

SILENCING THE GUNS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN FEMALE PHOTOJOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING.

2021

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Abbreviations

AU: African Union

AWiM: African Women in Media

COVID 19: Corona Virus Disease of 2019

FAP: Female African Photojournalists

GMMP: Global Media Monitoring Project

IFJ: International Federation of Journalists

MFWA: Media Foundation for West Africa

NWICO: New World Information and Communication Order

WCC: World Council on Communication

Executive Summary

Since the 1970s, African countries, under the aegis of the African Union (AU) and UNESCO have been crusading media targeted initiatives to rid the continent of conflict through conflict and gender sensitive reportage.

The recent launch of the AU flagship campaign dubbed “Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development” is an initiative that recognizes the role of African journalists in particular female photojournalists in changing the dominant narratives of Africa as a war-torn, disease and disaster ridden continent.

Given that the stories and images are the artefacts for telling the African story, places African photojournalists of both genders, directly at the centre of the discourse. At a virtual forum on Women, Peace and Security AU Special Envoy Benita Diop noted “We cannot silence the guns in Africa without the inclusion of women.”[1] While echoing concerns among feminist media scholars and gender activists pertaining to women’s poor representation and participation in journalism, the statement also affirms the contributions of women to peacebuilding efforts in specialized areas such as photojournalism and photography.

This study examined the live experiences of 10 African female photojournalist and documentary photographers from East, West, South and Central Africa, documenting mediation/conflict and peacebuilding in Africa.

The overarching question is: what are the lived experiences of female photojournalists covering conflict, peace and security initiatives in Africa and what opportunities exist, through them, for changing the dominant negative narratives about Africa? This qualitative study drew on the phenomenological approach which enables understanding of the meanings women photojournalists and photographers assign to their work based on their lived experiences

Findings from the study suggest that women do not see conflict photography as a male preserve for which they need to change their interests into male modes to be validated. These women come to the practice of their craft from a purposeful posture that seeks to correct the image of Africa and move the discourse away from horror and suffering. In other words, the women are not responding to such newsroom practices as gender typing or newsroom cultures such as gatekeeping practices that tend to devalue their contributions.

Women have come to see newsroom cultures as natural. They reasoned that one way of building peace on the continent is to change the dominant tropes of conflict with photographic depictions of peace asserting that female photojournalists/photographers take pictures with some humane touch than males. Silencing the guns could benefit from the feminine photojournalistic touch.

[1] <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00075749.html>



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, African countries, under the aegis of the African Union (AU) have been crusading media and communication initiatives aimed at addressing negative images of the continent as a conflict zone. The call for the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO) in the early 1970s, is one such early campaigns that drew global attention to imbalances in global news flow coupled with negative coverage of Africa particularly in western media, and the effects of such representations on the continent's development, peace and security. Wa'Njogu (2009) for example asserted, "Western media have continued to create images of Africa that portray her as reductive, dependent and crisis-ridden." [2]

Indeed, Africa has been challenged by diverse forms of conflicts. From independence in the early 60s, through to 2004, 16 (sixteen) West African states alone have encountered at least 82 coup plots, seven civil wars and many other forms of political conflicts. [3] However, African governments and scholars argue that there are many ways of showing the realities of the continent without projecting negative and stereotypical frames at the expense of stories that provide opportunities for peace and security.

Decades later, the AU revisits some of the NWICO concerns with the launch of a flagship campaign in 2019, dubbed "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development." The campaign is a call for peace and security in Africa and it seeks a fundamental change in conflict reporting from reaction to preventive and peacebuilding reportage. Underscoring the media's power to shape political, social and cultural norms positively, the campaign implicates African journalists and photojournalists, particularly those working in Africa in the continental goal.

Contestations about visual framing of conflict using iconic photos of war victims underscore the focus on photojournalists working in Africa. While western media have been largely blamed for constructing negative tropes about the continent, researchers noted that African media are equally culpable because they have tended to perpetuate negative constructions partly because of their continued dependence on western media sources for news, photographs and texts to tell stories about Africa. Given that their stories and images are the artefacts for telling the African story, this places African journalists and, particularly, photojournalists directly at the centre of the discourse. The AU recognizes this as it articulates as part of the campaign's objectives, capacity enhancement for African photojournalists to enable them share powerful images that tell Africa's story from an African perspective and to inculcate in African people, the spirit of Pan Africanism.

The success of such campaigns, as timely and laudable as they are, is perhaps hinged to their ability to recognise the dynamics that attend the targets of such capacity enhancement efforts. In particular attention needs to focus on the unique experiences of women covering conflict, peace and security in Africa and more so those of women photojournalists. Men and women are known to experience and function in media differently given the industry's highly gendered nature. For instance, males enjoy more prestige and flexibility (Steiner, 2007) and are also more likely to be assigned coverage of war which is deemed a hard news theme. Such gendering is even more pronounced in the differences that attend the sub discipline of photojournalism (Steiner, 2017).

[2] Wa'Njogu Kiarie John (2009) Representation of Africa in the Western Media: Challenges and Opportunities. Accessed DOI:10.3366/edinburgh/9780748635221.003.0006

[3] McGowan, J. Patrick (2005) Coups and Conflicts in West Africa, 1955-2004. Part 1 Theoretical Perspectives Accessed <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05277885>

At a virtual forum on Women, Peace and Security, AU Special Envoy Benita Diop noted “We cannot silence the guns in Africa without the inclusion of women.”[4] The statement resonates concerns among feminist media scholars and gender activists pertaining to women’s poor representation and participation in journalism and in specialized areas such as photojournalism. Besides the fact that few African photojournalists have the skills and experience to cover conflict and related situations, gender and media scholars have also observed male dominance in the field.

