



BE ALERT AND DEFEND YOURSELVES: NEWS FRAMING OF DANJUMA'S COMMENTS ABOUT HERDSMEN ATTACKS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigerian society has been plagued recently by terrorism and insecurity including herdsmen and farmers' clash which resulted in ruthless killing of citizens. General T.Y. Danjuma, former Chief of Staff of Nigeria, while speaking at the maiden convocation and 10th anniversary celebration of Taraba State University on 24th March 2018, alleged that the Armed Forces were conspiring with herdsmen to kill innocent Nigerians. He called on Nigerians to defend themselves, since the government and the military failed in their security function. The military on the hand was of the view that Danjuma's call for Nigerians to defend themselves against herdsmen attacks is an invitation to anarchy. This study used the Framing Theory to analyze how two Nigerian dailies (Punch and Vanguard newspapers) framed the news to ascertain if the reports favour Danjuma or the military. The study suggests that the news media was very positive about Danjuma's position; the issue of self defense was salient while the call for anarchy was de-emphasized.

Keywords

Newspaper; Framing; TY Danjuma; Military; Herdsmen; Insecurity; Attack; Self Defense; Nigeria



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БУДЬТЕ ОСТОРОЖНЫ И ЗАЩИЩАЙТЕСЬ: НОВОСТНОЙ ФРЕЙМИНГ КОММЕНТАРИЕВ ДАНЖУМЫ О НАПАДЕНИЯХ ПАСТУХОВ В НИГЕРИИ

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Аннотация

Нигерийское общество в последнее время страдает от террора и отсутствия безопасности, включая столкновения пастухов и фермеров, которые привели к безжалостным убийствам мирных жителей. Бывший начальник штаба Нигерии генерал Т.Я. Данжума, выступая 24 марта 2018 года на первом выпускном и праздновании 10-летия университета штата Тараба, заявил, что вооруженные силы вступили в заговор со скотоводами для убийства нигерийцев. Он призвал нигерийцев защищать себя, поскольку правительство и вооруженные силы не справляются со своей функцией обеспечения безопасности. По мнению военных, призыв Данжумы защитить себя от нападений пастухов – это призыв к анархии. В этом исследовании использовался рамочный анализ, чтобы определить, отдается ли двумя нигерийскими изданиями (газеты Punch и Vanguard) предпочтение Данжуме или военным. Исследование показывает, что СМИ положительно оценили позицию Данжумы; вопрос самообороны был насущным, а призыв к анархии снят с повестки дня.

Ключевые слова

Газета; фрейминг; Данжума; Военные; Пастухи; Безопасность; Атака; Самооборона; Нигерия



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BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The Press occupies an important place in world affairs. As an important agent of society, it serves the public by providing basic knowledge and information about events that affect them. ‘Not only are the mass media the chief sources of most people’s views of the world, but they are also the fastest ways known to transmit information throughout an entire society’ Abdur-Rahman (2013; p. 23)

The incredible power of the media to provide diverse information about relevant events from which members of the society take appropriate decisions can be found every day. The mass media is now a marketplace where facts are shared, and where people receive and express their opinions on important public, local, national and international issues. By providing information and updates to the public on various issues and events, the media bridges the gap between conflicting aspects of an issue which in turn gives assistance to the public that can help them reach individual judgment or broaden their perspective with regard to certain issues. This makes it possible for people to know what others think and say about issues of importance.

As an important print medium of mass communication, newspapers provide the most current analysis, debate and criticism of socio-political, economic, health and a host of other issues to inform, educate and entertain readers. The permanency, depth and variety of reporting attributed to print media have made information recall – with more lasting impact – possible because they remember its messages and use them for their daily purposes and in decision making. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from a newspaper, readers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of how the message is framed and the emphasis placed on it in a newspaper.

