

Conflict as an Ideological Orientation of the Nigerian Media

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Abstract

The reality of the impact of the media on violent conflict has become a global phenomenon. In Nigeria, this reality is obviously driving the growing desiratum for the instituting of peace journalism. Owing to its complex make-up, however, but essentially as a result of a lack of a national resolve to forge a truly united nation, Nigeria has remained a country where ethnicity, regionalism and religion are objective factors of daily life. General perception tends, therefore, to cast the country's media as influenced by these primordial pulls, especially in times of crisis. This paper, however, argues that rather than primordial considerations, the Nigerian media is fundamentally driven by an ideology of conflict into which it was born; within which it was nurtured and which it has internalized from the colonial through immediate post-independence political era to the authoritarian military period. Thus the Nigerian media tends to operate with a siege mentality and as a media in captivity. The paper posits that until the media weans itself from this orientation, its perception of issues will continue to be shaped by the ideology of conflict, in which case the efforts at peace journalism may remain a mirage.

Keywords: *Ideology, conflict, Nigeria media, orientation, relational, post-independence Nigeria*

Introduction

If we assume that everybody has an ideology, that growing up in any culture provides an ideology, that ideology is implanted in the language and hidden in the cultural assumptions, then it is only common sense that the members of the culture who work in the information industries – in the various media – also have ideologies... (Hahn, 1998, p. 29)

The crucial challenge facing journalism however is how it can be a handmaid and catalyst of social development. To achieve this, it has to work harder for greater public acceptance. It has to be closely associated with the popular struggle against poverty and disease, against deprivation and want and against inequality and injustice. It has to show a greater sensitivity to the issues that concern the destiny of the nation (Omu as cited in Abati, 1999, p. 70).

The two assertions above clearly give a focus to this paper. While the first by Dan Hahn apparently points to the fact that the media has an underlying national or social ideology within any cultural milieu that drives it, the other by Omu also clearly underlines what informs that ideological orientation within the Nigerian context.

In the literature, the discourse on Nigeria's media orientation vis-à-vis its behavior during crises and conflicts have focused mainly on its primordial orientation. To most scholars and public intellectuals, aside from the personal interests of the average journalist and media owners, which often border on the pecuniary, the Nigerian media is mostly influenced by ethno-regional and religious considerations in its reportage of daily events in society. In other words, to this school of thought, ethno-regional interests form the principal ideology driving the Nigerian media in its perception of national issues.

The ethno-regional orientation of the Nigerian media has thus been traced to its partisan origin – that is, how it emerged at a particular point in history. Hence the contention that, despite its vibrancy, the Nigerian media has not been able to wean itself from that origin Alozieuwa, forthcoming. But a careful study of the Nigerian media will reveal that in addition to those primordial pulls, there is an acute “war” mentality. The average journalist seems to set out in the day with this “we and them” mentality. Such mentality in itself is conflict-generating, especially in a society like ours in which the state bears overwhelming influence on most critical aspects of the life of the citizenry and in which the state seems permanently disconnected from society. In the daily conceptualization of his /her duty to society, the Nigerian journalist appears imbued with the fervor that s/he is the conscience of society, its fighter and defender. S/he is therefore constantly driven by the urge to fight the enemy of the people – the state. In the process, the Nigerian journalist’s perception of issues, even when these issues fall beyond the realm of state and society, has become essentially conflictually-defined. This orientation in many instances underpins his/her reportage. Incidentally it is not usually perceived in this light. Instead, the primordial pulls in him/her are perceived as responsible. In most cases, questionable reportage of issues or events, especially conflict-related ones, give much premium to the primordial inhibitions of the journalist than his operational mentality which perceives almost every issue in conflictual terms. Being a terrain with which s/he is thus familiar, in an unconscious “demonstration” of the life of the citizenry and in which the state seems permanently disconnected from society. In the daily conceptualization of his /her duty to society, the Nigerian journalist appears imbued with the fervor that s/he is the conscience of society, its fighter and defender. S/he is therefore constantly driven by the urge to fight the enemy of the people – the state. In the process, the Nigerian journalist’s perception of issues, even when these issue fall beyond the realm of state and society, has become essentially conflictually-defined. This orientation in

