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## Reporting Ethno Religious Conflict: The Jos Crises in the Nigerian Press

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**Abstract:** *This paper discussed generally how media report ethno-religious conflicts knowing fully of the fact that conflict anywhere is one of the elements that attract media attention due to the dictum that says 'it sells when it bleeds'. The paper specifically narrowed its focus on how the Nigerian Press report ethno-religion conflict or crises in Jos, Plateau state of North Central Nigeria. The famous city of Jos and its surroundings have experienced a series of crises that are doubtless linked to ethnoreligious conflicts. Several contents of the press were analysed, many studies were synthesized and a lot of opinions by community and religious leaders were consulted. Therefore, this paper found out significantly that the Nigerian press instead of contributing to facilitate peace resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding process was found pants down in inflaming the conflicts due to commercial drive and other political/religious motives of the owners. They did this without any consideration for the template of conflict-sensitive reporting.*

**Keywords:** Ethno-religious, conflict reporting, conflict-sensitive journalism, Nigerian press, Jos.

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### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a country is deeply enmeshed with various challenges of conflicts ranging from insurgency, kidnapping, agitation for secession and resource control to the age-long farmer/herder and ethno religious conflicts which have varying degree of devastation to the lives, properties, harmonious and peaceful coexistence of the people in the country. What propel the conflicts can be linked to mutual distrust among ethnic groups, religious and linguistic pattern among many

others. This was briefly summarised by Olagunju and Ajadi (2014) that “the ethnic and religious configuration of the nation couple with uneven distribution of national wealth and social cleavages between the rich and the poor have made Nigeria liable to internal disorder”.

To further lend credence to the unprecedented level of suspicious among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Dunu, Ugbo and Bebenimebo (2018) observed that following the events of early independent history which culminated to the eruption of civil war in 1967, the Nigeria nation with about 400 ethnic groups now continues to coexist but not without obvious trace of deep seated mutual suspicion among them.

Jos, the administrative headquarter of plateau state in central Nigeria that used to be a serene, peaceful and mountainous city has been grappling with series of crises for decades which are variously seen as ethno-religious conflicts. Higazi (2011) pointed out that Jos with the population of over a million people is the epicenter of most insecurity on the Plateau state which has been the site of some worst of the violence. This chapter borders on the analysis of how Nigerian press cover or report ethno religious conflicts in Jos considering the fact that negativity is a good element that attract swift media attention and subsequent reporting as the dictum goes ‘it sells when it bleeds’. However, one of the prominent advocates of peace journalism Howard (cited in Ozohu-suleiman, 2013) opined that “media are a double-edged sword that can serve as frightful weapon of violence, when they propagate message of intolerance, or as instrument of conflict resolution, when the information they present is reliable, respect human rights and represent diverse views”.

In which side of the sword Nigerian press decided to positioned themselves in the coverage of ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Plateau state are they for their commercial drive and other vested interest capable of enthusing conflicts or conduct their professional duties in a way that promote conflicts resolution and peace building process? This question is very relevant because of the antecedent usage of the media in instigating conflicts in different part of the world notable among them are: the most dreadful abuse of media – Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines in Kigali Rwanda. The story was the same with Serbian media. In case of civil war in Cote Ivoire, newspaper were found culprit for whipping up sentiment while in Sri Lanka press was used both ways (Roundtable on Conflict Reporting, 2003).

### **Problem Statement**

With communication nothing will fail and without communication, nothing will work. For most Nigerians however, the pressing problems of everyday survival remain the highest immediate priority. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria's economy has been in crisis despite continued expansion in oil production. Without the establishment of an accountable government, the chances of addressing pressing problems like the deterioration of living conditions and the collapse of once treasured town of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, looks slim.

Since the emergence of the nascent democracy in 1999, Plateau State has become a permanent flashpoint of crisis. The State which had hitherto been one of the most relatively peaceful in Nigeria has been deeply enmeshed and suffused in political and ethno-religious conflicts characterized by genocidal attacks, bombing, maiming and killings of several persons, loss of business investments, and properties worth several millions of Naira. Within the space of eleven years, several violent political, ethno-religious conflicts have been reported in Plateau State. Furthermore, these violent conflicts have compelled several Nigerians to attempt a redefinition of their identity as fallouts of emotive feeling and perceptions. The politico-violent conflict which has remained a recurring decimal has severally threatened the nascent democracy, national unity, and our collective security as a nation-state.

Thus, the challenges of managing the political and ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with particular focus on Plateau State have little been explored by earlier researchers. This yawning gap in terms of level of analysis is what this paper intends to fill; and in order to effectively do this, it has set for itself the following questions.

1. What are the possible ways to report ethno religious crises in Nigeria?
2. How can the Nigerian Press contribute in peacebuilding before, during and after conflicts?
3. What can government do to curtail conflicts?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Concepts have been clarified using thematic analysis.