Framing is largely about what information is truly salient; “to frame” means to select key aspects of a particular reality and make them more salient within a news story (Entman, 1993;52). How news media report a particular issue can influence and shape public opinion and debate. Consequently, the frame of news reporting and information conveyed to a large extent determines how the target audience interprets and feels about a particular issue (Brewer and Gross, 2011), and what attitudes they have about the issue in question (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009)

A particular issue in Nigeria that raised controversy through media interpretation and counter-interpretation is General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma’s comment on the “Herdsman and Farmers’ Clash” which claimed the lives of many citizens.



Danjuma, the elder statesman and former minister for Defense in Nigeria, said while speaking at the maiden Convocation ceremony of Taraba State University in Jalingo, Taraba state, Nigeria on the 24th March, 2018:

“I am not a politician and politics is one profession I don’t want to belong to because if I am a politician, I will not say what I am going to say to you now. When I arrived in this arena, I saw rich cultural display and I was amazed at the rich cultural heritage of our people. Taraba is a mini Nigeria with diverse ethnic groups living together peacefully, but the peace in this state is under assault.

“There is an attempt at ethnic cleansing in the state and of course, some rural states in Nigeria. We must resist it. We must stop it. Every one of us must rise up.

“Our Armed Forces are not neutral. They collude with the bandits to kill people, kill Nigerians. The Armed Forces guide their movements; they cover them. If you are depending on the Armed Forces to stop the killings, you will all die one by one.

“This ethnic cleansing must stop in Taraba State and other rural states of Nigeria otherwise Somalia will be a child’s play.

“I ask every one of you to be alert and defend your country, defend your territory and defend your state. Defend yourselves because you have no other place to go. God bless our country”.

In response to the above comment, the Federal Government through the Minister of Defense, Mansur Dan-Ali, said that Dajuma’s comment was “highly uncalled for and an invitation to anarchy, asking Nigerians to report any member of the armed forces suspected to be colluding with herdsmen.” (Punch 2018, March 26). His comments raised controversies, concerns and dissents among Nigerians because people held differing views and interpretations of the message. Some were of the view that his statement implied support of a state of restiveness and anarchy for which Danjuma should be arrested, while others supported Danjuma’s position since the government in power could not make a conscientious effort to stop the killing; thus called on the government to rise to its responsibilities.

Danjuma holds a revered position in the heart of most Nigerians, especially the citizens of Taraba State, his home having served as Chief of Staff to the erstwhile Nigerian Head of State, Olusegun Obasanjo. He was also the Chairman of the Presidential Advisory Council of President Goodluck Jonathan. Danjuma was known to have vehemently opposed the politicization of the military and support democracy and the rule of law. He



warned President Goodluck Jonathan about the increasing strength of the Boko Haram insurgency and garnered support for the victims of the Chibok kidnapping(s). Reputed to be one of the few who speak truth to power, Danjuma's comments on national issues are treated as newsworthy items.

This study looks at how two Nigerian dailies (Punch and Vanguard newspapers) framed this issue, in order to ascertain the dominant frame used in reporting the issue and how such framing can influence audience interpretation. This is because how an issue is characterized in news reports influences its understanding and interpretation by readers (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11).

Journalistic framing can increase a situation's seriousness in the reader's mind, and consequently can influence their attitudes (De Swert, & Walgrave, 2012; Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman & De Vreese, 2015). Changes in how an issue or event is presented results in a changing of opinion about that issue or event. (Dunaway, Branton and Abrajano, 2010). Framing has the potential to favour social groups or their issues without revealing bias. Conversely, media frames can taint social groups and their issues in order to attract hostile attitudes toward them, thereby becoming a catalyst for ethnic bigotry and hate-mongering (Tankard, 2001, p. 96). Omissions of relevant information and reporting information "out of context" are important criticisms that have been lobbied against media framing (Dunwoody and Peters, 1992).

Such pitfalls of media framing are exemplified by how TY Danjuma's speech on herdsmen's attack is portrayed in Nigerian newspapers with particular reference to Punch and Vanguard. The findings of this study would provide insight as to how journalists and other communication strategists can improve the comprehensibility, accuracy and objectivity of how they cover issues, especially with regard to conflicts; and in so doing will help them in understanding their role in distributing political narratives that shape public opinion and policy makers' decisions on issues of national importance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study will answer the following questions

1. Which frames can be found in the texts of Punch and Vanguard newspapers' coverage of TY Danjuma's comments on herdsmen's attack?
2. Do the frames favor Danjuma's view of self-defense or the government's view of self-defense as an invitation to anarchy?
3. Are there differences in the frames found in the Punch and Vanguard newspapers?



LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

News Perception

Feldman (1999), cited in Sadaf (2011; 228) defines Perception as “the sorting out, interpretation, analysis and integration of stimuli involving our sense organs and brain”. Perception plays an essential role in making some issues important and some unimportant. Severin (2001) as cited in (Sadaf 2011; 228), lists the different psychological factors that influence perceptions to include past experience, cultural expectations, motivations, moods, needs, and attitudes. Severin (2001) further suggests that different people react to the same message in differing ways, related to decoding how people process specific information. According to (Pate & Bashir, 2012), the believability of media messages largely depends on the credibility rating the audience gives them, which is a result of both individual and collective perceptions of the content, behavior and quality of the media outlet in question.

Perception is ‘reference-dependent’, which means that a given piece of information will be interpreted differently depending on which interpretation schema an individual applies; consequently, framing the same message in different ways. The journey towards formation of perception starts from the nature of the narrative which must include cause-and-effect relationship between people and event (Scheufele, 2008; Lykidis, 2005). Techniques that enhance perception include: exposition, i.e. the revelation of large amount of information about the character or event; omniscient narration, i.e. revelation of less information than is known by the readers; or, subjective narration which uses story to provide more information than the audience previously knew (Scheufele, 2008). Awareness of these techniques helps media audience to form judgment of the events and characters involved.

Framing Theory

This study employs Framing Theory to capture how select Nigerian newspapers represented TY Danjuma’s position on Herdsmen attack on Taraba. According to (Morner & Olausson, 2017), framing is largely about salient information, meaning that to frame is to select an aspect of perceived reality and make it more important in a communication text in a way that promotes a particular situation’s definition, “causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Reese, (2001, p. 11) further defines framing as the way “interests, communicators, sources, and culture combine to yield coherent ways of



understanding the world, which are developed using all of the available verbal and visual symbolic resources”. Frame analysis has generally been used in studying news media texts (Morner & Olausson, 2017; Shehata & Hpmann, 2012); and applicable to a wide range of textual materials (Morner & Olausson, 2017).

Frames are found in all types of media, from print to broadcast news, and they convey meaning through the interaction between the reader and the text (these meanings are not in the text per se, but rather already existent in the mind of the reader of the text). A common feature in most approaches to framing is the assumption that we do not relate to the world in a direct and unfiltered way, but that we recognize and interpret events within existing ideas which we have created through other information sources. There are a number of framing devices used in media framing. “Using certain words or phrases, making certain contextual references...giving examples as typical, referring to certain sources, and so on” are some examples of techniques which journalists use to frame issues (McQuail, 2005, p. 378-379). These play an important role in the way people perceive a topic and consequently form opinions about political issues. Jorndrup (2016) notes that there are three occasions when a journalist will abandon the idea of neutral reporting. They include: (1) moment of tragedy; (2) situation of public danger; and (3) threats to national security. The mass media can control public perception and decisions by strategically framing the messaging of an issue. Audience perception of the TY Danjuma’s comments on the herdsmen attacks largely depends on how the media framed the news.

METHOD

This study strives to ascertain how two Nigeria newspapers framed T.Y. Danjuma’s comments in relation to the herdsmen killing in Nigeria. Framing analysis has generally been used in studying news media text. Scholars (Reese & Buckalew, 1995; Tucker 1998), define frames on the basis of a text-based, non-quantitative analysis rooted in a qualitative paradigm. Frame is qualitative because the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through tests, unlike the quantitative where the researcher is interested in quantifying and analyzing numeric data. In this study, qualitative paradigm was used to better understand how T.Y. Danjuma’s comment on Herdsmen killing in Nigeria was represented in two Nigeria’s newspapers. Vanguard and Punch newspapers were purposively selected because of their national coverage, popularity and readership ratings.



