of conflicts. With the advent of the present democratic dispensation, the country at large is being drawn back by different crises ranging from ethno-religious conflicts, political violence, and thuggery and of late terrorism, kidnapping, and banditry where the Northern states are also badly affected. The media are interested in these crises as they strive to respond to the calling of their profession and satisfy the fundamental objectives of the field of journalism of informing, educating, entertaining, influencing public policy, and shaping public opinion.

The first and basic function of any media organisation is to disseminate news and information in response to a basic human need – the right to know. The importance of the media in shaping political behaviour cannot, therefore, be overemphasised. This significance of the media made some scholars like Mohammed (2012) dub the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm or People's Parliament. It is stating the obvious therefore that, the media is an important stakeholder in every social system and this is why media engages in moulding public opinion as well as shaping states' policies. Therefore, being security one of the cardinal objectives of every government makes its coverage by the media to be regarded as a fundamental political tool. This is true in Nigeria's political intrigues, as security is a vital campaign tool that is capable of taking away power from a ruling party or assisting an opposition to assume the mantle of leadership. Nigerian politicians therefore strive to have a vibrant and effective media house that would disseminate information, including information on security challenges, which will promote their political ambition. (Jason, 1997 and Sa'idu, 2017).

Since security and its associated traits are important political arsenals that are used in the political struggle in Nigeria, the media, based on its intimate relationship with politics, also participates in the political maneuvers associated with insecurity in Nigeria, hence implicitly or explicitly exacerbating or taming the security monster bedeviling Northern Nigeria. It is important however to note that the media as a social institution is involved in politics globally. The Greek conception of politics offered insight into why the media cannot be divorced from politics. To the Greeks, politics refers to a process by which men debate matters concerning the political community and take action in an attempt to realise the public interest or the common good. Thus, politics is seen as controversial, a process of resolution of conflict through discussion, bargaining, and compromise, (Lasswell, 1950, Bimber, 2003; Anifowose and Enemuo, 1999 and Sa'idu, 2017). Therefore, the media engages in the process of discussions, bargaining, and compromises in the politics of Nigeria, including the coverage of security issues as part of Nigeria's political architecture, as established by the foregoing existing literature.

Nevertheless, many scholars, Pate, Nwabueze and Idiong (2013), Haruna, Shariff and Yusuf (2003), Boorstin (1962), Alex and John (2012) et cetera, have accused the media of unethical conduct while reporting conflicts and other insecurity manifestations. The media often engages in reportage that escalates conflicts, portrays terrorists as heroes, takessides with feuding parties, and reports insecurity through proxy and partisan sources where all these unprofessional and unpatriotic attributes often lead to interloping and dangerous consequences for Nigeria and her corporate existence. As rightly pointed out by the preceding scholars, it is a common occurrence in Nigeria's media practice for journalists to engage in the dissemination of fake news, promotion of primordial sentiment while reporting sensitive security happenings, and above all compromise their integrity in return for token at the detriment of media ethics and harmonious coexistence of Nigeria.

Often, propagandists, who want to use insecurity as a vehicle for achieving political and other goals, manufacture facts and feed the media, and without hesitation, the media feeds the gullible public. In many instances, for example, media practitioners rely on military and local sources to report conflict zones and this leads to the staging of facts for media to report. Boorstin (1962) called this scenario "pseudo-events", a situation where propagandists manufacture facts for political and other gains.

The challenge the foregoing pose to the survival of Nigeria and in particular the media industry made Alex and John (2012) posit that the media have become rumour mongers while covering insecurity. According to them, the media engages in distortion of the truth among other unethical acts like misrepresentation of opinions, quoting people out of context and the selective reportage of parties in conflict (Alex & John2012:29). They further accused the media of using its powers to make its gullible audience to believe that the perspective disseminated is the truth that is the product of investigation gotten from reliable impeccable sources. They asserted that the media in their reportage fan the embers of ethnic nationalism and promote violence. The position of Alex and John (2012) is shared by many scholars leaving a gap in the role that market, ideology, ownership and religion play in determining the character of a given media, especially in the reportage of insecurity, which this research fills. Essentially, Nigerian media often engages in biased reportage for political and economic reasons that is to sell more copies of their newspapers or magazines or generate more subscriptions in their various social media platforms.