### **Ethnicity**

Nnoli (1978, P. 5) defines ethnic groups as ‘social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries’. To him, the crucial communal factors may be language, culture or both. Similarly, Suberu (1996, P. 4) conceptualizes an ethnic group as a “social collectivity whose members not only share such objective characteristics as language, core-territory, ancestral myth, culture, religion, and/or political organization, but also have some subjective consciousness or perception of common descent or identity”. This ethnic identity results from contact with other groups. But he argues that ethnic pluralism is necessary but an insufficient condition for ethnicity.

Ethnicity therefore is a ‘social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups’ (Nnoli, 1978, P. 5). It emerges when the members of an ethnic group become characterized by a common consciousness of their identity in relations to other groups with in-group and out-group differences becoming marked with time. Such exclusivist, identity-based discrimination undoubtedly results in conflicts over scarce economic resources and socio-political goods.

However, ethnicity hardly exists in pure forms. It is a consequence of ethnic group identity mobilization and politicization especially in a competitive ethnically plural environment or context (Suberu 1996; Nnoli 1978). Also, Wolff (2006) observes that ethnicity on its own does not cause conflict as several factors are always at play in each conflict situation, arguing that identity is a fact of human existence, and that it is what people make of it or to what use they deploy it that makes the difference between ethnic cohesion, harmony or conflict.

The manner in which activists define the in-group and out-group relationship (the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ sentiment) is crucial in conflict dynamics: “The more confrontational the definitions – that is, the more ‘our’ poor situation is a result of ‘their’ oppression, or the more superior ‘we’ are compared with ‘them’ – the more likely are inter-group relations to take a turn for the worse” (Wolff 2006, P. 35).

### **Religion**

Religion is an elusive and imprecise concept. It is difficult to define with precision and objectivity because it is emotion laden (Egwu, 2011, Agarwal et.al 1994); Religion has been variously defined as a body of truths, laws and rites by which a man is subordinated to transcendent being (Adeniyi, 1993). To Bellah (1970) religion denotes a set of symbolic forms and actions that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence. Drawing similar concern, Peter (1988) conceptualized religion as system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting mood and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Ogburn (cited in Agarwal et.al 1994, P. 236) defined religion as attitude towards superhuman powers. In the same vein, Maclever (1946) opined that religion is a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power. According to Christopher Dawson (cited in Agarwal et.al 1994, P. 236) “wherever and whenever man has a sense of dependence on external powers which is conceived as mysterious and higher than man’s own, there is religion, and the feeling of awe and self-abasement with which man is filled in the presence of such powers is essentially a religious emotion, the root of worship and prayer”. Yinger J. Milton (cited in Agarwal et.al 1994, P. 237) conceived religion as “the attempt to bring the relative, the temporary, and the painful things in life into relations with what is conceived to be permanent, absolute and cosmically optimistic”. To Sapir (cited in Agarwal et.al 1994, P. 237) religion is a man’s never ceasing attempt to discover a road to spiritual serenity across the perplexities and dangers of daily life. Lowie (cited in Agarwal et.al 1994, P. 237) conceptualized religion as a “spontaneous response to the awe-inspiring extra-ordinary manifestation of reality”.

In a broader perspective, religion can be understood in two related, yet distinct ways, material and spiritual. In the material perspective, it is conceived as religious establishments (i.e. institutions and officials) as well as social groups and religious concerns. On the other hand, in the spiritual

perspective, religion is concerned with models of social and individual behavior that help believers to organize their everyday lives. It is in this way that religion is characterized as transcendence, supernatural realities and sacred (Alanamu, 2004).

### **Conflict**

As noted by Wolff (2006, P. 2), the term ‘conflict’ is used to describe “a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just, goals”. He further argues that sometimes, conflict is as a result of the struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Because of such vested interests, the conflict entrepreneurs prefer conflict to cooperation and privilege violence over negotiations. To have a thorough grasp of conflict, therefore, one must cautiously examine the various actors and factors and their interrelationship in each conflict situation (Wolff, 2006, P. 3). The material value or economic viability of the territory is also vital in conflict dynamics. For example, if the territory is rich in natural resources such as oil, gold, diamond, timber or if there are cultural attachments to the territory, there would be more stakes in it.

Similarly, Otite (1999, pp. 20-22) argues that most conflicts in Nigeria are premised on land space and resource competition; disputed jurisdiction of traditional rulers; creation and location of local government council headquarters; scarce political and economic resources; micro and macro social structures of Nigeria; population growth; and disregard for cultural symbols. Conflict may either be non-violent or violent. Notably, what constitutes violence and non-violence varies depending on the context or perception of the legitimate use of force or challenge of authority. Max Weber in conceptualizing the state contended that violence is legitimate in the rule over men (Wolff 2006). To Wolff (2006) violence is the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desire of others. The criminal model of violence differentiated between legitimate and illegitimate violence. It places emphasis on the identification of criminal in the target domain. In this perspective, the problem of violence is ascribed to outlaws and thugs who unleash terror on the law-abiding citizens and cause social and political instability in the society. This model tends to ignore the socio-cultural factors that breed violence (Turpin and Kurtz, 1999).

