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## Rethinking the Risks Journalists Face in Reporting Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Jos

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### Abstract

*Jos is one of the most renowned cities in Nigeria for its tourist, commercial and historical significance. Sadly, this capital city of Plateau state has been engulfed by various ethno-religious conflicts over the past two decades resulting in the lost of many lives and properties. Journalists have been reporting over the matter, yet many journalists have faced various problems as a result. Some have been injured, others killed and a number of get emotional and physical injuries through their experiences of reportage in crisis pronged areas and especially in Jos. This research is case study research and is qualitative because it relied solely on interviewing some journalists from different media outlets in Jos. The aim is to obtained reports about risks faced by journalists when covering ethno-religious conflicts news in Jos. The researchers advocated that news framing is vital because journalists have the right to filter news reportage towards the peace of a community. This debate is discussed at length in this research. The researchers also recommended that journalist need to be provided with adequate security whenever they go to the field to obtained news item.*

**Keywords:** *ethno-religious conflicts, news framing, reportage, solution journalist.*

### 1. Introduction

Jos is the capital city of Plateau state in Nigeria. one of the major problems the city encountered over the years pertained to ethno-religious crisis which has tarnished the name of the city popularly known as the “home of peace and tourism” (Agai 2014). Journalists from different regions in Nigeria and beyond normally take seriously the reporting of the Jos ethno-religious conflicts. It has been alleged that some journalists report the crisis with

biasness towards their specific faith and ethnicity (Abdullahi, Abdullahi and Igbashangev 2024). In other instances, journalists are not allowed to enter certain locations in Jos to report crisis matters because of the faith or ethnic dominancy of the residence in a particularly area. This mean that journalist that belonged to a particular religion may find it different to report matters regarding

locations where majority of the residence do not belong to his/her faith.

Another problem pertained to the fact that perpetrators of ethno-religious crisis in Jos give little or no respect to a journalist whose intention is just to collect and report relevant information to the public. The journalist might be injured or killed doing his/her work of reporting about ethno-religious conflicts. It might be recalled that generally Nigeria is ranked 13 out of 14 countries in the 2018 Global Impunity Index made known by the committee to protect journalists. This makes it the sixth time in which the name Nigeria is listed in the index. Sadly, the killers of journalists in Nigeria have not always been found (Media Nigeria 2025).

In Jos in particular, the killing of journalists especially during ethno-religious conflicts has been frequent and while others are generally reported, some might not be known. The killing of Augustine Sindy in Kabong through a bomb blast during religious crisis sent a shockwave the community of journalists in Nigeria. The former chairman of the Plateau State Council of Union of Journalists (NUJ) expressed deep sadness of the suffering of many journalists that were involved in covering crisis matters (Gukas 2010). Apart from dying, many journalists covering ethno-religious conflicts also suffer insecurity, sustain injuries, and are classified as being biased and untrusted. As a result, some of them had to frame news to suit the interest of some communities. These researchers looked into this factor and how journalists are influenced with regard to framing news reportage.

Reporting on the Jos ethno-religious conflicts has little or not difference with reporting from other regions of northern Nigeria that are engulfed with various conflicts. Jos became a hotspot in 1994 and another in 2001 when different violence erupted creating tensions between Muslim and Christian communities (Krause 2011). The biasness in reportage is still prevalent among some journalists thus the need to conduct this research (Galadima 2010). It is for this reason that the researchers decided concentrate on

qualitative research where about 20 practicing journalists were interviewed.

## 2. Data Collection

This qualitative research is an elucidation on some of the plights faced by journalists reporting on ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Plateau state. The researchers used a questionnaire they developed to inquire from 20 journalists in Jos who have reported on ethno-religious conflicts. The purpose is to find and inquire from them some of the risks they have faced while reporting on conflicts matters in Jos. There are four major questions this research addressed that are centered on framing news which may generate certain kinds of risk for the journalist and also on some of the physical risk the journalists are faced with while or when reporting on conflicts related matters on the Jos-Plateau.

Interviews typically involves interaction between investigators of social phenomena and the people believed to be knowledgeable about what is being studied. The investigators (interviewers) attempt to probe the experiences of those they are studying (interviewees) by asking them questions about their behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, conditions, anxieties and general wellbeing relating to the subjects under investigation (Rowley 2012: 260). The researchers shall evaluate the experiences of journalists the cover ethno-religious crisis situations in Jos.