In the realm of political communication, this paper therefore examines the coverage of security challenges bedeviling Northern Nigeria and the role of media reportage in exacerbating or taming the monster of insecurity in Northern Nigeria. This study establishesitsproblematique by putting forward the premise that, in Nigeria, the identity of media organisations is largely determined by the location of its headquarters, the ethnic identity, region, religion, ideology or interest of the proprietor, and the main market that the media organisation seeks to serve and patronise, which is a major contribution to the existing body of knowledge as most of the existing literature focus their direction on the role of the media in fanning the embers of ethnicity and regionalism.

Conceptualising insecurity, media and politics

It is paramount in an academic endeavour like this study to situate a few basic concepts in perspective. Although, there is hardly a consensus of scholars on the definition of most conceptsof social sciences, but attempt will be made to offer instructive meaning of the concepts of insecurity, media, and politics because of their importance to the problem under study.

Like many concepts in social sciences, the views of scholars varied concerning the definite definition of insecurity. For some scholars like Wolfers (1952), insecurity is the absence of security. Therefore, insecurity is the presence of threats to acquired values or the fear that such values are vulnerable to attack. Insecurity is therefore a state of fear of attack and injury, which is the anxiety that is experienced when man feels vulnerable and insecure. Kshetri (2010) affirms the foregoing definition when he describes insecurity as a state of being not secure or a lack of confidence in the guarantee of man's safety. However, from Bande's (2015) categorisation of security manifests, it can be deduced that insecurity is the absence of daily life security, environmental security, income security, and the presence of crimes. Insecurity affects the stability of states as well as the well-being of the citizenry.

Media are channels through which information is disseminated. They are among the important social institutions that shape and strengthen the existence of democratic states like Nigeria. According to Usman (2021), media refers to different means of communication. Other scholars like Pate et al (2013) and Christensson (2006) have identified television, radio, newspaper, magazines, the World Wide Web (www) et cetera as types of media that are used for information dissemination. Media, especially in a democracy, influences public opinion and public policy asidefrom its traditional role of passing information, educating, sensitising, and entertaining the citizens. Therefore, media outfits are communication channels that can be used to store and disseminate information.

Politics permeates all aspects of human endeavours. It is on this perspective that Greeks assumed politics to be the process by which men debate matters concerning the political community and take action in an attempt to realise the public interest or the common good. Influenced by the Greek definition of politics, Harold Laswell defines politics as who gets what when, and how, while David Easton sees politics as the authoritative allocation of values. Therefore, politics involves competition for power, governance, a contract between the rulers and the ruled, constitutionalism, sharing of resources, and institutional setting and roles.

Although the foregoing did not in any way exhaust the attributes of politics, they however portray politics as a controversy, a process of assuming power, a process of discharging constitutional roles, a process of resolution of conflict through discussion, bargaining, and compromise as well as a process of authoritative allocation of societal and state values, (Lasswell, 1950, Bimber, 2003; Anifowose and Enemuo, 1999 and Sa'idu, 2017).

The politics of the coverage of security in Nigeria's media operation

Media organisations in Nigeria and other parts of the globe are supposed to operate independently devoid of interference from any quarters to ensure that they effectively discharge their professional roles. However, political interests, certainly, coupled with other interests, have made Nigeria's media partisan while disseminating information, including coverage of various conflicts and security challenges. Media partisanship usually stems from the foundational and ideological orientation that tends to push them to tilt and act infavour of their host regions, proprietors' tribes, and religion or strive to profit from different circumstances, including ogres-like insecurity that is threatening the existential anatomy of Nigeria. Scholars like Oso (2012) and Omu (1978) havealluded to the irresponsible partisanship of the Nigerian media on matters of national paramount importance like the coverage of security challenges facing the country.

