

Mass Media and Coverage of Conflict Situations in Nigeria: Implications for National Security and Integration in the Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Conflict situations in post-colonial Nigeria, ranging from communal violence, indigenes/settlers crises, environmental disasters, electoral violence, political upheavals to terrorist insurgency and the attendant increasing volume of media attention they receive seem to create a sense of insecurity and disintegration within the body polity. This paper examines the role of the mass media in covering conflict situations in Nigeria within the context of the subtle elements of insecurity and social disharmony among the constituent units of the country. The paper posits that mass media coverage of conflict situations, especially in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria should not only employ meticulous reportage that take cognizance of balance handling of all sides of the conflicts and resist explanation for violence in terms of group hatred and mutual suspicion but also avoid giving undue attention to violence, focusing rather on the domino effect of violence on political stability and democratic governance in the body polity. The paper further posits that despite the challenges before mass media practitioners vis - a - vis government hostilities, poor remuneration, harassment and murder, etc., the employment of conflict-sensitive coverage is imperative for effective conflict management and peace-building in the interest of national security and integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Key word: Mass Media, Conflict Situations, National Security and Integration

Introduction

In every human society, conflicts are perennial phenomena among people across various settings – be it at individual, family, group, organisational, national or international level. Among other variables, these conflicts tend to draw strength from the manner in which messages are communicated. Hardly can a nation attain its full developmental potential if such a nation is submerged in communicated messages that border on the face value of violence in terms of the number of people killed, number of property destroyed, position of the parties involved, etc, rather than engaging in critical, comprehensive and constructive assessment of the problem with a view

to shooting the problem headlong and redeeming the image of the body polity. The fallout of such a manner of reporting is measured by the threat it poses to national security and integration.

Since the emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, there have been unprecedented security-threatening conflict situations both at the grassroots and national levels ranging from ethno-communal uprising, indigenes/settlers crises, religious violence, political unrest, to the current "Boko Haram" sectarian terrorist insurgency. The prevalence of these conflicting situations and the attendant increasing volume of media coverage they receive are prone to misrepresentation, manipulation and misinterpretation, thereby constituting a threat to national security and integration. Given the generic character of conflict in any organised setting, mass media coverage of conflict situations, especially in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, should not only employ meticulous reportage of conflict progression but also avoid giving undue sympathy and biased disposition to sensitive issues that could instigate pathological hatred and mutual suspicion between or among the conflicting parties. Within the framework of the ethics of their profession, the mass media should promote agenda for peace and social justice as against agenda for war and mutual suspicion. With reference to Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the questions are: how can media coverage instigate conflict or trigger existing conflicts in the society? How can media coverage of conflicting events be improved to ensure group loyalty rather than mutual suspicion? Do the media have any significant role to play in Nigeria's quest for durable peace, security and improved democratically responsible and responsive governance in the 21st century? Against this backdrop, the paper critically examines the role of the mass media in conflict situation in Nigeria within the context of the subtle elements of insecurity and social disharmony among the constituent units in the country.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CLARIFICATIONS

The Mass Media

Mass media as noted by Asadu (2007), refer to all the avenues through which information can be passed from one person to numerous, scattered and heterogeneous audience. They can also mean vehicles through which messages, information, ideas, knowledge and culture are transferred from one person to the other. To Defleur and Dennis (1981), mass media are 'devices for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication'. Nwosu (as cited in Asadu, 2007) sees the mass media as "technical" communication concept which refers to the devices employed by anyone involved in a mass mediated communication situation for moving messages across distance and time. Hebert *et al* (1974) classify these devices into seven, namely: books, newspaper, magazine, motion picture, radio, television and sound recording. Rogers (1973), groups mass media into five: newspapers, magazines, films, radio, and television. Blake and Haroldson (nd) stress that the print media include newspapers, books, pamphlets, magazines, direct mail, circulars, billboards, and any technical device that carries a message to the masses by appealing to their sense of sight