many instances underpins his/her reportage. Incidentally it is not usually perceived in this light. Instead, the primordial pulls in him/her are perceived as responsible. In most cases, questionable reportage of issues or events, especially conflict-related ones, give much premium to the primordial inhibitions of the journalist than his operational mentality which perceives almost every issue in conflictual terms. Being a terrain with which s/he is thus familiar, in an unconscious “demonstration” of his/her expertise, s/he exaggerates conflict situations and so “unconsciously” fuels their escalation.

Public concern over the role of the media in the escalation of violent conflict no doubt, therefore, inspired the growing concern for the enthronement of peace journalism as a media culture in Nigeria. In a recent publication Joseph Ochogwu (2011), a peace and conflict resolution scholar using the Jos crisis as focal point, bemoans the fact that most media reports of the crisis “failed to utilize the opportunity provided by the conflict to showcase the potential roles of the media in conflict resolution and peacebuilding like in other conflicts in Nigeria and abroad” (p. 11). As ironical as that assertion is, it however begs the question: which media? A media that itself is born out of conflict, baptized in conflict, and weaned into conflict. Incidentally, while the reality of the media role in the escalation of violent conflict confronts Nigerian society, due attention has however not been devoted to this critical aspect of the Nigerian media. Little thought appears to have been given to the fact that the Nigerian media was born into conflict, became baptized in conflict, and indeed matured in the same.

This paper examines this aspect of the country’s media. It is our contention that any serious attempt at instituting the culture of peace journalism must necessarily proceed with a clear understanding of this crucial aspect of the Nigerian media. Two reasons inform this position: (1): we postulate that only in this way can we really understand why the country’s media behaves in the manner it does; (2): subsequently, it will enable the re-orientation of the

Nigerian media with the ultimate aim of enhancing a quicker realization of the much craved-for peace journalism.

Definition of Concepts

Conflict

Conflict has been defined as an inevitable aspect of human interaction and unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions (Zartman, 1991). As Zartman posits, it is “inherent in decisions even when there is only one person, (p. 369). Viewed from the Latin origin of the word, “*confligere*”, which means, “to strike together”, conflict results essentially from the fact of human social relations and the choices and decisions humans have had to make in their daily existence. Outside of its intra-personal context, therefore, it involves according to Stagner:

a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party... mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal (as cited in Adedeji, 2005, p. 3).

Hence the inevitability is not strictly as a result of the social inter-reaction, but because of the threat which one party perceives the other as constituting to the goal that could lead to conflict. To Akintayo and Agbu (2002), therefore, “conflict is viewed as an action, which prevents, obstructs, interferes with and injures or renders ineffective another’s action, with which it is incompatible” (p. 68).

According to Coser (as cited in Adedeji, 2005, p. 3), apart from incompatibility of goals, struggles over value, and claims to scarce resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals could also lead to conflict. This kind of conflict, Adedeji

(2005, p. 3) notes, not only highlights the competition between values in Coser's perception of conflict but could be injurious or destructive.

However, contrary to the common notion of conflict as a negative phenomenon, certain perspectives also hold conflicts as "not necessarily of negative consequence". Sanda (as cited in Adedeji and Zabadi, 2005), for instance, asserts that conflicts "could provide opportunity for change towards the greater good of concerned parties" (p. 39). She identifies such conflicts as those that may arise as a result of differences over ideas, and goals or the means of achieving them. Shortly we shall see whether this position agrees with the reality of the development of Nigerian journalism. In fact as a psychological term, Akintayo and Agbu (2002,) note that conflict refers to:

[O]pposition between two or more contradictory needs, motives, wishes, impulses or desires... [It] is seen as a struggle between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources and other scare values.... Conflicts essentially connote disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas.
(p. 68)

Ideology

The term ideology has been defined as a "form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones" (Cranston, 2014, para. 1). It is credited to the French writer Antoine-Louis-Claude, Comte Destutt de Tracy (1754 – 1836), who in 1796 coined it as a label for his "science of ideas". According to Encyclopedia Britannica, certain characteristics of his thought proved generally true of ideologies, including a more or less comprehensive theory of society, a political program, anticipation of a struggle to implement that program (thus requiring committed followers), and intellectual leadership. For Raphael (1990) however, "Ideology ... is usually taken to mean, a prescriptive

doctrine that is not supported by rational argument" (p. 10). Raphael therefore views ideology as a "body of doctrine, myth, belief, etc., that guides an individual, social movement, institution, class, or large group."