Visual stories on conflict populating television and print are credited to men typically assigned to such beats, as war photography is considered a “dangerous” assignment for women. According to Women Photograph, women constituted only a single digit percentage of lead photo bylines.[5] And yet, women are known to cover the news differently from men in which they emphasize different experiences and perspectives. For instance, Briscoe’s (2014) account has shown that although women are rare in the field, they are also showing photos that male photographers do not get to show. They emphasize other angles not easily seen through the male lens and which therefore expand the opportunities to understand conflict and its effects and antecedents as well as peace efforts. Such documentations are considered important contributions to the images and texts audiences and readers get exposed and, perhaps draw from their differential experiences of the world and the profession.

It would appear, therefore, that to effectively ‘silence the guns’ through the camera lens of Africa’s photojournalists, the experiences and perspectives of the few female photojournalists covering war and peace in Africa must matter. While they may be few and, therefore, easy to discount, African women photojournalists covering conflict, peace and security present a unique opportunity to uncover non-mainstream experiences in conflict and peace reporting.

The Study

The overarching question for this study is: what are the lived experiences of female photojournalists covering conflict, peace and security initiatives in Africa and what opportunities exist, through them, for changing the dominant negative narratives about Africa? It examined the lived experiences and perspectives of female African photojournalists engaged with conflict, peace building and security issues to:

1. Document their unique experiences as relate to their work roles and beats, and conditions of work.
2. Explore their perspectives on photojournalism as a gendered sphere for conflict, peace and security coverage.
3. Ascertain their perspectives on how their work contributes to Silencing the Guns and to changing the dominant negative narratives about Africa
4. Recommend, to media organizations, policy makers, funding bodies and African photojournalists, proposals for improving the lived experiences of female photojournalists documenting conflict, peace and security in Africa.

[4] <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00075749.html>

[5] Women photograph is a private nonprofit database for visual journalists. See <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-20-women-new-faces-photojournalism>

Study Rationale

Researching the experiences of African female photojournalists has attracted relatively little scholarly attention until recently. We know very little of their opportunities and challenges, and their daily struggles to negotiate these along with the many other realities confronting journalism practice on the continent. Hadland and Barnette (2018) for example observed that, there is little empirical data on the work patterns and challenges facing female photojournalists. She adds that additional pressures posed by the new digital era are also undocumented



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LITERATURE
REVIEW

The Gender Politics of Journalism/Photojournalism

To support feminist claims for gender inclusiveness in the Silencing the guns campaign, and to sharpen our understanding, this section examines existing knowledge on gender and journalism. Globally, there is consensus among scholars that the status of women in the workplace is one of disparity with males (Charles, 2003; Eurostat, 2016). Research into status of women in the media, women's representation and portrayal in media content, and women's access and participation in the media converges on the existence of gendering in five unique ways: educational segregation, horizontal occupational segregation, vertical/hierarchical occupational segregation, pay segregation and segregation in values and preferences (Vokić, Ćorić & Obadić, 2017).

Within media industries, the story is no different (see GMMP reports; Byerly, 2011; Yeboah-Banin et al., 2020). There are clear patterns of disparity in roles occupied by men and women, compensations, their presence in leadership etc. For instance, in the US media, women earn less than men. Their work is also less likely to win prestigious awards such as the Pulitzer (Women's Media Centre, 2017). Since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring project reports have also demonstrated that women suffer disadvantages in media. They have fewer by-lines across industries and report a limited bouquet of beats. Consistently, the reports have highlighted the obscured presence of women in news as sources, actors and as newsmakers globally. Andi, Selva and Nielson's (2020) analysis of 200 leading media organizations across ten media markets extends such evidence by showing that women are also absent in media ownership and leadership.

In spite of these challenges, there is evidence that women's presence in media has significant and unique benefits. This is because women cover the news differently (GMMP, 2005). For instance, women rely on sources who are otherwise not heard of in the news, including writing more women into the news (GMMP 2005).

Feminist media scholars attribute the situation in part, to workplace/newsroom practices and cultures. Practices include role assignment, gatekeeping in news production and values placed on what makes news. Newsrooms, as professional sites for production and reproduction of news, (Gravengaard & Rimestad, 2020), account for building professional vision of practice, rooted in "male-centred professional culture." Steady (2011) reasoned that domestic socialisation that defines women and men's roles at home is carried over to the work frame and shapes the culture of newsrooms. Steiner (2017) and de Vuyst and Raeymaeckers (2017) also assert that power relations in production practices determine opportunities for job promotions and assignments for male and female, training and the structural positions of the two genders. Also from this theoretical perspective, Djierf Pierre (2007) has shown in a study of Swedish news media, that gender determines the structure and logic of journalism practices at all levels of newsroom work.

Photojournalism as part of newsroom production work, is equally affected by the gender politics of news production. Since the 1980s when women photographic staff joined newsrooms, clear patterns of gendering were birthed, founded on existing practices and cultures (Darian-Smith, 2016). Long working hours and shift work, after work drinking meets, heavy equipment needing to be carried around etc. were all practices that informed women's entry and opportunity for success. In addition, was a culture that privileged male stoicism when covering traumatic events such as accidents and war (Darian-Smith, 2016).