Conflict

Etymologically, the word 'conflict' was derived from the Latin verb *Conflictus or conflagere*, meaning "to strike together". Conflict is used to designate a process and a state of being (Yarn, 1999; Albert, 2001; Nwolise, 2003). Despite the fact that conflict by nature, is a perennial

phenomenon among humans in time and space, a universally agreed definition of conflict has not emerged in extant development studies. Rather, individuals, diplomats, corporate bodies, peace and conflict scholars, political analysts, and other proponents and exponents of the phenomenon have looked at conflict from diverse ways. According to Azar (1990), conflict is perceived as an inseparable part of social interaction. Conflict cannot take place without the involvement of two or more parties. Mutually incompatible goals among parties amidst a lack of coordinating or mediating mechanisms give birth to conflict. In this broad sense, conflict is a generic social phenomenon involving individuals, societies, states and their collectives¹. Nye (1973) submits that 'conflict' is a term with different meanings, depending on the user. He argues that conflict is a product of mutual hostility between or among individuals or groups, which might be expressed in words (insults, name-calling, sarcasm, defamation, etc) or in actions (killings, fighting, destroying another's property, withholding needed assistance, etc).

Woodhouse and Miall (2005), write that "Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change. It is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arise as new formations generated by social change" ACDESS (1999) attempts to draw a line of distinction between conflict and potential conflict, while the former is defined as generalized, sustained violence afflicting most or all of a state, the latter is seen as endemic outburst of low-level, less generalized violence likely to lead to full scale conflict. As Burton (1969) sees it, conflict is a more extreme form of dispute, involving hostile action and the potential destruction of people and institutions. He further opines that disputes occur in situations where the issues are negotiable, while conflict is behaviour that goes beyond normal disagreements.

A careful evaluation of the above definitions clearly depicts that conflicts are bound to occur between or among individuals or groups in any organized human society in as much as they have divergent and convergent goals, interests and aspirations and they device different means of pursuing them. Apparently, Albert (2001) subscribes to the notion that conflict is a generic human phenomenon when he argues that there is nothing wrong with conflict. He stresses that it is a natural and inevitable human experience, and a critical mechanism by which goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated. Conflict should not be presumed from a negative point of view *per se*, but should be taken as a driving force which facilitates change and development. In other words, there is orderliness in conflict, although conflict can become disorderly (Albert, 2001).

National Security and Integration

The concept of national security is presumed to connote the guaranteeing of such values as national independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty; hence, the insatiable urge to equip the military sector with sophisticated weapons and skills. Hakan and Wiberg cited in Ochoche (1998) opine that the occupation and subjugation of a nation's territorial integrity by external aggressors through war should be considered as the worst threat; therefore, military means must be employed to ward off any attempts at occupation or destruction of the territorial integrity of the state. In this regard, the concern for national security has led to the development of amazing military machines. Various governments in both advanced and developing countries have invested heavy human and material resources in the procurement of military weapons in an attempt to

ensure the safety of life and property of their citizens and guaranteeing the territorial integrity of their respective geographical entities. Amplifying the foregoing, Lawrence (1980), argues that:

Africa shares with the United States of America, the USSR and the People's Republic of China as, indeed, with the rest of the world, one common basic concern, national security. The urge to acquire armaments derives from a natural human response to the ever present sense of insecurity in a Hobbesian state of international chaos.

However, in contemporary times, many scholars and policy makers alike have given up the traditional idea that security was basically freedom from military threat and political coercion and have come to terms with the new security paradigm, which anchors on improved condition of life for the citizenry. The continent Africa today suffers more from economic rather than military insecurity (see Ochoche, 1998). Hence, national security as a concept should be applied in its broadest sense to include economic security, social security, environmental security, food security, the equality of life security and technological security (Ochoche: 1998). Robert McNamara (as cited in Ochoche: 1998) aptly encapsulates this new security paradigm when he writes that:

In a modernizing society, security means development. Security is not military hardware, though it may include it; security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it. Security is development, and without development there can be no security. A developing nation that does not, in fact, develop simply cannot remain secure for the intractable reason that its citizenry cannot shed its human nature.

This notion is in tandem with Professor Charles Maier's (1990) definition of national security that:

National security— is best described as a capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community believes necessary to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy, prosperity and well being.