The journalists the researchers interviewed came from various media outfits in Jos. It is important to note that during the course of this research, there were 7 commercial radio and television stations in Jos, and about 16 national, regional, local and faith-based newspapers/magazines were in circulation at the time of this research (Gobum 2015). A purposive sampling procedure was used to select conflict journalists from these segments of the media who had reported the most violent conflict which occurred in Jos in 2001, 2008 and 2010. The purposive sampling technique sometimes referred to as 'handpicked sampling' were carefully done with a view that their perceptions will influence the objectives of this research (Rowley 2012: 260).

## 3. Presentation of Result and Evaluation of Case Study

Responses from Journalists

Theme	Agreed	Strongly Agreed	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Undecided	Percentage (%)	Total
Journalists Face Risks	0	20	0	0	0	100	20
Emotional injuries	0	20	0	0	0	100	20
Physical Injuries	10	10	0	0	0	50	10/10
Seeing People Injured	10	10	0	0	0	50	10/10
Seeing People Killed	5	0	0	0	0	25	5/15
Frame News	0	10	0	0	0	50	10/10
Don't Frame News	10	10	0	0	0	50	10/10
Apply Precaution	0	20	0	0	0	100	20
Solution Journalism	10	10	0	0	0	50	10/10

In addition, the researchers also interviewed the public randomly and the results are not presented in this presentation because the purpose of the interview was just to gather information about the general perception of the public about how the views of journalists with regard to framing news. This research is centered on reports developed from practicing journalists not necessarily on the public opinion.

There are four major themes that lead to the production of the 14 questions compiled in the questionnaire. The two major themes of this research have been addressed. The themes are firstly, the risks faced by journalists when reporting on conflicts related matters on the Jos-Plateau and secondly, on the strategies that needed to be pursued when framing news in order to subside or check the risks of reporting on conflicts. The researchers used five points rating scale

to determine the responses of the journalists over the subject under study. The rating scales are agreed, strongly agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed and undecided.

#### 4. Discussion of Results and Proposed Changes

With regard to the results obtained and based on the research conducted among the 20-journalist interviewed, it can clearly be postulated that all of the journalists are of the view that when it comes reporting on the Jos ethno-religious conflicts, all journalist not just those interviewed stand the risks of being affected.

More so, 100% of the journalists interviewed believed that they undergo through emotional risks or stress during their work of covering conflicts related matters especially in Jos. In fact, they noted that in most cases, they do not experience physical risks as they do to emotional risks. On physical risk, the data collated shows that only 50% of journalists experience physical risks when covering or reporting on conflicts related matters in Jos. The journalists noted that although they may not be physically attacked, yet they receive so much emotional trauma in conducting their work. They cited examples of how they often get doubted by the general public especially those that do not belong to their ethnic group or to their religious affiliations. They mentioned that in most cases even their relatives or children and family members get hated because they chose to be journalists who report on the Jos ethno-religious conflicts. Due to the fact that the journalists interviewed emphasized the issue of emotional risks, it is therefore important that they journalists be given the opportunity to go on holidays and also to be recommended to always visit their doctors or psychologists for counseling and other medical recommendations.

About 50% of the journalists interviewed say they do experience physical injuries or risks during their activities as reporters but they emphasized emotional risks than physical risks. In addition, 10 of the journalists mentioned that they have been physically attacked during their work in Jos. Within the periods considered in this research, the 10 of them claimed that they have been attacked severally. There are certain areas in Jos tagged as “no go areas” where people of certain faiths are not supposed to be seeing. They mentioned that some of them had to go through the ‘no go areas’ in order to get primary sources of information when reporting on conflicts. One of the journalists said to me that she was almost killed in 2001 when went to a particular location believed to be dominated by a people of a particular religion. It thus becomes pertinent for journalist to consider the need to be security-conscious when going to locations that are thought to be dangerous.

