

The Media, Ethnicity and Religion as Determinants of Failed Republics in Nigeria

BY

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Abstract

This paper analyses the covert influence of ethnicity and religion on the media and voting in Nigerian elections and demonstrates how previous Nigerian republics have been hindered because of the impact of ethnic disservice and election crises, thereby providing opportunities for the military to topple each of those failed civilian administrations. Unfortunately, the press could not play a meaningful role in the 1964/65 election crises because the leaders of the factional groups in those conflicts were equally the owners of the early newspapers. So, they simply converted their papers into channels for fighting wars of personal vendetta. In fact, ethnic rivalry and religious intolerance are today the two major sources of conflict in Nigerian politics. For these reasons the paper advises the media to avoid playing the role of an advocate in the support of individuals and governmental agencies as well as ethnic nationality whose aims and objectives are inimical to the national interest and religious tolerance among the Nigerian public.

Key Words: Media, Ethnic nationality, Election crisis, Religious intolerance and Advocacy journalism

Introduction

Every organisation, including a political system, is normally built and sustained through good leadership. So, the success and failure of any nation state serves as a function of the insight and commitment of its leaders toward ensuring the attainment of the nation's goals and aspirations. Nigeria gained its political independence on 1st October 1960, as a result of the efforts made by Nigerian nationalists in ensuring that the nation was liberated from the external control of the colonialist regime. It has often been commented, in a humorous manner, that the struggle against colonialism in Nigerian politics was basically fought and won on the pages of the Nigerian newspapers. Although relatively few members of the educated Nigerian elite would provide the leadership on behalf of the people during the debates on the various constitutional developments that would culminate in the Nigerian constitution of 1960, it was the press that had created the platform for discussions between the British Government and the nationalists. Nigerian newspapers gave convincing reasons in their editorials as to why Nigeria should be granted political independence by the British Government.

But scarcely had the nation obtained its political independence from the British Government than the prejudice of the north and south dichotomy swiftly emerged in the nation's politics and destroyed any sense of unity in the common aspiration of the Nigerian leaders toward building a country of people with one voice and one destiny. The north and south dichotomy in Nigerian politics is a phenomenon, which describes the persistent division and disagreement between the northern and the southern Nigeria in the effort of both regions to ensure that the interests of their ethnic nationalities are taken into consideration by the Federal Government when making important national decisions.

Against this backdrop, most Nigerian leaders became so conscious of the interest of their ethnic nationalities to the extent that the appointments of candidates into public service in the country were no longer based on their individual merits but rather on

other personal and tribal considerations. This turn of events in the nation's politics was so dramatic that one could hardly imagine that it was the same crop of leaders that had spoken with one voice during the colonial era. Okotie (2008, p.78) noted this occurrence in his study when he stated that in the management of political and economic governance, the forces of regionalisation and ethnicity introduced into the Nigerian political terrain suddenly took on a negative dimension that subsequently plunged the country into a 30-month long civil war. Unfortunately, this division did not end within the confines of the political arena, it also crept into the operations and activities of the Nigerian press as most of the newspapers then were owned by the political party leaders, who simply converted them into platforms advocating public support for their parties and for launching verbal attacks against their political opponents.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, used his *West African Pilot*, established in 1937, to give expression to the activities of the Igbo State Union (ISU) and the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); while Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the then Western region, used his *Tribune* established in 1949 to promote the beliefs and ideology of the Action Group (AG). As at that time, there was no nationally acclaimed newspaper to articulate and advocate the position of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) on national issues. But since the NPC was the ruling party, what party leaders lost to the opposition parties for not having a viable newspaper, they gained proportionately through the influence and support of the Federal Government for their party programmes and activities.