In an attempt to provide an analytical framework for a deep appreciation of the causes of violence and conflicts, it is pertinent to analyze the various forms in which violence manifests. Violence can be categorized as both small and large-scale depending on the intensity. Large scale violence is difficult to control and its consequences are hard to predict (Coady, 1999). Violence has also been categorized as physical and psychological. Psychological violence is an act of violence in the absence of a violent act. The destructive effects are gradual and cumulative. It involves brainwashing, indoctrination and threats. On the other hand, physical violence is an act that palpably involves physical means such as bombardment, whipping, stabbing to death, overpowering, poisoning, forceful intrusion, malevolent intrusion among others. Its destructive effects are swift and direct (Turpin and Kurtz, 1999). It is instructive to note here that the

distinction between the two is for the purpose of analytical clarity, as the borderline between both is little and sometimes difficult to draw.

Beyond the conceptual and categorical perspectives, violence has been part of human history. In this perspective, the social contract theorists held that man prior to the emergence of the contemporary state lived in a state of nature. According to Thomas Hobbes, in the state of nature “life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” Several other theories and models have been developed to explain violence. The micro and macro approach to violence is one of the several approaches. This approach draws a web of casual links between the personal biological impulse and psychological disposition on the one hand, and global structures, processes, and behaviour on the other. At the micro level the propellant of violence is identified as individual psychological factors and biological impulse, while at the macro perspective socio-cultural factors are adduced for violence (Turpin and Kurtz, 1999).

Studies have also shown that violence has been perceived as an instrument of survival under difficult circumstance. In this perspective, the frustration-aggression theory is the most explored. The exponents of the theory identified major conditions in which the individual or group deploy violence. To them, the obstruction or blockade of efforts by the individual intended to achieve desired ends such as power, wealth, social status, security, equality and freedom leads to frustration that breeds violence. Also, a causal link has been drawn between unfulfilled rising expectation and violence. In this perspective, it is contended that tension or violence arises from unfulfilled expectation to people who had experienced hardship or enslavement but suddenly promised improved material condition or freedom. Furthermore, a relationship has been drawn between relative deprivation and violence. In this sense, the objective material condition is believed not to nurture violence but rather the sense of deprivation in relation to others around them, or their own past condition is believed to be responsible for violence with the intent to redress the situation (Dowse and Hughes, 1982).

The greed and grievance analytical framework ascribes violent conflicts to grievances arising from limited economic opportunities, poverty and inequalities. There are two strands of contentions in this analytical framework. The first perceive violent conflicts as under-girded by irrationality originating essentially from hatred. In the second perspective, violent conflict is hinged on a number of grievances such as systematic discrimination and gross human rights violation, inequality in economic and political power, or dearth of resources especially in multiethnic state. In this regard, violence is perceived as instrumental like any means for seeking redress. Violent conflict has also been explained from the industry perspective. It is believed that the dominant propellant of violence is economic benefits and commercial interest rather than grievance. This presupposes that the preoccupation of the belligerents and insurgents is the economic spoils and booty that they appropriate from the protracted violence.

Another theoretical explanation for the etiology of violent conflicts is systemic pathologies arising from the dialectical changes in the structures and processes of society. According to Potholm (1979, p. 149 cited in Deeka, 2003) when a system does not deliver what its leaders had promised and the political elites continue to ask the masses to make sacrifices that the elites themselves are unwilling to make much of the aura of legitimacy gained during the decolonization period will be dissipated.

In another theoretical prism, eruption of violent conflicts is linked with group pluralism and interactions to achieve their diverse objectives (Deeka, 2002). In seeking relevance or retention of political power, the elites manipulate and massage religious and ethnic sentiments. Many of the ethnic clashes and sectarian conflagrations are rooted in the context of the group conflict theoretical assumption (Jega, 2002). Violence has also been perceived as structural and institutional (Coady, 1999). Structural violence is the form of violence rationalized on the basis of a great range of social injustice and inequalities prevailing in a state. In this perspective, reformers, leftists and even terrorists rationalize their violence and opposition against the state on the basis of seeking to correct the prevailing social injustice and inequalities in the state. The form of violence in this context often involves a direct physical attack in response to and defence against acts perceived as unjust and inequitable in the society. On the other hand, institutional violence is a quiet violence that arises due to systematic deprivation in the way of transactions within a state (Abah, 2009). Several other factors such as over population, impotence, loss of power, displacement, the quest for social values, as well as natural phenomena such as natural disasters, earthquake, environmental scarcities, disease outbreak, drought, and famine can be identified as contributory to violence.