Tucker (1998) suggests that frame studies should be based on relatively small samples that mirror the discourse about an issue. Based on this premise, this study focused on just two Nigerian newspapers – Punch and Vanguard. The study evaluated all the news articles published in Punch and Vanguard as regards to T.Y. Danjuma's speech from 24th to 31st of March, 2018. A total of 10 articles were published within this time frame on Danjuma's comment, from which five articles were randomly selected. The first week was considered since the issue was still topical and varying interpretations were given to the issue; journalists at this stage had few facts at hand. This time line shows how early media framing of an incident establishes a frame that could last through the evolving event (Bjerke, 2016; Kuypers, 2009). The possibility of generalizing from a small qualitative study is usually limited (Bjerke, 2016)

The articles chosen were selected by looking at the headlines and the lead. Two frames were considered: Concern and Integrity Frame since there is no consensus on how to identify frames in news and other texts (Jonsson and Karlsson, 2016).

FRAMING OF DANJUMA'S COMMENTS

This study focuses on two newspaper articles from Vanguard and three from Punch. The first article was published on 25th March, 2018 with a headline Killing; Danjuma Alleges Ethnic Cleansing, asks Nigerians to defend themselves. The article was written by six journalists; and this shows how important the story was to the news media. The choice of word in the headline indicates an important framing that suggests a problem of huge insecurity in the land. The military was seen as not being transparent in the fight to curbing the situation but conniving with the herdsmen in perpetuating the killing. The article made references to certain sources like Middle Belt Group and Pan – Yoruba Socio-political Organisation, Afenifere, all having been interviewed by the journalists and whose interviews supported Danjuma's position that the killings were part of an ethnic cleansing agenda which the people must resist. They groups believed that there was an orchestrated, premeditated, sponsored and coordinated agenda to overrun the Benue valley through dehumanizing and mind-boggling demented scheme. References were also made on how the residence of Takum and Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba state accused the Army operation Ayem Akpatuma (Cat Race) of providing cover for the killer herdsmen to attack and kill villagers in the area. These claims lend credence to the self-defense call by the elder statesman.

The second article by Punch was also reported by six journalists and was published on the 26th of March, 2018 with the caption, Killings;



Danjuma's self –defense call, evidence of Buhari's failure, says PDP. The story reported the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the major opposition party in the country claims that General Theophilus Danjuma's call that Nigeria should defend themselves against her killers justified their position that the ruling party and President Buhari are responsible for the suffering of the masses because of alleged failure to protect the populace, gross incompetence and deceitful leadership. PDP further states that Danjuma's comment was a testimony of the tragic situation Muhammadu Buhari and the Ruling Party, had created for the nation.

Other influential persons and groups who were reported to have supported Danjuma's call include two former heads of state: Generals Olusegun Obasanjo and Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Forum, and lawmaker representing Kaduna Central District, Senator Shehu Sani. The article also reported PDP saying that Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, South-East governors, South-West governors and Obas, would soon join the call.

Punch also published another news article on March 29th, 2018 with the headline Understanding Danjuma's Call for Self-Defense. The choice of word for this headline is an important frame as regards to convincing the readers about the reality of Danjuma's comment. The dilemma documented in the article was wanton killings and massacres sweeping through the country, and it indirectly criticized the government of President Mohammadu Buhari's handling of security problems in the country. It explained how the military failed to intervene when herdsmen struck in some states, despite the intelligence information provided by the state governors before the attacks. The governors of the state mentioned were: Jonah Jang of Plateau, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu, Samuel Ortom of Benue and Abdulaziz Yari of Zamfara. This is an important frame that put the integrity of the military in doubt.

The Vanguard published an article on March 25, 2018 with the caption Herdsmen attacks: Defend Yourself or You'll All Die —T.Y. Danjuma. The lead of the article reads "Disengaged General of the Nigerian Army and former defense minister, Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, yesterday spat fire by calling on Nigerians to rise and defend themselves against attacks by marauding herdsmen in some parts of the country, or continue to suffer casualties." The use of the phrase 'disengaged' instead of retired could infer disrespect for the elder statesman, as the use of the phrase spat fire is also an important frame that could represent violence, portraying Danjuma as a violent person.

