CHAPTER 36

JOURNALISTS' ROLE PERCEPTION IN THE COVERAGE OF VIOLENT FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN FOUR STATES IN CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

Notwithstanding accusations of the news media of bias, sensationalism and others in the coverage of violent conflicts, the literature indicates that the situation has not changed over many years and these accusations have persisted. What could be responsible for this situation? Does it have to do with a lack of understanding among journalists, on what their responsibility to the society is? Upholding the truth, objectivity, accuracy and fairness are among the known canons of journalism which have earned professional journalists respect and the confidence of their audiences. The normative theory of journalism prescribes working for societal good as a major journalism obligation, into which promoting peace fits. However, journalists face a dilemma between upholding the journalism core values which stress accuracy and reporting responsibly so as not to exacerbate tension or conflict. In Nigeria, there are those who accuse journalists and the news media of irresponsibility in the manner they report conflicts. At the same time, some others accuse them of suppressing the truth by 'toning down' the facts in line with the Peace Journalism Model which argues that journalists should make choices that promote peace by leaving out elements capable of aggravating tension or result in conflict. Amid of these contrasting positions, how do journalists perceive their role in the coverage of conflicts? This paper interrogates this using the conflicts between farmers and herders in four states in central Nigeria as focus. It seeks to understand the level of agreement among journalists with the postulation of the Peace Journalism Model in the coverage of these conflicts. It adopts a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews to seek answers to two research questions. The study found that most journalists agree that they have a duty to promote peace, but admit that they face a difficulty in balancing objectivity with responsibility. The paper recommends that journalists should report conflicts accurately but without sensationalising them and go further to do follow-up stories that promote peace or proffer solution to conflicts. It posits that journalists can serve as peace advocates in the coverage of the farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria.

Introduction

Violent conflicts arising from political, religious, ethnic and other social and cultural issues are widespread in different parts of Africa, including Nigeria (Golwa, 2011; Ochogwu, 2011). The conflicts result in killings, displacement and disruption of economic activities which worsen the economic condition of the people, most of whom are poor.

In Nigeria, apart from the Boko Haram insurgency in which a group has unleashed terror on different parts of the country for many years, another major issue of concern is the conflict between farmers and nomadic cattle breeders in different parts of Nigeria. The conflicts have escalated over the past years (from 2010 to the period of this study in 2019) spreading to almost every section of the country.

In particular, four states in the central part of the country namely, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau have witnessed more of these attacks lately. More than six thousand people are reported to have been killed and over sixty-two thousand displayed by the attacks in these states (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). The frequency and magnitude of the conflicts have made some to describe Nigeria as qualifying to be called a fragile or failed state (Ishaku, 2018).

While farmers accused the herders of grazing their animals on their crops thereby destroying their source of livelihood, the herders who are largely nomadic, accuse farmers of violent attacks and theft of their cows (Segun and Jegede, 2013). They also alleged that farmers poison the source of herbage or water for their cattle. Different states in the Central and Southern parts of Nigeria have experienced a lot of these conflicts because of the large population of cattle breeders who are attracted by favourable weather and perennial availability of herbage and water.

Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2018, p.5) note:
> [...] states within Nigeria's Middle Belt have witnessed an increase in casualties of these fractured relationships, crop damage, attack on cattle, and cattle theft/rustling are major conflict triggers that initiate violence between the two groups, which often leads to cycles of revenge attacks.

Conflict is widely accepted as a normal ingredient in human relationships (Golwa 2011). Interactions among individuals, communities and nations often result in conflicts arising from contending interests. Conflict is therefore part and parcel of life and according to Best (2006), conflict is not bad in itself since it can lead to positive developments if well managed.