Concepts such as gender logic and gender typing and the glass ceiling effect have emerged from such studies to explain newsroom cultures (Djierf Pierre, 2007; Carter et al, 1998). One of the most discussed examples of newsroom cultures, gender typing refers to the practice of restricting women journalists to beats considered female or so-called soft beats while male journalists get to cover hard beats. The practice defines male and female journalists' professional experiences of how the news is defined, elements that make news and how news is valued. An example of gender typing germane to the present discussion is war correspondents. Steiner (2017) shows that women who report on war and conflict are judged by different standards than men.

In particular, mothers are condemned when they go off to dangerous conflict areas, although fathers who cover war continue to be largely immune from public criticism. Women war reporters run a high risk of sexual violence and harassment, although women who have been sexually attacked rarely tell their supervisors—probably for fear of being pulled off an assignment.

This is not the only sense in which gendering occurs in conflict photojournalism, however. The practice is also gendered in terms of how men and women do it. Women come to conflict events with different eyes and perspectives that shape their coverage. As Sultze (2003, 274) argues, “put cameras in the hands of women, and you get a power shift and a different, feminine vision” concerning conflict situations. Evidence of this is presented by Campbell and Critcher (2017) who report that the gradual increase in women photographers covering conflict has resulted in a shift toward “aftermath” imagery. According to them, these women also “have intimate access to subjects which would otherwise remain under-represented” (p. 1541).

Other studies on newsroom cultures have prompted questions pertaining to how gender shapes the identities and experiences of women and men in the workforce. Lobo, Silveirinha and da Silva (2017) used the phenomenological approach in researching how males and females understand and express gender in news production processes. They found that gender “is simultaneously embodied and denied by both genders as they tend to adopt a natural attitude toward the prevailing gender system.” As Allan (2017) reasoned, the process of integrating a gender perspective into conflict reporting “starts with respecting the essential standards of journalistic professionalism which impartially present verified information in a fair and balanced context.”

African women who cover conflict beats are not exempt from such experiences as this present study will show. With a new era of African media dawning in the early 1990s media deregulation and democratization, a growing and expanded media environment has ensued. Media pluralism and access to advanced digital communication resulting from the reforms have changed Africa's media landscape and indeed journalism practices of news gathering and reporting. Yet, questions remain about media independence and freedom, safety, media development, professionalism and gender equality. Hadland and Barnette (2018) argue that the historical under-representation of women in photojournalism would likely continue in the near future. This is re-echoed by the GMMP 2020 report that the news media fall short of being an inclusive space for women and that it will take 67 years to close the average gender equality gap in traditional media globally.

Given their low numbers and invisibility, an essential question is how are African female photojournalists faring in the industry. More so, how does this reflect in the practice of their craft in the contexts of conflict and security? What contributions can they make to the AU agenda of Silencing the Guns in Africa? The question resonates with the phenomenological thinking that sees women as agents of change. From that perspective, women are known to have a measure of control over their environment and their own lives.

Briscoe (2014) notes a growing presence of women in photojournalism. Literature and internet documentation records a growing interest of women in photography and photo journalism. The following internet post valorising women photographers is illustrative:

Here are 13 massively talented female photographers who are African, African-descent, or living in Africa, who are taking to the streets daily to show us there is overwhelmingly more to this land, its people, its history, and its future, through their lens, their words, and their experiences.[6]

Another posting of interest and relevance is headlined; “[6] Female African Female Photographers challenging Misconceptions of the African Continent in the Diaspora.”[7] Literature further reveal several women coming out of photography training institutions and female photography award winners who are also challenging gender articulations and women’s marginalisation in media.

In their book, *Women and Photography in Africa*, Darren, Lorena and Kylie (2021) argue that contemporary women photographers are engaging with colonial photographic archives to contest stereotypical forms of representation and are producing powerful counter-histories. Amidst the risks associated with the profession, some daring African women are using photography to uncover some hard truths (Darren et al., 2021). The risks of sexual harassment and safety have been commonly cited.

Photographs, Photojournalism and conflict prevention in Africa

Apart from personal experiences, majority of African people’s ideas and encounters with conflict and related subjects are through images and other visual documentations, largely depictions of the horrors of violence, suffering and devastations. The production of such images is driven by journalists’ orientation and values such as immediacy and drama that tend to favour violence more than peace (Bractic and Schirch, 2007). These journalistic values pose challenges to conflict and peace building. Recent initiatives at ensuring a conflict free world have brought to the fore, the need to rethink these values especially when using photography as a tool for peace and conflict prevention.

Media scholars writing on photography and conflict such as Allan (2011) have called for a reconsideration of war photography. The researcher introduced the concept of peace photography noting that photojournalism committed to peace must be concerned about the re-mediation of the discursive power of photography. Peace photography enjoins photojournalists to consider the polysemic nature of war visuals noting that documenting the horrors of war is as significant as projecting visual alternatives of peace. He further notes:

... the ‘meaning’ of any one image is subject to a multiplicity of possible readings, with much depending upon the subjective positionalities brought to bear by the viewer in what is a complex process of negotiation. (162)

[6] <https://matadornetwork.com/read/14-women-shattering-stereotypes-africa-one-photo-time/>

As Allan (2011) has postulated, the act of taking photographs comes with negotiations, raising questions of responsibility and objectivity. Clark (2009) discusses the mediation effects of visual documentation. The researcher examined the visual discourse of photojournalism and explored the role photographs play in constructing the imagined geography of Africa to show how such photographic illustrations contributed to constructing knowledge of the continent for mainstream UK audiences. The study also showed how key compositions of photographs in particular style were used to represent famine and how such compositions relate to current interpretations of the “Majority World” and “Minority World” or Third World and cautioned that representations of reality must not become disconnected from the real world.