It is however fundamental to note that the Nigerian media has been involved in the politics of the country in the period before and after independence and since insecurity and its ugly attributes have become political campaign issues in Nigeria, the media also plays along that path by framing many of their news items on conflict and insecurity with contents portraying political maneuvers and intrigues. This attitude of the media is not a recent development. It has been part of the characteristics of the Nigerian press since the establishment of the first media outfit in the country.

Sa'idu (2017), Omu (1978) and Oso (2012), among other scholars, have established the inseparable attachment of the press and politics in Nigeria and elsewhere. These scholars used history to arrive at their position. It is a fact that the media organisations that were established before Nigeria's independence were meant to inculcate reading culture and create awareness of religious activities, but they later metamorphosed into political platforms. Again, after independence, the three major political parties that emerged were regionally based and each of these parties had its media outfit(s) supporting its manifestos, (Omu, 1978).

Before and after independence, according to the aforementioned scholars, political elites in Nigeria have used various media outlets to wrestle or retain political power. Therefore, insecurity bedeviling Nigeria provides another opportunity for Nigerian politicians to use the media to exacerbate the challenges, largely through "rumour mongering and distortion of facts", as Alex and John (2012:29) posited. Nigeria is indeed experiencing a daunting challenge of the almost collapse of her security architecture, but the reportage of the press on this existential threat is often informed by political interest – a desire to discredit a sitting government, expose its incompetence, even with "distorted" facts and sometimes "deliberate" assertion and mischief are made to demoralise and denigrate the Armed Forces and their personnel, Alex and John (2012).

Media organisations in Nigeria, both print and electronic, have been used, and are still being used, by political elites for the achievement of certain political and socio-economic goals. This is not unconnected with the fact that political and socio-economic information disseminated by the media usually influences policy formulation and implementation, as well as the decisions of readers or audiences.

It is however instrumental, going with Lilleker (2006) allusion, to confess that, political communication is used for the acquisition of governmental power or influencing the media agenda to support the acquisition of political power by making citizens think in a particular direction. Therefore, political communication shapes the perception of citizens over a given issue that the media continuously promotes (Sa'idu, 2017).

There is no gainsaying, therefore, the fact that security challenges striking Nigeria in the face have been mediatised within the premise

of politics mediatisation. Busy and Holbert (2011) said mediatisationof politics increases media influence in all aspects of politics. According to them, mediatisation of politics gives more prominence to the media. The media organisations, therefore, used media logic in their content to influence opinion formation, which makes political institutions and actors takethe media into continuous consideration.Security challenges in Nigeria have since become a logic where both perpetrators, sponsors, and masterminds of the numerous inhuman delinquencies, felonies, and atrocities as well as those saddled with the responsibility of curbing the gory menace struggle for media space, often to disseminate information, images, and messages that are not only propagandist in nature and content, but slanted to achieve evil objectives.

The coverage of insecurity by the Nigerian media has conformed with three out of the four Busy and Holbert's (2011) multi-dimensions of the mediatisation of politics. The first dimension, they said, is where the media is the most important channel of communication and source of information. In Nigeria of today, the importance of the media as a source of information is not in contention. The second has to do with the independence of the media; particularly to be independent of political institutions. This is where the Nigerian press is often found wanting. The third dimension, according to them, has to do with the degree to which media content is governed by media logic or political logic and the fourth focuses on political institutions and actors and the degree to which they are governed by media logic or political logic. How the media, politicians, and political institutions compete and race over coverage of security challenges is enough evidence to buttress the status of the media in the formation of opinion about the ability or inability of the authorities to address the menace.

Social Media, Insecurity and the Role of Traditional Media

According to Brants and Voltmer (2011), the traditional mass media, broadcasting, and the print press are now confronted with a shrinking and increasingly fragmented audience who now concentrate more on the new media largely because of theirtastes and interests.The woes of Nigeria's security challenges are compounded by the inability or incapacity of the authorities to regulate social media, hence they have become dangerous tools that enemies of the state vigorously use to fuel insecurity for political and other gains through demonisation of security forces, dissemination of propaganda and fake news, instilling fear in the citizenry with the releases of barbaric and gory videos and audios and above all showcasing the strength, arsenal and kinetic powers of hoodlums and gangsters that are behind most of the security challenges facing Nigeria. Therefore, the fact that youngsters, in particular, now don't see information provided by professional journalists as relevant to their own lives because of the prominence ofthe internetmakes social media a vital and dangerous ground through which insecurity in Nigeria is exacerbated.

