

Taking Gender Dynamics into Account in Conflict Reporting in Nigeria: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This paper is a discourse on media coverage of conflict in Nigeria from a gender perspective. The mass media play significant role in either conflict resolution or its escalation. Through framing of news reports, the media set the agenda on conflict in ways which serve prominent or hidden interests of the various players while ignoring other actors in the conflict. The often ignored actors are mostly women and this reduces the complexities and dimensions of the conflict and by extension, causes amplification effect. Consequently, the paper advocates such media coverage that puts into consideration the gender dynamics in conflicts and the consequences for gender relations that often go unnoticed and unresolved; information provided by the media should be all inclusive and balanced, in a way that the 'who and what', represents the men, women and their diverse views and actions in conflict situations. Therefore, Gender Aware reporting principles become not only imperative but a journalistic creed that the contemporary journalists and editors must imbibe for a balanced representation of the experiences and roles of men and women in conflict situations and resolutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict; Gender Dynamics; Gender Aware Principles; Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Conflicts are a 'central part' of human lives (Hamelink, 2011, p.11), and the media are 'an active part of any conflict' (Tehrani, 2007, p.2). Indeed conflict has been among the list of news elements that also provides high rating for media houses. However, decades of study suggest that the media rarely report conflict neutrally (Ross, 2007; Herman & Chonsky, 2002; Hall, 1980). The body of literature point to many factors that contribute to and influence media coverage of conflict. Among these influences and often overlooked is gender. Under these influences media frame news reports and set the agenda on conflict in ways which serve prominent or hidden interest of the various players and which in turn ignores other actors in the conflict.

Take for instance, the Boko-Haram violent conflict situation in Nigeria. In the wake of the April 14, 2015 Chibok girls' saga, the Nigerian media were awash with stories of the abduction of the about 276 female students of Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State. Women suddenly became 'prominent' as 'subjects' of major news in Nigeria. Although the conflict emanating from the BokoHaram sects had for over four years ravaged the North Eastern States, the reportage has more or less centred on the carnage, havocs and threats by the terrorists group. While the aggressions chiefly exhibited (as has always been attributed to) by men is widely reported, women remained in the shadows and at the receiving end; as the 'helpless' victims of the conflict – as widows, displaced, raped etc. Suffice to say at this point that even the horrendous experiences and the supposed 'helplessness' of the Nigerian women in the war-torn zone had before the 'Chibok Girls' incident, received minimal media coverage.

This insufficient and stereotypical coverage of women in conflict situations further demonstrates the social constructed nature of news as argued by scholars. According to Stuart Hall, (1980), the media do not simply and transparently report events which are naturally newsworthy in themselves. News is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selection of events and topics according to a social constructed set of categories.

Media's role in reporting conflict is significant and mainly exhibited in journalist's quantity of news coverage and construction. As Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) explain, "the power of the media in warfare is formidable. It can be a mediator or an interpreter or even a facilitator of conflict; if only by editing away facts that do not fit the demands of air time or print space". During conflict, the media assume a central role because citizens are dependent on the media to provide timely, credible and comprehensive information of distant events. And journalists act as the communicative agents to provide the information. In Nigeria, most of the conflict situations are concentrated in North East and South- South zones of the country. Majority of Nigerians from other geo-political zones therefore rely on, to a large extent, media coverage of these conflicts as they unfold and are able to follow the events through the eyes of the media and make informed decisions based on media accounts. In this instance the strategy and style of reporting conflict becomes strategic in the overall context of the conflict situation. Peleg (2007), points out that "Communication" is a crucial determinant in conflict and conflict resolution, because it creates consciousness of, and attentiveness to, the other (p.26). Therefore, it becomes crucial that information so provided by the media becomes all inclusive and balanced, in a way that the 'who and what', represents the men, women and their diverse views and actions in conflict situations – that is the gender dynamics of conflict.