The paper reports that General Danjuma's outburst came against the backdrop of recent violent attacks by killer herdsmen. It further reads



“.....in the first ten weeks of 2018 alone, over 1,351 people lost their lives, largely due to violent killer herdsmen attacks.....”. The use of figures in reporting the casualties within a specific time frame is significant in understanding the gravity of the situation as well as the gruesomeness of the attacks. The journalist further writes that Danjuma lamented that, in spite of the cultural diversity in the state which was supposed to be used as a tool for uniting the people, there were armed bandits who entered the state and conspired with the military in ethnic cleansing.

The Vanguard published another news article written by three journalists on March 27, 2018 with the title: Military Aiding Herdsmen Against Us, Taraba Residents Allege ...It's Not True – Army. The article reports that mixed reactions continued to trail the advice of former Defense Minister, Lt. General T.Y. Danjuma (retd), for Nigerians to defend themselves against herdsmen to avoid what he described as ethnic cleansing; that some Taraba residents alleged that operatives of Ayem A'Kpatuma (Cat Race) military operation were aiding killer herdsmen in the state through harassing people. Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, however, quickly dismissed the allegations as false, insisting that the army was carrying out its constitutional role diligently in the state.

Before the operation, there were cases of kidnapping and armed robbery perpetrated by people using police and army uniforms. Hence, soldiers were mistaken for kidnappers at the inception of the operation, which caused anxiety and apprehension. “I have reports that soldiers have been breaking into people's houses at night, harassing and demanding for people, but it was in front of the army barracks that a member of the state House of Assembly, Hossa Ibi was kidnapped and killed.” On his part, Rimamsikwe Karma, Chairman of Ussa Local Council, said the operation was causing more harm than good to the people of the area. “The herdsmen that followed the Army to our council are not friendly with our people, they are strange faces to us and they are killing people.”

DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of how T.Y. Danjuma's message of self-defense was framed in Punch and the Vanguard. The findings are thematically structured around the central findings/frames emerging from the analysis – Concern and Integrity frame.



Concern Frame

Two concerns are expressed in the news report of Danjuma's comment on self-defense. Firstly, citizens are killed by herdsmen without any conscientious effort on the side of the military and the federal government to intervene and; secondly, an 'unfortunate' call for self-defense, which the government saw as an effort by Danjuma to incite the people against the military and promoting anarchy, especially, coming from an elder statesman. All the articles reviewed employed this frame to portray the suffering of the masses and the resulting insecurity in the country. The media used the Concern Frame to link the herdsmen killings to other crises Nigerians have encountered in recent times. For example, Punch (March 28, 2018) writes:

Nigerians are no longer feeling secure in their land. Our country has, in close to three years, assumed a status of killing fields where defenseless citizens are despoiled, raped and mowed down by insurgents and marauders in Benue, Taraba, Yobe, Gombe, Kaduna, Adamawa, Borno, Plateau, Nasarawa, Rivers, Enugu, Kogi, among other states.

Mentioning the states that are directly or indirectly affected by the resultant insecurity in the country would not only increase reader's interest in the stories but also facilitate their positive perception of Danjuma's comments. This is in line with views proposed by (De Swert & Walgrave 2012; Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman & De Vreese 2015) that presenting a conflict issue from a human angle, increases the perceived seriousness of the situation which can influence people's attitudes.