Conflicts by their nature attract wide coverage by the news media because as Spark and Harris (2011) note, conflict and controversy excite the people hence the news media accord them priority. In line with the objective of making news or information available to their audience, the news media give prominence to stories of conflicts which usually satisfy many of the parameters used in news evaluation. These include the number of deaths, the level of destruction to property, disruption of lives or displacements (Allan 2012). However, the coverage of conflicts by the news media have attracted negative reactions such as, accusation of bias or exaggeration of stories for profit motives and fanning the embers of discord. Journalists are accused of 'framing' the reportage of crises in manners that do not reflect reality or tend to promote some agenda (Galadima 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Many studies on conflicts in Nigeria (e.g. Best and Obateru, 2011; Galadima, 2011; Nwabueze and Ebere 2013; Nwanne 2013) suggest that the news media in Nigeria tend to, as Tumber (2009) claims, over-value conflicts through sensational or biased reportage that exacerbate tension.

For example, Garba Shehu, a Special Assistant to President Muhammadu Buhari in February, 2018, expressed the dissatisfaction of government with news media coverage of the farmers-herders clashes in Benue State and accused a section of media of promoting hate speech. He urged the news media to exhibit better decorum and professionalism in reporting security and humanitarian issues in the country (The newsguru.com).

The above allegation, if true, is contrary to the postulation of the peace journalism model which argues that the news media should de-emphasise violence and focus more on non-violent responses in the reportage of conflicts (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Patindol 2010). According to Patindol (2010, p. 197), peace journalists report in a manner that opens avenues for alternative to violence and war through "more truthful and responsible reporting".

However, critics of peace journalism counter that it would amount to journalists abandoning their primary role as neutral observers and reporters of events to becoming a party in conflicts (Gilboa 1998; Wolsfeld, 2004). Tumber (2009, p. 395) argues that, to follow the prescriptions of peace journalism amounts to journalists taking over the role of conflict mediators and becoming "the third party" in conflicts. How then can journalists contribute to peace building without becoming players in conflicts?

Different literature on the farmers-herders conflicts (see Akapan, Ering and Olofu-Adeoye, 2013; Segun and Jegede, 2013; Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018) have focused more on the cause and effects of the crisis but little in the literature, to the best of the knowledge of this study, has examined the role perception of journalists in the coverage of the farmers-herders conflicts using the Peace Journalism Model as lens. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:
1. What is the perception of journalists in Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau states on their role in peace promotion during conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes?
2. To what extent do journalists in Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau states agree with the postulation of the Peace Journalism Model that they should deliberately advance peace in the coverage of conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes?

Literature Review

Perspectives differ on the postulations of the Peace Journalism Model in relation to the normative role of journalists in society and upholding the journalism core values of truth, objectivity and impartiality. In the face of contending positions, this paper interrogates how journalists perceive their role in peace promotion or in reporting conflicts. First, do journalists feel they owe society any obligation beyond providing timely, credible and reliable information to their audience? Second, do journalists improve or exacerbate conflict situations, and are the propositions of the peace journalism model realistic for journalists in developing countries like Nigeria? This section examines different perspectives on the Peace Journalism Model.

The News Media and Society

The normative theory of journalism, which has many variants, focuses on the ideal function of the news media (the press) in society. The Four Theories of the Press by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) and other social theories (Christians, et al., 2009; McQuail, 2013; McQuail, 2005; White, 2009), all focus on the relationship between the press and the society. Normative theory explicates ideals which include news values, the standard of news, journalists' role perception, representation and accountability (Christians, et al., 2009). The different versions relate to the self-chosen social purposes of the news media which include the promotion of integration, cohesion and maintenance of social order. McQuail (2013) argues that journalism is deemed to have a responsibility to the public

despite the right to publish. "[…] the view that news media have a part to play in society is an inherent and important component of the image the press has of itself as an institution" (p. 22).

In furtherance of these purposes, journalists strive to uphold the ideals of 'good journalism' which stress objectivity, fairness and accuracy (Hanitzsch, 2007). These ideals identify what ought to be the role of the news media in society and generally expect them to work for the good of society (McQuail, 2010). Journalism is also seen as vital to the effective functioning and survival of democracy which made it to be accorded the unofficial tag of 'the fourth estate of the realm' (Asp, 2007). In line with these principles, objectivity and truth seeking have become accepted norms or a kind of occupational ideology which journalists try to uphold (Schudson and Anderson, 2009).

