



Media as Peace Advocates: A Reflection on Nigerian Press Coverage of the Bakassi Peninsula Conflict (2002-2006)

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the quality of coverage Nigerian newspapers gave to the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon within the period 2002-2006. This period is significant because it marked the delivery of judgment on the case by ICJ resulting to heightening of tension between the two countries and the eventual handover of the Peninsula. Newspapers' performance was assessed against the backdrop of how socially responsible their reportage was considering the fact that the Nigerian press has often been adjudged in empirical research as aggravating rather than dousing tensions in conflict. Essentially, the study sought to determine the extent to which newspapers' coverage facilitated a non-violent resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. In this regard, the study evaluated, among other objectives, if the Nigerian newspapers were oppositional to the official stand of the Nigerian government on the conflict and whether they rather endorsed war as the preferred option to resolve it; and if not, whether the Nigerian press set an agenda for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The study was, therefore, anchored on Social Responsibility theory which stresses press freedom matched with responsibility and agenda setting theory which emphasizes the role of the media in charting the course of social discourse in society. Content analysis and survey were used to generate data from newspapers' editions as well as journalists who covered the conflict. Data were analyzed descriptively using percentages while the hypotheses were tested using ANOVA and *t-test*. The study found that the selected Nigerian newspapers reported the conflict episodically, but did not advocate war as a means of resolving it. However, the newspapers were oppositional to the way the Nigerian government quickly conceded the Peninsula to Cameroon, emphasizing political solution as a better option to implementing the ICJ judgment.

Keywords: Media, Conflict, Peace, Coverage, Nigeria, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, one thing that has given sleepless nights to nations, scholars, diplomats, and international organizations among other concerned groups is how to make the world a better place to live in through the instrumentality of peace. The world apex body, the United Nations [UN], takes the lead in this all-important crusade for sustaining global peace by declaring 21 September the *World Day of Peace*. On this day, seminars, symposia, workshops, Long Walk, and other social activities are organized to raise awareness on the need to work for and maintain peace. What has prompted such spirited efforts is the fact that the whole world seems to be in turmoil as one crisis gives rise to another across the globe.

Balabanova (2007, p.1) has observed that the twentieth century was marked by war. This scholar quotes Eric Hobsbawm, a historian, who writes that: “[the century] lived and thought in terms of world war, even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not exploding”. Balabanova (supra) adds that “the end of the Cold War established an international system which is frequently described as being even more ‘chaotic’ than that which existed during the Cold War”. Historically, aside of numerous inter-state and intra-state conflicts, the world has fought itself twice in what has occupied the inglorious pages of human history as World War 1 (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) respectively. More worrisome is the apocalyptic prediction of a looming third World War except, perhaps, drastic proactive measures are taken to curtail it.

Considering the turbulent nature of the contemporary world, many have taken the gospel of peaceful coexistence beyond the religious sphere, where it has always been situated, to the domain of international relations discourse. Several conferences, seminars, workshops and symposia have been held at very high levels to articulate what makes for peace globally. This has become exigent because the present society faces a host of threats which tends to make nonsense of every security arrangement that governments at different levels have put in place to guarantee the safety of life and property.

The spate of global terrorism, for instance, has turned the world into an endless theatre of nightmares. The 1988 Lockerbie bombings in Scotland; the 1998 bombing of the American Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which killed 240 people; the 2004 Madrid bombings by religious fundamentalists; the 2005 London underground Train bombings killing 56 and wounding 700 people; The September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre, USA with a casualty figure of over 3000; and the recent Boston Sports bombings (USA) among others are still resounding calamities in the minds of many. Aside of mechanical error or nature induced unforeseen contingencies, a flight anywhere in the world today cannot be said to be secure from terrorist attack no matter the security checks put in place until the plane taxis to a stop and its passengers disembark safely at the destination point.

In Africa, internecine and intertribal wars have almost become a trade mark for the continent for nearly two decades now. Towards the end of the second quarter of 2011, the protracted civil war in Sudan that has raged like a storm with its attendant loss of life, property and stagnation of development has culminated in the eventual breakup of the country into Southern and Northern Sudan respectively on Saturday, 9 July, 2011. This is aside of the decade long disasters in the form of civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Nigeria, religious crisis (no thanks to *Boko Haram* unrelenting insurgency), indigene-settler violence, militancy, kidnapping, high profile killings, among other social aberrations have become a recurring decimal in the life of the beleaguered nation. The fact is that conflict and crisis would always be a factor in human existence which cannot be wished away.

However, a pertinent issue to consider from the angle of mediation of social reality is: how has the media, as an institution, reported these conflicts? In other words, is the media institution acting responsibly in reporting conflicts by not escalating them or the media is guided more by political, economic, tribal, sectarian, racial, nationalistic and such other sentimental considerations rather than ethical responsibility in conflict reporting? McQuail (1977) in Anyadike (2009, p.322) believes that mass media have the social responsibility of mobilizing people towards positive change. We hasten to add that this also apply to conflict management. The likely outcome of a conflict has much to do with the attitude of the media towards it. Such attitude is always demonstrated in the pattern of coverage that the media give to the conflict.