### **An Overview of Ethno Religious Conflicts in Jos and Other Areas on the Plateau**

Jos as a town was founded as a result of various activities such as mining, railway and missionary movement. These activities attracted people from far and near to come and settle at what we have currently as Jos, the capital of Plateau state. This makes the city to have a cosmopolitan outlook with people from different part of the country with different culture and belief systems. Higazi (2011, P. 5) noted that,

Jos grew as a town of migrants, who arrived there from other parts of Nigeria. From its genesis Jos had a substantial southern Christian population- the Yoruba and Igbo comprise the majority of Christians in Jos. In rural areas and in the small town of the Jos plateau, indigenous Christians form the majority but in Jos itself the population of plateau peoples is relatively small.

As noted earlier, Jos was largely peaceful around 1980s and 2000 during which some major northern states such as Bauchi, Kaduna and Kano were under serious communal violence. But

before then, Jos had its first experience with mass violence in 1966 against Igbo community (Dan Fulani & fwatshak, 2002; Higazi, 2007; Higazi, 2011). But from 2001 to dates Jos and the state entirely has never been in its normal self-following many crises erupted the city and other rural settlements in the state beginning from 2001 crisis which was said to be as a result of appointment of Jasawa to public office from Jos north local government. And the spillover of it in 2002-4 extended to other parts of the state such as Wase, Shengdam, Pangshin, Langtan North and South among others. Others are the aftermath of suspension of Jos north local government election by the state government in 2008. Another one in 2010 broke out in Dutse Uku in Jos and other pockets of conflicts occurring within and around the Jos city (Krause, 2011).

The root causes of these conflicts have several lenses and dimensions to look at; ranging from political, economic to social and ethno religious dimension which is more glaring of all the dimensions mentioned above. Take for instance, in a research conducted by Nyam (undated), most of the responses elicited regarding the causes of crises in Plateau are of ethno religious leaning which quoted an Imam from Angwan Rogo as:

The Christian on the plateau do not want Islam as a religion to be in this state. They are working very hard to see that Islam is wiped out of the state and that is why the conflict is always happening.

The research findings also revealed that ethnicity play significant role in the conflicts bedeviling Jos and its surroundings. A community leader has been quoted in an interview that:

It seems we are heading towards a state-where most of your ethnic identity, qualifications are secondary when it comes to employment, admission into higher institution of learning and even elections or appointment into executive office, where your ethnic identity stand is more important; the certificate of “belongingness” is your qualification

In view of the above findings and other position stated, it is an obvious fact that there are other factors igniting the conflicts in Jos such as land disputes, politics, settler vs indigene labeling but all these have been perceived and fought over through the prism of religion and ethnicity.

### **Ethno Religious Conflict**

Conflict is simply mean a disagreement between two or more people or groups over an interest that could not be shared among different groups in conflicts. Stapathy (2001) describes conflicts as inalienably, a part of the human condition that promises good or ill, depending on how it is understood and handled. He further explains that, conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political or other) is engaged in conscious opposition to another identifiable group

because the latter is pursuing incompatible goal. By this, it is crystal clear that conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human existence that people engage consciously or unconsciously. What matter is how people handle it.

Therefore, ethno-religious conflicts are opposition or disagreement between two or more groups pursuing different goals that are not in harmony with each other which are defined by ethnic and religious basis. According to Salawu (2019), ethno-religious conflicts are arise from suspicion and distrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country. She further explains that, these conflicts are characterized by lack of geniality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency toward violent confrontation. It is also seen as conflicts arising from groups defined along ethno-religious lines, ethnic identities which create distinctions between conflicting groups and religious beliefs and teaching which reinforce action or inaction of adherence.

It is a straight fact that the series of carnages being taken place in Jos and its surroundings are classic manifestation of ethno-religious conflicts that have to entice media attention because it is “bread and butter” of journalism (Owens-Ibie, 2002).

### **Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

Salawu (2010) submits that a major cause of what we now see as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry. In every nation (Nigeria inclusive), there is no complete agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. There is also no agreement on how to effect necessary changes and reforms. This is because, different groups and individuals have diverse interests in which case, some groups will have their aims met, while others will not. What this means is that conflict (ethno religious ones inclusive) usually occur when deprived groups and individuals attempt to increase their share of power and wealth or to modify the dominant values, norms, beliefs or ideology. Thus, in Nigeria and going by the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited earlier in this paper, there seems to be a divisive interplay of politics, ethnicism and religions, which has consequently led to the rising nationalism and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements. It is interesting to note that the overall consequence of this is the escalation of various ethno-religious conflicts that are witnessed all over the country today which are meant to correct any perceived form of marginalization, oppression or domination.