In a multi ethnic society such as Nigeria, national security may perhaps connote the security of the various ethnic groups that constitute the nation. If the citizens are guaranteed a sense of identity through economic, social and political security within the body polity, they will feel a sense of belonging and work towards national integration and sustainable peace in high spirit of loyalty and patriotism. According to Doro and Staltz (as cited in Ndolo, 2005), **national integration** is subsuming the parochial loyalties of culture, religion, language and ethnic and tribal groups to the over-riding interests of groups into a harmonious whole with equal access to national opportunities, resources and services. It is argued that national integration reduces socio-cultural and economic differences or inequalities and strengthens national unity and solidarity, which is not imposed by any coercive authority. In any given society, information management plays a pivotal role in determining the quality of national security and integration. Hence, for Nigeria to evolve a consolidated democratic system and maximize its potentials of socio-economic and political developments in the 21st century, the role of the mass media, especially in the coverage of sensitive national issues should not be undermined by both the government and the citizenry.

Theoretical Anchor:

Social Responsibility Theory and Human Needs Theory serve as the theoretical anchors for the study.

The Social Responsibility Theory developed as a response to the limitations of the American libertarian theory. As (Akinfeleye, 1988: 50) notes, the theory argues in part that whoever enjoys freedom also has certain obligations to that same society particularly on national development. In that light, the theory postulates that press freedom could only worth its salt by assuming the role of serving the political system, enlightening the public, safeguarding the system and providing good entertainment without necessarily harming the democratic values. The theory goes further that if the media failed to perform for the society in which they operate, then other social forces would make them live up to their responsibilities to the society. It is the solemn responsibility of the mass media to ensure that they perform their duties with all sense of patriotism for the good of all and sundry.

The conscious understanding of social responsibility theory among mass communication practitioners may help them to be sensitive when covering conflict situations. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, they would not only employ meticulous reportage of conflict progression but also avoid giving undue sympathy and biased disposition to sensitive issues that could instigate pathological hatred and mutual suspicion between or among the conflicting parties.

Human Needs Theory

Human Needs Theory advances the needs-based approaches to the causation, manifestation and management of conflict. The theory postulates that the relative deprivation of basic human needs is the underlying factor responsible for conflict generation (Yam, 1999; Wallensteen, 2012). The argument is that if the basis of a conflict was the denial of particular needs, then the resolution process must identify those needs and analyse ways of meeting them through equitable economic policy responses (Wallensteen, 2012). Leaning on Maslow's famous hierarchy of human needs, which identifies both physiological and psychological requirements, needs theory suggests that intractable and deep-rooted conflicts are inherently concerned with deprivation of basic necessities that are non-negotiable rather than with interests that are negotiable. Prolonged deprivation of these fundamental human needs could degenerate into frustration and resorts to aggressive reactions by the citizenry.

The relevance of both theories to the study should be perceived in the light of the advocacy role the mass communication practitioners can play as a function of social responsibility; which may perhaps help make government responsible and accountable to the people. To wit, responsible government will no doubt, mind citizenry's welfare; reduce prolonged deprivation of fundamental human needs that could degenerate into frustration and conflict by the citizenry and by extension endanger national security and development.

Understanding the Nigerian society

The need for a careful coverage of sensitive issues by the mass media is perhaps appreciated with the understanding of Nigeria as a nation. Before colonial conquest, a political entity called Nigeria was non-existent as various ethnic groups that later constituted the Nigerian nation-state

ran isolated socio-economic, political and communication systems. With the conquest, and amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorate in 1914, by Lord Fredrick Lugard, the British Administrator of the nation, Nigeria was born.

Nigeria, often referred to as the "the Giant of Africa", lies along the Gulf of Guinea in the West Coast of Africa. Nigeria occupies an area land mass of 356,669.89 miles (or 923,773sq.km). Nigeria has the largest diversified set of people in the whole of Africa. There are multiplications of cultures within the country, numbering well over two hundred and fifty (250) autonomous ethnic groups. And each of them has its own unique language/cultural pattern (Uche, 1986). Among the diverse ethnic groups, the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo constitute the three largest single dominant groups in Nigeria. The Hausa/Fulani occupy the Savanna belt of Northern Nigeria with some other minority ethnic groups in the Northern belt such as the Jukun, Igbirra, Tiv, Gwarri, Idoma, Igala, Nupe, Kanuri etc. The Yoruba occupy the south-west (often referred to as the West) of Nigeria. The Igbo ethnic group is located in the Eastern thick forest portion of Nigeria. Some other minority ethnic groups in Eastern Nigeria are the Ibibio, Efik, Annang, Ekoi, Ijaw and numerous others. The three major ethnic groups have always taken advantage of their majority status to dominate the political and economic life of the country at the detriment of other minority groups. In the words of Uche, "one is not far from the mark to state that the political history of modern Nigeria is the history of inter-tribal schism, open rivalry and maneuvering among the Hausa/Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the south and eastern extraction". The Nigerian mass media as social institutions have unfortunately being caught in the web of ethnic sentimental projections for virtually all the distinct regions that created them. Evaluation of media reportage on certain issues shows that more often than not, the Nigerian media have not performed their statutory responsibility within the framework of conflict-sensitive reporting and peace journalism. This has resulted into either the escalation of a conflict situation into a more alarming degree or influenced the re-escalation of an already doused tension and making the accomplishment of national security and integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic difficult.