The emotional and cognitive qualities of photographs make them useful tools for peace building. In Africa, a multilinguistic, oral society with majority of the populations unable to read and write, photographs can overcome language and literacy barriers and make news more relatable to audiences. Hence, their positive potential in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In a study on the usefulness of photographs during Apartheid in South Africa, Krantz (2008) examined a unique genre of photojournalism called resistance or struggle photography. This refers to the photographic documentation of conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor from the perspective of the subjugated. The researcher cited Afrapix, a group of photojournalists who used the genre in the context of apartheid South Africa during the 1980s. This group’s images of the repression of black and coloured populations by the apartheid regime, although were restrained in South Africa, received massive international attention. The photographs contributed to the worldwide condemnation and sanctions that ultimately led to the collapse of the apartheid government.

Other scholars have drawn attention to the impact of modern technologies and digitalization on photojournalism practice and the effect on conflict prevention. Specific reference is made to use of video footage and the role of citizen photojournalists. Mortensen (2011) discussed the current rise of citizen photojournalism, using as case study the mobile telephone footage of the Iranian woman Neda Agha Soltan, who was killed during a demonstration in Iran in June 2009. The article investigated the media’s eagerness to use citizen photojournalism as a unique and headline-grabbing source. While this photo footage may grant insight into areas of tension, to which the media has no other access, careless footage challenges the ethical standards of conventional journalism and has the potential of inflaming conflicts into brutal wars.

Istek (2017) discussed the plight of freelance photojournalists, focusing on their perceptions of support and how that affects content. Istek argued that this category of photojournalists lacked resources that affect them in the coverage of conflict zones. The grounded theory was used to analyze nine in-depth interviews with freelance and staff photojournalists. The research found that freelance photojournalists receive less than sufficient support. Both respondents however believe that support systems could improve their coverage in conflict zones (Istek, 2017).

[6] <https://matadornetwork.com/read/14-women-shattering-stereotypes-africa-one-photo-time/>

[7] <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-6-female-photographers-challenging-misconceptions-african-continent-diaspora>

Gendering Conflict Photography

Is photography gendered? Does gender influence the photographs men and women take? The subject has been examined in the literature from several perspectives. One is the image of women as subjects of conflict and violence. Records show that women are incessantly portrayed as helpless and desperate victims of war. Writing on the “Women and Images of War” Kate Parry, notes that women are portrayed in stereotypical images as mourning mothers, refugees and peacemakers.[8] Lloyd and Howard (2004) further pointed out that particularly in conflict situations women’s perspectives are barely nuanced arguing that such images only tell a part of the story.

In other literature on the subject, practitioners and scholars opine that since pictures are not taken in a vacuum, the sex of the photographer can have an effect on the resulting photograph. The thinking may be underpinned by what scholars like Djierf Pierre (2007) term gender logic. This is a phenomenon which places women’s roles in journalism and photojournalism in relation to their domestic responsibilities and femininity. Hudgins (2014) investigated French images of women during World War I, focusing on feminine traits and postures documented by war photographers; how female images were used in the media and how captions and other textual modes conveyed messages of female consent to the war. In another study that content analysed French and British photo journals, cartoons, art criticisms and early career guides aimed at women, Hudgins (2020) showed that these early photographic documents insisted on masculine values and authority. The researcher attributed the situation to the privileged presence of male in the industry during the period covering the study.

Other scholars argue that gender itself doesn’t determine the photographs a person takes. However, gender can influence women’s access to scenes and people and shape the photographs that circulate as a result. Lobo, Silveirinha and da Silva (2017) who used feminist phenomenological perspective to explain women’s experiences of gender in news production point out how women and men engage with journalism work is part of a natural attitude that does not question gender. The scholars describe what happens in journalism practices as a phenomenological “typification.”

[8]<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc238> first published in July 2020



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METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This qualitative study draws on the phenomenological approach. The approach enables understanding of the meanings women photojournalists and photographers assign to their work based on their lived experiences. Against the background of their practical experiences with work, the study also explored the following conceptual question: What does it mean for an African female photojournalist to cover conflict? How do female journalists define conflict coverage? Are there gender implications for the kind of photos female journalists take and why.

Key informants for the study were purposively selected from across Africa. They were identified with the help of professional media associations/organizations and networks such as Media Foundation for West Africa, (MFWA), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and African Women in Media (AWiM) coupled with independent internet search. Thus, sites such as African Photojournalist Data Base, and World Press Photo were consulted. Geographic representation was a primary consideration. The plan was to select 10 female photojournalist, two each representing East, West, North, Central and Southern Africa.

Phenomenologists suggest that two to 10 respondents are sufficient to reach saturation. A total of 20 photojournalists from Sudan, Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroun, Tanzania, Ghana, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire Botswana, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali and Tanzania were reached via email and Instagram. However, 10 respondents granted virtual in-depth interviews on zoom. They are from Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzanian, Zimbabwe Uganda and South Africa representing West, East, Central and South Africa. The respondents consented to audio recording of the interviews. Challenges due to connectivity and availability of respondents slowed down the process. Some of the respondents complained about cost of internet service. Below is a profile of the interviewees:

