



CONFLICTS, MASS MEDIA, AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

This study has examined the extent to which the mass media serves as instrument of escalation, generation and de-escalation of conflicts in Nigeria and the consequent effects of the role of the mass media in the development of the country as a whole. Secondary sources of data were the main method employed in the collection of data. The study examined critically news reports and analysis, editorials, advertorials and special columns' contents of some newspapers and news magazines. Also radio broadcasts, television news and International News Agencies' reports on conflicts were examined. From the analysis, the paper showed that the role of the mass media during period of conflict contribute immensely to the escalation of these conflicts which consequently affected the socio-economic development of Nigeria in particular and the nation at large. In addition, the paper established that even in some instances when conflicts arose as a result of other factors, they usually assumed religious colourations thus making them intractable. The study therefore recommends a paradigm shift in conflict reportage by the mass media in order to play down the situations rather than escalating them.

Keywords: *Conflicts, Mass, Media, National. Development.*

Introduction

Conflicts of varying scales and intensities have been witnessed in this century in different parts of the world. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of these conflicts but it is safe to say that these social unrests have taken a toll on humanity in terms of deaths, displacements and disruption of economic and social activities. Indeed massive violent conflicts on a scale previously unimaginable have come to stare humanity in the face with their attendant adverse effects on

the socio-economic development of the society. Conflicts in general are not new to human societies, they are as old as human society because they have been in existence in all spheres of human life since the beginning of history. According to Otite and Albert, conflicts are necessary characteristics of every human society—a “normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce”

A conflict however, becomes an abnormality when it results to violence. The religious dimension in conflict is also not a new phenomenon, as casual checks of some religious texts reveal accounts of bloody conflicts fought in the name of religion. Religion has the capacity to serve as both a force for good and for evil in violent conflict situations. However, experiences have shown that many of those involved in violent conflict situations have used religion or ethnic identities to rally support, justify their actions and proclaim a “moral superiority” over others. Whereas religion was once the preserve of specialists, it has become the concern of all and sundry including journalists and academics across various areas of study after the New York World Trade Centre terrorists’ bombing of 11th September, 2001. Nowhere is this shift more significantly witnessed than in the area of religious, ethnic, social, and political conflicts. Scholars from various areas of study have written so much about conflicts in general and ethno-religious conflicts in particular. It is however worthy of note that many violent conflicts still remain unrecorded. So also, scholars of various fields have proffered solutions to violent conflicts, yet violent conflicts continue to afflict mankind.

Nigeria has recorded bitter experiences of violent conflicts in various forms. Since the early 1980s, ethnic and religious crises have become a re-occurring decimal, especially in northern Nigeria. Amongst the 19 states that constitute Northern Nigeria, there is virtually none that has not witnessed one form of conflict or the other. The spate of violence has been on a steady increase. Some of the conflicts include: *Maitatsine* crises in Kano, 1980, Zuru 1980, Maiduguri 1982, Yola 1984, Ilorin 1984, Bauchi 1984 and Kano 1984. Others are the crises in Kafanchan 1987, Gure Kahugu 1987, Birnin Kebbi 1990, Katsina 1991, Tafawa Balewa 1991, Kano 1991, Jalingo 1992, Kaduna Polytechnic 1992, Kasuwar Magani (Kaduna) 1994, Kaduna 2000, Jos 2001, Kano 2001, Tafawa Balewa (since 2000) and Nasarawa 2001, Jos 2004, 2008 and 2010. There have also been the Chamba-Kuteb crises in Taraba State 2013, Tiv-Jukun crisis 2013, Bassa-Igbira crisis in Toto 2012 and a host of others. Ikenga Metuh identified three broad types of religious conflicts, namely: ...intra-religious which occur between different denominations or sects; interreligious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic

dimension; and Sinter-religious conflicts which though have socio-economic origin end up in the form of religious conflicts (111-112).