The Nigerian media became divided along ethnic lines and started playing the role of an advocate in favour of their newspaper proprietors, who incidentally were the leaders of the different political parties. Paradoxically, the same newspapers that had been used by the nationalists to fight and convince the British Government as to why Nigeria must be granted independence suddenly became the instruments of cruelty and pettiness in the hands of Nigerian politicians. Indeed, it was the inflammatory news coverage by the Nigerian journalists on the disagreements between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group (AG) and Chief Samuel Akintola, the deputy leader of the party together with the riots that trailed the 1964/65 election crisis in the western region that created the platform for the emergence of the 15th

January 1966 coup that truncated the nation's initial democratic practice. According to Odu (2008, p.1):

On the night of 15th January 1966, five young army officers who were motivated by genuine intentions to change Nigerian society for the better overthrew the democratic government of Nigeria led by Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The five army majors led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu were not happy that the 1964 federal elections were not free and fair in many parts of the country; they were massively rigged.

So from the foregoing revelations, it is obvious that the press inadvertently contributed towards the collapse of the Nigerian First Republic as each newspaper would defend the ethnic and sectional interest of its proprietor on the crisis in the western region until the military took over power from the civilian government in January 1966. Nevertheless, the Nigerian press of the 21st century is significantly different in many respects today from the press of the post-colonial era. This is probably because the Nigerian media practitioners of today have learned from the mistakes of their predecessors, and ever since the collapse of the First Republic, the majority of Nigerian media outlets has been very careful when taking a stance on particular public issues. The media, especially the *Weekly Magazines*, have been consistent in their fight against injustice as well as to in ensuring that the government observes the principles of the rule of law in the administration of the country. To some extent, the current Nigerian Fourth Republic was only made possible by the effort made by the press in ensuring that the country regains its political freedom from the internal colonialism that was imposed upon the nation by the military cabals prior to May 1999. This paper therefore is an exploration of the Nigerian political system with a focus on the impact of ethnicity and religion on the media and voting practice in the Nigerian democracy.

A Theoretical Overview

This study is situated within the subject area of media and society, and focuses upon the symbiotic relationship between the news media and the political leadership in Nigeria, which is examined within the context of the normative press theory. When we refer to normative theory, we consider the ideas of rights and responsibilities that underlie those expectations of benefit from the media to individuals and society (McQuail, 2005,p.162). However, it is the nature of society and its political ideology that determine the structures and operations of its media system. During the cold war in the communist bloc, where the media were owned and controlled by the state, a journalist was not expected to criticise government policy nor the ideology of the communist party as was demonstrated in soviet controlled Eastern and Central Europe and is currently witnessed in China. In such a society, the desire of a government-owned media to protect government interests on every reported issue could influence the editorial policy of the media outfit and minimise its sense of objectivity when reporting on issues relating to government. Therefore, in a communist or in an authoritarian press environment, media organisations that insist in reporting objectively the account of government performance-whether good or bad-will probably be proscribed by the government as has been demonstrated by the experience Google had recently in China. It is worth noting that under a state-controlled media system, advertisers are not the major factors of influence on the editorial content of the media as both the print and electronic media houses would not depend on the patronage of advertisers to survive; but like other ministries, they rely heavily on the financial support from governments to carry out most of their activities.

But on the other hand, the media organisations that operate in democratic societies -whether private or public- are given a free hand to operate, so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of the state or those of its citizens. Among the theories that guide media activities in most democratic societies today is the Libertarian Media Theory. This theory empowers the media to hold governments accountable to the people in all respects. Iredia (2008, p.23) supported this view in his comments that: “the best strategy to promote governance through accountability is for the media to set the agenda for the nation. The best way to set an agenda is to create a platform for the exchange of ideas between the people and the government.”

Nevertheless, it was the excesses of journalists in the exercise of their freedom in line with this theory that led to the establishment of the Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press in 1947 by the American Government to re-examine the concept of a free press. It was a part of the recommendations by the commission that resulted in the emergence of the Social Responsibility Media Theory. Unlike the open-ended freedom of the Libertarian Media Theory that often leads to cases of abuse of human rights by journalists, the Social Responsibility Media Theory among other functions, proposes that the media should serve the political class by making information, discussions and the consideration of public affairs generally accessible; to inform the people, so as to enable them to take self-determined action; to protect the rights of the citizens by acting as watch-dog over the government; to serve the economic class by bringing buyers and sellers together through the medium of advertising and to promote culture and entertainment in society (Folarin, 2002, pp.30-32).