Understanding the Concept of Gender Dynamics in Conflict

Gender dynamics in conflict is defined as an understanding of the diverse roles and realities of women and men in conflict situations. It describes how the conflict situations affect men and women who may simultaneously play the roles of activists and parents, soldiers and victims in conflict stressed areas; and how the way women and men's distinct experiences may alter gender relations during and after conflict situation (El Jack, 2003). Gender dynamics therefore, implies the diverse and changing roles of women and men during conflict situations, as well as the gendered outcome of conflict. Conflict as a gendered activity affects men and women differently and often results in gender specific disadvantages, particularly for women. By understanding the broad spectrum of gender roles in conflict, a more nuanced insight can be gained about gender in conflict and more suitable policy responses and actions adopted accordingly. That is why media's coverage of conflict becomes critical.

However, the media by choosing 'who' to include and omit in their report and 'how' to report events in conflict often times fail to portray the diverse realities of conflict situations not only in Nigeria but elsewhere. Since a reporter's story on conflict can be the sole information available to the audience, how the reporter frames the conflict can bias the audience in favor of one party, or the other. By also ignoring or marginalizing issues of gender in conflict reporting, the media insensitivity can reinforce stereotypes of women and men facing conflict situations. But, if the media agenda concerning conflict is gender sensitive and the framing gender inclusive it will reflect the diversity of the reality of men and women in conflict situations, and can positively influence public opinion towards quick resolution of conflict.

To further put gender dynamics in perspective, we need to understand that terrorism, war or armed conflict is a gendered activity and the conception we have of armed conflict, war or terrorism is a gendered one. This traditional perception mainly focuses on men's role in society in general and in armed conflict in particular. Such opinion encourages the expectations that men will fight and women will support them in the 'home front'. This expectation is also dominant in Nigeria society where issues of armed conflict are automatically perceived as 'men's affair'. Denying the often true reality that any conflict such as is present in Nigeria, whether Boko Haram, Niger-Delta crisis and Biafra agitation, affect men and women in Nigeria both as victims and aggressors. The popular perception is that men are soldiers or aggressors and women are wives, mothers, nurses, social workers and sex-workers. This stereotypical perception and interpretations of gender roles during conflict are shaped by social, political, economic, cultural and religious contexts of the society and often reflected and reinforced by the media. Byrne (1996) explains that, it is true that it is primarily men who are conscripted and killed in battle, but women make up the majority of civilian casualties and suffer in their role as caregivers, due to a breakdown of social structures.

Women are also combatants, as evidenced in the Boko Haram bombing activities, and men victims. These realities necessitate an understanding of the gendered nature of conflict and the consequences for gender relations, which often go unnoticed and unresolved. Gender dynamics in conflict, disallows the often limited narrow understanding of gender that tends to allow us conceptualize gender in terms of interchanging the term gender with biological differences between men and women or equating gender with women only. Gender dynamics expands to conceive gender in terms of gender relations, in terms of the ways women and men interact. It therefore, explores the impact of conflict on gender relations in terms of how power dynamics between women and men are affected by the distinct types of disadvantages that conflict imposes (El Jack, 2003). In the case of Nigeria, gender dynamics implies the realities of internally displaced men and women in different settlements or camps, the realities of their struggles, the distinct disadvantages caused by the displacements, the reversed roles occupied by these women and men facing these conflict situations in the Northern part of the country and the Niger delta, including the impact of these new gender roles in conflict resolution, healing and reconstructions. In this regard, El Jack, (2003) further explains that the language of gender moves away from stereotypical interpretations of what women and men should do and what they should need, to accepting and supporting what women and men are doing and what they do need. In most analyses of conflict and post-conflict resolution, some ignore women while others take a gender-blind approach or define the role of women in stereotypical ways. Still others look at women and men without considering gender relations to understand that women and men function in a variety of roles – stereotypical ways or otherwise – and to examine how changes in these roles affect gender relations. Gender dynamics however takes all these into account.

GENDER AND CONFLICT REPORTING IN NIGERIA

Conflicts emanating in Nigeria in recent times is such that demands media coverage in such a way that the public will understand the various dimensions. Reporting conflict as argued by critics has always presented a number of dilemmas to the journalist. First, the style and quantity of coverage appears insufficient, superficial and gendered when compared to the often complex nature of such conflicts. Second, is the use of stereotype and prejudice to narrow down the perceptions of the conflict actors and parties so as to determine the outcome of a given conflict and influence the process of its resolution. Another dilemma for the media in reporting conflict relates to the nature of the media as an institution that is time bound. This readily lends itself to the reporting of momentary