Newspapers Headlines with Subtle Elements of Insecurity and Division

No doubt, media coverage of certain sensitive issues within the period under study has influenced a sense of insecurity by sending wrong signals to the members of the public. Perhaps, in an attempt to capture public attention, and attract sympathy from certain individuals or groups within the political space, the print media coin the headlines of their news bulletin with violent-induced wording. Sometimes such information could be wrongly decoded by the audience and generate fresh conflicts or ignite existing group hatred. Hence, rather than promoting a sense of mutual trust and peaceful co-existence in the citizenry, media reportage has given undue consideration for open confrontations at the detriment of sustainable peace and social harmony among the constituent units within the political system. The table below showcases such conflict-inspiring headlines.

Table I: Newspaper and Magazine Headlines with Subtle Elements of Insecurity and Division

S/N (Not in chronological order)	Date	Name of media house	Headline	Remarks
1	March 6, 2006	The NEWS weekly Magazine	OBJ Loses Control: Full Blown War in the Niger Delta	Projecting the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo as incapable of addressing the Niger Delta Crises
2	December 8, 2003	TELL Weekly Magazine	Terror in Bayelsa	Provoking a sense of terrorism in some parts of the country
3	March 22, 2004	TELL Weekly Magazine	Bloody Road to 2007	Capable of triggering inter-party mutual distrust in democratic process, particularly signalling electoral violence
4	September 13, 2004	TELL Weekly Magazine	Rivers of Anarchy; Why Dariye is a Goner	Provoking a sense of anarchy and sectional crises in some states of the federation
5	February 25, 2012	Saturday Punch	FG Hunts for Boko Haram Backers in Army, SSS, NIA	Expressing government distrust in the rank and file of the state security apparatuses, occasioned by alleged complicity of the latter with the Boko Haram insurgents.
6	October 17, 2011	TELL Magazine	What if Nigeria Breaks Up?	Creating a sense of looming disintegration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria over lack of political commitment and institutional response to the protracted unresolved identity crisis in the country
7	October 11, 2004	TELL Magazine	Biafra or Presidency	Creating a deep sense of marginalisation, deprivation, dissatisfaction and social exclusion among the constituent groups in the country on the one hand, and on the other, lack of political will and institutional commitment for peaceful resolution of Nigeria's internal problems
8	July 11, 2005	TELL Magazine	The Looming War Over Resource Control	Projecting a sense of internal implosion over economic marginalisation and social exclusion

9	May 9, 2005	TELL Magazine	CONFAB: Why The North Will Fight	Projecting the government as insincere over the conveyance of CONFAB with a view to addressing the long awaited national question
10	February 21, 2005	TELL Magazine	Obasanjo's CONFAB: The Hidden Agendas	Ditto
11	June 5, 2006	TELL Magazine	Obasanjo's New Move; and Why the North Will Fight Him	Signalling distrust in Obasanjo's leadership by the political elite of Northern extraction
12	January 12, 2004	TELL Magazine	Nigeria May Explode: Obasanjo Has Lost Control	Projecting a looming internal implosion over alleged president's weak hold on the centre
13	March 7, 2005	TELL Magazine	How Britain Rigged Elections, Census For the North	Creating a sense of protracted group hatred and disunity in the country occasioned by the British colonial legacy of divide-and-rule
14	February 9, 2004	TELL magazine	Obasanjo Is A Liar	Giving the impression that Olusegun Obasanjo was running a government of deceit, provoking inter-group distrust
15	March 11, 2002	TELL Magazine	Igbo politicians set for war: We Will Make Nigeria Ungovernable	Creating a deep sense of internal chaos, insecurity and disharmony in the body polity
16	November 22, 2004	TELL Magazine	How Uba's Army Sacked Anambra	Projecting lack of political tranquillity over loss of control of some part of the country by constituted authority
17	August 4, 2003	TELL Magazine	The Coup Plot Against Obasanjo	Creating a deep sense of threat to democratic tranquillity
18	July 2, 2012	TELL Magazine	Boko Haram: a conspiracy of Silence	This could provoke inter religious and inter group distrust
19	August 13, 2012	Newswatch Magazine	Nigeria on the Brink of people's Revolt	Creating a sense of imminent anarchy in the body polity as a result of myriad political, socioeconomic and security challenges confronting the present administration
20	August 10, 2009	Newswatch	The Bloody Rampage	Projecting the country as being replete with unmanageable violence.