It is important to note here too that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, has led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have now characterized the Nigerian nation. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for many ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who

warmongers as mercenary fighters. What this means theoretically is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit. This explains why all ethno-religious crises that ever occurred in Nigeria have a large turnout of people (including the under-aged) as fighters.

A very important cause of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the breakdown of such vehicles of social control that characterized the traditional African societies such as the family, education, law, religion and political system that cared for the well-being of all citizens. Indeed, the malfunctioning of all these important institutions has actually increased ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, the inability of many homes to make the ends meet with the family income tends to increase immorality, broken fatherless/motherless homes, divorces and drunkenness, leading again to a large reserve of youths who could be employed for execution of ethno-religious conflicts. It is also important to note that the school system in Nigeria today is in shambles and cannot impart even sound knowledge, let alone instill discipline and desired type of morality. The religious institution is also not playing its expected roles, while the law enforcement agents indulge in crimes, demand bribes and collect illegal levies from motorists openly and, shamelessly. All the above constitute a wrong signal to the social and encourage social vices in the society thereby laying the foundation for conflicts in general.

The long military intervention in politics tends to encourage and legitimize the use of force and violence as instruments of social change and attainment of set goals and demands. From this, it is customary to see that as a hangover from the military era, the use of coercion and force in settling conflicts has become a tradition in the Nigerian body politics. Strongly related to this is the uncontrolled arms supply, which has quickened the outbreak of conflicts, and encourage belligerents to go on fighting rather than find peaceful settlement to disputes. Lastly and very importantly, and not the least, the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some historical antecedent. This is because many governmental actions during the colonial rule and after independence encouraged, to a large extent, the sowing of the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts that are found to be rampant in the Nigerian nation today. As noticed by Ikejiani Clark (2005) over the years, many events in Nigeria have led to the politicization of mistrust, intolerance, violence and acrimonious relations between the mainly Moslem north and the Christian south of Nigeria. To this extent, Ikejinai-Clark contended that there has been an unfortunate insertion of ethno-religious discrimination and incompatibility in the structures of the Nigerian State since the colonial period. In 1931 for instance, the colonial administration under the leadership of Governor Donald Cameron did not encourage intermingling of religions. An advice given by the governor is indicative of this. The Governor advised the Christian missions to thread softly in Moslem areas so as to maintain the stability of indirect rule. The political events of the January 15, 1966 coup and the July 1966 counter-coup further entrenched ethno-religious configuration in Nigeria. This is because the killings and counter-killing that follow the coups which took ethnic and religious

colorations as the Muslim dominated tribes in the north were set against the Christian dominated tribes of the southern region.

The ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some connection, with a number of politico-religious developments at the international scene. According to Albert (2005), religions crises in Nigeria could be traced to the developments in the Middle East. In this regard, he pointed out that religious issues became particularly phenomenal since the late 1980s with the death of the cold war and replacement of communism (a global social and political ideology) with Islamism. With this new Islamic ideology, the Muslims worldwide, and particularly in the Middle East, were determined to resent the 'socio-economic impoverishment and psychological alienation that stem from failed modernization and excessive westernization in the post-cold war world (Ayubi, 1991, Dekmejian 1995; Faksh, 1997). The contemporary increase in the incidences of terrorism around the world has also been linked to this new ideology of Islamism (Cordesman, 2003; Booth and Dunne, .2002).

It should be understood that the problem created by the new Muslim ideology was not limited to the Middle East as the increasing feelings of relative deprivation and alienation around the world makes developing states with large Muslim populations susceptible to militant forms of Islamism in the Middle East. This explains why the increased rate of religious violence in Northern Nigeria (a Muslim dominated region) since 1980s can be understood from this perspective. The influence of foreign factor on ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria become obvious in 1983 when the then Nigerian Minister for International Affairs attempted to link the development crises in Nigeria to the global political economy. It was the opinion of the Federal Government of Nigeria that many of the ethno religious crises had foreign backing and as such ordered that aliens without valid permit must leave the country within a fortnight. The main reason given for this expulsion order was that the presence of the aliens at the time threatened the economic and political security of Nigeria (Albert, 2005). Particularly referred to, as the justification for the government action, was the 1980 maitatsine riots led by Marwa, a Camerounian by nationality. In 1985 too, major General Tunde Idiagbon pointed to the foreign connection in the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In this regard, he alerted Nigerians about the impending crisis and the foreign supports some religious fundamentalists were receiving (Ilori, 1987, p. 25).