events making the media ignore contexts and other details that may aid the audiences understanding of the issue being reported (Howard and Prentoulis, 2003). The pressure of deadline encourages journalists to focus on conflict trends rather than focusing on the details of what led to the conflicts. The outcome is, a simplistic, vivid, low coverage, where consequences and victims are covered while causes and solutions are ignored. The wide held view is that media reports deriving immediately from conflicts hardly deepens the Nigerian audiences' understanding of the situations other than that they are kept posted on the list of casualties, utterances of leaders of troops, pronouncements and threats of rebel leaders, victims of the conflict, government latest operational tactics and victories as well as governments treatment of victims. A few examples of some past screaming headlines in our National dailies will suffice: *Another Bomb explosion rocks Jos as hundreds of people lose their lives; 350 massacred as Boko Haram overruns community in Borno State, North -East Nigeria; Death toll continues to rise as more victims die from the Nyanya bomb blast in Abuja. Escalating cases of hunger and malnutrition witnessed among children and women in IDP camps.* Sometimes news media are filled up with the number of casualties as evidenced in the excerpts above, such that it arouses fear and confusion in the mind of the average audience without any critical examination of the details, causes and effect of conflict. As Waisbord, (2002) emphasizes, the news media establishes a "culture of fear" which they perpetuate by portraying a "vast array of threat". No wonder, the Nigerian media has been criticized for focusing on conflict behaviours. Pate (2002, p.41) submits that the press is wont to "writing incomplete stories that do not cover sources, options and resolutions. Instead, they concentrate on conflict behaviour: 'who is doing what to whom with what effect'". Conflict reporting discourse in this instance is not balanced and exhaustive.

The media of Nigeria has also been criticized in falling short in its responsibility of providing the balanced reflection of diverse views and voices by ignoring and marginalizing women issues in conflict reporting. The gendered distinction in society between private and public is also such that in periods of conflict, women's suffering is invisible and excluded from the news stories since it does not take place in the public domain. Turshen and Twagiramariya, (1998, p.118) support this view based on their experience with Rwandan women as they write. "Women tend to define their suffering in relation to other people such as their husbands and children and are reluctant to make public their own experiences of abuse which society often sees as belonging in the private realm (Meintjes and Goldblatt 1998, p. 54). In order to understand conflict situations we have to understand that structures in our societies which are gendered result in different experiences for men and women during conflict due to their different roles in society. Using the Boko Haram conflict as a case in point let's examine some of the experiences of women during conflict and find out whether such experiences have been reported duly by Nigerian media:

- In conflict situations in the area affected by BokoHaram insurgency, women's right are violated and not always recognized as human rights.
- Gender based violence increases as we see in the Chibok Girls' abduction case.
- Incidences of internally displaced women and children increase.
- Sexual violence becomes evidence in conflict with systematic rape and sexual abuse used as a part of strategy to demoralize the group under threat.
- Some women are taken as combatants while some are taken in by rebels and expected to perform non military services such as cooks, carriers, sex slaves and forced marriage. This is evident in the evolving strategy of the Boko Haram terrorist group in using female teenagers as suicide bombers and 'wives'.
- Social networks are disrupted and destroyed and family structures and composition changed (Adapted from, DeTemmer, 2001).

From what we have above, it becomes clear that Nigerian women's experiences have not received a lot of attention in the media perhaps because our society is structured in such a way that women's suffering remains invisible. Or perhaps as argued by some, media usually adopt inner censorship mechanism to deescalate the effect of conflict attack by deliberately underreporting issues concerning women sufferings. Nigerian media coverage of conflict does not just retain the dominant pattern of "Women are largely seen but not heard", rather in conflict stories women are excluded, almost near absent in media coverage. They all but disappear from the scene of media stories. When they do appear they are in the peripheral region scantily visible, and often voiceless. In majority of the conflict stories, women are portrayed as victims or when they do extraordinary things like being one of the suicide bombers they are sensationalized and suddenly acquire prominence. These few excerpts from some of the Nigerian dailies will suffice: *15 Women, Kids Feared Killed In Fresh Borno Attacks(Guardian, Tuesday, August 26, 2014); Female Suicide Bombers kills Six in Kano Market(This Day,Thursday,Dec,11,2014); Shekau Claims Chibok Girls Married Off, Military Moves In More Troops (This Day, Sun, Nov. 2, 2014).*