It is a generally accepted claim in media studies that conflict reporting is a pastime of the media. This is because conflicts generate a steady stream of news which also translates into some economic benefits accruable to the media in terms of patronage by the audience and advertisers. Nwosu (2004, p.103) says that conflict like other events or occurrences provide the media with new materials for their news presentation. Perhaps in the absence of the media, we would never be aware of most of these conflicts even when they occur in the countries we live. The media, through the surveillance function according to Harold Lasswell (1948), report the conflicts and through this process acquaint the audience with the day-to-day happenings in their environment and beyond. It is to be quickly noted too that the media give a colouration to any event by interpreting the issues surrounding such happenings thereby supposedly guiding the audience in making informed decisions about what is at stake. This is the interpretive/correlation function of the media.

For instance, the media would not only identify the parties to a conflict but would identify with them by projecting the views advanced by each party for engaging in the conflict in the first place as well as what could be done to douse tensions. At times, the media would overstep their bounds to take sides with the parties to the conflict against the ethics of journalism which emphasize neutrality, objectivity, fairness, accuracy and balance. When the media are biased, it is very likely that they would aggravate conflict because

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each party would feel justified in whatever it is doing in as much as there are sympathizers to their cause readily mobilized and made available by the media. The UNESCO's Convention (1978) cited in Nwosu (2004:15) anticipates the mass media role or influence in conflict management to go far beyond the public attention-giving function, noting that since all wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed. Nwosu (supra) further says that the war for the mind or mind-share in war and other competitive situations, are mostly sought in the mass media.

What the foregoing analysis indicates is the fact that the media have become an active participant and not just a passive observer in conflict management in contemporary times. Especially in interstate conflicts, national media of various power brokers across the world would always take a position to align with their government's perception of issues in the conflict.

In this study, therefore, effort is made to analyze how selected newspapers in Nigeria covered the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between Nigeria and Cameroun from the standpoint of how socially responsible the newspapers were in the coverage. It could be recalled that the conflict started in the early 1980s but the case was formerly presented by Cameroun for adjudication at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in 1994 while the handover of the disputed Peninsula was done peaceably in 2006. Even though the dispute ended in a non-violent way, it is important to assess the contribution the Nigeria press made to the realization of this feat; a situation that could have resulted to a war. Gordon Martel (2003, p. x) has noted that "Anyone interested in the conduct of international relations in the twentieth century is aware of the significant—perhaps revolutionary—role that the media has come to play. Reportage and commentary in print, on radio and television, and most recently on the Internet, have profoundly altered the way in which states conduct business with one another".

A guiding question in this direction is: did the Nigerian press report the Bakassi Peninsula conflict with a view to encouraging the parties to the conflict to find a peaceful resolution to it in line with the Nigerian government's pacifist posture on the conflict or the coverage was borne out of sentiments to escalate the crisis for pecuniary gains for the media and their operators no matter the consequences on the two disputing countries? In other words, did the Nigerian newspapers perceive the conflict in the same way the government of Nigeria did? In essence, how the Nigerian newspapers help in achieving a peaceful resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict is the underlying puzzle this study was set to unravel.

Objectives

These were to:

- i. Determine whether the selected Nigerian newspapers endorsed war as a means of resolving the Bakassi Peninsula Conflict.

- ii. Ascertain the extent the selected newspapers aligned with the Nigerian government's position on the conflict.
- iii. Evaluate the quality of coverage given by the selected newspapers to the Bakassi Peninsula conflict.
- iv. Analyze the extent to which the voices of the parties to the Bakassi Peninsula were represented in the newspapers coverage of the conflict.

Research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical bent of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

H₀: Newspapers' coverage of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was not significantly geared towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of prominence given by each of the selected newspapers to the coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict.

H₀: In the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, issues pertaining to Nigeria and Cameroun as the major parties to the conflict did not receive more significant coverage than issues relating to the Bakassi residents.

Literature review

Concept of Conflict/Conflict Resolution

Anyadike, (2009, p.321) says "Conflict is a recurring natural phenomenon which is inherent in every socio-cultural, economic and political settings characteristic of group interactions. However, depending on how it is handled, it could either be constructive, or it could be destructive". Pate (2011) reiterates the views of Owens-Ibie, (2002) that conflict is seen as "the bread and butter of journalism" adding that studies have shown that the media have remained the most credible source of news and information to most people in crisis periods. To Otite and Albert (2001) in Anyadike (2009, p.323), conflict is the consequence of the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environments. Onaiyekan (2003, p.4) says that the term conflict now embraces the psychological underpinnings of physical confrontation. What this means in essence is that conflict is not all about the physical struggle between the contending parties but embraces the usually not too visible effects that it produces such as trauma, displacement, disorientation, among others.

When there is conflict, there will certainly be the need to resolve it. Iji (2007, p.48) defines conflict resolution as:

synonymous with the term peace; amicable solution, arrived at after trouble-shooting exercise in which two or more parties in discord agree to mend their co-existential fences; a temporary or permanent truce or cessation of exchange of aggression. Such cessation of mutual hostilities can be arrived at through litigation or adjudication, negotiation, mediation, arbitration or mere surrender by or subjugation and defeat of the weaker contenders.