Friedrich (1963) asked what the media, including new media, should do to ensure fair play in a state like Nigeria with over 250 ethnic nationalities where politics is always tense with political actors using every opportunity, including security challenges, to promote their ambition. As the watchdog of society, Friedrich (1963) said, it is expected of the media to give out information and news in a way that will make the public generate their views. In other words, the media must be objective, though contestable, transparent, believable, and credible to play the watchdog role. Based on the foregoing, it is in the interest of Nigeria's peace, stability, harmonious coexistence, and development for the relevant authorities to regulate the operations of the various social media platforms, as many of them have become channels of disseminating the propaganda of the terrorists, bandits and other enemies of the state.

Iliyas (1998), in Ali (2002:45), stated that "the Nigerian press is also known to be sentimental, partisan and one-sided in reporting ethnic, regional, religious and economic issues." According to Ayu (1997), almost right from the start, the press had already shown strong cracks and a preference when in the 1920s the first elections were held and newspapers supported different political factions. The pattern of media ownership and control in Nigeria is one of the factors that often contributes to or causes suspicion, acrimony, and complaints.

Alex and John (2012) have identified political interest as one of the factors that account for the media's, new and traditional, irresponsible partisanship in the coverage of insecurity and other spheres of Nigeria. Other factors include profit motive, editorial endorsement, production values, news services subscribed to, number of days published per week, size of the average week-day news hole, time of publication, and ownership status. These factors, according to them, are paramount in the determination of media behaviour in their coverage of various political phenomena where insecurity and its adherent manifestations are regarded as prominent determinants to who gets what, when, and how, especially during electioneering in Nigeria.

The foregoing factors that determine media behaviour, according to Alex and John (2012), are internal to the media and they interact with external factors, especially uncertainties of the market, to further shape the behaviour of the press. The personality of political actors and the events at hand, in this case, insecurity, are other important factors that combine to produce the output of the press system. However, Alex and John (2012), perhaps, failed to recognise inducement as an important external factor, because they believed in media ethics as well as the assumption that media practitioners are men of integrity who prioritise national interest above self-aggrandizement.

In Nigeria, inducement is one grave impediment to press professionalism. Often, the media is induced to downplay casualty figures of security breaches. Similarly, journalists, as posited by Haruna, et al (2003), receive a bribe to portray enemies of the state as heroes who are fighting against the injustice meted on them. According to them, some political actors in Nigeria wriggle their way to influence an editorial decision of a media house.

Theoretical premise and coverage of security challenges in Nigeria

Many theories can be used to gauge the behaviour of the media in its coverage of Nigeria's security challenges. However, in this study, four theories will be examined to establish their relevance to the coverage of security challenges in Nigeria by the press. The Political Economy of Communication Theory, Framing Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and Agenda Setting can be used for or against national interest to report the phenomenon of insecurity by the media.

The Political Economy of Communication Theory, which generated its impetus from the Marxist-Leninist theory of political economy, entails that the media as a means of viewing systems of communication are integral to fundamental economic, political, social, and cultural processes in society. The political economy of communications theory is built upon epistemological principles. The way we know things stems from the epistemological approach. The theory is therefore based on a realist, inclusive, constitutive, and critical epistemology. It is realistic because it recognises the reality of both concepts and social practices (Mosco, 2009).

Vincent Mosco, who propounded the theory in 1996 and reviewed it in 2009, postulated that the social process of exchange can be referred to as communication where the product is news items, and this brings about social relationships. Therefore, communication and society are mutually constituted. This is why, according to him, business, government, and other structural forces tend to influence communication practices and this has situated communication within the wider realm of capitalism, trade, and the international division of labour. Therefore, the political economy of communication theory was a response to several social and intellectual challenges, including the growth of the media as a business (Mosco, 2009). This justifies the quest for market and profit by the media around the globe, Nigeria inclusive.