This table shows how conflict-inspiring headlines on National Dailies and Magazines could provoke mutual distrust among various sections, and by implication, expressing a sense of insecurity and disintegration within the body polity.

From the foregoing, it seems that either by omission or commission, media reportage has not been sensitive enough to the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria. This is capable of provoking a sense of insecurity, disunity, mutual suspicion, disintegration and division as various groups within the body polity give different interpretations to information at their disposal. Besides, the comments of the pressmen on certain sensitive issues have ignited 'sleeping conflicts' through misinterpretation of the intent of the reporters. For instance, the misinterpretation of press reports over the 2002 edition of Miss World beauty pageant sparked the existing religious violence in the North, which claimed over two hundred (200) innocent souls. The genesis of the conflict was traced to the opposing view of the Muslim community, particularly of northern extraction over Nigeria's intention to host the event. However, the event assumed a destructive proportion when on Saturday, 16 November 2002, *This Day* newspaper sarcastically suggested that the Prophet Mohammed would have approved of the Miss World contest as he would have probably chosen a wife from among the contestants. The article triggered religious violence within a short time as Muslims across the country reacted violently to the development

Conflict Coverage, National Security and Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: What role for the mass media?

Traditionally, the function of the mass media is principally to disseminate news and to pass judgement on matters of the moment or topical interest by means of printed words, illustrations, cartoons, caricatures or other visual symbolizations.² In the process of encoding and decoding the information for public consumption, any attempt of biased reportage in terms of misrepresentation, misinterpretation, propaganda, exaggeration or any other form of distortion and falsehood either real or imagined could either trigger an existing conflict situation or precipitate fresh feuds. Specifically, the mass media can play the following roles among others, in conflict situations:

Reporting Conflict Situations with a Frame of Mind of Peace

According to Strobel (2006), it has been generally acknowledged that conflict coverage, whether by international news agencies or local reporters produces its own significant impacts on conflicts. "The influence of information", Strobel notes, "can begin before the first shots are fired and last long into the post-conflict, reconstruction, and reconciliation phases". In a somewhat similar vein, Isola (2010), observes that the impact of the media on conflict situations can be as simple as increasing a single individual knowledge or understanding on an issue or event. And it may be as compounded and complex as influencing people's attitudes and behaviour in undertaking consequences on the society. Hence, a frame of mind within the purview of peace journalism may perhaps positively influence both parties in the conflict. Strobel (2001), perhaps seems to agree with the assertion, when he stated that "if the methodologies for conflict coverage are within the purview of peace journalism, a conflicting situation may be handled constructively as parties to the conflict could develop a productive and cognitive view of the conflict".

Setting and Promoting an Agenda for Peace Journalism

As a corollary to the above, the mass media may not only help influence peoples' attitude and behaviours in conflict situations positively by reporting such situations with a frame of mind of peace but also help set and promote an agenda for peace journalism. Jake (nd), advocates a peace journalism-approach that consciously adopts an 'agenda for peace' as an alternative 'agenda for war'. Within the framework of this strategy, conflict reporting can seek to counter the employment of war as a medium of restoring peace by looking for alternative perspectives that promote mutual understanding. This approach may lead to peaceful resolution of conflict because it serves to diversify dialogue and broaden the range of opinions about the conflict. It opens channels for communication, educates people, builds confidence, frames conflicts, harmonises disputants, provides emotional outlets and creates rooms for win-win outcomes.