Table 1: Profile of Study Respondents

Interviewee	Country	Years of experience (Years)	Industry/ Beats	Status
1	South Africa	11	Works on personal beats including Human rights, poverty migrant communities, history of transitions, social justice She has worked as a stringer for AFP and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), New York Times, National Geographic	Freelance Photojournalist
2	Nigeria	4	Newspaper , Freelancer for 2 years, Beat- Street photography	Photojournalist
3	Nigeria	5	Worked with UINCEF as Communication Officer. Now on her own. Beat: Impact of conflict, Lifestyle, culture, transitions, preservation and archiving cultures	Fulltime Freelance Documentary Photographer Produce Documentaries
4	Kenya	2	Television company Gender and everyday beats	Freelance
5	Kenya	3	Private Organisation	Videographer
6	Kenya	5	Communication Researcher with a private organisation. Also works on climate change	Part-time Photography
7	Cameroon	11	Television and Print with mother organisation Beat: Humanitarian projects in conflict zones and with some international organisation on contract	Journalist Freelance Documentary photography
8	Uganda	5	Works as freelance and on collaborative projects with organisations such as Magman Foundation, Gulu Association of women with disabilities.	Freelance Documentary photographer
9	Zimbabwe	2	Works for Television and Film resources in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe	Intern Photojournalist
10	Tanzania	12	Print Media/online Beats: Women and development issues	Photojournalist

Data presentation and Analysis

Photojournalists employed in established media institutions were trained on the job. One of them however, paid for part time training in the trade as a documentary photographer (Interviewee 7). The rest had developed interest in photography working in diverse roles as a communication officer and in researcher or with humanitarian and peace building organisations. Their work experiences ranged from 12 to two years. All of them have had some experiences with conflict, some violent.

A primary finding in conducting this study was just how few and difficult to find are women photojournalists covering conflict. While this is not necessarily surprising given the predominance of males in photojournalism in general, it does signal, however, the limited opportunity there is to have news that would otherwise attract the female lens. Quite a number of them self-define not as photojournalists nor even conflict photojournalists even though they cover such content. For instance, interviewer 2 self-defines as doing street photojournalism; “I am practically everywhere trying to take photographs. I do street photojournalism”. Another claims “I am not calling myself a conflict photographer because I haven’t covered actual conflict” (Interviewer 6). In such instances, the individuals’ work tends to be focused on documenting peacebuilding efforts rather than active conflicts.

The photojournalists’ experiences were as varied as the meanings they each assigned to their work and their role as photojournalists documenting conflicts and violence. Some are either pedestrian or vicarious encounters with conflict shown below:

“I have not been to countries that are at war...but if you know what Johannesburg is like then you will know that unfortunately, crime and violence is very high so you in many it could be taken to be a war zone... we do live in a country that has experienced so much violence...there are constant mobilizations... even though I haven’t been into war zone, we live in a lot of violence situations... as a Journalist in South Africa, seeing live shooting in the streets is normal for us (Interviewee 1).

“...you know I don’t know if I could tick one box.....as conflict and all that because sometimes I find myself at the intersection of all, soI am ...I do a lot of work with NGO’s and refugee communities and right now you might not say I am doing conflict but you are... because you are dealing with the experiences of people whose current situations are the aftermath of a war or conflict so in the end you might be doing peace building...so I guess that sometimes it is all interconnected...(Interviewee 7)

“One of the photos I did was from the Albino camp. This is a marginalized community. There was no water, no electricity and no food. There is violence and the photo drew attention of government to support them so that they can live in peace. (Interviewee 10)

Others have come up close and personal with war and conflict, including even being exposed to personal risk. This is evidenced by Interviewee 2 who explains with “I have covered a lot of bomb blasts and is so traumatizing.... there was even a time I received a hot slap...and when even I was pregnant, I was made to cover a protest and there were gunshots in the air.....

A similar claim about direct contact with conflict comes from Interviewees 2 and 3 respectively:

“there is some border dispute between two towns and has generated some conflict between them...they fight a lot, sometimes it is bloody and rowdy...it is very dangerous but we have to cover it.

“...well in the beginning when I started, I was documenting the impact of conflict.....in the North east of Nigeria we have been having terrorist attacks for more than a decade and I have been talking to people on the impact that has had on the people.

Generally, the interviewees largely the documentary photographers deem war as not the main evidence of conflict. It is rather the post war conditions of victims and the effect on communities and the domestic spaces that they highlight.

This informs what they decide to capture and emphasize in their stories. Indeed, in their efforts towards building peace in Africa, some initiate their own peace building agenda by capturing and magnifying images of moments of conflict resolution and post violence situations. The experience of Interviewer 4 illustrates the point:

The picture I took was when the police were removing stones from the road to allow people to have their way after calming down the situation... it was to resolve the conflict. There was another photograph I took where a group of youth were going about counseling people and building peace... the essence of the story was to calm down the situation and also bring peace. While women may be assigned to photograph incidences of violence, the photos they produced portray peace and calm as the evidence above suggests. They indicate that they deliberately direct focus of images they photograph away from the brutalities of the conflict situations. They do this to avoid reactions which could exacerbate the situation. For example, as Interviewee 7 explains:

“...I just focused more on the damaged buildings and I just took distant pictures of the wounds and people...I tried not show the gory pictures of dead bodies.

“...because I have to give evidence, I will take the picture but I have to blur it or not take the part that will someone viewing it to be scared (Interviewee 8)

The respondents underscored the importance of documentary photography as the genre that produces detailed information. Their reports of the incidences of conflict and peacebuilding tend to take the form of news features or documentary photography. According to some of them, violence and outbreak of conflict should be reported in-depth not as one-off news articles with gory visuals.

Out of the Danger zone: Pre-conflict and post conflict engagements

Typically, interviewees indicated that they do not want to engage with conflict zones despite the journalistic value placed on reporting conflict. All of them had photographed and documented post-conflict and pre-conflict situations and little of live conflicts. Although such photographs take them out of the danger zones, the women's primary concern is their interest in humanity. The respondents define pre-conflict and post - conflict photographs as peace building, community building, mediation and humanitarian photos.

