Peace Journalism, Panacea for Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

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Abstract: There is no doubt that security and peaceful atmosphere lead to national development in any society. Unfortunately, peace eludes many societies because of factors such as greed, lust for power, unequal access to resources, oppression of minorities and poverty among others. Conflict, however is a natural phenomenon but if it degenerates to violence and terrorism, it becomes catastrophic. This is the stage of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria today. Considering the power of the media, this paper focuses on peace journalism as a panacea for reconciling members of Boko Haram with Nigeria as a nation. This is a theoretical paper which focused on Agenda Building theory and Diffusion of Innovation theory. A lot of useful recommendations were made, one of which is that, the entire Nigerian Society should cooperate with the media and fight Boko Haram the ‘Ebola Way’.

Key words: Book haram • Nigeria • Peace journalism and Insurgency

INTRODUCTION

Peace is absence of war, fear, threat, anxiety, suffering and violence. It involves activities that lead to sustainable development either directly or indirectly. Peace is a value and necessary ingredient of security of life, property and meaningful development [1]. On his own part, Waiss (1993), [2], states that absence of peace would create general insecurity, disorderliness and lawlessness and gives room for destruction of lives and property.

Corroborating the above points, Wilson (2012), [3], opines that humans, animals and plants thrive best in conditions of peace and tranquillity. The reality is that these twin ideals continue to elude human kind for several reasons such as personal, group, communal, social ethnic economic, political etc. Furthermore, (Nwanne, 2009), [4], states that peace is essential for creating the right psychological and emotional condition for proper human relationship that can produce a collective resolve for a progressive human society.

However, Adedayo (2015), [5], posits that peace does not exist in the absolute absence of conflict. No matter how peaceful a society or man may be, there would be a type of conflict or the other. This confirms the position of (Wilson, 2012), [3], that conflict is a normal phenomenon because, there is no society that exists without any form of conflict, but when it is allowed to degenerate into violence and terrorism, it becomes devastating. The world has witnessed violent and terrorist acts in South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Northern Ireland, India, Pakistan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, United States etc. Individuals, groups, organisation and nations have been involved in these acts that leave mankind in pathetic states.

Recently, Nigeria as a nation is not left out in the terrorist act. Initially Nigeria has been held hostage by ethnic militias pressing for increasing inclusion in the power architecture of the state, later by Niger Delta militants demanding increase in stake in Nigeria’s Petro Dollar business and most recently the Islamists (Boko Haram) wishing to enforce perhaps the strictest observance of the Sharia [3].

The present situation of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is a tumour and if efforts are not made to surgically operate on it on time, it may become malignant [6]. It is on this premise that this paper is anchored on “Peace Journalism as a Panacea for Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria.” The peace media initiative is borne out of the fact that there is conflict and the need has arisen for such conflict to be resolved [7].

Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored on the Agenda-Building theory and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The Agenda Building Theory is closely related to the popular Agenda Setting Theory, which stipulates that
the media might not tell people what to think but what to think about. The media in Agenda setting therefore pick topics, selectively collate the materials and selectively have the materials presented [7]. Explaining the theory further, Agbo and Ukozor (2000), [8], opine that though the media may not change person’s point of view on a particular issue but may change a person’s perception of what is important. Graber (1984), [9], who initiated this theory, explains that, in many issues, the media manipulate political climate of action. Agenda building theory goes beyond Agenda Setting theory because it focuses not only on how media audience perceive news stories but evaluates the appropriateness of the proposed materials presented [7].

Graber, therefore, distinguishes the theory from Agenda-Setting thus: “the media set the public agenda when they are successful in riveting attention on a problem. But they build agenda when they supply the context that determines how people will think about the issues and evaluate its merits.

Unlike the Agenda-setting theory, the agenda-building theory is based on three steps: first the media capture and publish stories they consider too important to the mass media audience; second, they give a high degree of attention to the issue at stake thus building into an agenda and third, they provide the context under which such issues should be examined through creative use of language [10].