Jimoh (2015) studied the framework of media survival in Nigeria with a case study of Punch, Daily Trust, The Comet, and The Democrat newspapers. He established in his research many factors that led to the collapse of newspapers in Nigeria and other parts of the world; among which is lack of patronage due to illiteracy and lack of reading culture among many Nigerians. In essence, media as part of the capitalists' strand needs the market to survive. This market, as postulated by the political economy of communication theory of the media, is found in their constituencies, hence they do all they can to satisfy these constituencies to ensure their continuous existence. Based on the findings of Jimoh (2015) and the postulations of the political economy of

communication theory, media in Nigeria often engages in irresponsible reportage of security menace out of their desire to sustain their "business enterprise", even at the detriment of national interest.

Another theory that can be used to explain the behaviour of the media in its coverage of security challenges in Nigeria is the Social Responsibility Theory. The social responsibility role of the media presupposes that the media is free to effectively discharge its responsibilities, but it should responsibly carry out its expected watchdog role in society. The theory also holds that the media has the right to criticise government and institutions but also has certain basic responsibilities to maintain the stability of society (Des, 2012).

It is based on the foregoing that some media organisations in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world attempt to hold the government accountable. Many media organisations in Nigeria have done that, and are still doing the same. For instance, in its attempt to expose the hidden secret behind the banditry in Zamfara state, the Desert Herald of 19th February 2016 stated thus:

> *The solid mineral resources in the state have been hijacked by highly placed people in the state including traditional rulers… mining has continued to arouse and attract local and international attentions with regard to mining and exploration of these vast deposits in the state…considering the fact that illegal mining is the main business of the traditional rulers and highly placed people in the state…who are always at loggerheads with other artisanal miners (Rufa'i, 2021:14)*

However, Monroe (2006) posited that for the press to effectively execute their social responsibility role, an independent source of revenue must be at their disposal. Monroe (2006) subscribed to the view that internationally recognised media outlets like the New York Times in the United States of America are operating as independent reputable media houses largely because of having independent sources of revenue for their sustenance. Therefore, the absence of an independent source of revenue affects the social responsibility of the Nigerian media, especially their coverage of insecurity.

Framing, as a theory, is used in the characterisation of media reportage. It entails how an issue is characterised in news reports to influence the understanding and comprehension of the audience. The way journalists and other media practitioners preset information by underlying schemas within a given audience can be defined as framing. The way people gather information which subsequently influences their impressions and actions can also be seen as framing. Through framing, many Nigerians believe in the unquestionable nature of information transmitted by the media. Entman (1993:52) states that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."

From the foregoing, many Nigerian media outlets use framing to exacerbate conflict situations and insecurity. The following can justify how media frame news items of sensitive issues like insecurity to achieve certain objectives:

On the theoretical postulation of framing, the Daily Trust newspaper of January 19, 2010, featured a story that reads: "How Jos crisis began - by man on the spot: The crisis that engulfed the Plateau State capital of Jos on Sunday started at Dutse Uku on the city's outskirts when Christian youthtried to stop a Muslim man from renovating his house that was destroyed in the November 2008 riot…." The framing of the above story by Daily Trust newspaper was deliberately done to pass judgment on who caused the eruption of the violence. Without the foregoing prejudice, the newspaper would have simply used "youth" instead of "Christian youth" and "a resident" instead of "Muslim man." (Lalo& Bashir, 2010).

While frame tells the audience or readers how to think about a certain phenomenon through the suggestion of certain frames of reference, the Agenda Setting Theory is inclined to a certain linear of telling the audience or readers what to think about. Busy and Holbert (2011), have advanced the case that agenda-setting is the foundation from which one should approach media influence in politics. Agenda-setting theory is essentially about the

prominence that the media gives to certain issues and how those issues become the subject of discussion of the mass audience. Agenda setting role of the media describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda, that is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important (Scheufele & David, 2006 and Des, 2012).