Upholding Accuracy, Honesty and Responsibility in Reporting Conflict Situations

In such a heterogeneous society as Nigeria in terms of diversity of culture, ethnic plurality and religious differences, it should be anticipated that the people would be highly sensitive to information. Hence, mass media practitioners must take cognizance of this and pass information to the citizenry with all sense of accuracy, honesty and responsibility rather than instigating public reactions to sensitive issues in society through misleading information or amplification of ill-conceived news. In communities replete with intractable violence, the challenge of establishing security for national development and sustainable peace confronts all stakeholders. In such a situation, the mass media as the intermediary between the political society and the civil society have sensitive roles to play. The media can uphold the attributes that are central to human security by creating a responsible, responsive, effective and reasonably honest atmosphere for national security and unity.

Reporting Well-Researched Causes of Conflict rather than Depending on Symptoms

It is a popular dictum in media parlance that 'facts are sacred'. Hence, the Fourth Estate of the Realm must liberate the masses from aggressive inclination to sensitive reports by playing the role of midwives of social justice in the interest of the collective existence of the citizenry. This, mass media practitioners can do, by designing friendly strategies for enquiry, systematically identifying the problems, carefully analyzing the data without prejudice and dispassionately disseminate the message for public consumption in form of news. Thus, the media could play their role effectively as agents of positive change and facilitators of cognitive conflicts and by extension help to douse tension and cement relationships among parties of opposing interests and divergent inclination.

The Mass Media, National Security and Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: What Challenges?

It is instructive to note that the mass communication practitioners have suffered various dimensions of hostile reactions both from the political elite, governments at various levels, and aggrieved individuals and groups within the body polity. With particular reference to the period under review, evidence abounds to substantiate various violent acts perpetrated against the Nigerian

press, despite conventional, constitutional and legislative provisions that guarantee the freedom of the press. At this juncture, it is expedient to examine some instances of crackdown on the press.

Hostilities by the government: Since the evolution of the Fourth Republic, governments at all levels have at one time or the other demonstrated hostile disposition to constructive criticisms from the press. This development has not only threatened the conduct of the Nigerian media within the limit of international best practices, but has also undermined the influence of the press as agents of national integration and security. Aggressive reactions by the political class were perpetrated in terms of unilateral bombardment and closure of media houses, arbitrary arrests of journalists without fair trial, confiscation of information ready for public consumption, and other forms of abuse of legitimate force. For instance, in September 2004, the State Security Service (SSS) bombarded and shut down *Insider* weekly magazine on the order of the presidency without obtaining a court order. These systematic attacks on freedom of expression have not only undermined the tenets of democracy and the rule of law, but have also restrained the performance of the press in its bid to help ensure the nation's security and integration in the republic.

Hostilities by non-state agents: This comprises various dimensions of violent activities perpetrated against the press as an institution, and gentlemen of the press as individuals by non-state agents. These include hostage taking, armed robbery, assassination, and bomb attacks, among others. One of such events in recent times is the unjust attacks on some media houses in some parts of the North of which the "Boko Haram" insurgents claimed responsibility. On Thursday April 26, 2012, Boko Haram terrorists bombed *This Day*, *Tribune*, *The Sun* and *The Moment* newspaper houses in Kaduna and Abuja. Over five persons were reportedly killed and scores sustained injuries of varying degrees in their respective media houses. Besides, properties worth millions of naira were destroyed beyond repair. The terrorists claimed responsibility, accusing the media of misrepresenting and misinterpreting the image of the sect.

Ownership Constraint

Perhaps, one other challenge quite daunting to journalist is ownership influence. It is obvious that mass media owners exert an overwhelming control over the press whether the organisation is managed by a board of directors or by a public corporation established by the government (Ezeah, cited in Layefa, 2013). Agbese, quoted by Asadu (2007), contends that no publication, no matter how independent it may claim to be, can escape serving vested interests whether knowingly or unknowingly. This interest may be commercial, political, communal, tribal, or even religious (see Dimkpa, 1997:18-19). A newspaper publisher may negatively influence the direction a news story or editorial should have taken. Or influence the selection of documentaries, opinion column, etc. The reporter or editor also, may allow his/her personal interest to come to play in covering conflict situations. This practice – whether consciously or unconsciously – does not augur well for peace journalism.