Some of the photographs women take during pre-conflict situations are random pictures, such as depictions of happiness. Such random images also contribute to positive construction of the continent. Interviewee (4) said she once took pictures of little girls fetching water from a well, and another of woman pushing a wheelbarrow to tell a story of the peace women and children enjoy in a conflict-free environment. Interviewee 6 a freelance, working as a communication officer, linked peace journalism to climate change and to Silencing the Guns. She reasoned that:

“... when the guns are on an uproar, people begin to disperse to different directions. Of course, when the land is not at peace, the people are not at peace the child who is going to school cannot go... the security of their livelihood is affected...their peace and stability is affected.

Therefore, her photographs focus on climate change. With regard to post conflict visuals, photographers focused on videos on mediation using print and video images and sometimes videos taken in conflict periods. One of the video images published was titled “Bad Blood.” This account by Interviewee 2 is explained:

“...there were a lot of women who were abducted by terrorists and they were coming back...being rescued by the military and they were coming back...now a lot of them were coming back with children, many were traumatized...

The interviewees shared their experiences of how they have fought for the rights of women, children, the youth and even the environment. Some of them have done this through strategically profiling for example victimized women while insisting on the need for the society to respect them. Also, almost all the interviewed photojournalists shared interest in issues relating to gender and discrimination against women in the African society especially within the male-dominated space of photojournalism.

Silencing the Guns

Existing literature suggests that women come to the news, particularly conflict news with a different eye and different interests. The study explored the opportunities within the work of women photojournalists covering conflict for silencing the guns. The findings agree with expectations in how the interviewees articulate their motivations for the work they do. These women come to the practice of their craft from a purposeful posture that seeks to correct the image of Africa and move the discourse away from horror and suffering. This should further the cause of the AU in its efforts towards silencing the guns. As recounted by the Interviewee 3,

“In the North east of Nigeria we have been having terrorist attacks for more than a decade ...the reasons that I focused on it was because a lot of the journalists that were coming in were foreigners and there was a way, they represented Africa that I was not happy about...you know they always look at your vulnerability, they look at your tragedy...you know they don't really photograph you in a way that is humane in my opinion so I didn't like it. I felt that I wouldn't do that. It's just like what happened in Rwanda, the genocide you know even from 10 to 20 years now people think of Rwanda as a place of genocide despite all of the progressions that they have had so my fear was that they are not documenting the region right they are not treating people in a humane way, they are not following the ethics they would use if they were in their own country and so I felt I wanted to tell our story in a way that I felt honors our community

With such motivation, those who are aware of it consider themselves and their work to be instrumental to achieving the AU's objective of 'silencing the guns'. They reasoned that one way of building peace on the continent is to change the dominant tropes of conflict with photographic depictions of peace. And because, according to Interviewee 3, "female photojournalists take pictures with some humane touch than males", silencing the guns could benefit from the feminine photojournalistic touch.

Other interviewees expressed similar thoughts on how differences in women's photojournalistic practice can move Africa towards peace and away from war:

“I believe that women photojournalists can cover stories with emphasis on the humane aspect of such stories which will help people to have more in-depth understanding of some of these conflict issues. And I also think that we need more voices on some of these issues so the more women photojournalists we have, the more diverse the voices...so it important that everyone gets the chance to document on one issue (Interviewee 1)

“yea... through the angle they take with their photo...it might not necessarily focus on the war....it can focus on a positive manner (Interviewee 3).

“yea I think women play a major role ...what I have seen during this conflict...more and more women becoming breadwinners... more and more women going into peace building and dialogues and setting up NGO's and organisations.... so now there is a shift...it is a more humane, more compassionate style of leadership with women we see so I think we have a more incredible role to play and because we were such a conservative community, when you see a woman behind a camera, people are warm with us, people are more willing to talk with you...because they feel that in general, a woman is more nurturing, a woman will approach it in a calmer way (Interviewee 2)

“

yes absolutely they have....yea through taking pictures, we can educate 10000's of people by telling stories and this gives the journalist, a bigger chance in this (Interviewee 8)

From their accounts we also see that these articulations about the roles female photojournalists can play in silencing the guns are not merely anecdotal. Indeed, the study finds that women photojournalists actually implement strategies that de-emphasize violence when covering conflict, security and peace. As some of the evidence presented earlier show, they do this via the orientations they take in capturing events, and also amendments made, post capture, to redirect the audience attention. Interviewees also indicated that they adopt a humane and optimistic approaches to telling stories which otherwise could be seen as very gruesome and hopeless. As one explains, “I see that female photojournalists take pictures with some humane touch than males”.

Another way by which female photojournalists can intervene in Silencing the Guns in Africa is captured in the proposal by Interviewee 3.

“

Our story is not told by us.... its always someone else. And when they take up that body of work, it becomes their property and we have to go to their institutions to access them. It's like somebody else taking your stories and your privacy away from and charging you or you know having to ask someone to permit you access something about your community...I thought why don't we do that ourselves....why don't we have our own archive where our stories are stored and where the property is ours and it belongs to us.

Gender issues in practice

Respondents confirmed male dominance in the industry stating that the phenomenon has influenced public perception and acceptance of women in the industry. This is articulated by Interviewee 4.

“

There was a time when I got a good environment to take pictures and there were some guys sitting on a truck.... immediately I took my camera they all began to shout at me... hey what are you doing...I had to put my camera back...you know when you are a woman, people can attack you anyhow and they can trash out the camera you hold

Another explains that:

“

...errrrrrm for women the challenge will be....even if you want to take a picture at odd hours probably someone can rape you (Interviewee 8)

“

...I went to a palace and I was told I need to take my shoes off...bow down not keep eye contact ...and it was a challenge because I needed to take close shots, close up (Interviewee 7).