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From another perspective, Miller (2008, p.8) sees conflict resolution as “a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems as distinct from a transformation of conflict”.

Conflict coverage

Pate (2004) postulates that reading through the literature on diversity and conflicts in Nigeria, there seems to exist an agreement that the politicization and poor mediation of diversity and conflict issues in a pluralistic society like Nigeria have been partly accountable for the negative turn of events. Pate quotes Albert (2002) as saying “Nigerian media’s coverage of conflict and diversity often de-emphasize how to make a contribution towards a culture of peace, and building policies and leadership ethos that could support sustainable peacemaking. Instead, the Nigerian press raises more issues about our differences as ethnic and religious groups than our similarities”. This observation has been extended to media coverage of conflict in Africa.

Esuh (2006, p.143) reports that:

After a thorough assessment of media coverage of conflicts in the African Continent, panelists at the ACCE (2004) Regional Conference in Nairobi, Kenya came to the conclusion that ‘the media are partly to blame for the condition Africa finds itself today. Coverage of conflicts is weak. At best, it comes in form of western perspective and viewpoints. There is very little that is African in content and context, hence the lack of direction’.

Anyadike (2009, pp.328-331) identifies seven approaches the media could use in conflict resolution as follows: i) Media as sources of information ii) Objective reporting iii) Dialogue iv) Countering misinformation v) Transformatory role vi) Interpretative role, and vii) De-emphasizing profit motive.

Concept of social responsibility

Owens-Ibie (1994) observes that the issue of press responsibility has been a controversy and no generally agreeable definition may be reached on the issue as long as societies differ. However, he reproduces a four-part categorization given by Hodges (1986) as a working definition. Under the headings of political, educational, utility and cultural functions, Owens-Ibie sees press responsibility in informing the citizenry of what goes on in government, thereby keeping the rulers in check. The media should be reporting on and promoting discussion of ideas, opinions and truths toward the era of social refinement; acting as a nation’s “bulletin board” for information and mirroring the society and its people just the way they are, thus exposing the heroes and the villains.

Udoakah (1996) observes that the emergence of the social responsibility theory in America in the 1940s was a window dressing response to the contradictions of the libertarian system. Social responsibility theory,

therefore, demands that the media should act responsibly by realizing that they have certain obligations to the public. In other words, the media should reflect all shades of opinion to enable the public reach rational decisions. In summary, the media should function in response to the expectations and norms of their societies and those expectations are peculiar to their setting. The bottom line is that the media should see themselves as stakeholders in maintaining the peace and stability of the society they are.

Peace Journalism as a concept

Claus Schrowange writes in *Peace Journalism: Analysing and Reporting Conflict* (undated, p.8) that “to use the power of the media to transform conflicts and violence a new school of thought called ‘Peace Journalism’ has been created....The peace journalism approach provides a new road to see the consequences of reporting and shows opportunities for journalists to promote peace”. Peace journalism perspective seems to re-echo what Martin Luther King Jr. once advised the United States of America (USA) to do in ending the Vietnam War (1967) that “There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood”. Hanitzsch (2007) notes that having seen the endless atrocities of war and standing on the brink of professional disillusionment, many journalists started to ask how they could help to make the world a better place.

Literature on Bakassi peninsula

The story of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict dates back to the colonial times in the chequered histories of Nigeria and Cameroun. Geographically and culturally speaking, the peninsula and its people have much affinity with Nigeria. An excursion into the ethnographic configurations of the disputed territory would reveal that the inhabitants of the peninsula are predominantly Efik and Efut, which are ethnic groups in the present day Cross River State, Nigeria. The name ‘Bakassi’ came from ‘Bassey Eke’ and that is Efik, according to the Obong of Calabar, late Edidem Nta Elijah Henshaw, reported in *The Guardian* (12 October, 2002, p.20). But another source, Otuka Anyasi, in a letter to the editor of *The Guardian* (16 August, 2006) claims that “The original name of Bakassi is ‘Ubakansi’ corrupted by contact with Europeans”.

Edet Uno writes in an article “Bakassi: The Oron Perspective (2)”, that “... contrary to the highly uninformed opinion from the wholly pedestrian minds in Nigeria, Oron [whose people were also resident in Bakassi] has a tremendous cultural affinity, which translates to vital interest, with parts of Camerouns” (*The Guardian*, 26 November, 2002, p.75). Mr Inyang Ekpe, erstwhile Chairman, Bakassi Local Government Council identifies the

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Bakassi indigenes with Nigeria saying “we are Cross Riverians from Nigeria. We owe our allegiance to the Obong of Calabar. We are Efik people. We dress like this. I’m a typical Efik man (*The Punch*, 18 October, 2002, p.2).