The foreign connection in ethno-religious crises in Nigeria is also evident in the involvement of non-Nigerians in a number of urban insurgencies. These foreigners have been found to actively participate in the ethnic conflicts around the country and particularly in the Northern part between the Hausa- Fulani Muslim hosts and their Christian dominated southern Nigeria 'strangers' who reside in their midst. A scuffle that started between an Igbo trader and a Fulani security guard at the Sabongari Kano market developed into city-wide ethno-religious conflicts in which many non-Nigerians from the neighbouring African 'states were arrested fighting on the side of the Hausa - Fulani Muslims (Kano state, 1995, p. 1617).

In addition to the above, it is important to note that foreign preachers often contribute to the insurgence of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. For instance, in 1991, the religious crisis in Kano was traced to the plan of Evangelist Richard Bonnke, to conduct a crusade tagged 'Kano for Jesus' in Kano'. Simply because the government had earlier denied access to Kano a Muslim cleric from South Africa to preach in the city, serious crises loomed up between the Muslim and Christian populations.

The causes of ethno-religious conflicts discussed so far can be summed up under the theoretical framework developed by Ted Rober Gurr used by him to explain ethno-religious conflicts. Gurr's theoretical approach combines the relative deprivation approach pioneered in his classic book, 'Why Men Rebel' with the group mobilization approach. Gurr's basic model is very simple and is found to be useful in explaining ethno-religious conflicts, the types we have in Nigeria. Gurr's model has three steps. First, he opined that discrimination against an ethnic or religious minority causes the minority to form grievances. Second, these grievances contribute to the mobilization of the ethnic or religious minority for political action. Third, the more mobilized a minority, the more likely it is to engage in political action including protest and rebellion.

It is instructive to say here therefore that in Nigeria and from the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited earlier, religious discrimination and religious grievances based on such discrimination affect the level of protest and/or rebellion in which the various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria engage. In the case of the introduction of Sharia in Zanzara State and some other parts of the Northern Nigerian for instance, it was the religious framework that caused a group to take actions, which affect groups that do not subscribe to the same religious framework. Such actions as we have seen infringed upon those other groups and provoked a conflictive response. This is true irrespective of whether the group that is infringed upon occupies a dominant or subordinate role in society. This analysis is also true of all the ethno-religious conflicts that we have witnessed in Nigeria.

### **How Nigerian Press Report Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Jos**

It is conventional thing for the press to be magnetically interested to events that have significant impact on peoples' lives. As Pate and Kurfi (2022, p.10) observe that "crisis, conflict, insecurity, disorder and crime are very attractive sources of news for the media." as Okunna further described that the nature of conflict and media inclination toward negativity as newsworthy situations, media are attracted to the conflicts like ants to sugar or honey (Okunna , 2004 cited in Okunna, 2017). She also adds that, "by giving more attention to conflicts, the media is strategically positioned to play a role that can either promote peace or escalate conflicts" (Okunna, 2017, p.120). It is on this note that, press is expected to play a crucial role further than providing the information but to also contribute dispassionately to the discussion over how to response and guarantee citizens' access to live saving information.

But unfortunately, Nigerian press is variously and evidently found neck deep in inflaming the fire of ethno religious conflicts in their coverage of Jos crises. A cursory look at the headlines of some newspapers will without an iota of doubt affirm that. For instance, Punch newspaper's headlines of September 10, 2001 read: "*Plateau is the only predominantly Christian state in the north and they are not happy about this.*" Headlines of this structured may be designed deliberately to poison the mind of the Christians in plateau state to nurse a deep seated animosity against members of Muslim community. Other instances cite in (Dunu, ugbo and bebenimibo, 2018) ... "*Whether they like it or not, we will not allow any Muslim to be president in Nigeria again. I am declaring this as president of the Christian association of Nigeria (CAN)*" (Dr Sunday Mbang, in Thisday, Monday, July 31, 2000, p4). This kind of piece is rather exacerbating the dichotomies along religious and ethnic division thereby instigating hatred against Muslims and Christian in the north. Another headline by the Sunday Tribune of September, 2009 read "*Ex head of state and governor behind jos mayhem.*" This headline was a telling evidences that Nigerian press at some point work to deepen the level of ethno religious conflicts in Jos and surroundings through insensitive reportage of the conflicts even though the report did not come out clearly with names of the head of state and the governor but the reporter stated that *a former military head of state from the north sneaked into jos before the crisis and also stated that the governor of Bauchi state supported him.* Daily trust of Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> august, 2021 carried a story of travelers attack in Bukuru Jos with the headline that read "*Irigwe youths kill 25 Fulani travelers in Jos, over 50 missing*". This headline was recklessly inciting for reprisal attack by the Fulani Muslims on any innocent Christians they found around where they are dominant as a revenge. And this was given the most prominence of as the main story in the cover page of that day edition.