Against this background, it is clear that Nigerian journalists play a major role in educating the political class on the modern trends and issues of global politics, so that the leaders would be able to stay abreast of what it takes to provide good leadership that would be worthy of emulation in other countries on the African Continent. It is worth mentioning that it is the responsibility of the media to also hold the government accountable to the people in the conduct of elections as well as to discourage the negative influence of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian politics. In addition, they should from time- to- time educate the public on the effort the government is making towards advancing the growth and development of society. As part of their contribution, the media should encourage the citizens as well as the corporate organisations in Nigeria to pay their taxes regularly as such payments will enhance the government's ability to meet the needs of the general public. Furthermore, journalists must endeavour to give wide publicity on the possible effects of government strategic policy on the living standards of the citizens so as to enable the government to adjust its policy framework, if necessary, to ensure that the citizens are not exposed to unnecessary difficulties that might have been created through governmental determination to effect a change.

The media as the fourth estate of the realm are not only expected to be critical of the shortcomings of government, but also to complement the efforts of the other arms of

government toward ensuring good governance. Leadership is a responsibility that requires leaders to demonstrate by example that they are worthy of emulation by the followers. So, the media working in concert with the government could reduce the chances of conflict in politics- be that of an ethnic or religious nature- as journalists are capable of creating the platform for the government and the citizens to exchange ideas on potential ways of solving national problems.

The Nigerian First Republic

Sir James Robertson was the last British Governor-General to Nigeria who handed over power to the Nigerian leaders on 1st October 1960 when the country attained its political independence. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa became the first Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first indigenous Governor-General of Nigeria. Similarly, Chief Obafemi Awolowo became the Premier of the Western Region with Sir Adesoji Aderemi as governor; in the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello became the Premier, while Kashim Ibrahim served as governor; in the Eastern Region, Sir Michael Okpara was the Premier and Sir J.Ibiam became the governor. When the Midwestern Region was created in 1963, Chief Dennis Osadebe became the Premier of the region. (Faseke, 2002, pp. 162-163)

Although there were occasional disagreements among Nigerian politicians during the colonial era, none of these misunderstanding ever deterred them from pursuing and achieving their common goals and objectives. But the crises that ensued from the 1964/65 elections, coupled with the inability of the government to find solutions to the problems were among the factors that led to the collapse of the unity of purpose that existed among the politicians prior to 1960. Popoola (2004 cited in Mustapha 2008, p.306) pointed out the problem of violence during the elections. He said that since Nigeria became an independent country on 1st October 1960, conducting elections that are free of violence remains a goal yet to be attained. From the first federal elections after independence in 1964 to those of 1983 and 2003, electioneering in Nigeria has always been characterised by thuggery and political violence.

Covertly, the antecedent of most electoral conflicts in Nigeria is premised on either ethnicity or religion. These two factors took the centre stage of the nation's politics after independence as the people suddenly became divided along lines of ethnic

nationality and religious bigotry. Some Nigerian leaders became intolerant of one another. This was evident in the quarrel between Chief Awolowo and Chief Akintola who were members of the same party. It was that disagreement, coupled with election problems that resulted in the general breakdown of law and order in the western region until the military took over government in January, 1966. Ake (2003, p.5), while commenting on the influence of ethnicity on Nigerian politics, observed that Nigerian leaders at a certain time in history, condescended so low: “so they began to place emphasis on vertical solidarities across class lines. In particular, they tried to establish a mutual identity and common cause by appealing to national, ethnic, communal and even religious loyalties;...they created not only strong divisions within their own ranks but strong antipathies and exclusivity in society.”