To further explain the concept of Agenda building theory, Akpan and Ekwueme (2012), [10], posit that: the media should go beyond mere reportage of the story dig up the facts of the matter and reporting them in such a way that they guide the public on how the issue reported should be viewed by making conclusion [10].

Furthermore, the words of Segmour Topping, former director of editorial development for the New York Times throw more light on Agenda Building Theory. As president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, he stated:

There is an agreement in our profession that the press has furnished enough facts. The question is whether the press has provided the understanding of what those facts mean to enable the citizenry to cope with the problem confronting them?

The Mass Media and Terrorism: The definitive term ‘mass media’ in this research focuses on the print and electronic media. The print media include newspapers, magazines and books by extension posters and handbills.

On the other hand, electronic media refer to radio, television and cinema. The mass media and journalism are used interchangeably in this research work.

Basically, the media inform, educate entertain, socialize, mobilize, persuade, set agenda among other things. The common axiom which says that “the pen is mightier than the sword” still holds in the consideration of issues till today. The pen under reference is the mass media [11].

The power of the media cannot be over-emphasized that is why Thomas Jefferson once declared that he would prefer newspapers without government to a government without newspapers [12]. Corroborating this fact, Abiodun (2012), [11], states that the media can cause war and at same time serve as an instrument of resolving conflicts.

Anyanwu (2004), [13], lends support to this when he states that the mass media can both generate or solve conflicts, the former through inciting coverage, inadequate reporting, non reporting at all or through objective and balanced reportage.

Stressing the role of the media, Momoh (1981), [14], states that a duty is imposed on the press to ensure that political objectives of Nigeria are achieved in accordance with the motto which is “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress”. The interest of this research is using the mass media to embark on peaceful campaigns that will bring both Nigerians and Boko Haram members together to dialogue in the interest of peace and development. In the absence of peace, there will be no development. This is the position in areas where Boko Haram activities are manifest in Nigeria, many lives and property are destroyed because peace eludes them.

Awake (2006), [15], defines terrorism as “the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.” When terrorism is discussed, it often centres on the damages that it causes the society. Little attention is paid to the damage caused by the way the media present the issues of terrorism to the public. The way mass media in Nigeria at times present the issues of terrorism and security is an invitation to more groups to emerge. Majority of the media practitioners take propaganda, stereotype and biased reports for peace journalism, thereby promoting crisis rather than peace. This is majorly because in Nigeria the media are divided along ethnic and religious groups. This has led to the death of
many journalists. For example Ola (2001), [16], reports that gunmen believed to be members of Boko Haram sect killed a journalist, Zakri Isa of NTA, Maiduguri, for what the group described as biased reporting of their activities. On the other hand security agents and government officials are not always comfortable with some journalists that are objective in their reportage because of security reasons and at times they harass the media practitioners.

However, despite the challenges of journalists, they are expected to provide the public with the right to know what is of threat to them. This will of course enable them to make informed decision or contributions in solving their problems.

Supporting the above, (Mbazie and Nna, 2012), [17], opine that the media should not only report the bomb blasts and consequent insecurity but should provide context, meaning and significance to the incessant bomb blasts.

**Peace Journalism Initiative**

**Origin of Peace Journalism:** Peace journalism follows a long history of news publication, originating in non-sectarian Christian peace movements and societies of early 19th century which published periodicals sectarian organisations also created publications focused on peace as part of their proselytizing in the 19th century. From the 20th century, a prominent example of sectarian journalism focused on peace was Dorothy Day’s Catholic worker [18]. Norwegian sociologist, peace researcher and practitioner Johan Galtung proposed the idea of peace journalism for journalists to follow to show how a value bias towards violence can be avoided when convering war and conflict [19]. Christian organisations such as the World Council of Churches and the World Association for Christian Communication also practice peace journalism.