However, adherence to these ideals differs from place to place. Hallin and Mancini (2004) observe that the media systems in different parts of the world dictate journalistic norms and cultural orientations. This tends to dismiss the notion of any 'universal' journalism standard. McQuail (2013) subscribes to the argument that the diversity of national circumstances make it difficult to talk convincingly about universal journalism principles. He nonetheless, asserts that there are general guiding principles of journalism and what should be its obligations to society. Christians (2015) concurs, postulating that shared humanity dictated by "creatureliness as lingual beings" (p.68) made certain universals possible. Despite Kruger's (2016, p.22) claim that the possibility or reality of asserting universal journalism standards "in a fractured world is doubtful", objectivity, truth and impartiality feature in many ethical codes of journalism bodies in different parts of the world (McQuail 2013). Also, there appears to be little debate on the need for journalists to work for the good of the society in which they operate. This paper aligns with the position that while there may be no global journalism culture, certain ethical codes such as truth and objectivity guide journalists in trying to win and retain the confidence of their audiences who look up to them for credible information. However, it believes that this should be done in consonance with their respective cultural realities. Different countries in Africa, for instance, have peculiarities and circumstances which require a media system suited for them. Conflicts which worsen the people's social and economic wellbeing are part of these peculiarities, and peace journalism advocates consider the model relevant to address them.

The Peace Journalism Model

Peace journalism developed from the works of John Galtung who is described as the 'father' of peace studies (Lynch 2012). It arose as an alternative to 'war journalism' following what Tumber (2009) called a shift of scholarly and journalistic attention to developing new paradigms of conflict coverage. Peace journalism explores alternatives to conflicts in reporting news (Lee, Maslog and Kim, 2006). Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) assert that peace journalism is at work whenever editors and reporters "make choices of what to report, and how to report them [...] that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict" (p. 5). The definitions suggest that journalists can promote peace by the manner they choose to report conflicts.

Peace journalism is concerned with getting journalists to be more involved in the resolution of conflicts through their journalistic duties. It expects the news media to attach greater value to non-violent responses in conflict situations and to stop "over –valuing" violence (Tumber, 2009).

Lynch and Galtung (2010) compare peace journalism to 'health journalism' which not only draws attention to disease, but focuses on causes as well as possible preventive and curative measures. The analogy suggests that journalists could report conflicts (draw attention) and also explicate the causes and solutions (preventive and curative measures) to conflicts.

However, critics of the peace journalism model see this as an anomaly asserting that it would amount to journalists getting involved in conflicts (Gilboa, 1998; Loyn, 2007; Hanitzsch, 2004; Tumber, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 2004). For instance, Loyn (2007) contends that pursuing peace journalism turns reporters into 'players' in conflict which contradicts the principle of objectivity and impartiality which journalists should uphold. Hanitzsch (2004) supports this position suggesting that peace journalism negates the basic principle of professional journalistic reporting which emphasises objectivity and neutrality. Wolfsfeld (2004) and Gilboa (1998) similarly assert that peace journalism turns the news media into active agents rather than impartial conveyors of information.

> "The accepted norm for the individual journalist based on their professional values is that they should adopt a neutral role in reporting conflict, avoiding bias and striving for objectivity, thus refraining from advocating or defending the position of either side [...] the danger for journalists is that they can become the third party, a role that is

legitimately reserved for conflict mediators rather than reporters (Tumber, 2009, p. 395)".

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), counter these arguments, asserting that peace journalism does not propose ignoring violence but is rather interested in how violent events are framed. This tends to support Gardner's (2001) position that the way conflict is reported by the news media can have a strong influence on the parties. Lynch (2008) critiques the objectivity concept as unhelpful to peace. He faults it as a template for conflict by favouring 'event' (drama) over process (structure) and for 'dualism' which fosters a win-lose situation. Shaw (2011) shared this view noting that, the news media tend to pursue 'dishonest' or 'propaganda' journalism "which fits the problematic war journalism model" as against "honest journalism" which fits the peace journalism model (p.364).