Only 25% of the journalists have reported that they have seen people/general public being killed when covering their reports. They said this issue made them not to consider staying in conflicts zone areas in Jos for a long period of time. Few of the journalists have noted that they have seeing people physically killed in certain locations on the Jos-Plateau. They again noted that this has added to certain emotional trauma to them. One of them said, there was a time he was covering a conflict scene in one of the areas in Jos and one of his colleagues who was a journalist serving for another media firm was serious injured and taken to the hospital. His colleague died two days after being taken to the hospital.

On framing news or changing or reinterpreting news items so as to check tension raised during any form of ethno-religious in Jos,

50% of those interviewed believed that news items on conflicts should be framed towards peace. This is important so that further tension should not be generated. They regarded journalists as people that have a great role to play in promoting peace among its people. In other words, to them journalists are peace makers that seek solution to societal problems especially on conflicts related matters. The problem with framing news is that, it does not answer to what extend news are to be framed or interpreted? This view is difficult because it can be ethically wrong to report something different from what transpired exactly. There is therefore a need to come up with codes or ways or guides on how news is expected to be framed. In our view, the framing of news may lead to bias in favor of one group of people over the other. Yet, it is still important to note that reporting news item exactly as it happens is highly possible but the journalist has to be careful of not raising further tension among the people.

Also, about 50% of the journalists interviewed said that conflicts related news items should not be framed, instead, it should be reported as it is. They noted that changing or framing news that pertained to conflicts suggests that the journalist is unethical. They claim that the originality in journalism is hampered-with when a journalist maneuvered with news reportage. To them, it is better to report conflicts as it is. They are of the view that reporting conflicts as it is will give a true picture of the reality and that this will help those affected to find a real solution to their respective problems. Once more, there is a need for researchers in this field of study to further engage themselves in developing ideas or concepts about the subject of framing or not framing news. One of the purposes of this research is to point at the need for scholars to develop strategies that is contextually applied to specific scenes in specific places that can help check conflicts base on media reportage. In other words, there should not be specific guide that must be applied in all conflict’s scenarios instead, each case should be handled according to the background or context of the people and the nature of the conflicts.

This research found out that 100% of the journalists interviewed believed that precautionary measures need to be taken seriously by journalists when reporting or covering conflicts related sceneries especially on the Jos-Plateau. This may involve some engagements with security personnel where a journalist is provided protection, the use of security protection gargets like the wearing of bullet proof vase and being security-conscious when covering conflicts related matters. In some cases, the journalist is expected to engage the communities and introduce himself/herself to the community leaders or people.

Solution journalism involves the use of a journalist to seek for peace in the community and report mainly on matters that warrants unity among the people of a community. In this case, the journalist is expected to frame his/her report to make peace and he or she had to discard some realities that transpired during conflicts in other to report only aspects of the realities that may further generate peace in conflicts affected communities. About 50% of the journalists interviewed are of the view that solution journalism should be the ultimate priority of all journalists especially those reporting on the Jos ethno-religious conflicts.

#### 5. Conclusion

The researchers here advocated that the interest of the public should be the priority of the journalist. The framing of news item is vital for the sake peace and there is need to screen/check

information to the point that the originality of a news item must be maintained. This same view has been echoed by Tasia Bass who noted that the journalist should be seen as the builders of the society and that they can achieve this by reporting on matters that can unite the society (Bass 2019).

## 6. Recommendation

The following recommendations have been made to guide journalists that are reporting from conflict zone areas and to also guide future researchers and policy makers on the same subject:

- a. It is important for journalists to work hand in hand in most cases with security agencies so that they could be accompanied whenever they need to cover a report on conflicts related issues from conflicts areas;
- b. Journalists should consider public interest as a priority to the point that the interest of what will benefit and unite the public becomes a top priority;
- c. Journalists should be recommended by their organizations to often go for medical or clinical checks so as to receive updates on their state of health as many often go through emotional stress caused by reporting and being present often in conflicts zones;
- d. The privacy of the interviewees ought to be respected especially if the journalist assured the interviewees of maintaining their secrecy;
- e. As the search for remedies to the world's conflicts is gaining momentum across disciplines, journalism and mass communication educators should design curricula/syllabi on the framework of the solutions-review journalism proposed by this study, which they can use to teach would-be journalists this improved tradition of problem-solving journalism. This effort will help to build or rekindle in them the culture of a safe, tranquil and peaceful world through their art and ingenuity in news reportage on ethno-religious conflicts.

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