The fact remains that conflict affects men and women differently and as such should be reported that way. In conflict, women can be civilians' not just helpless victims; they can be breadwinners because conflict situations affect gender roles; and they can also be peace builders and at times also combatants. However, stereotypical, episodic representation of conflict issues supported mostly by single narrative case analysis

dominates Nigerian media coverage of conflict. This portrays women in the subordinate role of the peaceful passive victims; the vulnerable and powerless dependent in need of protection and rescue. Patterns of underrepresentation, misrepresentation and *invisibilization* (relative invisibility of women in conflict as if they are not part of it and not affected by it) of women in Nigeria conflict news story summarizes news media construction and coverage of women. It is instructive to point out that this problem of marginalization and inadequate gender coverage and portrayal is deeply entrenched in news media system not just in conflict reporting. That is why an understanding and recognition of gender dynamics becomes necessary. Gender dynamics extend to encompass the broad diversities of experiences of men and women, featuring views of ordinary people affected by conflict. It is understanding gender dynamics in armed conflict situations such as we have in Nigeria that will result in media adoption of gender sensitive-conflict reporting and conflict sensitive reporting that is gradually becoming adopted globally. Why take gender into account in conflict reporting?

Reasons for Understanding the Relationship between Gender and Conflict

As conflict situation arises changes in gender relations occur in these fundamental ways:

- a. Changes in Demographic Profiles- In armed conflict situation more women than men survive.
- b. Changes in Division of Labour- between men and women that can be permanent and result in shift in income earnings.
- c. Increased political Participation and Organization-More women learn to become part of different groups that affect power dynamics by increasing their confidence in themselves (Morrison, 1998).
- d. Women and men experience violence differently during and after conflict, in their capacities as both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' (Moser and Clark, 2001, p.7) which needs to be taken into account. More specifically, gender analysis in armed conflict highlights the differences between women and men in terms of their gendered activities, their needs, their acquisition and control of resources and their access to decision-making processes in post-conflict situations (UNDP, 2002).

The above reasons underscore the necessity of mainstreaming gender concerns in conflict reporting. Joseph (2005) emphasizes the advantage of mainstreaming gender in conflict as he writes:

The media –and media professionals –stand to gain by recognizing that there is a gender dimension to virtually every event, process, institution and /or individual experience covered by the media, including disasters and conflicts And that women, including poor and illiterate women, have knowledge and opinions on practically everything. Failure to tap women – including those now attempting to resume life after the disaster – as sources and resources can only impoverish media coverage and diminish our understanding of the post-Tsunami scenario, as well as many other similar situations.

Mainstreaming gender in conflict reporting reflects a more accurate picture of the conflict situation. It also provides sufficient, balanced information, women and men in conflict stressed area need to make informed decisions and responses. During conflict, the media perform these principal roles as summarized below by scholars:

1. Bridging Communication gap;
2. Educating the audience;
3. Confidence building;
4. Correcting misperceptions;
5. Identify underlying interest and causes of conflict;
6. Framing the conflict;
7. Face-saving and consensus building;
8. Solution-building (Conflict resolution);
9. Encouraging a balance of power (Lloyd, Ross, 2009; Joseph, 2005)

These roles as argued by authors mostly occur during the three stages of conflict:

Pre-conflict stage: In this phase of the conflict, the media publicizes the competing interests of conflicting parties and in this way performs its surveillance function. The quality and the frequency of media report in this stage is critical as it may lead to averting impending conflict by providing the conflicting parties an opportunity to strike common grounds for a negotiated settlement of differences and thus raise demands for peace.

The conflict period: at this point, the media reports on the ongoing conflict situation. The nature and pattern of coverage here is also critical since it has the potential to prolong the conflict, exacerbate it or provide opportunities for quick and lasting resolutions. Most importantly the media at this stage represents the major channel for the public to understand, follow and respond to issues arising during the conflict as it unfolds. Since a misreporting, underreporting and even over-reporting can affect the outcome of the conflict, adhering strictly to the doctrine of responsibility, accuracy and neutrality in covering all aspects of the conflicts becomes necessary.