In an opinion column published in Daily Trust and the Nation Newspaper in July, 2012, Haruna described how Nigerian press turning media logic upside down when reporting the conflicts in Jos just to further emphasise the hatred and glaring dichotomies between Muslims and Christian. Haruna wrote:

A case in point was last Sunday's shocking attack of mourners, allegedly by Fulani herders, at a burial ground in Jos which resulted in the death of Senator Gyan Datong and the majority leader of plateau house of assembly, Mr Gyan Fulani. Virtually all the newspapers accepted the state government house's more sensational version of the events at face value, namely that the two prominent legislators were shot to death, apparently because this version conformed to their stereotype of evil, Christian hating Hausa/ Fulani Muslim.

But what happened actually was that the two deceased died as a result of shock from unexpected attack which led to stampede but unfortunately this did not made the headline. The accurate was revealed when Jona Jang said to have asked Mwadkon as an eye witness and a lucky survivor to narrate how the two legislators died. "Everybody," said Mwadkon, was racing away, but the

senator slumped and there was a race to take him.” This was blatantly downplay or absurdly ignored by the press reporting the incidence.

This piece clearly pointed out the obvious disregard of fundamental principles of journalism of accuracy, balance, fairness and objectivity by Nigerian press coverage which he stressed that it is in time of conflict that media ought to strive harder to uphold them and only an adherence of these and other time-honoured tenets of professionalism can protect the media from being used by either side in a conflict for propaganda (Haruna, 2012).

The insensitive nature of conflicts reportage of Nigerian press elicited so much response from imminent personality within jos and the country. As captured in *The Vanguard newspaper of Saturday, 27 March 2010* cited in Adisa (2012) voicing out his complain on press coverage of jos conflict, Major General Saleh Maina under the headline that: Jos crisis: GOC explodes! *“I was very disappointed that some part of the print media misconstrued, misunderstood, misrepresented and misinformed the public and was apportioning blame on the military.”* This concern was not only raised by the security operative on the scene but also some religious leaders like Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama as reported by Daily independent of 22 February, 2010: *“it is obvious that certain section of the media have taken side in reporting of events in the recurring crises on the plateau and this has the capacity to cause more harm than good.”*

Muslim media group also expressed its concern and called for fair coverage in Jos, 15 March 2010 that *“as an umpire, media has a duty to be fair, just and balanced in its reportage of events, not only in respect of the jos crises, but also other issues in line with the ethics of journalism profession”*

Moreover, the instances of poor handling of conflicts reportage by Nigerian press is increasingly and embarrassingly provoke serious concern by well-meaning Nigerians as the instances of that are abound few others are as Yusuf explains(2002 cited in Doki, 2012) that, “the two months after the (Jos) riots The Tribune persisted in its conflict promoting style of reporting. It carried a front-page story attributing the riot to ‘Christian girls force to marry Muslims’. However, the reporter did not cite a single incident of such a force marriage. Also in its front page the news magazine of 8 August, 2001 cast an inflammatory headline that read “the jihadist invasion - how foreign fundamentalists wreak havoc in the north”

This goes to show how Nigerian press are being abused the inherent power it has in setting agenda and framing the stories that may have a devastating effect on the society on its coverage of ethno religious conflicts; instead of stories frames that can douse tension and help in conflict resolution and peace building process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this paper, Conflict Trap Theory was adopted as the framework of analysis. The exponents of this theory are Paul Collier, V.L. Elliott, Havard Hegre, Ankle Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol and Nicholas Sambanis. To them, conflict trap denotes that once a conflict has erupted, it tends to develop a momentum of its own. Peace seemingly becomes elusive and hard to restore. Even when peace is restored it often does not endure (Collier et. al 2003).

The exponents of conflict trap ascribed the lengthy pattern of a typical conflict to a number of interlocking factors. Conflicts in multiethnic societies are enduring possibly on account of their ready vulnerability to the rallying, massaging and mobilization of ethnic sentiments for both the warring groups and the government. In addition, in a plural society, particularly where the population has significant grievances, conflict usually becomes an effective political strategy for pursuit of their interests and goals. Also, even if the custodians of power and authority in the society are willing to concede to the demands of the groups, they are usually neither trusted nor believed to have credible means of committing the warring factions to agreement. The warring groups might be afraid that once they hold the olive branch the custodians of power and authority would renege on any agreement (Collier et. al 2003). Furthermore, it is also contended that it is even difficult for the custodians of power and authority to concede to demands of the warring groups because such could encourage the flowering, proliferation, mushrooming and radicalization of other groups, which often have opposing objectives. Also, a significant pattern to lengthy conflict is the extremely unequally distributed income and a very low average income, possibly on account of the cost of sustaining conflict is low if there is an expansive layer of economic destitute and possibly significantly weak institutions such as the security agencies, which are unable to deter and apprehend violators of the laws. More so, sustaining conflict has become easier because the warring groups have easy access to armaments for prosecuting conflict (Collier et. al 2003).