Lynch's (2006) explanation that, the peace journalism model focuses on what editors and reporters can do to promote non-violent responses by placing the responsibility of the choices made squarely on the shoulders of individual journalists and editors, has also been queried. Hanitzsch (2007) and Phillips (2006) wondered why individual and voluntary perspectives of reporters and editors should override the structural perspectives in executing peace journalism.

It is difficult to totally dismiss the arguments of critics of peace journalism despite this paper's support for peace journalism. For example, can the role of citizens (non-journalists) who now gather and disseminate information of happenings (including conflicts) via the internet be ignored? Would a journalist who 'tempers' a report to suit the peace journalism model not be undermining his or her credibility if the raw facts are gotten from citizens' reports? On the other hand, given arguments that the reportage of conflicts can exacerbate violence (Galadima 2011; Ochogwu 2011) should journalists ignore the effect of their journalistic activities on society? Should they not be bothered if, as it is claimed, their reports worsen conflicts?

This paper contends that the well-being of society should override other considerations in line with normative arguments which the peace journalism model shares. By reporting conflicts as objectively as possible and making choices that would diminish rather than inflate tension, journalists would be making a better society. Moreover, if as has been argued, the objectivity principle is an ideal which is difficult to achieve, should it not be employed in the interest of the society as the peace journalism model argues? The next section examines the concept of objectivity in journalism.

The Objectivity Principle

A major criticism of peace journalism as has been discussed, is that it negates the objectivity principle of journalism. Truth and objectivity are core journalism values that have endured despite differences in the media systems operating in various parts of the world (Spark and Harris 2011). Walter Lippmann identified as the most forceful spokesman for the truth and objectivity ideal, was cited by Shudson (2008) as urging journalists to seek for evidence and verify information without withholding the limits of available information. The objectivity concept is another subject of intense academic debate (Ochogwu, 2011; Shaw, 2011).

Allan (2010) quoted Forgal Keane, a respected former BBC foreign correspondent as having emphasised the importance of reportorial integrity as a standard journalism norm. To Keane, "the fundamental obligation of the reporter is to the truth" (p. 71). Spark and Harris (2011) equally stress the importance of upholding the truth in journalism practice if journalists must convince their audiences that they are trustworthy. These views tend to present journalistic output as true, impartial and objective, but is this really the case?

Some scholars have indeed argued that, the truth and objectivity claims in journalism remain mere ideals that are unrealisable (see e.g. Davis, 2008; Hanitzsch, 2007; Obijiofor, 2009). They view the objectivity doctrine as hypocritical and pretentious when journalists know that it is difficult to attain. Obijiofor, 2008, p.181 contends:

> "Journalists, whether they acknowledge them or not will always have feelings and opinions in response to the story they are covering. Trying to ignore or section off those feelings and opinions can lead them to distort, without fully acknowledging it even to themselves, decisions they make about what to cover and how to cover it".

Allan (2010) shares this view submitting that how news events are framed by journalists entails a selection process influenced by various factors. Similarly, O'Neil and Harcup (2009) posit that news values cannot be examined without looking at the occupational, ideological, cultural, economic and political considerations that shape them. On their part, Onyebadi and Oyedeji (2011) faulted the impartiality argument as incongruous with journalism's expected role of working for society's good. They posit that journalists are expected to serve as society's moral witnesses and should not be 'objective' bystanders who just watch and report the collapse of humanity.