It is interesting to note that as at the time of the conflict, two prominent Nigerians, Senator Florence Ita-Giwa and Hon. Patrick Ene, (both Legislators), the latter being deputy Speaker, Cross River State House of Assembly were natives of Bakassi. Abang (2009) in Bassey and Oshita (2009) describes the Bakassi Peninsula as a low lying region bordered on the West by the estuary of the Cross River, on the North by the Akwanyefe River (also known as the Akpa Ikang) on the East by the Rio-del-Rey estuary, and on the South by the Gulf of Guinea. The Peninsula itself consists of a series of Islands covering approximately 50 square Kilometres and occupies for the most part by long-established communities of Nigerians, in several dozens of villages.

By way of summary, this brief literature review has brought to the fore the following key points. One, conflict is endemic in human nature and it usually occurs as a result of clash of interest. Also, conflict could be managed in the form of resolution so that it would not be counter-productive. Journalism could offer a platform for effective conflict resolution through peace journalism, anchored on responsible coverage. Finally, the Bakassi Peninsula episode qualifies to be termed a conflict because it was a clash of interest which would have pitted Nigeria against Cameroun in a war situation.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on two major theories of Mass Communication: The Social Responsibility Media theory, and the Agenda Setting theory.

Social Responsibility Theory

Folarin (1998) discusses the social responsibility theory as part of the normative press theories of the media. The author submits that the chief duty of the media operating with this theory is to raise conflict to the plane of discussion. This scholar further notes that in actual sense, social responsibility media theory owes its origin to the Hutchins’ Commission on Freedom of the Press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the libertarian or free press theory.

In general, socially acceptable press behaviour was to be anchored on self-regulation, but if the press would not voluntarily behave, then there must be certain social structures to ensure that it does behave in compliance with recognized social standards. This theory is relevant to this study in that the focus of the study is on how much the Nigerian newspapers lived up to expectation on their social responsibility in the coverage of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. In other words, was the coverage done in the overall public interest?

Agenda Setting Theory

Another related media theory to this study is the Agenda-Setting theory which, according to Folarin (1998, p.68), 'implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society'. He goes on to say that Agenda-Setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we (the audience) actually think; but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about. Thus, the media bring issues they deemed pertinent to the surface level of discussion through frequency of reporting the issue, the prominence it is accorded in the media, the degree of conflict generated in the media reports, and the cumulative media-specific effects over time (Folarin, 1998). In essence, this theory stipulates that whatever the media does not give attention to in any society is as good as non-existing.

The agenda setting role of the media (Shaw and McCombs, 1972) is very much pronounced in conflict situations. Members of the public would look up to the media to get updates on the conflict and the media usually take advantage of this to set the tone of discussion on the issues at stake. The public would have no choice than to accept whatever interpretations of the conflict offered by the media thereby yielding to the central assumption of this theory that the media give the audience what to think about but do not necessarily think for the audience.

Dietram and Tewsbury (2007) in Anyadike (2009, p.325) argue that by extension, the mass media can also shape the consideration that people take into account when making judgements about conflict issues. Balabanova (2007, p.21) submits that even in international issues, the media could be seen as setting agenda because "By highlighting a certain crisis or a certain policy dilemma, real-time images can put pressure on policy-makers to make choices and to decide priorities in a compressed response time. The news media, therefore, in cases of international conflicts, rightly or wrongly, have the power to set the international agenda". In relation to our study, the Nigerian press through its coverage brought the Bakassi peninsula conflict to the public sphere for discussion and arguably, could have set the tone of discussion for the Nigerian government which ostensibly might have influenced the course of the negotiation and eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on what the selected Nigerian newspapers, through their reportage of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, did or did not do responsibly to ensure that the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroun did not escalate into war. Content analysis was, therefore, employed in the study to evaluate the newspapers' coverage. The research method is suitable because one, "content

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analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables” (Kerlinger, 2000 in Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p.150) and two, what will be used as units of analysis is recorded information in print.

Also, survey method was used to determine if there was any deliberate effort or an established framework in the form of an editorial policy of the selected newspapers that influenced the type of coverage each of them gave to the conflict. The survey also gave an insight into the perception of the journalists who covered the conflict before and after the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

For the five year period of the study, 7, 200 editions of the selected newspapers formed the population. This is based on the assumption that each of the four newspapers published 30 editions per month over the five year period of the study. Both week day and weekend issues of the newspapers were included. However, four newspapers (*The Guardian, Punch, New Nigerian* and *Vanguard*) were purposively selected for the study. It is pertinent to observe here that these newspapers were selected from the top ten national dailies in Nigeria as at the time of the research namely: *The Guardian, Punch, Vanguard, Tribune, ThisDay, New Nigerian, Champion, Daily Trust, Daily Independent, and Sun* (Batta 2010, p.84).

The study covers January 1, 2002–December 31, 2006. This period is considered ideal because it marked the height of tension in the conflict. This is why the period chosen for this study is significant because it covers the year of the ruling, and four years after the ruling up till the handover time. This has placed the research in a good stead to ascertain the role the Nigerian press played in reporting the conflict at this crucial stage till when the dispute was peaceably resolved. Equally, the study is restricted to four national dailies which are believed to be a fair representation of the views of the larger Nigerian press on the issue at stake. In addition, all the selected newspapers were in circulation during the study period. For the survey, all editors and reporters of the selected newspapers constituted the population.