The Nigerian Second Republic and Elections

The Nigerian Second Republic began on 1st October 1979. Five political parties contested the 1979 Nigerian Presidential election: Chief Obafemi Awolowo contested under the platform of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Nigeria People Party (NPP); Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); Aminu Kano, the People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim would be the flag bearer of the Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP).The election was conducted under the leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo’s Government. It was a free and fair election on the condition that the claims and objections regarding the conduct and the results of the election, which were raised by the candidates who contested for the election, were amicably resolved in the court of law. In the end, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the presidential candidate of the NPN was declared the winner of the election. Consequently, he became the first Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 1st October 1979.

But the outcome of the 1983 general elections was not as successful as it should as the elections were to be characterised with cases of electoral malpractice, and the judiciary was unable to assist in ensuring that justice was delivered to the aggrieved candidates who contested the elections, so this development once again provided the military with an opportunity for taking over government. Indeed, the outcome of those elections was scandalous as results were announced in some places where elections had not taken place, or they were rather inconclusive. So, Shagari’s Government was

toppled through a coup that was led by General Muhamadu Buhari in December, 1983. General Buhari and his deputy, Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon, were focused leaders who had the zeal to effect a change in Nigerian politics; although cases of human rights abuses were later established against the government. It was the allegations of the human rights abuses by Buhari's administration that General Ibrahim Babangida exploited to organise a palace that terminated the Buhari/Idiagbon Government in August 1985.

General Ibrahim Babangida came to power with a promise to revamp the Nigerian economy. He had several laudable programmes that were implemented to his credit. But his personal ambition tended to conflict with his desire to serve the people. This was evident in the annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election by General Babangida: an election that was adjudged to be the freest and fairest ever conducted since Nigerian political independence. The role most Nigerian leaders played in the cancellation of the election compounded the problem of ethnicity in Nigerian politics. Anyanwu (1999, p.38) made this observation in her study:

Another sore point in the Igbo-Yoruba fragile relationship was the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections, in which M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba, was widely believed to have won. The role some Igbo people, like Authur Nzeribe, Uche Chukwumereije and Clement Akpangbo played tended to give the impression of a Hausa-Igbo conspiracy to deny the Yoruba the presidency.

Because of the pressure mounted by the press on General Babangida to either revalidate Abiola's electoral mandate, or cause him to vacate his office, he decided to handover power in a hurry to an interim government, headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan on August 1993. General Ibrahim Babangida will however be remembered for his clear understanding of Nigerian problems and for his ability to carry his followers along with him but not to the destination that is beyond his own personal ambition. The dynamic nature of IBB among others was manifested in the annulment of June 12 Presidential election and his inability to keep to the promise of his handover date. Babawale (2006, p.79) observed that when President Babangida inaugurated the Political Bureau in January, 1986, he made a promise to return the nation to civilian rule on 1st October 1990. This promise was altered on 1st July 1987 when he changed the hand-over date to October 1992. When October came, he

changed the date once again to January 1993 and then again on 17th November 1992 to 27 August 1993.

In fact, the incident of the June 12 Presidential election is likely to last a little longer in the memory of the Nigerian political history than any other ugly event that had occurred in the history of Nigeria aside from the civil war, because of the way and manner the military deliberately humiliated public opinion over the election and rejected public appeal to revalidate Abiola's mandate. Chief Ernest Shonekan who took over from IBB on August 1993, though he was a seasoned technocrat but his experience and knowledge in boardroom politics could not resolve the complexity of the June 12 presidential elections. So, General Sanni Abacha, who had always nursed an ambition to rule the country even when he was the Defence secretary under Shonekan's Government, took advantage of the fear of the possible disintegration of the nation, following the widespread protests and riots of the June 12 Election crisis to topple the government of Shonekan on November 1993. Abacha remained in power until his death in June 1998. It is on record that the abuse of human rights under Abacha's Government was unprecedented. Many members of the pro-democracy groups, including the late Alfred Rewane, who fought on the side of revalidating the June 12 election mandate, lost their lives in the process. General Abdul Salam Abubakar, who took over power on June 1998 after the death of General Sanni Abacha made history within his brief stay in office. He handed over power to former President Olusegun Obasanjo on 29th May 1999. But it should be noted that the process that was leading to the emergence of the Nigerian Third Republic was aborted by the cancellation of June 12 Presidential election by IBB notwithstanding the success that had earlier been recorded in the elections of governors and candidates to the state and national assembly.