The arguments for and against the objectivity concept have their values depending on perspectives. This paper submits that while objectivity might be difficult to achieve, the news media still need to demonstrate some level of fairness and balance to remain credible and retain the confidence of their audiences. Since members of the audience develop trust in the news media as a source of credible information (McQuail 2013), they should strive to be as impartial as possible even if they cannot be completely objective. Even then, also relevant is the social dimension raised by Onyebadi and Oyedeji (2011) on the responsibility of journalists not to watch society collapse while pretending to be objective. In other words, societal well-being should not be neglected on the altar of 'objectivity' and objectivity could be tempered for the good of society.

If objectivity remains an ideal which is not completely attainable, would it not serve society better for journalists to exercise their 'choices' (Allan 2012) for the good of the society in line with journalism's commitment to championing public interest? Or as Allan (2010) suggests, should journalists "not abandon the pretence of being 'unbiased' altogether?" (p. 269). This paper concurs with Gans' (2003) proposition that journalists should be responsive to the needs of their audience in the manner in which they report events. This perspective aligns substantially with the contention of the peace journalism model which encourages journalists to promote peace by the choices they make on what to or not report. If peace is necessary for development (Best 2006), promoting peace could be a way for journalists to demonstrate responsiveness to the needs of the audience as Gans proposed.

Peace Journalism in Practice
Despite criticisms of peace journalism, evidence shows that peace journalism is gaining acceptance among journalists in different parts of the world (Rogers, 2008). Lynch and McGoldrick (2012) report that efforts to promote peace journalism have resulted in some journalists consciously adapting it in their work, although they admit that a larger percentage of journalists are yet to do so. They found this in a study which examined the nature and extent of different effects generated by "adjusting the framing of familiar stories from the news media to display characteristics of war journalism and peace journalism" in Australia and the Philippines (p. 1043).

Similarly, Kempf (2007) studied media effects in a content analysis of newspaper articles on the conflict in former Yugoslavia and found that the publications exhibited escalation-oriented moderately and more strongly, de-escalation framing characteristics. He also found that de-escalation texts had a higher degree

of acceptance among interview respondents, concluding that the results favoured peace journalism.

In a different study, Lynch (2012) claims that many journalists in Indonesia adopted what they called "journelismedama (peace journalism)" following the outbreak of violence after the fall of the Suharto regime, which the news media were accused of fuelling. He reported that following the lifting of the restriction placed on the coverage of community tensions, journalists and the news media collaborated to promote peace and mutual understanding through the practice of journelismedama. Coronel (2000) also found that the Philippines Daily Enquirer, the biggest newspaper in the country, contributed to ending martial law through the pursuit of peace journalism.

While the above examples might seem insignificant to make any claim of a wide adoption of peace journalism, they nevertheless, show that the argument that peace journalism can de-escalate tension and promote peace have some merit. This is probably why Wenden (2007) views peace journalism as a neglected variable in the analysis and prescription of solutions to conflicts (cited in Lynch, 2008). The critical issue remains how journalists can balance between pursuing or promoting peace without becoming players in conflicts as critics of the peace journalism model have pointed out.

News Media Coverage of Conflicts in Nigeria

As pointed out earlier, violent conflicts are rampant in different parts of Nigeria. Political, social, cultural, religious and economic issues often generate tension among different groups which degenerate into violence (Best and Obateru, 2011). The coverage of these conflicts by the news media have been criticised by many commentators who blame them for precipitating more violence.

Golwa (2011) who once headed the Institute for Conflict Resolution in Nigeria for instance, argued that the news media stokes recurring conflicts in different parts by the manner in which they cover conflicts:

> "Despite the strategic role of the media in conflicts, conflict resolution and peace building, the emphasis has been on the negative without considerable attention to the positive role (the) media and its practitioners can play in ending conflicts and promoting peace (p. 89)".

Golwa adds, however, that similar news media culpability had been established in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and other places, an observation that suggests that this is

widespread phenomenon. Ochogwu (2011) made similar observations in an assessment of news media coverage of ethnic and religious conflict in Jos, Central Nigeria blaming them for fueling the conflict. "The objectivity of the media became subjective [...] The media with its power can get both state and non-state actors to act and make peace happen" (p. 16).