The sample size was determined by purposively sorting out the newspapers editions that actually covered the conflict. The reason for doing this was that using a probability sampling technique would likely skip most of the editions in which reports on the conflict featured since the conflict was reported episodically in the form of a timeline. What this means is that the newspapers were carrying reports on the conflict in line with how events were unfolding around it. In most cases, one would not find the conflict mentioned in the newspapers over a fairly length of time until a major happening takes place concerning the conflict. It also accounts for the low number of editions (161) obtained after the rigorous sorting of the newspapers and the overall items published on the conflict by the selected newspapers. A sample of journalists used in the study was drawn from those who actually covered the conflict. Two editors and two reporters who covered the conflict in each newspaper were interviewed through a questionnaire to ascertain the rationale behind the coverage given to the

conflict by each of the newspapers. For editors, this added up to eight and the same number was used for the reporters. In all, sixteen (16) journalists were interviewed.

In this study, the units of analysis were straight News, Features, Letters to the editor, Editorials, Cartoons, Photographs, Opinions/Commentaries, Advertorials and Columns on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. The units of analysis indicated above were coded using the following content categories: Litigation (reports on court proceedings and related issues), Compliance with the ICJ verdict, Rejection of the ICJ verdict, Plebiscite on the opinion of the Bakassi residents, Political Solution aside of the court judgement, Common historical Traits shared between the two countries, and Impact of conflict on the two countries and the Bakassi residents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the four newspapers used in the study published a total of 440 items on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2006. *The Guardian* and *Punch* tallied in the number of items published (133 items, 30.23%) of the total coverage in each case. *Vanguard* ranked next with 104 items (23.63%) while *New Nigerian* had the least score of 70 items (15.91%).

Table 1: Summary of the coverage of Bakassi Peninsula conflict by the selected Newspapers.

Name of newspaper	No. of items published	Percentage
<i>The Guardian</i>	133	30.23%
<i>Punch</i>	133	30.23%
<i>New Nigerian</i>	70	15.91%
<i>Vanguard</i>	104	23.63%
Total	440	100%

Table 2 presents data coded on the basis of content categories and units of analysis used in the study. Ten units of analysis were used and out of these, news stories topped the list with 204 items (46.36%) followed by opinion/commentary 88 items (20%), interviews 43 items (9.77%), features (33 items, 7.5%) and letters to the editor (25 items, 5.68%). All other categories as shown on the table (editorials, photographs, cartoons, advertorials and columns) each scored below 25 items.

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Table 2: Distribution of all items covered in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict (2002-2006).

Unit of analysis	Content Category							Total
	Litigation	Compliance	Rejection	Political solution	Plebiscite	Common Traits	Impact of conflict	
News	35 38.47%	49 59.76%	45 50%	30 53.58%	10 26.32%	-	35 50%	204 46.36%
Features	08 8.79%	02 2.44%	09 10%	03 5.36%	05 13.15%	01 7.69%	05 7.14%	33 7.5%
Editorials	01 1.09%	02 2.44%	-	02 3.57%	02 5.26%	02 15.39%	03 4.28%	12 2.73%
Opinion/commentary	26 28.59%	11 13.41%	16 17.78%	08 14.28%	05 13.15%	06 46.16%	16 22.86%	88 20%
Letters	02 2.19%	06 7.32%	04 4.44%	05 8.92%	02 5.26%	02 15.38%	04 5.71%	25 5.68%
Photographs	-	01 1.22%	-	-	09 23.69%	-	-	10 2.27%
Cartoons	03 3.29%	-	06 6.67%	02 3.57%	04 10.53%	-	01 1.43%	16 3.64%
Columns	03 3.29%	-	02 2.22%	-	-	-	-	05 1.14%
Interviews	13 14.29%	11 13.41%	07 7.77%	04 7.15%	01 2.64%	01 7.69%	06 8.58%	43 9.77%
Advertorials	-	-	01 1.12%	02 3.57%	-	01 7.69%	-	04 0.91%
Total	91 20.68%	82 18.64%	90 20.46%	56 12.72%	38 8.64%	13 2.95%	70 15.91%	440 100%

In terms of content categories, the coverage of litigation had the highest score (91 items, 20.68%) closely followed by coverage of rejection of the ICJ judgement (90 items, 20.46%); coverage of compliance with the ICJ judgement had 82 items (18.64%) and coverage of impact of conflict on the parties involved had 70 items (15.91%). Other units of analysis (coverage of political solution, plebiscite, common traits) each scored less than 60 items as the table indicates.