Peace journalism shed light on structured and cultural causes of violence as they impact upon the lives of people in a conflict arena as part of the explanation for violence. It also frames conflicts as consisting of many parties and pursuing many goals rather than a simple dichotomy. An explicit aim of peace journalism is to promote peace initiatives from whatever quarters and to allow the readers to distinguish between the stated positions and the real goals (Wikipedia). Peace journalism is based on the fact that there is something wrong with typical conflict reporting.

Furthermore, Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices about what to report and how to report it. That creates opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict. Peace journalism is a remedial strategy and an attempt to supplement the news conventions to give peace a chance. [20].

It is more realistic, in the sense of fidelity to a reality that already exists, independently of our knowledge or representation of it. To report violence without background on context is to misrepresent it. Since any conflict is, at root, a relationship of parties setting and pursuing incompatible goals. To omit any discussion of them is a distortion [21].

Furthermore, McGoldrick (2000), [22], describes Peace Journalism as a new form of journalism “which looks at how journalists could be part of the solution rather than the problem”. Corroborating the importance of peace journalism in a conflict situation, Hamid, (2014), [23], posits that as war is a phenomenon that attracts journalism so can peace as a process also attract journalism. She further states that there are well meaning journalists who can promote agenda for peace and sustain it. So, the society should identify such few well meaning journalists for peace, encourage, motivate and support them. It is unfortunate that our government gag the press with the result that journalists dance to the tune of their masters and in most cases suppressing the truth.

Basic Principles of Peace Journalism include to be:

- Creative
- Constructive
- Concrete
- Compassionate
- Concise

**Creative and Constructive:** A peace journalist writes a solution oriented piece, focuses on proposed solutions acceptable by all parties and does not just identify problems or blame those at fault. Peace journalism is not merely investigative journalism, advocacy, activism or description of events/violence- neither is it biased. Peace journalism has three stages:

- Identifying the goals of the various parties involved directly or indirectly in a conflict and possible contradictions between them.
- Distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate goals
- Finding creative solutions to transcend the contradictions and fulfil all the legitimate goals.
Concrete: Writings should not consist only of generalities but should be concrete, specific and detailed, without assuming that the reader is already familiar with the matter/theme.

Compassionate: The articles must be respectful of all cultures and belief systems and do not hurt or offend any group; compassion for all groups involved in a conflict. Hate speeches should be avoided because they can instigate avoidable violence. Peace journalism should contribute to healing not to hate, pain and suffering.

Concise: An ideal article is written in easily readable English and presents new insights, even surprises to keep the readers interest. It provides a lucid and credible description of facts/events; informs, explains, puts events/actions/reactions and so forth, in insightful context for those who need/want to know and form an educated opinion.

A good peace journalist enables the reader to think further through diverse perspectives and to identify the causes and all the parties to a conflict.

On his own part, Oji (2012), [7], analysed the peace media efforts to include three main stages namely:

- Crisis prevention stage
- Mitigation stage
- Mediation stage

At the crisis prevention stage, professional journalists should be guided by objectivity, accuracy, balance and fairness, experience and news judgment, countering hate media at the on-set of crisis and professionalization whereby media personnel could be trained in peace media reporting methods.

In explaining the mitigation stage, Babawale (2000) cited in Orji (2012), [7], posits that the media can help mitigate conflict by:

- Educating the communities and parties involved in the conflict
- Identifying the underlying interest of each party to a conflict
- Preventing the circulation of rumour and counter them when they surface
- Establishing networks to spread information about strategies that have succeeded in other places
- Reporting results of peace meetings professionally with the objectives of peace media in mind.

At mediation stage, the communication expert should plan the peace media in such a way that it goes beyond having radio, television and publication in place. Orji (2012), [7], posits that the peace media planner must take due cognizance of the role bill board, newspapers, handbills, special events such as seminar, conferences and awareness campaigns, rallies or the use of internet could play in his/her campaign project. The peace media planner should also know the media to use to break communication, illiteracy and poverty barriers bearing in mind the cost effectiveness.