The phenomenon of insecurity is having its present momentum and currency largely on the account of Nigerian media's resolve to make it a national issue for discussion among the general public. In other words, the media has consistently covered the numerous security challenges bedeviling the country and has succeeded in setting a security agenda for public discussion (Pate, et al 2013). The major assumption of the agenda-setting theory is that the media set an agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most times the picture in the heads of the citizenry, the things they worry and think about are based on what they have seen, heard, and read from the media. Therefore, the media exerts a significant impact on what people think, discuss, or worry about if the media continuously gives prominence and importance to such an issue (Des, 2012).

In a practical demonstration of the postulations of the Agenda Setting Theory, many major Nigerian newspapers have continuously been given prominence to the challenge of insecurity in the country, being Northern Nigeria the epicentre of insecurity, Daily Trust newspaper, whose major "constituency" is Northern Nigeria had, for instance, throughout the first ten days of the month of January 2022 featured major stories in its cover pages on happenings related to security challenges befuddling the Northern states. This is a bid by the newspaper to make the security challenges in the region a public agenda for public discussion that may attract the necessary action and wrath of the relevant authorities.

With a bold and prominent headline, the Daily Trust cover story of January 2, 2022 "celebrated" the killing of two notorious bandits' leaders, and the title reads thus: "How NAF Airstrikes Killed 2 Zamfara Bandits' Leaders, Others", (Abdulaziz, 2022:1). In the same period, the first ten days of the month of January 2022, the newspaper had featured, among others, these prominent stories: "Despite containment measures, gunmen continue violent campaigns in Kaduna", "Katsina Police Raid Another Camp, Kill 1, Arrest 2, Rescue 9 Victims", "Killings, abductions spike: What should be done – Analyst", "Zamfara Massacre: 143 buried as search for more bodies continues: Children, women among victims: More than 2, 000 cattle rustled", "Finally, FG declares bandits as terrorists", "Vigilantes execute 11 'informants' in Zamfara" and "Why Zamfara bandits' kingpin, Turji, released 52 captives", (Liman& Surajo, 2022, Umar, 2022 and Shuaibu, 2022).

Mediatisation of Insecurity for the Exacerbation of a Monster

From the foregoing sections of this study, it has been established that the character of the Nigerian media in the coverage of security challenges that are hunting Northern Nigeria, in particular, andthe country, in general, can be classified into two themes - manifestation of exacerbation and taming manifestation. As established above, in many instances, the Nigerian media acts responsibly to contribute its quota in taming the menace; it also gives prominence to the monster to set an agenda and attract the public and authority's attention.

However, the often "irresponsible" reportage of the media during conflict and insecurity led to research and authoring of many literatures about the monster that the media had become in fuelling crisis, conflict, and insecurity in Nigeria. Mohammed (2012) studied politics and the media in Africa. He said because of the inevitability of politics in every society, people attempt to outwit one another in search of scarce resources, influence, authority, and even power. Within this premise, he cited how the media were used in the events that led to the genocide that took place in Rwanda between July 1993 and July 1994. Apart from Rwanda, according to him, media was also instrumental in igniting civil wars and other conflicts in many African countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Sudan, Congo Kinshasha etcetera.

In Nigeria, Mohammed (2012) said some newspapers and journalists from the Southern part of Nigeria not only maligned Northern Nigeria, specifically Hausa/Fulani, but were instigating a genocide of the Hausa/Fulani similar to what the Hutus did to the Tutsis in

Rwanda. He cited the example of the Guardian and Tribune newspapers, quoting Dr. Reuben Abati and late Chief Bola Ige calling for genocide against the Hausa/Fulani.