Although Cranston further notes that Destutt de Tracy's ideas were adopted by the French Revolutionary government in building its version, as a body of prescriptive doctrine that is not usually supported by rationale argument, it invariably means that ideology can be misplaced and individuals, groups, institutions, and classes misguided by a particular ideology or set of ideologies (para. 2). In this regard, it may perhaps be worthwhile to look at it from the perspective of the dialectics between conflict and the Nigerian media.

What is perhaps interesting about the concept is that in its power relational context, Marxists conceived of it as a term developed to talk about how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the maximum control with the minimum of conflict. According to Lye (2008):

This is not a matter of groups deliberately planning to oppress people or alter their consciousness(although this can happen), but rather a matter of how the dominant institutions in society work through values, conceptions of the world, and symbol systems, in order to legitimize the current order. Briefly, this legitimization is managed through the widespread teaching (the social adoption) of ideas about the way things are, how the world 'really' works and should work. These ideas (often embedded in symbols and cultural practices) orient people's thinking in such a way that they accept the current way of doing things, the current sense of what is "natural", and the current understanding of their roles in society. This socialization process, the shaping of our cognitive and affective interpretations of our social world, is called, by Gramsci, "hegemony". (para. 1)

The Theoretical Basis

Arguably, the popularity which the media enjoys anywhere in the world owes more to its watchdog function than its roles as informer, educator and entertainer. This is as a result of the fact that the watchdog function obviously predisposes the media more towards society – that is the people – more than the government. In fact the media is meant to watch over society and alert society to the antics of the government. Although the watchdog function ordinarily creates a situation of conflict, in which the media constantly engages the government for the benefit of the people, it may be pertinent to critically examine two terms which have individually been used to refer to the media: the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm and as a Fifth Columnist.

The Fourth Estate of the Realm suggests a dual meaning. Credited to Edmund Burke, who first used it in a speech in the British Parliament, while mentioning the various estates of the realm, namely, the Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal and the Commons, Burke then pointing to the press gallery had added, “And yonder sits the Fourth Estate, more important than them all” (Tusa, 1992, p. 2). On the one hand, Burke’s statement may seem to include the media as part of the government, a situation that contests the assumption of a conflictual relationship that should ensue from a watchdog function. On the other hand, however, the idea of “yonder” fundamentally suggests an outsider, despite the flattery of being “more important than them all”. This was also the position of John Tusa, a former Managing Director of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); he further argues that “governments and journalists have different objectives and that tension between them is inevitable” (Tusa, 1992, p. 4). Tusa’s account of a former British Prime Minister’s statement about the media further underscores this point: In the 1960s, Harold Macmillan, the most quasi-aristocratic of Britain’s recent leaders was asked what he thought of the press? He replied that they were all

very well but they were “hardly the kind of people you would ask to the country for the weekend” (p. 4).

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s statement that “Four newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets”, besides underlining the power of the media, also attests to the historical conflictual circumstance in which the media operates. In the words of Tusa,(1992), “[W]hat is implicit in those [statements] is the view on the part of the government that the media are at best a nuisance, at worst dangerous...” (p. 7).

The other term, the Fifth Column, was first used by Fascist General Mola during the Spanish Civil War in October 1936 but was popularized by Ernest Hemingway. The term however means civilians subversively working in a clandestine fashion to undermine a regime or a state from within (Tusa, 1992, p. 3). Again, what we see is an attempt to pass off the media as part of the government, hence the idea of working clandestinely from within to undermine a regime or state. Notwithstanding, it yet portrays the conflictual relationship which exists between the media and the government.