Orji (2012), [7], further states that it is baseless for media planner to preach peace when the factors causing the conflict such as lack of roads, water, unemployment, deprivation, corruption, dictatorship, oppression and other conflict causing agents are left unattended to.

Peace Journalism and Boko Haram Reportage: The media have a moral obligation to create awareness and educate citizens about how to counter and prevent act of terrorism while also making themselves approachable enough so that every citizen can approach them with their suggestions about how to create a terrorism-free world. The primary functions of the media in assisting and combating terrorism include information, surveillance, transmission of cultural heritage and media initiative.

In reporting Boko Haram, the media should give adequate information about the activities of Boko Haram. Such reports should be accurate and objective, free from sensationalism, or religious bias:

It is not enough to report on the surface like reporting that there was bomb blast claiming some innocent lives. According to undisclosed source many lives and property were lost. The media should not only report about the blasts and consequent insecurity, but should provide context, meaning and significance to this incessant bomb blasts. This will mould strong opinion towards addressing this menace and the cause [17].

In the usual straight news reporting, it is the usual he said, she said, eye-witnesses said; a usually-reliable-source confirmed, etc. none of the reports went further to give more than quotes from those in authority, the victims and sometimes from security operatives. What the audience gets from the mostly straight news stories were these largely second-hand reports that hardly give insights into the real issues at stake

A peace journalist should not be neutral in his reportage when the masses are ruthlessly butchered by Boko Haram bombs and bullets. The reporters should
consider it a patriotic duty to report the killings both objectively and subjectively, provided it is the truth. So, the press should provide the understanding of the facts surrounding the Boko Haram insurrection to enable the citizenry and perhaps, the government to cope with this particular menace [10].

However, opponents of peace journalism argue that it is a departure from objectivity and towards a journalism of attachment. Supporters of peace journalism on their part are of the opinion that it is the best strategy in reporting conflict situation. They posit that the peace reporters should raise awareness on potential security threats in the country, educate the masses on how to identify and deal with suspicious movements. The media should find out and let the masses know. This corroborates the opinion of Opubor (1985), [24], about the basic function of the mass media which include fact finding, determining what is and saying that it is and saying that publicly without fear or favour”. The media cannot shut its mouth or close its eyes to the corruption of highly placed public officers as this constitutes a big threat to our peace and stability.

Recently, president Buhari stated that: “the victory over Boko Haram cannot be achieved by basing the command and control centre in Abuja. The command centre will be relocated to Maiduguri and remain until Boko Haram is completely subdued”. That buoyant announcement has all but fizzled into insignificance, considering the recent Boko Haram activities. In July, 2015, Boko Haram fighters massacred more than 200 Nigerians in coordinated attacks on worshipers inside mosques [25].

Boko Haram no doubt has launched more attacks in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, since Buhari announced the relocation of the military’s tactical command to that city. It is as if the insurgents were saying to the president and the armed forces, “There is nothing you can do.”

The peace journalist should find out what has emboldened Boko Haram to escalate its attacks instead of retreating going by Buhari’s military credentials. Furthermore they should present their findings to the public to enable them make informed decisions- as to handle the activities of Boko Haram.

Osagie (2015), [26], in support of peace approach to the fight against Boko Haram posits that the northern leaders must as a matter of urgency call an emergency meeting to harness and dispassionately X-ray the problem of Boko Haram which is fast turning the North to nothing in terms of infrastructure, investment and development in general. The destruction that is taking place now has the tendency of setting the region almost 30 years back in all sectors. Whatever the governors are doing in terms of development without checking the menace of Boko Haram will amount to nothing. A gathering of political leaders, religious personages, Emirs, Clan heads and other relevant stakeholders deliberating honestly and sincerely ought to be able to stem this ugly trend.

The pertinent questions that the peace journalists should sincerely address and make public to Nigerians are ‘Did these Boko Haram people descend from the skies? Don’t they have roots somewhere? Didn’t they grow up in communities? Don’t they have people who know them, who can appease them to drop their arms against their people and nation?