Table 3 presents data on the specific items covered by the four newspapers used in the study on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. The table shows what each of the four newspapers scored in the coverage of the content categories. In all, *The Guardian* and *Punch* had a total score of 133 items each representing 30.23%. However, whereas *The Guardian* focused more on impact of the conflict (35 items, 50%), *Punch* had its highest score in the coverage of rejection of the ICJ judgement (40 items, 74.45%). *The Guardian* had the lowest score in the coverage of political solution (3 items, 5.36%) while *Punch* had its lowest score in the coverage of common traits (3 items, 23.07%). *Vanguard* had its highest score as 25 items (27.47%) in the coverage of litigation but scored lowest in the coverage of common traits (3 items, 23.07%) just like *Punch*. *New Nigerian* scored highest in the coverage of compliance (20 items, 24.39%) with the lowest score in the coverage of plebiscite (5 items, 13.16%). Unfortunately, *New Nigerian* is the only newspaper among the four used in the study which did not record anything in the coverage of common traits.

Table 4 presents the units of analysis covered by the selected newspapers used in the study. *The Guardian* recorded a total of 141 items (32.05%) with the highest score (62 items, 30.39%) going to news coverage and the lowest score (1 item, 25%) in the coverage of advertorials. *Punch* had the highest score in the coverage of news (67 items, 32.85%) thus beating

The Guardian to the second place. *Punch* had its lowest score (one item, 25%) in the coverage of advertorials just like the *The Guardian*. *Vanguard* ranked next to *The Guardian* in news coverage (41 items, 20.09%) but had its lowest score in the coverage of advertorials as well (one item, 25%). *Vanguard* had no score in the coverage of editorials. *New Nigerian's* highest score was in news coverage (34 items, 16.67%) and the lowest (one item, 25%) in advertorials. *New Nigerian* did not publish letters to the editor, columns and interviews in these categories. Generally, the four newspapers under study published more news stories on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict than in any other item of coverage. Advertorials were least published in all of the four newspapers.

Table 3: Distribution of specific items covered in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between January 1, 2002 & December 31, 2006.

Name of newspaper	Content category							Total
	Litigation	Compliance	Rejection	Pol. Solution	Plebiscite	Common traits	Impact of conflict	
<i>The Guardian</i>	32 35.17%	32 39.03%	18 20%	03 5.36%	06 15.79%	07 53.86%	35 50%	133 30.23%
<i>Punch</i>	22 24.18%	20 24.39%	40 44.45%	33 58.93%	08 21.05%	03 23.07%	07 10%	133 30.23%
<i>New Nigerian</i>	12 13.18%	20 24.39%	11 12.22%	08 14.28%	05 13.16%	-	14 20%	70 15.91%
<i>Vanguard</i>	25 27.47%	10 12.19%	21 23.33%	12 21.43%	19 50%	03 23.07%	14 20%	104 23.63%
Total	91 20.68%	82 18.64%	90 20.45%	56 12.73%	38 8.64%	13 2.95%	70 15.91%	440 100%

The survey of journalists' opinions reveals that prior to the judgement of the ICJ on the conflict, half of the respondents (eight respondents, 50%) believed that the Bakassi Peninsula conflict would lead to a war between Nigeria and Cameroun. However, this perception was evidently dicey even after the ICJ verdict in which case, eight respondents (50%) indicated that there was no change in perception and the same number said there was a change. The responses here are not surprising because of the tension that prevailed between the two countries just before and immediately after the ICJ judgment. A quarter of the respondents (four respondents, 25%) agreed that their newspapers thought it was right of the Nigerian government to approach the conflict peacefully. However, a slightly higher number (five respondents, 31.25%) indicated that their newspapers did not agree with the Nigerian government's position. Interestingly, ten (62.5%) respondents agreed that the editorial boards of their newspapers were honestly convinced that press coverage could facilitate a non-violent resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. This shows that a good number of the respondents believed in the mediating power of the press in conflict situations.

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Table 4: Units of items covered in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict by the selected Newspapers

Name of newspaper	News	Editorials	Feature	Opin-ions	Letters	Photographs	Cartoons	Columns	Inter-views	Advert-orials	Total
<i>The Guardian</i>	62 30.39%	04 33.33%	09 27.28%	34 38.64%	09 36%	02 20%	03 18.75%	02 40%	15 34.88%	01 25%	141 32.05%
<i>Punch</i>	67 32.85%	04 33.33%	08 24.24%	20 22.73%	08 32%	03 30%	06 37.5%	02 40%	14 32.56%	01 25%	133 30.23%
<i>New Nigerian</i>	34 16.67%	04 33.33%	08 24.24%	18 20.45%	-	02 20%	02 12.5%	-	-	01 25%	69 15.68%
<i>Vanguard</i>	41 20.09%	-	08 24.24%	16 18.18%	08 32%	03 30%	05 31.25%	01 20%	14 32.56%	01 25%	97 22.04%
Total	204 46.36%	12 2.73%	33 7.5%	88 20%	25 5.68%	10 2.27%	16 3.64%	05 1.14%	43 9.77%	04 0.91%	440 100%

Majority of the respondents (ten respondents, 62.5%) expressed disappointment with the ICJ verdict which they saw as unfair while half of the respondents (eight respondents, 50%) thought that Cameroun was the aggressor in the conflict just as nearly the same number (seven respondents, 43.75%) felt neither of the two countries was the aggressor. To the former, Cameroun started the conflict while the latter believed that both countries were to blame. The survey shows that over half of the respondents (nine respondents, 56.25%) relied on monitored media reports in covering the conflict which indicates that a good number of the journalists did not go into the Peninsula to see things for themselves. Equally, nearly a half of the respondents (seven respondents, 43.75%) agreed that the editorial boards of their newspapers took the ICJ judgment in good faith. This is not surprising because five (31.25%) respondents had indicated that it had occurred to them that Nigeria would lose the case at the ICJ, four (25%) had indicated 'No' while six (37.5%) respondents were undecided.