The post-conflict phase: In this situation, the media keeps an eye on enforcement of peace agreements,

on-going dialogue and other negotiations of settlements. By reporting continually on the progress made concerning the peace agreements that have been put in place by competing parties the media ensures that they are being implemented judiciously.

In whatever stage of conflict, journalists' rigorous balanced and in-depth reporting can challenge prevailing prejudices and stereotypes and help to promote understanding, reconciliation and reconstruction. In reporting conflict the media faces challenges that compromise its ability to effectively and adequately report conflict. Some of these challenges include:

1. Personal safety and threats during reporting
2. Ethical versus un-ethical reporting
3. Lack of training and appropriate capacity for conflict reporting
4. Lack of understanding of elements and gender dynamics of conflict

Journalists can overcome many of the challenges they face in informing publics about conflicts through a basic understanding of the elements of conflict or what some have called an understanding of the conflict context or conflict analysis. Conflict analysis is generally defined as the analysis of what is presented by conflicting parties through the broad lens of the implicit and explicit causes and actors involved in a conflict. The objective is to find the reason for the conflict which becomes a common ground between conflicting parties to move towards negotiations and peaceful settlements of the dispute.

Elements of Conflict/Conflict Analysis

There are four elements of conflict analysis:

- ❖ **Profile of conflict-** Conflicts are often complex in nature and rooted in multidimensional causes and factors that interact and overlap, especially for violent conflicts. To put conflict in appropriate context requires an analysis of the conflict. What are the political, economic, security, governance and socio-cultural context? What are the emerging political, economic, religious and social issues?
- ❖ **Causes of Conflict-** identifying the proximate and structural causes of conflict is also important for conflict reporting. Since conflicts involve a balancing of vectors of power to produce effects, it embodies the levels of potentiality, dispositions and powers, or manifestations. The structure and levels of conflict needs to be understood and nuanced by the journalist. For instance conflict as potentiality is the space or opening within the society of possible conflicts. The realm of potential opposing vectors of power which must be understood and identified early.
- ❖ **Actors of conflict-** actors to a conflict are most times multiple with multilayered perspectives, interest and agenda. They can be individuals, groups and institutions engaged in as well as being affected by conflict. The journalist needs to identify all these implicit and explicit actors to segregate their profile and possible consequent actions. This will also help the journalist in the following area:
 - Understand the stated interest of actors involved;
 - Hidden agenda of actors involved;
 - Relationships of various other actors and their perceptions of such interrelationships;
 - Resources the conflict actors have at present in order to realize their agenda; and
 - Actors who are interested in peace through negotiations (Lloyd, 2012)
- ❖ **Dynamics of conflict-** Men and women experience many of the same phenomena during armed conflict such as we now have in the country: loss of livelihoods and assets, displacement, physical and mental injury, torture, the death and injury of loved ones, sexual assault and enforced disappearances. Yet we see that these factors affect men and women in different ways because they are differently embodied and symbolize different things to their community and those that attack them (Mazurana&Proctor, 2013). These different dimensions of the factors of conflict need to be clearly understood and reflected. Such that the windows of opportunities for conflict resolution by the various actors can be explored. The purpose is to identify through investigative journalism the current trend of the conflict and the implication to the wellbeing of all those affected in the conflict and in this way determine the objective reason that can be recognized by the actors involved in the conflict as common grounds for peace.

However, the effectiveness of media's role in conflict largely depends on media understanding of conflict in a holistic manner that often times, is a source of challenge. This understanding provides the tools for approaching conflict from a broad perspective. Media studies document a host of new concepts in a bid to explain what should be the new role of media in conflict, starting from "the journalism of attachment (Bell, 1998) to reliable journalism (Howard, 2003) to what Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2005) call "conflict mapping". Conflict mapping has been defined as an "understanding of the origins, nature, dynamics and possibilities for resolution of the conflict." Looking at the concept we also see that it is another term for the new approach in conflict reporting that is all encompassing as well as ethical, that has been referred to in other terms as conflict sensitive reporting, gender sensitive conflict reporting and even peace journalism (Ross, 2007). All of these new concepts are essentially drawn from the notions which stress the social responsibility of the media including a

proactive role for media in resolving conflict. These approaches in whatever appellation have become critical media strategies to building blocks of reliable professional journalism practice especially in conflict situations. These approaches aim at providing more insightful, more comprehensive, more balanced news content instead of a situation where conflicts are underreported, misreported while the violence and insecurity are over reported and inaccurately reported. This way the media can provide for a more informed and critical audience that will not fall prey to gendered prejudices and will have the capacity to address violence responsibly. What is conflict sensitivity and gender sensitive reporting?