Such experiences of harassment and cultural interferences in professional practice are common across interviewees. Interviewee 2 recounts that "...there was a time I went to cover a story and this bodyguard pushed me from behind because he thinks the educational minister must go before me".

“...even sometimes on the job when I go in to interview some people, they see me to be a woman and so refuse to volunteer information to me. And also, I get discouragement from some of my friends because I cover protest.

“ahhhhhh generally females are believed to have a lesser voice...even when a female writes a story people will say this is written by a female and maybe it is not factual and people seem to have their perception of how females we deliver our messages (Interviewee 8)

Similar evidence was recounted about the perceptions of society about women in photography as exemplified in this statement by Interviewee 5.

“...sometimes you will meet a contact and they will be like oh I thought they are sending someone and then you will be like...I am that someone...you know just because you are woman and they just disregard you.

Yet, there is evidence also that being a female photojournalist covering conflict can have its privileges. On a positive note, respondents indicated that they enjoyed access to news makers within the communities due to the fact of being female and their interest in humanitarian photography including human rights issues. The respondent from Cameroon, for instance, noted that women more than men gain easy access to sources because they are able to establish relationships with them. They adopt a humane approach to gain access to enable them take photographs.

The challenges these women photojournalists face are not limited to public perceptions and reactions, however. They also experience discriminatory practices internally as exemplified by the same interviewee who claims that there is discrimination in hiring practices and work routines with media. According to her, sometimes her “ editor assigns certain jobs to my male counterparts... maybe he thinks I could not do it.”

In spite of challenges they face with equitable opportunities and discriminatory perceptions, these women must also contend with stiff competition from their male colleagues, sometimes under unjustified circumstances. Historical norms that privilege exclusive news or, as is known in parlance, ‘scoop’, sometimes expose these women to difficult treatments from their colleagues. A respondent from Nigeria recounts an experience that demonstrates this:

“there was this time when the Chibock girls were being sent from Maiduguri to Abuja...it was a Saturday so I called one of my colleagues who works at the Punch and I told him.....I wanted to go with people for security purposes and another reporter...they all told me they did not know such an event was taking place....but I managed to trace the place and when I went the first lady was talking to the girls and I could not enter so I decided to wait outside maybe when they are coming out I could get some shots but I was shocked to find these colleagues who I called earlier to be there...and my investigations told me even by the time I called them they were there. I just stood there and tears were coming from my eyes...it was not an exclusive thing for only one paper. (Interviewee 2).

In spite of this, they do not relent in their professional endeavors. Interview participants were more concerned with creating spaces for themselves as peace builders when covering conflict beats than in contesting male dominance in that space. Some of the evidence, particularly from South Africa and Zimbabwe suggest that women do not see conflict as a male preserve for which they need to change their interests into male modes of photojournalism practice. In other words, the women are not responding to such newsroom practices as gender typing as well as newsroom cultures such as gatekeeping practices that tend to devalue women's contributions. Women have come to see newsroom cultures as natural.

Working conditions of female photojournalists

From the interviews, one would conclude that the working conditions of African women photojournalists are not very encouraging. This is even more so for those who work on a freelance basis. Working condition challenges take varied forms including the absence of requisite resources for working. Interviewees mentioned lack of access to resources and training opportunities as well to modern photographic equipment. Interviewee 4 for example, recounted how she often has to work without any cover for risk or any form of insurance. For instance, when covering a story on COVID 19 for example, she said she had no protection even when she went as far as the isolation ward. While not indicated as a gendered issue, the fact that these women must face such risks likely puts them in a situation of double jeopardy. On the one hand, they must contend with unfair treatments rising out of normative practices and cultures while on the other, they must do this by exposing themselves to undue risk.

Where such female photojournalists work as freelancer, the challenge is exacerbated. Both the Kenyan and Cameroonian interviewees indicated challenges arising out of their incomes being contingent on being published.

“...it is not always easy for the female to get her articles published...especially in the position where the editor is male.... if you really want your article to be published unless you have connection.....yea that is a challenge (Interviewee 9)

As some respondents however noted, opportunities offered by internet and social media enable them address the challenge of publishing their work. Such digital facilities give them expanded access to international media and other spaces to project their work. The interviewee from Nigeria

“we have social media so we’re actually very lucky by coming at a time that social media exist so you can self-publish...so when you publish online, you can see a lot of people on social media reaching out to you...I want a photographer, I want you to do this for me...so social media has actually helped in a way and because I built my career on social media, a lot of people come to me to work for them to work for them or write for them so publishing has been easy because of social media

There is also the challenge concerning work shifts and the disadvantage it places on women in media who have domestic role commitments as noted by Interviewee 3 from Kenya

“In Kenya journalism is guided by the code of conduct....and when it comes to the working condition, it is biased against women.... The time of work...men can work all day...this is the challenge

Generally, respondent articulate a sense of work-related freedom. This takes the forms of freedom in choosing which subject to cover and who to photograph provided it tells a good story. However, if for instance, they are doing a collaborative project with for example, UNICEF or any other organization, the subject is already defined by the organisations based on objectives they have set for themselves and the female photojournalist must take photos within the confines of the set objectives.

“... I think that with a lot of organisations when you are working as a freelance, you have more freedom of movement, of creativity and you can take photographs that you think you should...but when you are with an organization, they have a clear-cut agenda...they have guidelines on what they think is a topic for them.