With particular reference to Nigeria, Metuh observes further that most interreligious conflicts usually developed into inter-ethnic conflicts even where and when they begin as purely religious disagreements. The reverse is also often the case that some socio-ethnic or political conflicts are deflected and fought under the interreligious banner (112). Conflicts according to Alemika are “often categorised in terms of their origin, domain of expression and issues or grievances that are canvassed”. However, such categorization according to him ...are not mutually exclusive, because issues that are at stake in any conflict may traverse several domains, culture, ethnicity, religion, economy, politics, race and gender. Nonetheless it is common in the literature to classify intragroup or inter-group antagonism and aggression as class, political, cultural, racial, ethnic and religious conflicts.

There are many types of social conflicts. However, in practice it is very difficult to isolate which conflicts are primarily provoked by political, ethnic, religious, cultural or economic factors. Experiences from the past have shown that most violent conflicts result from interplay of ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic and cultural differences. Therefore, according to Alemika, “classifying the conflicts as solely religious, economic, ethnic, cultural or political may turn out to be misleading”. This is because ethnicity and religion are two broad concepts that could be treated on their own merits. In Northern Nigeria however, the two concepts are so interwoven to the extent that conflicts between groups in the region tend to be quickly interpreted as ethnic or religious conflicts. This tendency of not establishing the boundary between ethnic, religious, cultural or political issues especially during moments of conflicts and violence has for want of a better expression been captured by some scholars as “ethno-religious conflicts” (Egwu ; Alemika) or identity conflicts. This study therefore, subsumes religious conflicts in northern Nigeria because in such cases, the ethnic nationalities usually involved are predominantly of one religious group - Christianity or Islam. Thus a religious conflict eventually assumes ethnic dimension and vice-versa. These concepts of ethnicity, religion, culture and politics are closely associated so much so that the boundary is sometimes difficult to draw. Therefore, the concept “ethno-religious” is used in this thesis to refer to these various identity-based violent conflicts which are ethnic, political, religious or economic in their manifestations. It is in this sense that the coinage “ethno-religious” is used in this study (Egwu). Nigeria as a nation state has had and continues to have its own share of ethno-religious conflicts. The first major

violent religious conflict in post-colonial Nigeria occurred in Kano between December 18th and 29th 1980. Since then the relative peace and harmony in the country has been shattered. Ostensibly, after several years of independence, one of the major problems retarding the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria has been the recurrent incidences of ethno-religious crises and the attendant destructive effects. The growing propensity of protracted ethno-religious conflicts is potentially destructive to the extent that if nothing is done it can compromise the corporate existence of the country. So far, there appear to be no singular phenomenon in the history of Nigeria that shows the inability of the various identities to live together peacefully and pursue the goal of development than the regular occurrence of this monster called ethno-religious conflict.

What the country is experiencing is a recurring decimal of violence that is deeply rooted in mutual suspicion and hatred among the various ethnic and religious groups in the country. The aftermath of these violent conflicts and indeed "religious wars" bears destruction, physical and mental devastation, death, deprivation, dislocation of people, destruction of property and massive economic stagnation. In the last three decades alone, Nigeria has witnessed so many incidences of ethno-religiously based violent conflicts that it is difficult to keep proper track of the number. These violent occurrences have resulted in the destruction of lives and property worth several trillions of naira. As a result, many have lost their lives while many more have suffered injuries including permanent disabilities. According to Samuel Kunhiyop, while countries like Tanzania, Switzerland, India, Belgium and the United States of America have taken advantage of their multiethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural diversity, it has remained a divisive factor in Nigeria. The nation's diversity has continued to threaten its progress and even its existence. This is because of our orientation of non-commitment to the ideal of the nation but rather to our various ethno-religious identities. This is reflected in the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious and other violent conflicts that have afflicted the country since independence and particularly in the past three decades.