Conflict Sensitivity and Gender Sensitivity in Media Reporting: The Nexus

The information failures of the media in providing timely and credible information can become a ‘primary contributor’ in escalating conflict (Lake & Rothchild, 1996, p.75). Such failures occur when media construct and reinforce simplistic or negative portrayal of those representing the other side (Hofman, 1972) and when some other actors’ (women) activities are ignored or insufficiently reported. Conflict is multidimensional; its coverage must be multidimensional as well. Reporting a violent incident is not sufficient, focusing on the physical details, like the number of people killed (e.g. Bomb explosion in Borno 250 dead as the death toll keeps rising) or the nature of weaponry used and places attacked is not sufficient. Rather the new approach to conflict reporting – Conflict-sensitive journalism – should be adopted. According to Ross (2009, p.10) conflict sensitive-journalism:

Is a normative mode of responsible conscientious media coverage of conflict that reflects a modernization of the original values of the news media. It is rooted in the belief that the news media in many societies can be a powerful force to reduce the causes of conflict and to enable a conflict stressed society to better pursue conflict resolution.

Anchored on the social responsibility principles of the media, conflict sensitive journalism expands on journalism principles to include a more nuanced rigorous reporting that can challenge prevailing prejudices and stereotypes by giving the bigger picture and in this way help promote understanding, reconciliation and healing (Lloyd, 2012). Arguing in favour of conflict sensitive journalism an author points out that it demands the most rigorous journalists standards and skills because the reports has to investigate more deeply; question mainstream perceptions; and remain constantly on the alert to ensure that the story is not coloured by their prejudice. No wonder Lloyd (2012, p.9) emphasized the positive nature of conflict journalism this way:

Conflict sensitive journalism goes to the field; it listens to the affected and the ignored. It assesses their needs, hears their views and examines their ideas for alternative approaches and reports them.

Conflict sensitive reporting is about making choices in terms of ‘what’ to report and ‘how’ to report in conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005a, p.50). These choices create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict. Lynch and Galtung (2010, p.52) stressed that ‘selection is the issue, the criteria applied and the codes and the context in which event is placed and interpreted’. Looking at these definitions it is easy to understand that conflict sensitive reporting is an expansion of routine journalistic reportorial mode that seeks to provide an additional framework for more comprehensive reporting of conflict in a context that will provide possibilities for peaceful resolution of conflict. It involves media coverage of conflict in a way that will de-escalate the conflict by giving equitable opportunity to diverse sides of the conflict to state their case and in this way promote the common value of peace without compromising the duty to inform. This understanding demonstrates the link between conflict sensitive journalism, peace journalism and gender sensitive journalism. The practical application of the concepts further demonstrates the link as it argues for the journalist to include the following:

- Expanding the Agenda-This means broadening the mainstream definitions of who and what is considered newsworthy. The news conflict frame, should include people (especially women, minorities and marginalised groups) who are often ignored in the report, so that the media give space to all voices in the community especially those who are affected by the conflict who are oftentimes women, not just the powerful (advocates and elites and government). By including more voices and views the media challenge stereotypes and polarization;
- The media need to also recognize that news is a part of a process and not just a series of related events and allow this to be reflected in the provision of the bigger -picture and the context of the conflict. Journalists can go beyond the usual conflict narrative of this side versus the other side and expose the complexities and actors involved. The complexity of the conflict should be reflected in a clear narrative that is continuous, building from the development of the various aspects of the conflict to its present state. Such reflective narratives have the capacity to deepen the understanding of the multiple layers of the conflict making the news stories more interesting and realistic. The media frame should also be a combination of episodic and thematic frames to capture the essence and why of the conflict situation.
- Avoid spinning: Spin has become an integral part of the provision of information by most interests in positions of authority during conflict. Instead of just relying on them, the journalist should be aware of

the multiple frameworks which may be applicable to a given story in order to set the spin in context rather than as the whole truth. To achieve this, the journalist should include more choices in the selection of the sources and voices to be heard and in the widening of perspectives of the story. Instead of merely following the agenda of the powerful, the conflict reporter should be more proactive, by reflecting the causes, sources as well as the impact of conflict.