In addition to what other scholars established on the attitude of Nigerian media in their coverage of conflict, Alex and John (2012:29) explained further thus:

> *...role of the press in a conflict situation is seen to be that of rumour mongering, distortion of the truth with the intent of destroying a party in a dispute, misrepresenting the opinion of one person for the opinion of a group to which he belongs……subjectively quoting people out of context, reporting from only one side of the conflict and thus misleading the readers to believe that only that perspective is available and right….Media in Nigeria also uses language that is pervaded by the doctrine of ethnic nationalism, dramatisation of conflict situations, and heroisation of violence to sell more copies of their newspapers or magazines…*

Tobechukwu (2014), who studied the coverage of conflict in a pluralistic society by the Nigerian press, observed that the role that the Nigerian press plays in this regard usually breeds conflict and crises. He identified the complex and heterogeneous nature of Nigeria as factors that make the Nigerian press defend the interest of the ethnic or the region it belongs even in conflict situations. He noted that this trend has been on since independence to date.

In their research that centred on the crisis threatening Northern Nigeria, particularly the saga that is now prominently known as the 'Abduction of Chibok Girls', Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015) established that the Nigerian press, even in reporting insecurity that involves human lives, adopts different patterns that suit their interest, which may be ethnicity, regionalism, religion, and other primordial emotions. The reportage of the abduction of the Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, Borno State on April 14, 2014, by the Nigerian press was not an exception. To justify the partisan character of the Nigerian press, which fuels insecurity in Nigeria, Ngwu, et al (2015) said among the newspapers they selected from the North and South, the Daily Trust newspaper reported the issue of the abduction of the Chibok girls largely by using the hopelessness frame, and that, according to the research, has influenced the audience of the newspaper to give the incident a regional perspective.

The accusation that the media in Nigeria, through irresponsible reportage, exacerbates insecurity and conflict is not a recent mantra. Following research on the 1987 Kafanchan, Kaduna State riot, Alex and John (2012) found that the deliberate promotion of the rhetoric of damages done to the Christian communities by The Guardian, The Standard, and The Punch newspapers led to the escalation of the violence in the name of reprisal. Alex and John (2012:69) further blamed what they called "pro-Southern and pro-Christian press" for profiling damages done to the "Christian communities, but ignoring that of the Muslims."

Similarly, a Thisday newspaper's report of November 2002, on a beauty pageant that referred to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (pbuh) led to riots in different parts of Northern Nigeria where lives and property worth billions of Nigeria were destroyed. Many Muslims considered the reports as blasphemous as well as derogatory to not only Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but to the entire religion of Islam. The then President, Olusegun Obasanjo, reechoed what many others ascribed to the media as being insensitive and irresponsible, (Djebah 2002:8).

Another feature that shrouds media character in its reportage of insecurity can be seen in its coverage of the crisis that over the years bedeviled Jos, Plateau State. The intensity of the media's role in escalating the crisis informed the many academic endeavours and efforts, which are meant to bring to the fore the monstrous and atrocious nature of the Nigerian media character in the coverage of insecurity.Higazi (2011), for instance, used a deliberate incitement of the populace to violence by the Plateau State Radio and Television Corporation (PRTVC) during the January 2010 Jos crisis as a clear case to demonstrate the height of media irresponsibility in the reportage of violence and insecurity.

The PRTVC, according toHigazi (2011:25), decided to continuously broadcast an "unprofessional and partisan" statement made by the then Plateau State Commissioner of

Police, Mr. Gregory Anyating, that some "Muslim youths caused a breach of peace by attacking worshippers around St. Michael Catholic Church, Gwong Area, Jos without any provocation whatsoever." This statement, accompanied by Bob Marley's lyrics of "get up, stand up, stand up for your rights" was continuously aired by the PRTVC at the interval of nearly every 30 minutes. The impact of this irresponsible attitude of PRTVC on the crisis can be better imagined.

Such irresponsible mediatisation of conflict and insecurity made many prominent Nigerians add their voices to the right form of attitude that the media is supposed to form while covering conflict and insecurity. Kukah (2012), for example, frowned at how the media "heroinise" criminals by ascribing them to religious toga. He said: "I think the media have to be more responsible in dealing with this very important issue (insecurity)." (Kukah 2012:12) further noted that, "the media are constantly misleading people about Christians bombing Mosques or Muslims bombing Churches. The denomination of the person who is involved in a crime is not important.".