“Number one training on communication and safety...training is very important. Number 2 is equipment...I don’t need to be 50 meters closer in a war zone when I can get a camera that I can stand as back as 500 miters and still get my shots (Interviewee 9)

“female photojournalists should be given more freedom...they should be intimidated and then their stories should be given more priority to be published (Interviewee 8)

“...more training, more visibility and also the equipment...up to date equipment. We also need the newsroom to be more accepting of other forms of telling stories with pictures.... newsrooms should also invest in photography and resources (Interviewee 7).

Interviewees also narrated incidents of trauma in the course of work. They explained that these are inevitable as they make efforts to place themselves in the positions of the people they photograph and also try to understand their stories from a very personal stance. The respondent from Interviewee 3 stated:

“...because these are experiences that humble us and show us what the world is really made of... people have terrible experiences and go through bad things that you not know from their faces.... There have been times when we are sitting for interview and I feel busting down in tears.... but I can't do that...sometimes when they are reliving the stories...I have to console them...it's okay...you are here now.”

“...really, I have suffered a lot of emotional trauma. There were times when images of dead and injured people I have covered kept me down for days... (Interviewer 5)

Interestingly, respondents did not sound deterred by these psychological effects. They sounded ready to always get out from the daze to cover even more traumatising situations to help their communities and people. As one puts it “well for what I do is that the day I wake up and can't move or feel anything is the day I should stop making these photos...I find it very hard to distant myself from these stories.”

Discussion of Findings

The study on female African photojournalists' experience explored beats they cover, the conditions of work, their perspectives on gender issues in photojournalism and factors that enhance or hinder the day-to-day practice of the craft. It also explored from the phenomenological perspectives, what it means for an African female photojournalist to cover conflict and the gender implications in covering conflict and peacebuilding.

Some of the evidence, particularly from South Africa and Zimbabwe suggest that women do not see conflict as a male preserve for which they need to change their interests into male modes of photojournalism practice. In other words, the women are not responding to such newsroom practices as gender typing as well as newsroom cultures such as gatekeeping practices that tend to devalue women's contributions. Women have come to see newsroom cultures as natural.

The findings generally agree with expectations in how the interviewees articulate their motivations for the work they do. The study has shown that female African photojournalists are more interested in pre-and post-conflict coverage than photographing live conflict situation. This is considered an important intervention in the AU Agenda of promoting a conflict free society. They recognized the gendered nature of the profession in some areas of their work roles. For example, some of the interviewees did not think gender mattered in the images women take. Some of the gender theories that define women's roles and craft as photojournalists like gender typing was found to applying some cases only. Female journalists see a connection between conflict and peace reporting in the ways they interpret conflict and peace reporting.

It came as no surprise that respondents preferred not to engage with conflict zones but rather in pre and post conflict situations. They attributed these to their femaleness (nature of naturing and being humane etc.) an attribute feminist scholars may interpret as photojournalists reinforcing their own stereotypes. All of them had photographed and documented post-conflict and pre-conflict situations and little of live conflicts. Although such photographs took them out of the danger zones, the women's primary concern was their interest in humanity. They did not compromise on documenting photographs on horror and perhaps may not have found such negative visuals as significant as projecting alternative positive visual as Allan's (2011) submitted in the "theory" on the polysemic nature of conflict war photography.

Conclusions

Given women's low numbers and invisibility in photojournalism and photography, an essential question that guided the study is how are African female photojournalists faring in the industry. How does this reflect in the practice of their craft in the contexts of conflict and security? What contributions can they make to the AU agenda of Silencing the Guns in Africa? The following conclusions are based on these questions and the research objectives. The first is the agency of the female photojournalists, photographers and journalists to change the image of Africa through photography regardless of their low numbers and invisibility. All the respondents recognise the power of photography and their roles and professional contribution to the industry. However, they also recognise the challenges they face as women. One would conclude therefore that change is slow in coming regarding societal, professional and gendered perceptions about women in the profession. The tendency to focus on their femininities rather than their capabilities is quite worrying.

One would also conclude from the interviews that the working conditions of African women photojournalists are not very encouraging and this is even more so freelance photographers. Interviewees mentioned lack of access to modern photographic equipment, resources and training opportunities. Involving female journalists in Silencing the Guns has been proved to be a positive move and one can conclude that by way of their intervention women have a lot to learn from in terms of their style of reporting and their unique advantages and skills in gaining access sources. Their style of gathering information from conflict zone is akin to conflict sensitive reporting.

Recommendations

Reports of male dominance and gender insensitivity partly in production practices call for gender mainstreaming in African news rooms. The pre-and post-conflict approach to photojournalism work should be encouraged as a strategy for the AU agenda to promote a conflict free society. The study recommends that more African females should be encouraged to pursue careers in photography and photojournalism. Training for female journalists on photojournalism skills and skills in emotional intelligence as well as free counselling services are recommended. This is crucial given that only two of the respondents have had professional training in photojournalism/documentary photography. Training opportunities such as international seminars and conferences should be extended to female African photojournalists to expose them to new skills and development in the industry.

Provision of resources for the women (cameras) and funding should gain immediate attention. Adequate security structures should be put in place for the women especially when they cover ongoing conflict and peacebuilding situations. It is also recommended that female photojournalists should be given more freedom to be creative and their stories must be given a priority in terms of publishing. Female photojournalists should be more to publishing opportunities. It is also evident from the responses that there is a constituency of photographers or photojournalist. with little or no knowledge about the AU agenda of Silencing the Guns. The need to educate journalists, photojournalist and photographers on the tenets of the campaign and their role cannot be over- emphasized.

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