Eleven (68.75%) respondents had indicated that the editorial boards of their newspapers did not change the guidelines for reporting the conflict in spite of Nigeria's loss at the ICJ. This position finds some credibility in view of findings above that over a quarter of the respondents (five respondents, 31.25%) had felt that Nigeria would lose the case at the ICJ. Quite interesting, over half of the respondents (nine respondents, 56.25%) had indicated that they did not feel constrained by patriotic fervour to report the Bakassi Peninsula conflict in favour of Nigeria even though they were Nigerians working with Nigerian newspapers. This is a demonstration of professionalism. On the contrary, it is surprising that half of the respondents (eight respondents, 50%) did not believe that a journalist could be objective in reporting conflict. Nearly a half of the respondents (6 respondents, 37.5%) indicated that they would have been surprised if Nigeria had refused to hand over the disputed Peninsula to Cameroun because as they indicated, the respondents felt that the rule of law must be upheld and for peace to reign. However, this claim has to be treated on its own merit as the perception of individual journalists which could be radically different from the newspapers' views on the issue as corporate entities.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₀: Newspapers' coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was not significantly tilted towards a non-violent resolution of the conflict (Table 5). The calculated mean squares for the categories in the above table are presented below in Table 6 and the summary of ANOVA is in table 7.

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Table 5: Data for testing hypothesis 1 using ANOVA.

Name of newspaper	Content Category							Total
	Litigation	Compliance	Rejection	Pol. solution	Plebiscite	Common traits	Impact of conflict	
<i>The Guardian</i>	32	32	18	03	06	07	35	133
<i>Punch</i>	22	20	40	33	08	03	07	133
<i>New Nigerian</i>	12	20	11	08	05	-	14	70
<i>Vanguard</i>	25	10	21	12	19	03	14	104
Total	91	82	90	56	38	13	70	440

Table 6: Calculated mean squares for the categories shown in Table 5.

A	B		C		D		E		F		G		
X	X ²	X	X ²	X	X ²	X	X ²	X	X ²	X	X ²	X	X ²
32	1024	32	1024	18	324	03	09	06	36	07	49	35	1225
22	484	20	400	40	1600	33	1089	08	64	03	09	07	49
12	144	20	400	11	121	08	64	05	25	-	-	14	196
25	625	10	100	21	441	12	144	19	361	03	09	14	196
X=91	X ² =2277	X=82	X ² =1924	X=90	X ² =2486	X=56	X ² =1306	X=38	X ² =486	X=13	X ² =67	X=70	X ² =1666

Table 7: A summary of the ANOVA calculations.

Total sum of squares (TSS)	Sum of squares Between (SSB)	Sum of squares within (SSW)	Mean squares for SSB	Mean square for SSW	F-ratio	df	Sig. level	Critical value
3298	1274	2024	212	96	2.20	6/21	.05	3.24

Decision rule: If the calculated F value is greater than or equals the critical (F-table) value, reject the null hypothesis. From the table calculations shown above, the calculated F value of 2.20 with 6 degree of freedom for the numerator mean square and 21 degree of freedom for the denominator mean square @.05 significance level is lesser than the critical value of 3.24. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that Newspapers’ coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was not significantly tilted towards a non-violent resolution of the conflict. This means that the alternate hypothesis that Newspapers’ coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was significantly tilted towards a non-violent resolution of the conflict is upheld.

The newspapers anchored their call for non-violence in the conflict on the following points which they articulated in all their editorials on the conflict:

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- i. Nigeria is the arrow-head of African diplomatic relationship with the rest of the world; going to war with Cameroun would have seriously dented this enviable leading position as the “Giant of Africa”.
- ii. Nigeria was absolutely committed to peace-keeping missions in the African continent as at the time of the conflict through ECOMOG in such countries like Liberia, Sierra-Leone and very recently, Sudan. It would have amounted to a contradiction for her to start another war in the continent against Cameroun.
- iii. The historical ties between Nigeria and Cameroun would make nonsense of any thought of hostilities between the duo.
- iv. There was no point giving vent to foreign interest in the conflict to destabilize the African continent further through instigating a fratricidal war between the two contiguous countries.

Hypothesis 2

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of prominence given by each of the selected newspapers to the coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. In testing hypothesis 2, since the same issues are involved in the test as in hypothesis one above, the same data, table and calculations are used. The results are interpreted as presented below.