- **Realities and Responsibilities:** Responsibility has to do with obligations to the people we report as journalists. It is operating within the ambits of the law and mindful of journalistic ethics. The most basic responsibility is to protect sources. Another core responsibility is to be more in-depth and analytical, providing all sides of the story. By doing this the conflict reporter disaggregates than lumping everybody together. In trying to reflect diverse opinions, the journalist show what people from different sides have in common and expose the shifting range of views within monolithic groups. In doing this, the important creed should be to always reflect the core values of journalism such as accuracy, objectivity balance and inclusivity.
- **Gender-Sensitivity:** Conflicts affect men and women differently journalists need to move from gender-blind approach to one that is more gender-aware by including the voices of both men and women, both positive and negative and how the conflicts affect men and women differently (Tahir, 2009) during conflict.

Using the traditional news format scholars provided a simple guide to conflict reporting that summarizes the new approach as follows:

- ❖ **Who** is affected by this conflict? **Who** has distinct stake in its outcome? **What** is their influence, affluence?
- ❖ **What** triggered the dispute? **What** issues do the parties need to resolve?
- ❖ **When** did the conflict begin? **How** long has the circumstances existed that gave rise to the dispute?
- ❖ **Where?** What geographical or political jurisdictions are affected by the dispute? How has this kind of thing been handled in other places?
- ❖ **Why** do the parties hold their positions? What needs, interests, fears and concerns are at stake?
- ❖ **How** are they resolving the conflict? – Negotiation, mediation, arbitration, armed warfare – What are the costs/benefits of the chosen method?
- ❖ **What Options** have the parties explored? How do the various options related to the interests identified?
- ❖ **What Common grounds** are there between the parties? What can they build on? (Ross and Llyod,2004)

The Conflict- Sensitive Reporters Creed

Reporters also devised what is referred to as the conflict sensitive reporting Creed or peace reporting Creed. This set of guidelines as enumerated below can as well be adopted in Nigeria:

Before you report:

- Listen and observe;
- Look for the untold stories;
- Be on the alert for hidden agendas;
- Be aware of your own prejudices;

When you report:

- First, do no harm!
- Show the bigger picture, without blaming anyone;
- Make sure your language & labelling is neutral:
- Challenge stereotypes;
- Focus on common needs;
- Open up creative possibilities for healthy solutions.

Applying the creed of conflict sensitive reporting in conflict stressed areas is adopting the conflict sensitive approach and can correct misperceptions and challenge inaccurate information as well as identify underlying interests and sources of conflict, investigate alternatives and solutions. This in turn, can produce a fuller report that can contribute much to gender parity and peace building in many ways.

Gender Perspective in Conflict Sensitive Reporting: Making the Link

In accordance with traditional social perceptions of gender, media coverage of conflicts tends to construct men as active participants in conflicts (fighters, aggressors, offenders, active defenders). In contrast, women are perceived as pacifying influence (Sjoberg, 2010) as if they naturally oppose war and conflict; are peace loving and resistant to violence; suffer from violence; need protection and are only victims of conflicts (Fröhlich, 2014). This notion and one-sided stereotypes though unrealistic, dominates news media coverage of conflict and resonates across Nigeria news media because it aligns with the traditional conception of the difference between

men and women. This notion as argued can be reversed instead of being reinforced by the media when there is a conscious awareness of the incomplete picture the media presents and when the media recognises the critical role and effect such presentations have on the public perception and responses to conflict situations.