Statement of the Problem

Considering the protracted nature of ethno-religious conflicts in northern Nigeria and the attendant destructions of lives and property, many questions arise as to: On the whole, what have been the negative effects of ethno-religious conflicts on the economic, social and political development of the region and Nigeria as a whole? The issue at hand is the degree to which the mass media handle conflict issues and how that affects conflict escalation or de-escalation. How did mass

media reportage contribute to the escalation or de-escalation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and northern Nigeria in particular in the past three decades? What factors compelled the mass media to take sides or not in the coverage of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria? Do the nature of mass media ownership, location, ethnic-religious affiliation of proprietors or editors affect the way the mass media report ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria during the period under study? What can the mass media do to contribute positively to the process of conflict resolution and national development? The question, further, is what makes the role of the mass media more problematic in a pluralistic society like Nigeria? What are the differences in covering ethno-religious conflicts and other non-religious based conflicts? How can media practitioners detach themselves from being influenced by their religion or ethnic background in the discharge of their duties during ethno-religious conflicts and other types of conflicts? What role can the mass media play in promoting religious tolerance and dialogue to enhance co-operation and development of a pluralistic society like Nigeria? It is against this background that this thesis examines the incidences and prevalence of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the causes, the role of the mass media and the threat that ethno-religious conflict poses to national development of the nation state. These and other related issues are the main thrust of this work.

Objectives of the Paper

The general objective of the paper is to look at Conflicts, Mass Media, and National Development: The Nigerian Perspective. The specific objectives of the paper are:

1. To examine the nexus between conflict, religion and mass media in Nigeria.
2. To look at the effect of conflict, crises on development of Nigeria as a nation.
3. How the mass media can serve as a viable tool/instrument in the management of conflicts for the development of Nigeria.
4. And recommend how the mass media can be a useful tool in peace building.

Research Questions of the Paper

1. What are the nexus between conflict, religion and mass media in Nigeria.
2. What are the effect of conflict, crises on development of Nigeria as a nation.
3. Can the mass media serve as a viable tool/instrument in the management of conflicts for the development of Nigeria.
4. What are the recommendations to be adopted on how the mass media can be a useful tool in peace building.

Hypothesis of the Paper

- a. That mass media can be a viable tools for national development and integrations.
- b. That mass media cannot be a viable tools for national development and integrations.

Significance of the Paper

The significance of this study therefore cannot be overemphasized because there cannot be development if there is no peace. Also, the study has social and political significance. This is because the consciousness generated as a result of these persistent ethno-religious conflicts does not only foster a sense of social distance, but also retards the socio-economic and political development of the nation. Therefore, this study serves as an eye opener to political leaders on how to regulate the use of the media to serve as agents of conflict management and peace building. Scholars and students of communication will equally benefit from the findings as a result of additional literature in the study of the media and conflict reportage. The study also has policy significance because there is a gap in public policy for both government and the mass media in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. The challenge is to specify which policies and actions can be put in place to address the growing incidences of ethno-religious crises that have bedevilled Nigeria in the past three decades.

Justification of the Paper

Though conflicts, mass media and national development have generated mounting intellectual discourse, and a sizeable amount of literature developed therefrom, there still exists a vacuum that is yet to be filled, that is looking at the role of the mass media in finding solutions to the crises. Conflicts seem to have been one of the major problems retarding the development of this country and threatening the peaceful co-existence of the citizens of the country. It will not be quite correct to say that because much has been written, therefore, there is nothing new to be discovered again. This is because the issue under focus has continued unabated. For instance, since August, 2009 when *Boko Haram* crisis erupted in some states in northern Nigeria it has continued till date without solutions in sight. In all these crises, the level of destructions can only be imagined. In these instances too, the media came under critical scrutiny from various segments of the population for its role in the reportage of these crises. Therefore, this study examines the role of the mass media and suggests ways to report sensitive issues like ethno-religious conflicts. The paper adds insight into

the quest for solutions to the spread of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The development of the nation is at stake and all hands must be on deck to encourage peaceful coexistence because there cannot be any development in the face of frequent violent ethno-religious conflict. This study will therefore, be useful to policy makers on how to legislate on laws that will regulate the use of mass media whenever ethno-religious conflict erupts. Also students of communication will benefit much from the findings and it will serve as a guide to their study in communication and conflict resolution in a multi-religious society like Nigeria. Among others, this study therefore, serves to fill these gaps.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework of the Paper

The literature for this paper will be discuss under the following sub-topics

Conflict

Conflict has been defined in many different ways. Historically, attempts by scholars to conceptualize conflict have “been conflictual.” One of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict regards conflict as “... a struggle over value and claims to scarce, status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”(Onigu Otite 1). Conflict, according to Shedrack Best is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. However, violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly. Best defines conflict as: “...the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups...armed conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals”. The emphasis is on the divergence of interests and aspirations of the parties.

Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict, according to Princeton University “is an armed conflict between ethnic groups often as a result of nationalism”. It is a form of identity based conflict and like religious conflict, it is intractable and therefore, difficult to resolve. This is the sense in which this study has used the concept of “ethnic conflict” in this thesis.

Religious Conflict

Essentially, conflicts based on religion tend to become dogged, tenacious and brutal, intractable and a threat to the meaning of life. Conflict is said to be religious if the reason for the conflict is based on religious disagreement. When conflicts are couched in religious terms, in most cases they become transformed

into value conflicts. Unlike resource conflicts, which can be resolved by pragmatic and distributive means, value conflicts have a tendency to become mutually conclusive. They entail strong judgements of what is right and wrong, and parties believe that there is no common ground to resolve their differences. Ikenga-Metuh identified three forms of religious conflicts thus (Egwu): Intra-religious which occur between different denomination or sects, Inter-religious which is between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimensions and interreligious which is between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimensions. This study uses the term “religious conflict” from this perspective in this thesis.

Ethno-Religious Conflict

Ethno-religious conflict is a conflict that combined both religion and ethnicity as the basis of disagreement. As Ikenga-Metuh has noted with particular reference to Nigeria’s “most inter-religious conflicts usually developed into inter-ethnic conflicts even where they began as a purely religious disagreement. The reverse is the case: namely, some socio-ethnic conflicts are defected and fought out under inter-religious banner” (Egwu 4). It is hardly surprising because there is a very strong correlation or overlap between ethnic and religious boundaries in Nigeria’s plural setting. According to Egwu: “this tendency for the boundary between the two forms of identity to collapse during moments of conflicts ...has been captured in the phrase “ethno-religious” violence (4). This study adopts this perspective on ethno-religious conflict.

Mass Media

Mass media, according to Collins English Dictionary online is a medium of communication that is designed to reach the mass of the people. Mass media is the means of communication that reach large numbers of people in a short time, such as television, newspapers, magazines, and radio. Mass media is also seen as diversified media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience by mass communication. Mass media consists of the various means by which information reaches large number of people such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the internet (Sociology.org).

Peace Journalism

Peace journalism, also called conflict solution journalism or conflict sensitive journalism according to Jake Lynch is when editors and reporters make choices about what to report, and how to report it, that create opportunities for society

at large to consider and to value violent responses to conflict (1). Peace journalism is an advocacy approach to the traditional form of reportage that is oriented toward truth, people, and solutions. While the aim of traditional journalism is simple coverage of the facts of conflicts, the goal of peace journalism is to promote conflict resolution, peace initiatives, and the reconstruction of conflict-torn societies. Peace journalism thus offers a cautionary tale for any effort to establish a formal model of constructive conflict coverage. It is a reminder that the coverage of conflict and disputes takes place in a real world of deadlines and organizational, professional, societal, and other pressures on news reporting-forces that must be respected by any formal model of constructive conflict coverage.

Development

Development is a term with a positive connotation associated with a better future. However, development is a complex issue, with many different and sometimes contentious definitions. A definition of development has therefore, been a major area of controversy and unstable over time- "a victim of definitional pluralism" (Tolu Lawal and Abe Oluwatoyin 2). However, attempts have been made by scholars to conceptualize development. A basic perspective equates development with economic growth. Traditionally, economists have measured development in terms of increasing per capita income, or gross domestic product. But if the distribution of income is skewed and the poor part of the population is getting poorer even while average income increases, many people would hesitate to call this development (Measuring Sustainable Development 2).