The foregoing notwithstanding, Hahn (1998) has argued of “a sense in which what passes for news can be said to be advertisements for the status quo” (p. 40). Jamieson and Campbell assert for instance that the “[t]elevision routinely covers (reports) the rituals of government, such as swearing-in ceremonies, inaugurals, welcoming addresses, and press conferences that reinforce our sense of governmental process” (as cited in Hahn, 1998, p. 40). Thus, adds Hahn, “not only do the media cover governmental processes, they go out of their way to prove that those processes work” (p. 41). What this represents therefore is that the media is not always an adversary but, according to Tusa (1992, p. 3), could be the Fourth Estate of the Realm in a plural democracy.

The conflict orientation of the Nigerian media was further bolstered by Nigeria’s 1999 constitution when its Section 22 unequivocally tasked the Nigerian media to “uphold this

responsibility (watchdog role) and accountability of the Government to the people.” It is appropriate to note that although several countries may have some provisions within their respective constitutions specifying the duties of their media to the society, they may not have couched this responsibility in the manner Nigeria did. Thus one of Nigeria’s media experts, Eddie Iroh, in apparent reference to the manner in which the Nigerian media has carried on, cautioned that: “We must not become adversary journalists. We must not see government as a permanent enemy, a permanent opponent, a permanent rival...” (as cited in Haruna, 2007, p.10). What the foregoing simply signifies is that outside of the seeming universality of the adversarial relationship between the state and the media, owing to the latter’s watchdog function to society, the conflict orientation of the Nigerian media even enjoys a constitutional backing that appears to have made the media fixated on this ideology.

Background to the Problem

In nominal terms, Nigeria’s journalism owes its origin to *Iwe Irohin*, a Yoruba-language newspaper. Its founder, Henry Townsend, a Briton, started the paper “to beget the habit of seeking information by reading,” (Uche, 1989, p. 93). After *Iwe Irohin*, which was founded in 1859, came other newspapers that were actually engaged in active journalism outside of the missionary orientation of their forebearer. Although the newspaper was a religious one, Abati, (1999) made the following observations:

Iwe Irohin had started as a harmless publication of obituary notices, and the goings and comings of missionaries and traditional rulers. It sought to promote a reading culture “among the natives” but it soon broadened its responsibility and it became an organ for the criticism of social vices, notably the slave trade and the colonial authority. The newspaper thus anticipated the use in Nigeria of the press as a weapon to define the scope and limits of official power and authority, and as a forum for public enlightenment and advocacy. It

established quite early, the relational conflict between the press and authority. *Iwe Irohin* soon became sufficiently political to attract a protest to the colonial office in 1862 by Governor Freeman. In 1864, Freeman accused the paper of obstructing foreign policy (p.72).

Following *Iwe Irohin* was the *Lagos Times*, which was founded in 1880. A true Nigerian newspaper in terms of origin, according to Uche (1989), “it opened the way for a militant... press in Nigeria (and)... started the first pitched press war between the Nigerian nationalists fighting for independence and the British colonial administrators” (p. 93). Despite the pioneering efforts of both *Iwe Irohin* and the *Lagos Times* in setting the tone for a conflictual orientation, it was not until the arrival of Nigerian nationals with their newspapers, in particular Nnamdi Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot* that Nigerian journalism embarked down the road from which it would not return. Abati puts this in perspective:

The period 1880-1937 witnessed the emergence of a more authentic Nigerian press. It was the era of over 50 newspapers, published by an emergent educated elite which promoted education, the participation of Africans in government, and matched both objectives with a trenchant opposition to government. It was a critical, impatient, and radical press. The earliest of this press was Richard Beale Blaize’s *Lagos Times*, which emerged on November 10, 1880.... The emergence in 1937 of the *West African Pilot* marked a turning point in Nigerian journalism in terms of how The *Pilot* revolutionized the press. It brought new nerve.... The *Pilot* established by Nnamdi Azikiwe appeared on November 22, 1937. Its motto was “Show the light and the people will find the way”. Clearly, the paper set for itself the pursuit of the interests of the people. It sought to set an agenda for popular action and mobilization. It re-invented Jackson journalism, by bringing new force, and a combative stance, targeted at the myth of white supremacy and an insistence on the value of the black race. The average man (and

woman) in society found in the *West African Pilot*, his (/her) voice and representative.... (as cited in Abati, 1999, pp. 72-73).