Decision rule: If the calculated F value is greater than or equals the critical (F-table) value, reject the null hypothesis. From the table calculations shown above, the calculated F value of 2.20 with 6 degree of freedom for the numerator mean square and 21 degree of freedom for the denominator mean square @.05 significance level is lesser than the critical value of 3.24. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of prominence given by each of the selected newspapers to the coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. This means that the alternate hypothesis that there is significant difference in the level of prominence given by each of the selected newspapers to the coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict is upheld.

Hypothesis 3

H₀: In the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, issues pertaining to Nigeria and Cameroun as the major parties to the conflict did not receive more significant coverage than issues relating to the Bakassi residents. Table 8 presents data for testing this hypothesis using the *t-test*. The resulting mean squares and t-test summaries are shown in tables 9 and 10.

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Table 8: Data for testing hypothesis 3 using the *t-test*.

Newspaper	Nigeria/Cameroun	Bakassi Residents	Total
<i>Guardian</i>	88	18	106
<i>Punch</i>	79	32	111
<i>New Nigerian</i>	40	19	59
<i>Vanguard</i>	46	37	83
<i>Total</i>	253	106	359

Table 9: Mean squares of the categories in Table 8.

X_1	X_1^2	X_2	X_2^2
88	7744	18	324
79	6241	32	1024
40	1600	19	361
46	2116	37	1369
X=253	X²=17701	X=106	X²=3078

Table 10: Summary of the *t-test* calculations.

S_1^2	S_2^2	<i>t-value</i> calculated	df	Sig. level	Critical value
566.25	89.66	2.87	6	.05	2.447

Decision rule: If the value of *t* @.05 level of significance is larger than the critical value, reject the null hypothesis. From the table calculations shown above, the value of *t* calculated is 2.87 which is larger than the critical value of 2.447. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that In the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, issues pertaining to Nigeria and Cameroun as the major parties to the conflict did not receive more significant coverage than issues relating to the Bakassi residents. This means that the alternate hypothesis that issues pertaining to Nigeria and Cameroun as the major parties to the Bakassi Peninsula conflict received more significant coverage than issues relating to the Bakassi residents is upheld.

CONCLUSION

The selected Nigerian newspapers used in this study did not endorse war as a preferred option to settle the Bakassi Peninsula conflict which indicates that

they were socially responsible in setting a peace agenda between Nigeria and Cameroun. Hypothesis 1 supports this proposition. Some newspapers' headlines further attest to this claim such as "Nig will quit Bakassi as scheduled", *The Guardian* (08/08/06), "Obasanjo says peaceful solution imminent on Bakassi", *The Guardian*, (18/11/02), "Nigerians react to judgement, urge caution, peace", *The Guardian* (11/10/02), "Nigerians seek diplomatic option over Bakassi", "I would ask Nig not to go to war", *The Guardian* (13/10/02), "Why we should obey the ruling", *Punch* (13/10/02); "Retired Diplomats urge FG to respect ICJ's ruling on Bakassi" *Punch* (19/10/02); "...Don't go to war with Cameroun" *Punch* (23/10/02); among others.

The selected newspapers severely criticized the Nigerian government's easy concession of the ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun after the ICJ judgement which is equally a mark of the social responsibility function of the media in holding the government accountable to the governed. Some newspapers' headlines attest to this: *New Nigerian* 20/07/06 "Bakassi Indigenes sue FG"; *Vanguard* 03/08/06 "Bakassi natives move to stop FG's plan to cede Peninsula to Cameroun"; 16/08/06 "Obasanjo gives Bakassi to Cameroun finally"; 18/08/06 "Bakassi as a sacrificial lamb"; 20/08/06 "Bakassi handover: FG goofed"; 30/07/06 "Bakassi: A national Disaster", *The Guardian* 18/08/06 "Bakassi: Redrawing Nig's map"; 15/08/06 "Tearful bye as Nig pulls out of Bakassi" among others.

The selected newspapers gave episodic coverage to the Bakassi Peninsula conflict during the period under study ostensibly because of the nature of the conflict, and this cannot be considered adequate. The low coverage of opinion/commentary, features and editorials, which would have given more insight to the issues at stake, is not commendable. Hypothesis 2 further shows that each of the newspapers had a different focus on issues in the coverage. *The Guardian* and *New Nigerian* were more positive in emphasizing impact of the conflict and compliance with the ICJ ruling while *Punch* and *Vanguard* were more critical by emphasizing rejection of the judgement and the litigation process.

Although the selected newspapers in this study gave a voice in the coverage to the immediate victims of the conflict (the Bakassi residents), the representation fell below expectation compared to the reportage of official comments from the governments of the two contending countries. Hypothesis 3 supports this assertion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Newspapers should not focus disproportionately on official comments by the authorities when reporting conflict especially those of cross-border nature; the voice of those directly affected by the conflict need to be heard loud and clear.

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Newspapers should provide a forum for a critical analysis of conflict through incisive, informed and critical comments from columnists, opinion writers, and feature writers among others so as to open up the issue for discussion from all fronts which would enlighten the reading public and possibly, the government.

More emphasis should be accorded conflict studies in the curriculum of Mass Communication training in Nigeria so as to acquaint both trainee and practising journalists with the nuances of constructive reportage of conflict from a social responsibility perspective.

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