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1994), development entails leading long and healthy lives, knowledgeable, access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community (13). Thus the UNDP sees development as an increase in wellbeing across the members of a society between two points in time. Achieving development therefore means freeing people from obstacles that affect their ability to develop their own lives and communities. Thus, development entails empowerment; it is about local people taking control of their lives, expressing their own demands and finding solutions to their problems (UNDP 2). According to Dudley Seers, the questions to ask about a country's development are: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all of these three have become less severe, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing

worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result „development“, even if per capita income has soared (24), Seers questioned the basic issue of whether growth in the average level of per capita incomes would be an adequate measure of development if development was defined in terms of the satisfaction of basic needs. Another perspective in the definition of development is directly related to the achievement of poverty reduction and of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is no doubt, considerable confusion over the wide range of divergent conceptualization of development. A common theme however, within most definitions is that „development“ encompasses „change“ in a variety of aspects of the human condition. According to Tolu Lawal and Abe Oluwatoyin, for a nation to be in a phase of development there must be some pre-requisites, which include socio-political and economic stability. To them development is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens in a sustainable way such that “today’s consumption does not imperil the future,” it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

Indicators of Development

How then do studies determine, measure or assess whether a nation is developing or not? Development indicators have evolved considerably since the 1960s. This evolution has been inter-woven with disputes on the meaning of development. A major feature of this has been the contrast between economic indicators such as per capita and broader views of development and wellbeing which include social and psychological dimensions at their centre. According to UNDP, the search for what constitutes development has involved so many problems. Development indicators were needed for elements of basic needs – physical necessities such as food, shelter and public services, as well as the means to acquire these through employment and income. Progress in these broader measures was reflected in the greater availability of data on health and education for many developing countries during the 1970s.

National Development

National development involves changes or advancement in a nation aimed at improving the political, economic and social lives of the people. It covers political, economic and social issues. National development hand can be described as the

overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. It is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education and pipe-borne water (Lawal and Oluwatoyin 239). In discussing national development, one needs to look at economic development, socio-cultural integration and development and how these flow to human development. Without human development, which is the development of the human capital of a nation or its citizens, national development can be thwarted or defeated. In fact, human development is one basis for judging the effectiveness of the economic development component of national development (UNDP 1). It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life. Development is understood from this perspective in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx's general perspective is that ideas are reflections of the true causes which he identified as the material condition of man (Kaleb Shimp 43). According to him, it is the material conditions that shaped the ideas or determine the form of religion of a people. To Marx, religious beliefs arise out of the material condition of people's existence. He argues that the material world shaped the peoples' beliefs. Thus, to Marx, the economic system largely determined the beliefs that are held by individuals. In Marxist term, the mode of production determined the type of religion that is dominant in any society. Karl Marx did not argue that religion has no effect but he did not see religion as a source of social change (qtd in Haralambos 346). Marx believed that a change in infrastructure of society would lead to changes in the superstructure such as religion. Marx asserts that religion helps to maintain the status quo and that change in religion result from changes in the wider society. To Marx, religious beliefs grow out of the conditions under which people experience the social world.

Marx, like Durkheim, viewed religion as an integrative force that represents a means of creating feelings of togetherness, common bonds, shared values and the like. Unlike Durkheim however, Marx did not see this ideological aspect of religion in terms of its integrative function for society as a whole. On the contrary, he saw religion as one aspect of the social control mechanisms seized upon by the ruling class to enforce their ideological domination of other classes in society (Chris Livesey 5). In this respect, religion is not just an integrating ideology, it also serve the purpose of justifying the unequal distribution of rewards in the society.

Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim have generally dismissed the possibility that religion can cause changes in society. They believe that religion acts as a conservative force and that it is changes in society that shape religion not vice versa. In his attempt to dispute the Hegelian stand on the supremacy of idea over the material world, Marx took another extreme position by saying that religion is conservative and a mere tool for use not for the benefit of the larger society as explained by Durkheim but for furtherance of the interest of the ruling class in any society (Livesey 15). This is what Marxist scholars refer to as the manipulative role of religion.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, secondary data materials were mainly relied on. In sourcing for secondary materials, books, conferences and seminar papers, the internet and journal articles were used. Also the study surveyed and analysed contents of editorials, news analysis, news items, readers' opinions, advertorials in selected newspapers and magazines. It examined some of the headlines, cover stories, and features published in the selected media and compare the ways and manner the media analysed, interpreted and reported these conflicts. Also some radio and television broadcast and commentaries were analysed. The study evaluated what the selected media reported on the selected major incidences of ethno-religious conflicts in the last three decades. In selecting the newspapers and magazines for the survey, the study was guided by the geographical base of the newspapers, news magazines or television/radio stations, ownership and control including religious affiliations of media owners and editors. The primary focus of analysis of this study is the print media. However, occasional references were made to local and foreign electronic media like the *Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna*, the *Voice of America (VOA)*, the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, the *Cable Network News (CNN)*, the *Al-jazeera* and some International News Agencies. The following newspapers and magazines were surveyed for this purpose. The *New Nigerian Newspapers*, the *Vanguard* newspaper, the *Saturday Vanguard*, the *Sunday Vanguard*, the *Daily Trust*, the *Weekly Trust*, the *Sunday Trust*, the *Nigeria Standard* newspapers, *The Punch* newspapers, *ThisDay* newspapers, *The News* magazine, the *Tell* magazine and the *Newswatch* magazine.

Conclusion

So far, attempts have been made to discuss the adverse effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria in the past three decades. This paper concludes that ethno-

religious conflicts are protracted, widespread, complicated and dangerous forms of conflicts plaguing Nigeria today, especially the northern part of the country. These conflicts have lingered on for the past three decades without solutions in sight. The aftermath of these conflicts led to the destruction of lives and property, physical and mental devastation, deprivation and dislocation of many Nigerians. The mass media's roles in escalating or deescalating these incessant conflicts have been questioned by scholars and non scholars alike. The result of this study shows that the general knowledge of journalism is not enough for most media professionals to report ethno-religious conflicts effectively. As a result, the consequence can be a reporting style that feeds on and repeats the worst stereotypes, the drama and the immediacy of conflict, and fuels their ignition into violence as the study has shown. The mass media therefore, can overcome many of the challenges of reporting ethno-religious conflicts when they understand the psychology and the emotion involved in ethnic and religious issues. Once the media practitioners are able to understand various issues and intricacies of ethno-religious conflicts, they will engage in objective and responsible reportage for a peaceful society which will lead to national development. Therefore, peaceful co-existence among adherents of various religions in Nigeria, especially Muslims and Christians, can best be promoted by the mass media for national development. National development on the other hand cannot take place in the face of incessant conflicts with their attendant destruction of lives and property. That is why all institutions in the society, especially the mass media should carry out their functions responsibly towards a peaceful society.

Recommendations

1. Religious leaders should endeavour to give proper teachings and interpretations of their religious tenets and dogmas to their followers in order to avoid religious extremism and fundamentalism.
2. Because of globalization the world has become a global village. This has brought about the influx of extremist religious influences from outside into Nigeria. Government should monitor the influx of extremist religious literature and teachings that are capable of radicalizing our youths and thus making them prone to religious violence.
3. As a pluralistic society, the mass media while reflecting this plurality and diversity of opinions should report with sensitivity, ethno-religious issues that are capable of destabilizing and therefore affecting national development. Journalists handling religious bits should be made to acquire adequate knowledge of the major religions in Nigeria. They should note the basic beliefs and practices of the religions, especially Islam and Christianity.

Taboos of these religions should be noted so as not to encroach on them like the case of *This Day* newspaper and Miss World controversy cited in this study. The mass media need to avoid the use of gory pictures and sensational headlines and the use of inflammatory and derogatory language especially when reporting ethno-religious issues. For instance, “these are the bodies of the 300 Christians or Igbos killed in Kano,” instead of “these are the bodies of 300 people killed in Kano.” International media organizations should engage more reporters on full time basis and not rely on stringers who are paid based on the number of stories published as they have done over the years.

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