The reports did not only frame Danjuma's comment in isolation, they linked it to other stories on how the ruling party has failed abysmally, which lends credence to Danjuma's call. The journalists also quoted a press statement issued by the IPOB members that Danjuma's call for self-defense is belated, that if he had supported the IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu, Nigeria would not have degenerated into a state where life meant little or nothing. The use of words like "Nigerians were massacred with impunity", "no one should allow himself to be slaughtered by bandits, especially herdsmen" are strong indications that the concerned frame used in the article is in favor of Danjuma, having framed the ruling party as "grossly incompetent leadership and a deceitful ruling party" (Vanguard, March 27)

However, the story does not link Danjuma's advice as an explicit call for anarchy. The only point where 'Anarchy or Lawlessness' mentioned in



the whole text reviewed was where the Minister of Defense, Mansur Dan-Ali was reported in Punch straight news story to have said:

...on a recent comment by one of the elder statesman alleging that the military colludes with bandits to kill people and calling on them to rise and defend themselves, this is highly uncalled for and it is an invitation to anarchy. It should be disregarded by well-meaning Nigerians

No supporting sources that shared the same view with the above were mentioned. In as much as Danjuma's comment could be interpreted as a call for anarchy, significant predictor for emotional responses of blame of irresponsibility on the part of the government and the military who could not protect the life of its citizen favour Danjuma's position.

This could be in line with (Jorndrup 2016) whose opinion is that journalists would abandon the idea of neutral reporting in moments of tragedy, as well as threats to the public and national security. Nigeria presently faces the three mentioned situations, which could be the reason why the journalists rely on the public's voice to make more salient the perceived reluctance of the Federal Government in curbing the herdsmen attacks. This serves as a wake-up call for the government to rise up to its responsibility in protecting the lives and properties of its citizens.

Integrity Framing

How the two major actors (Danjuma and the Federal Government) were portrayed in news is discussed under the Integrity Frame. While Punch presented Danjuma as a "Retired Lieutenant General who is knowledgeable about security... with his strategic position in the world today, every bit of his words should be taken more seriously." Punch did not only support the message but also the messenger. Vanguard (March 25, 2018) did not only refer to Danjuma as a "Disengaged General of the Nigerian Army and former defense minister," but went on to say that he "spat fire". The use of the phrase "spat fire" portrays Danjuma as being temperamental. The newspaper reinforced this when it writes:

As a young officer, he was not only in the loop of the cold-blooded murder of his Supreme Commander, Major-General Johnson Thomas Ummunakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi and the military governor of the defunct Western Region, Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, on that fateful night of July 29, 1966, but also what Akogun Tola Adeniyi called "a murderous clean sweep of the Igbo officers." The pogrom that followed thereafter in



the north led to the death of thousands of innocent civilians, mostly of Igbo extraction, who were hacked to death in the most grisly manner ever ...the first generation of Nigerian commissioned officers that included Danjuma actually sowed the wind of blood in the 1960s and 70s, the whirlwind of which Nigeria is reaping today. The seeming inability of Nigerians to place any premium on human life remains a legacy of the tendencies Danjuma represents.

The above comment reveals how Danjuma's description yields more than one apparent truth, and no final truth. While Punch portrayed him with much honor, The Vanguard discredited him on the basis of his alleged involvement in the killings of members of the Igbo ethnic group in the past. This corroborates (Dunwoody & Peters, 1992) criticism of the media frame that it can omit relevant information and take results out of context.

The two newspapers reviewed in this study portrayed the military in a bad light. The unreserved bias in reporting about the military is evident as there was no conscientious effort to source information on the efforts of the military in the fight against the herdsmen attacks. The articles gave examples of how the military failed in protecting the citizens against herdsmen attacks, which is supposed to be part of their primary responsibilities. Both newspapers reveal of the questionable integrity of the military is in favor of Danjuma's position.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reportage of Danjuma's comment on herdsmen attacks is framed in the concept of Concern and Integrity frame. There was no significant difference in the use of Concern frame in reporting Danjuma's comments on herdsmen's attacks by both Vanguard and Punch. The finding suggests that both newspapers were positive in framing news in favour of Danjuma's position. The issue of self-defense was salient while the call for anarchy was de-emphasized, serving as emotional guidance to prevent the exacerbation of an already tense situation. There was also no difference in Integrity framing of the military in the two newspapers. However, Integrity framing of Danjuma's personality differs based on ethnicity and past experiences.

The paper recommends that journalists should shun rumors, hate speech and ethnic bias in news reporting. Again, the sensitive nature of conflict situations should be taken into consideration by the news media in order not to exacerbate an already crisis-prone society.



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