In a similar study, Galadima (2011) notes that the concentration of the news media on the violent aspects of conflicts and less on peace building distorts reality, making people to see conflict as pervasive and peace as abnormal. Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013) also confirm that the news media in Nigeria tend to worsen the state of insecurity by reporting conflicts in ways that aim at maximising profit and boosting audience base and less concerned about fostering peace.

Both Ochogwu (2011) and Galadima (2011) submit that, the news media ought to take a more peace-oriented stance considering their influence on the audience. Ochogwu described the news media as key pillars in peace building through communication that reduces violence and opens avenues for dialogue and confidence building among conflicting groups. Galadima concurs, noting that the news media can promote peace by providing channels through which different parties in conflicts could be heard or communicate with each other. Their observations tally with the position of this paper that the news media can contribute to peace building.

Methodology

The qualitative research method is adopted for this study, using semi-structured interview as instrument. Qualitative research, is hinged on the social constructivist worldview and is utilised to explore and understand how individuals or groups perceive a social or human problem. According to Creswell (2014, p.4):

> "The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysed inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of meaning of the data".

Being a perception study which focuses on the way in which people make sense of their world (Jibril, 2010), semi structured interviews were held with 20 journalists (five from each state) in Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau States to get their views on issues related to the research questions. Six prepared questions served as guide for the interviews, while additional questions were raised as necessary during the interviews.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed to get a pattern of meaning of participants' views on the issue being studied. The responses of the participants were interpreted bearing in mind that their background, personal, cultural and historical experiences shape their perspectives.

Findings
Four key findings emerged from the data:
(a) Participants agree that journalists have a role to play in peace promotion as propounded by the Peace Journalism Model.
(b) A majority agreed that they take deliberate actions to promote peace in the course of their journalistic duties, but without sacrificing their primary responsibility as journalists.
(c) Journalists face a dilemma in upholding journalism core values such as truth and objectivity on one hand, and peace promotion on the other while covering conflicts.
(d) Reporters are not the sole determinants of how stories on conflicts are slanted, Editorial and ownership factors play key roles.

Discussion of Findings
As explained, data for this paper were generated from semi-structured interviews with journalists in four states to get their views on what they perceive as their role in the coverage of the farmers-herders clash in relation to the Peace Journalism Model. An interview guide of six questions was the primary instrument while additional questions followed as necessary in seeking answers to the two research questions.

The findings are discussed below in relation to the research questions.

Research Question One (RQ1) - *What is the perception of journalists in Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau states on their role in peace promotion during conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes?*

From the data generated, all the participants agreed that journalists have a role to play in peace promotion even though they differ on how this plays out in practice. While some assert that journalists should downplay issues capable of aggravating conflicts, even if it means toning down certain facts, others contend that facts should be reported accurately without sensationalising them in a manner that could trigger further violence.

spondent 2 stated for instance:

"I believe it is a fundamental responsibility for us journalists to promote peace because without peace, there can be no development. But we also have a responsibility to be as objective and truthful as possible so as not to misinform our audience which relies on us for reliable information. So, while I agree with the peace journalism school that we should work for peace, we should do it with caution to sustain people's confidence".

Respondent 2's view and those of other respondents who shared this view, supports the position that journalists should uphold their professional values and remain neutral in reporting conflicts (Tumber, 2009). On his part, Respondent 17 subscribes to the proposition of the Peace Journalism Model noting, "We owe a duty to society to work for peace and we will be failing in our responsibility as journalists if we fail to do this". Respondent 18 and some others do not see anything wrong in ignoring or downplaying facts that have the potential to worsen a bad situation viewing it rather, as being responsible. Other respondents agreed with this position which aligns with those of advocates of peace journalism. The Peace Journalism Model as has been stated, advocates that journalists should make choices that downplay violent responses to conflicts and play a more constructive role in reporting and resolving conflict (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Tumber, 2009).