Many media outlets in Nigeria are culpable, in one way or the other, in the escalation of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. A story prominently featured by Daily Trust newspaper, as cited above, as a lead on January 19, 2010, was framed to portray the Muslim community of Jos, Plateau State as victims of the violent conflict that erupted in the preceding day.

Another report that escalated tension in Nigeria was the one also featured by Daily Trust newspaper on August 15, 2021, which reads: "Irigwe youths kill 25 Fulanitravellers in Jos, over 50 missing - Victims Our Members – Miyetti Allah - They're Coming Back Home from Bauchi – Ondo Gov – We've arrested 12 suspects – Buhari order manhunt of attackers - Lalong imposes a curfew." The report further went to reveal that: "At least 25 Fulanitravellers were yesterday buried after they were intercepted and killed by suspected Irigwemilitia in Jos, Plateau State, authorities and witnesses said," (Musa, Mohammed, Ojuola, Ogbonnaiye& Olaniyi, 2021:1).Reports such as those cited above on Jos crisis had on many occasions led to the spread of crisis and insecurity into different states of the North where adherents of faith who felt their compatriots were victimised on the account of their faith went on reprisal spree.

Unlike the Nigerian media that usually heroinise bandits, terrorists, and other enemies of the state in the framing of their news items, in other climes, media works in unison with authorities to nib terrorists and other criminal activities in the bud. Therefore, in crisis and conflict situations, media organisations in other states usually side with the state out of sheer patriotism to defeat their collective enemies. Media in such circumstances becomes a critical mouthpiece of the establishment, as the success of insecurity means failure of the state and the general populace. It is on this basis that Daramola (2013:155) embellished the potential of the media as one critical social institution that ought to contribute to conflict transformation and peacebuilding as well as the duty that is incumbent on the media to counter "stereotypes and misconceptions (through) promoting (of) empathy and depolarising attitudes and facilitating dialogue and understanding."

Conclusion

This paper established that Nigerian media had over the years engaged in certain unethical practices while reporting the monster of insecurity that is bedeviling the country, particularly the geopolitical North. Often, as the paper found, the Nigerian media uses religious, regional, and ethnic lenses while reporting the scourge of insecurity, especially in Northern Nigeria. Security breaches and fissures in different parts of Northern Nigeria are frequently framed to please and gratify the emotions and sentiments of the targeted audiences and readers by giving prominence to the schemas of religion, ethnicity, regionalism, and even the market that the media is serving for profit. Therefore, this informed the near-consensus among scholars that the media isan important stakeholder in conflict resolution; however, while reporting conflict and insecurity in Nigeria, it used to escalate crises by fanning the embers of hatred, abhorrence, and loathing. Peace activists hold that the media ought to report conflict and insecurity from the nationalistic premise, hence the need for restraint in language use, and focus on the projection of angles that promote conflict resolution, Unfortunately, in Nigeria, often, the reverse is the reality, this paper found.

The behaviour of the Nigerian media in conflict situations, as established by this paper, clearly suggests thatthe coverage of conflicts and insecurity is too important a task to be left

to journalists alone to determine its course, especially if the irresponsible attitude of many journalists and media organisations is anything to go by, which is a unique major contribution of this paper to the existing frontiers of knowledge. Similarly, media outfits, in addition to using the framers of religiosity, regionalism, and ethnicity, also set agendas to hearten and gladden their proprietors' interests and ideologies as well as the market they serve to make profit which ensures their continuous survival and relevance.

It is instructive that the analysis of the relevant literature, experiences of the researcher as a journalist as well asother materials used by this work to determine the character of the Nigerian media in its reportage of conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria, Northern Nigeria in particular, revealed that the Nigerian media, as an important social and political institution, should always be guided by the important postulation of the Social Responsibility Theory that: "the media is free to effectively discharge its responsibilities, but it is to operate responsibly to maintain the stability of the society." With this postulation as their guiding principle, the Nigerian media can raise the tempo of patriotism, which is an important salvo in bringing conflicts and insecurity to an end in Nigeria.Safeguarding the sovereignty and corporate existence of Nigeria by reporting insecurity and conflict through nationalistic lenses should be the focus and priority of the Nigerian media.

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