Omu (1978) would explain that the major components of the Jacksonian journalism “were a militant disposition, forcefulness, (and) critical ability.... (p. 72). Thus while *Iwe Irohin* theoretically gave birth to Nigerian journalism, within its docile, dogmatic and conservative religious public, it lacked, in practical terms, the bite, vibrancy and character that would eventually define Nigerian journalism. It is in this context that Golding and Elliot (as cited in Ekpu, 1999) observe that “Nigerian journalism was created by anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of colonialist propaganda and nurtured in party politics” (p. 56).

Nigerian Media in the Immediate Post-Independence Period

Any hope that the post-independence period would witness a departure from the mutual antagonism between the government and the media, which shaped the conflict orientation of the Nigerian journalist since the colonial era, was, Abati (1999) observes, dashed:

Post-colonial governments in sub-Saharan Africa in general have been characterized by bad methods, arbitrariness, and a palpable alienation from the interests of the people. The end of colonialism merely led to the emergence of a local elite that has inherited the methods of the colonial master, and exceeded those models.

Dictatorship, corruption, military rule and nepotism have been the bane of post-colonial Africa. In Nigeria, the responsibility of the patriotic press has been to defend

the interest of the people against the cynicism of the government. From the very beginning, this has entailed an insistence on human rights, the independence of institutions in civil society, good governance, rule of law, equity and justice, and

democratic rule. These choices represent a direct condemnation and rejection of authority. The response from the other side has been to gag the press and hound journalists. (p.78)

Media function the world over as society's watchdog. For Nigeria in particular, whose media sprouted out of the "we and them" mentality (fighting the alien colonial masters), the commitment is even deeper. A *Lagos Times* editorial charged that:

We are not clamouring for immediate independence... but it should always be borne in mind that the present order of things will not last forever. A time will come when the colonies on the West Coast will be left to regulate their own internal and external affairs. (as cited in Uche, 1989, p. 93)

The Nigerian media led by the burgeoning national political elites looked forward to a democratic country in which the ills which it fought against in the authoritarian colonial era would be a thing of the past. But Nigeria's post-colonial experience was not anything to go by in the context of the formation of the media psych in the new society. In this regard, the behavior of the emergent political elites who replaced independence of institutions in civil society, good governance, rule of law, equity and justice, and democratic rule. These choices represent a direct condemnation and rejection of authority.

The response from the other side has been to gag the press and hound journalists (as cited in Abati, 1999, p. 78). The colonialist was crucial to shaping the perception of the media of the emergent new Nigerian society. As Williams (1980) rightly noted:

The colonial government had acceded to the immediate demands of the Nigerian bourgeoisie who responded by intensifying competition among themselves for the future spoils of office and preparing for the electoral competition. Nationalist agitation by politicians gave way to their need to secure local bases of power. (p. 350)

Sklar describes this national bourgeoisie as “intermixture of elites” (as cited in Nnoli, 1981, p. 174). We have noted that:

[A]lthough the Nigerian bourgeoisie class from the onset was already clearly engaged in intra-class struggle, their common interest remained the indigenous control of the new capitalist relations and economic surplus, thus the formation of the emergent petty-bourgeoisie class and development of the nationalist parties corresponding to the “intermixture of elites”. (Alozieuwa, 2005, p. 228)

In their desperation to appropriate the privileges left behind by the departed colonialists, these elites not only turned politics into a violent enterprise, but also exacerbated the ethno-regional schism and intrigues which had been simmering while the war against the colonialists lasted, but which now has turned into open conflicts. As Joseph (1991) persuasively argues, “the individual Nigerian, especially in a context of competitive group interaction, enters into a system of sectional opposition from which it is usually impossible to opt out” (p. 50). This kind of opposition of course expresses itself vividly in conflictual terms. Indeed the question which Joseph further poses also helps us understand how the media in the immediate post-independence period was being oriented:

In the circumstances, the question indeed inevitably becomes: how can competitive and open politics be encouraged and pursued in Nigeria in the full knowledge that it generates the very forces which represent such a threat to the stability of that same system? (p. 49)

There appear to be no answers to this question perhaps because as Williams (1980) asserts, “The Nigerian state has failed to weld into a coherent bloc, the bourgeoisie that could have institutionalized its rule over other classes” (p. 48). Implicit in these scenarios is a conflictual atmosphere, in which incidentally the Nigerian media has had to work. We have argued elsewhere that as appealing as the principle of objectivity is in the journalism

profession, the journalist remains a product of his/her environment and is daily influenced by the events around him/her however insidiously, and thus cannot sometimes completely avoid being biased in his/her reportorial duties (Alozieuwa, 2011, p. 71).

In the circumstances, the violent nature of the politics of the immediate post-independence period, the mutual antagonism that defined the ethnic rivalry, and competition of the period (all which were indisputably conflictual in nature), went a long way to determining the Nigerian media's vision of reality. Daily, the events that formed reports are political violence, character assassination by political opponents, stiff ethnic rivalry, etc. In fact the immediate post-independence Nigeria media operated in an atmosphere of "war". Thus, when issues are raised over seeming ethno-regionally and even religiously-inspired items in media reportage, the Nigerian society ironically fails to see that a Nigerian media, rather than being driven by those primordial factors, is a victim which has been conditioned to perceive issues from the conflict point of view, having been born, weaned, and baptized in conflict.

The Military Era

The incursion into politics of the "specialists of violence" (Ake, 1996:6), the military, amidst the violence that characterized post-independence politics and the prolonged stay on the Nigerian political landscape of the military, obviously did little to re-orient the Nigerian media away from conflict as a guiding ideology in the performance of its duties. With little exception, perhaps during General Abdulsalami Abubakar's regime of the late 1990s, the general political climate that prevailed during most of the period when the "bourgeois militarist" (Elaigwu, 1999, p. 22) took over power from their civilian politicians counter-parts and presided over the affairs of the country, was essentially authoritarian. For that period, Abati (1999) made the following observation:

Every military administration (in Nigeria) has had cause to suspend parts of the Nigerian

Constitution, and arrogate to itself, law-making powers through the instrumentality of decrees and ouster clauses. The militarization of the Nigerian State has been the major threat to human rights in Nigeria, and the press, acting as ‘inspector-general’ of the public estate has been both target and victim. (p. 79)

Beyond the penchant for successive military regimes in Nigeria to target the media for repression because of “the greater sensitivity to the issues that concern the nation” (Abati, 1999, p. 79), it was self-evident that the military era in Nigeria in fact encapsulate a throwback to the colonial era as they formed themselves into internal or indigenous colonizers trampling upon the rights of citizenry with impunity. Thus when Ali Mazuri noted that “the African state is sometimes excessively authoritarian to disguise the fact that it is inadequately authoritative,” (as cited in Diamond, 1994, p. 6), he could not have exempted the Nigerian state, including those periods of its capture by the “militicians” (Elaigwu, 1999, p. 22). In fact, while this paper is not about a media-military relationship, Charles-Obi’s (1999, p. 226) assertion that “Buhari and Babangida chastised the press with whip, but Abacha whacked us with scorpion,” puts into perspective not only the conflictual environment in which the media operated at the time but also how its espousing of its conflict orientation affected its relations with the military authorities during those periods. Thus, Charles-Obi further states, “[I]n our time, the press became one of the first institutions to... engage the dictatorship in low-intensity internal warfare...” (p. 228). The characterization of the Nigerian media as “adversary” and “an enemy forum”, as Charles-Obi describes, at a point in time (p. 229), particularly during the Babangida and Abacha periods, probably vividly captures conflict as its ideological orientation. Again Abati (1999) provides the justification for the media choosing that path at the time:

What is often overlooked in this regard is the fact that those newspapers were responding to a real and present need in the environment.... The average reader was in a dilemma: he had been pushed to the wall by government, by the reality of mis-governance around him. Cynicism was so pervasive in the land, it could be felt. The people made a choice: they wanted a press that would champion their interest, and they stood by this choice.... (p. 78)

The after-effect of decades of military rule in Nigeria was the militarization of the entire Nigerian society. This created a sense of antagonism rather than consensus in social relations (Senghaas, 1977). The media, whether as an institution or journalists as citizens, is not immune to this antagonistically-oriented social behavior. Therefore, whether under civilian or military rule, manifestations of the conflict orientation of the media are often perceived strictly in terms of a mutually antagonistic relationship between it and the government. Hardly any notice is taken of the fact that the problematic goes beyond a media stand-up to the excesses of an overarching government authority. Hence more than a decade after the enthronement of democratic government in the country, the Nigerian journalist does not appear to have come to terms with the new reality. S/he appears yet steeped in this conflict orientation which incidentally clouds his perception of issues, especially violent conflicts, and influences the manner in which s/he reports them. S/he therefore carries on as though the country is still under the jackboot authority of colonial or military adventurers.

Conclusion: The Imperative Need for a Paradigm Shift

Some years back, a mass communication scholar, Professor Ralph Akinfeleye, advocated the concept of peace journalism for the Nigerian media. The Professor, who was apparently perturbed by the various crises in the country, claimed that the then happenings in Oyo, Ondo, Niger Delta and Plateau demanded a change in the way in which the media practiced

its reporting (Akinfeleye, 2003, as cited in Parte, 2009). It has indeed been argued that in terms of conflict reportage, the media generally “either consciously or unconsciously... have through their reportage helped to stoke the conflicts thereby making them protracted” (Ochogwu, 2011, p. 11). Ochogwu further notes that in the specific case of arguably one of Nigeria’s more protracted conflicts – the Jos conflict – the Nigerian media has been observed to exhibit “clear signs of media partisanship and bias in their coverage and reportage” (p. 11).

While Professor Akinfeleye’s charge against the Nigerian media may tend to cast it as consciously engaged in partisanship and bias in its reportage, which in turn fuels the conflicts, Iroh’s earlier criticism of the country’s media indicates, however, that the conflict orientation of the Nigerian media has become an unconscious behavioral tendency. For emphasis, in the concluding part of his lecture “Fourth Estate or Fifth Column – media, the government and the State”, Tusa (1992), then a Senior Manager at the BBC World Service, suggested that the media is “the Fourth Estate of government in a plural democratic society” and in a tyranny, “The Fifth Column.” But more than 10 years later, after Nigeria had embraced democratic rule, Iroh made a very pertinent statement:

We must not become adversary journalists. We must not see government as a permanent enemy, a permanent opponent, a permanent rival... we are now in a democracy, not in an adversarial relationship with democracy (as cited in Haruna, 2007, p.12).

Although Haruna’s response to Iroh’s observation was that tyranny exists in civilian and military rules alike, both Akinfeleye’s charge (that the Nigerian media changes the manner it approaches its practice especially in area of conflict reportage) and Iroh’s advocacy (of non-permanent adversary relationship between the Nigerian media and government) clearly underscore the point that the Nigerian media operates with a certain adversarial mentality

which shapes its perception of issues and which needs to be changed for the interest of Nigerian society.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) have defined peace journalism as “when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict. In other words, peace journalism entails deliberately choosing facts that would promote peace rather than conflict,” (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005, p. 5). As honourable as the Nigerian media’s intention is to this end, it can be argued that the tendency to blame ethno-religious factors for the partisanship and bias in the Nigerian media, especially on conflict reporting, will greatly hinder any serious and genuine attempt at bringing about peace journalism. There is the need therefore to help the media move away from the orientation. Whether this awakening comes from within or without is immaterial as long as the media begins to shed this mentality which influences and fuels its reportage of conflict.

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