Some of the respondents cited examples of specific actions they have taken to advance peace in the course of their journalistic duties to justify their belief in the Peace Journalism Model. These, according to them, include writing news reports or analyses to warn of impending conflict or to draw attention to conflict-prone activities:

"I can say without fear of contradiction that we have been doing our best to promote peace through news stories, features, commentaries and other programmes. Some of us have witnessed violence and its consequences and have become vanguards of peace even as journalists (Participant 13)".

A majority disagreed with the view that journalists fuel or worsen crises by the manner they report conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes. They contend that certain facts concerning a matter cannot be ignored by a good journalist in a competitive environment. "No matter how much you believe in peace journalism,

there are certain facts you cannot ignore because if you fail to report them your colleagues will do and this might put you in trouble with your bosses" (Respondent 7). Some others nonetheless, admitted that some journalists, for different reasons, sensationalise or doctor facts, but insisted that such exceptions should not be used to assess every journalist.

Findings 'a' and 'b' which states that "participants agree that journalists have a role to play in peace promotion as propounded by the Peace Journalism Model" and "majority agreed that they take deliberate actions to promote peace in the course of their journalistic duties but without sacrificing their primary responsibility as journalists", therefore answer RQ1 confirming that journalists perceive that they have a role to play in promoting peace during conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes.

Research Question Two (RQ2) - To what extent do journalists in Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau states agree with the postulation of the Peace Journalism Model that they should deliberately advance peace in the coverage of conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes?

This research question was a response to the argument that adherence to the postulations of the peace journalism could make journalists become parties in conflicts. Tumber (2009) for instance, avers that journalists should adhere to their professional values of impartiality and neutrality or run the risk of being seen as third parties in conflicts. Respondents were asked if they agree with the above position and which weighs higher between peace building and strict professional values while reporting on conflicts.

Most of the respondents were not categorical about a particular position. They supported a balancing of the two – promoting peace while not abandoning completely, journalism values. A few described it as a dilemma. The respondents' ambivalence tends to support Pantidol's (2010, p.197) position for journalists to report conflicts in a manner that opens avenues for alternatives to conflicts through "[…] more truthful and responsible reporting".

These responses from some of the participants exemplify this point:
> *"This is a difficult question. I think what we do is trying to balance the two. We report the two but in a responsible manner. I will rather write that 'unknown gunmen' attacked a village than report categorically that it was Fulani herdsmen that did it when I know this can provoke reprisals"* (Participant 4).

"I adhere to journalism news values. I am a professional and the quality of the reports I write determines my rating so, I apply the core news values in writing my reports while being careful not to escalate the conflict" (Participant 17).

However, some of them pointed out that as reporters, they do decide which stories get published and how they are presented. They noted that the management, proprietors and editors of news organisations sometimes determine this. Thus, the data as summarised above support findings 'c' and 'd' which state that "journalists face a dilemma in upholding journalism core values such as truth and objectivity on one hand, and peace promotion on the other while covering conflicts" and "reporters are not the sole determinants of how stories on conflicts are slanted, Editorial and ownership factors play key roles".

Conclusion

This paper sought to establish the perception of journalists on the postulations of the Peace Journalism Model that journalists should, among others, promote peace by making choices that downplay violent response to conflicts, using the farmers-herders conflicts as case study. It examined various perspectives on the model in the literature upon which it formulated two research questions to guide the study. Semi-structured interviews were held with journalists in four states in the central part of the country where the farmers-herders conflicts have been recurring, to generate data for the study, based on the findings, this paper submits that journalists can report conflicts such as the farmers-herders clashes as objectively as possible but in a manner that would not exacerbate the situation, Apart from careful word choice journalists could do follow-up stories, features, analyses and other programmes that promote peace in line with the Peace Journalism Model.

This paper and similar other studies on peace journalism cited have thus affirmed that the model has the potential to contribute to peace. More research on other aspects of peace journalism would, no doubt, illuminate further, issues relating to the model.

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