The Incidence of Poverty

It is no gainsaying that the country's economy is in bad shape. According to the United Nations, the poverty rate in Nigeria has gone up from 46% to 70% over the last 13 years (Mohammed,

as cited in Layefa, 2013). Inflation has gone high while naira keeps losing its purchasing power. These have affected all sectors of the economy; the media industry inclusive. The price of newsprint has gone up, no apology to naira devaluation. Some media houses find it difficult to pay their staff, the not-too-high remuneration. With the difficulty of making both ends meet, media practitioners may find it very difficult to overcome the temptation of receiving 'brown envelops'. They, most probably may fall prey to bribe-taking to mutilate or kill stories. Concentration on issues on lasting peace; highlighting of facts that can help cement good relationship among parties; systematically identifying the problems; carefully analyzing the data without prejudice and dispassionately disseminate the message for public consumption in form of news, may likely be of no interest to them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The mass media remain a major functional agent of change in terms of sustainable development and national security and integration in any society. Sustaining the Fourth republic depends on government's sensitivity to factors that generate conflict and the employment of people-oriented conflict resolution mechanisms. In either case, the role of the media cannot be underestimated. The mass media should be objective, nonpartisan and avoid making war-inspiring or adversarial stances. Rather than creating avoidable tensions with stories, journalist should always be peace-prone and security conscious in their analyses and determination of information in the interest of national security, sustainable development, societal harmony and national integration. It needs to be stressed that our argument is not to intimate the press to project the national image at variance with the prevailing socio-economic, political and existential realities at any point in time. Rather, the point we are making is that the press should take cognisance of the destructive consequences of violence on the citizenry and endeavour to facilitate constructive communication towards sustainable development and national integration rather than giving undue attention to violence in the country.

In ensuring mass media lived up to their constitutional, statutory, ethical and societal responsibilities in covering conflict situations in the interest of national security and integration, the following recommendations are made:

- There is the need for journalists to promote the core values and ethics of the profession and ensure that public interest serves as the guiding principle of media coverage of events, particularly conflict reporting. It is imperative to note that the community which the media seek to serve is an amalgam of saints and sinners, with the latter overwhelming the former. Hence they must be committed to the ethics of their profession by resisting the anticipated pressure from the political elites, which could distort the ethics of their profession and generate conflicts or intensify the existing ones. If the press is allowed to operate in an atmosphere that guarantees freedom of conscience and expression, they will be able to resist the undue patronage of the elites and not be subjected to their whims and caprices.
- In order to render a rewarding service to the state, particularly in the area of peace journalism, the press itself must be sufficiently knowledgeable. Hence, there is the need for the press to organise and participate in both local and international workshops, conferences and other educative forums from time to time so as to catch up with emerging

developments in line with international best practices. To borrow the words of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, an unsophisticated press is much worse than the fool who, in the Chinese proverb 'knows not and knows not that he knows not'. The duty of the press is not only to inform and entertain, but also to instruct. To be well versed in giving instructions, pressmen must be knowledgeable, well-informed, dedicated and constructive.

- In a country such as Nigeria, where democracy is still very young and the masses of the people are sensitive to conflict situations, the press has the role of educating and enlightening the public about their civil responsibilities and about the importance of harmony and unity in the body polity despite our ethnic and religious diversity.
- Journalists should always appreciate the fact that 'truth', as it is, is subjective. Therefore, they must look at the immediate and remote causes of any conflict, define the character on all sides of the conflict, analyse their interests and disseminate unbiased and dispassionate information in such a way that public aggression would not be provoked.
- In the interest of the public which they serve, the media should be well catered for. It is commonly said that a hungry man is an angry man. Hence, in order that journalists will not dip their pen in gall at the expense of peace and social justice, their welfare should not be compromised. Government and other media proprietors should adequately cater for the welfare of journalists and other media staff to avoid any act of corruption that could undermine their noble character.
- In any given society, the elites are bound to be biased and self-centred in their opinions and worldview. Hence, journalists should not base reports or analysis of conflicts only on elites' position, which could either trigger latent conflicts or aggravate already escalated violence. In order to handle conflicting issues within the context of 'agenda for peace', in the interest of national security and integration, journalists should diversify the sources of their reports and analyses of conflict on three different but mutually reinforcing sources

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