Yet, very important to the lengthy pattern of conflict is that once a conflict has occurred a template is raised. It becomes difficult to return to status quo. Presumably, conflict reinforces hatred, and may shift the balance of influential interests in favour of continued conflict. Also, the criminal entrepreneurs that profit from the conflict would do anything including sabotaging peace process for it to continue. According to Paul Collier et al. (2003, p. 12): violence entrepreneurs, whether primarily political or primarily commercial, may gain from conflict.

to such an extent that they cannot credibly be compensated sufficiently to accept peace. Those who see themselves as political leaders benefit from war because they can run their organizations in hierarchical, military style with power concentrated in their own hands, something much more difficult to justify in peacetime. Those who see themselves as extortionists benefit from the absence of the rule of law in the areas they control. However, leaders see themselves as if they will have invested in expensive military equipment that will become redundant once they agree to

peace. Asking a rebel leader to accept peace may be a little asking a champion swimmer to empty pool.

Following from the above assumptions, the conflict trap theory is apt and relevant for the appreciation of the challenges of ethno-religious conflict management in Nigeria. It offers deep insights to the interlocking factors that sustain conflict. It presupposes that once conflict has occurred it lengthens and becomes challenging to restore peace on account of a number of factors such as ethnic pluralism, proliferation of arms, existence of income disparities, existence of expansive republic of hoodlums and the activities of criminal entrepreneurs.

The conceptual and theoretical excursion reveals various perspectives for the appreciation of violence. Notably, each of the perspectives may be perfunctory, deficient, incomplete and restrictive but in sum they are illuminating and complementary.

### **A Template for Conflicts Sensitive Reporting**

The growing concerns about the prevalence of conflicts globally and the various media forms that are being used by conflicts entrepreneurs to perpetrate the act for vested interest prompted many scholars and professionals to initiate series of discussion and brainstorming to come out with the template on conflict reporting. In one of the discussions on this, journalism scholars and professionals summarised the bottom line of how conflict reporting should be as thus: “ modern conflict reporting must at all times adhere to accepted standard of professional journalism and only then add new qualities, like better understanding the dynamics of conflicts, more sophisticated sources selection or other innocent tools.” This is obvious that journalists’ responsibility has been extended beyond providing accurate, balance, impartial and objective information to that of advocacy for peace. This extension of professional responsibility raise some concern about the changing role of media as an impartial commentator; but the raised dust was clear as well that professional journalism by definition should lead to peaceful resolution of conflict because it serves to diversify dialogue and broaden the range of opinions being heard (2003). Reporter while covering conflict issue should try as much as possible to approach it holistically focusing attention to the event that leads to conflicts. This is what it is call conflict mapping; which includes an understanding of the origins, nature, dynamics and possibilities of resolution of the conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2005 cited in Adisa, 2012).

But owing to the analysis on press coverage above it clearly demonstrated that they did not take all these issues into consideration when reporting conflict instead, they resort to the following:

1. They are only focus on event not what lead to it
2. They are interested on bad news aspect of conflict and careless on the peace process
3. Media sensationalise and emotionalise the conflict

4. Their source of news are only the elites residing in the cities with no regard to the masses that are usually worse hit by the conflict
5. Stereotypes are encouraged etc.

Guidelines for responsible and effective conflict reporting identified by Allen & Wilkinson are as follow:

- a. Cover each side of the conflict
- b. Present people as individuals not as representatives of the groups
- c. Provide a right context not just coverage of the event
- d. Focus on processes not on the event only
- e. Remind the audience that ethno religious diversity is a global thing as such managing it for peaceful and harmonious coexistence is feasible.
- f. Will self-censorship or others reduce ethnic violence? If yes refrain from reporting the event completely.

Others guidelines for responsible and effective conflict reporting are proposed by McGoldrick and Lynch (2007), some of which are:

1. Avoid reporting conflict as consisting two parties contesting one goal but try to disaggregate the two into smaller group pursuing many goal for a wide range of outcome
2. Do not focus on what divide but seeking to unearth common ground that will lead to lasting solution
3. Should avoid the use of victimizing language such as destitute, devastate, defenseless and other demonizing adjectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is a verifiable fact that media is like an empty slate whatever impact it has is directly linked to the people behind the production of its content. It is evidently clear that despite the significant role of the press in providing live saving information in conflict situation (Pate and Kurfi, 2022); they are immersed deeply in instigating further the dividing lines of ethno religious issues in their coverage of the Jos crises and other areas on the Plateau. And this ignoble practice brazenly contravenes even the conventional ethics of journalism profession that emphasises fairness, balance, objectivity and detachment from the events and issues under coverage talk more of conventional guideline of reporting conflict. It is also an incontrovertible fact that journalism practice is committed to serving public good not serving the vested interest motivated by revenue drive and other primordial consideration at the expense of peaceful coexistence and the general welfare of the people.

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