In reporting conflict or any news story there should be no need for a special focus on gender. The need however becomes necessary when it becomes apparent that journalist's agenda setting and framing of news stories are sometimes gender blind. But if reporters do their job properly – that is they are fair and ensure the views of those affected are reflected properly – then the gender perspective would be automatically included. This argument points out that gender sensitive approach is an integral part of responsible, balanced reporting not a special consideration, not an extra formula or the add women and stir optional extra some journalists see it to be. In conflict situations as we have presently in Nigeria, our understanding of gender dynamics have shown that gender relations are seriously affected, therefore, demonstrating the extra need to understand and report these differences especially for women. This becomes a major cause for concern since most often women's voices are silenced; their perspectives ignored and their contributions and experiences in conflict situations often untold. Turely Ann (2001) captures it well as she writes:

The perspectives on women are rarely nuanced, especially in conflict situations. When women appear, they are portrayed as passive victims and their stories frequently sensationalised. Yet these incessant media images of desperation and victimization tell only part of the story. The other part, the strength, the courage and the resilience of many women, is rarely captured. The different experiences of women, the ways in which they live through conflict – as fighters, community leaders, social organisers, workers, farmers, traders and welfare workers – and their role once the violence has ended in peacekeeping and conflict resolution process are not considered newsworthy.

To redress this imbalance, Nigerian journalists need to mainstream gender perspective in conflict stories and redefine conflict from a gender perspective not necessarily because it is a gender thing or as a token but because gender dynamics are essential features of any conflict situation and must therefore be taken into consideration to produce a balance news story.

Reporting Conflict through the Lens of Gender-Sensitivity

The process of integrating gender perspective into conflict reporting starts with, respecting the essential standards of journalist's professionalism which impartially presents verified information in a fair and balanced context. That kind of context also values and gives voice to marginalised interest (Llyod and Ross, 2004). This goes beyond just including a woman's voice into the story or finding a woman's angle or even assigning women journalists to cover gender stories, or resort to reverse stereotyping. It rather means in simple terms consciously trying to frame and report conflict from a gender perspective and to proactively try to be conflict –sensitive. It implies a deliberate use of gender aware principles in routine news coverage and reportage of conflict. What are gender aware reporting principles?

Gender Aware reporting principles require journalists and editors to ensure that the coverage of any event or issue is constructed and told through the voices of both women and men; and requires editors to use data, background information and analysis through the perspectives of women and men to illustrate how the issue or policy reported on affects women and men in the society (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). It also involves research, in-depth reporting and analysis, a diversity of sources and perspectives which are also the basis of good journalism. Gender aware principles is a recognition of the complexity that informs any news story which means reporting such stories in the full context of these complexities that include gender diversities and realities. It is a truthful balance account of the complexities and diversity of the views of men and women in any news story. Most have defined it simply as reporting news using the gender lens, being gender aware instead of gender blind or gender ignorant in news coverage and reporting. The gender sensitive reporter recognises and reflects gender relations in conflict and uses same to report and uncover the underlying roots of conflicts and the solution to it.

CONCLUSION

The discourses so far clearly indicate the need for the adoption of gender dynamics in conflict reporting in Nigeria to provide sufficient information required by the citizens to make informed decisions and responses to conflict situations. Taking gender into account during media coverage of conflict is also linked to the new approach in conflict reporting. When media in Nigeria and elsewhere report conflict the coverage and portrayal are predominantly from a gendered lens that often marginalize women and their conflict experiences, creating the need for improved media awareness on mainstreaming gender as part of everyday news narrative on conflict. The one-sided and stereotypical representation of women and men in the coverage of conflict reduces the complexity of the issue and causes amplification effect. We recount them here to show how our understandings of conflict can change when we first accept that gender matters in times and zones of struggle. As argued, we

know gender matters because ideas and ideals about bodies, behaviours and belongings both affect and create forms of legitimacy, authority, agency and access to resources, both material and discursive. In this instance reframing stories with a gender lens (Gender –sensitive reporting), which actually is reflecting gender dynamics of conflict as we have pointed out becomes important. By asking the following Gender Dynamics questions:

- ❖ Where are the women in the story?
- ❖ How can gender information strengthen the story?
- ❖ How do gender roles and power relations between men and women further explain the issue?
- ❖ How are the impacts of events and processes different for women and for men?
- ❖ Where are the points of collaborations between genders?
- ❖ What are the common ground and shared interest? (Ross and Llyod, 2004)

As observed in extant literature, a balanced portrayal of men and women that reflects the composition of the society and the diverse human experiences, actions, and concerns in any conflict situation represents the multidimensional nature of conflict and positions the media as facilitator for conflict resolution, reconstruction and peace.

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