It is also time for those who created the Frankenstein monster in the name of politics or whatever reasons, to face the reality that the evil wind they sowed yesterday has birthed a whirlwind ravaging the north and the nation today.

He further posits that Nigerians would not forget when some people threatened that, should Jonathan contest and win 2011 elections; they would make the country ungovernable for him. Everything he did was criticised. “if one Boko Haram member was killed, they would accuse Jonathan of wanting to wipe out the North.” Ironically, the same people who always criticised Jonathan but never proffered any solution on how the issue of terrorism could be tackled are now asking Nigerians to support Buhari against Boko Haram. These facts should be highlighted by the peace reporters to the masses to enable them contribute meaningfully to the fight against Boko Haram.

A lawyer and public affairs analyst, Martins Agoziem, lamented that the issue of insecurity and terrorism in Nigeria had been so politicised that it would be a difficult nut to crack. He said that if Nigerians faced the issue of terrorism the way it tackled the Ebola virus, terrorism would have been drastically reduced.

During the Ebola scare, everybody faced the problem with one spirit. There was no APC or PDP because Ebola did not know who was in party A or B and with the corporation of all Nigerians, Ebola was defeated.

This implies that the war against Boko Haram can be won if all Nigerians come together without attachment to political or religious affiliations. A peace journalist should analyze how the war against Ebola was won tell the people publicly that if the same strategies should be used to fight Boko Haram, we shall succeed.
The deputy senate president under the caption- Boko Haram: Ekweremadu urges support for Buharia that "all hands should be on deck in the fight against Boko Haram. Whatever has caused insurgence, we need to address Boko Haram and aggressively too before it gets too late. I do hope that we would be able to work together to find solution to this and come to the end of Boko Haram activities. It is not giving us any good image, it is damaging our reputation all over the world. It is damaging our lives, property and has disoriented our brothers and sisters in the Northeast. It is a big challenge we must all come together to deal with." [25].

Excepts from president Muhammadu Buhari’s interview granted CNN on April 2, 2015 was that he would deal effectively with Boko Haram terrorists in two months when he gets into office. Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief but from the activities of the dreaded sect so far many have doubts if the president would live up to his promises on the issue of checking insecurity in the country. Some optimists, however insist that the president should be given more time [25].

Today, two months have translated to eight months and Boko Haram members have intensified their operations. In a media chat on Tuesday Live 2nd January 2016, President Buhari said that the war against Boko Haram has been technically won. However this explanation was not acceptable by many Nigerians. Because the activities of the sect are on the increase.

The peace journalist should excavate news beyond the news, throw more light on the president’s statement and off course get suggestions from different quarters on how the problem could be approached. Thus, allowing the masses to make informed decision after being exposed to useful information.

**CONCLUSION**

Many communication scholars are of the opinion that Nigerian journalists still focus on the traditional method of reporting, not going beyond surveillance stage. In most cases, they do not report objectively because of political and religious affiliations, low technical skills, lack of access to information, identification with regional bias, ethic biases, lack of investigative and interpretative journalism, lack of equipment or tools among others.

Added to this, is that the government do not give the media practitioners, the free hand to operate on the premise that; whoever pays the piper dictates its tone’. Also, many scholars have also agreed that the media in many cases help to escalate conflicts instead of resolving them. One of the causes of this is attributed to poor understanding of the issue by the journalists and the carelessness in cross checking facts and figures about the conflict situation [26].

The media and the military operate in disarray, giving confusing information to the public. A good example was the misleading information given the to the media that more than 70% of the Chibok abducted girls were recovered. It was later found to be untrue; and subsequently the information provoked public feeling.

Finally, our leaders and the stakeholders particularly in the affected region are not sincere to themselves in the fight against Boko haram. The issue is that members of this sect have their roots and it is only leaders in those areas that can identify their root and realistically use different strategies to curb the menace. This implies that the use of security agents and military alone cannot stop the activities of this sect.

**REFERENCES**