The Nigerian Fourth Republic

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo pioneered the Nigerian Fourth Republic. He demonstrated good leadership qualities during his tenure in office, particularly with regard to his national disposition while handling ethnic and religious issues. He came to power when the nation was on the verge of disintegration, following the public

disaffection that trailed the annulment of the June 12 Presidential election. Despite the criticisms levelled against the leadership style adopted by former President Obasanjo while in office, the patriotism and commitment demonstrated by his government toward the unity and progress of Nigeria cannot be undermined; not even by his critics. He fought for the unity of the country during the Nigerian Civil War; he was the first military president in Nigeria who voluntarily handed over power to a civilian administration in October 1979, and 20 years later, when the nation was on the verge of collapse, he came back to power as the president of the nation under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP); he recruited experts and professionals and put the nation back on the track of economic recovery while the citizens enjoyed the rights and freedoms attached to a democratic government. According to Jimoh (2008, p.12): “At least, the Obasanjo Administration has shown that with purposeful management, our foreign reserves can, as Obasanjo has done, be increased from 3 billion Naira to about N45 billion within eight years; that our seemingly irredeemable foreign debt could be, as it has now been, virtually wiped-off within a very short time, and that our banks can raise their capitalisation from a mere 200 million Naira to N25 billion or more at short notice,”

In spite of these achievements, the 2007 elections conducted by former President Obasanjo left much to be desired. The judgements delivered by the Nigerian judiciary on the various claims and objections raised by the candidates who contested in the elections confirmed that the elections were actually rigged as had been alleged earlier by the internal and external observers that monitored the elections. The elections could have plunged the nation into crisis, but for the patience and understanding of the Nigerian electorate who patiently waited for the judiciary to resolve the fraudulent versions of the election results. Saliu (2008, p.383) admitted to the above fact. He said the cause of worries regarding the 2007 elections conducted by the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), were the results of the elections, which the judiciary revises daily, thereby confirming the reports of the various Monitoring and Observer Teams which had given the elections a low score because of the flaws that characterised them. The development did not help the image of Nigeria in the eyes of other members of the international community. Nigeria in these elections did not provide an example that other African nations would wish to emulate. Although the judiciary had been able to recover the stolen mandates and restored them to their

rightful owners, the account of history on the conduct of that election remains unfavourable.

The Media and Nigerian Politics

It is a common experience in Nigerian politics today that during electioneering campaigns politicians make several unfulfilled promises. The citizens have become so familiar with these political statements often made by politicians during electioneering campaigns that most of the electorate are now tempted to believe that most politicians appear to be incapable of keeping electoral promises. Leaders are supposed to show good examples. Today, integrity and honesty that were once among the basic attributes of public servants have been traded-off for a monetary-based value system that indirectly encourages the acquisition of wealth by public office holders. If anyone today claims to have faithfully served the nation and yet he or she is not among the richest people in the country, the public may doubt the truth behind such a claim. Among the wealthiest Nigerians today are public servants, who worked and retired as either civilian or military officers. The question is how these individuals make their money while in public office; considering that the total salaries and allowances put together earned by some of these public servants while in office is below one per cent of their present capital investments. According to Guobadia, (2009, p.208): “It is a common allegation that annually, legislators demand and receive monetary rewards from the executive branch before they can see any merit in the Appropriation Bills forwarded to them by the executive branch. The receipt of the monetary rewards is a precondition for the passage into law of the Appropriation Bills.”

Against this background, one may be convinced that there are categories of Nigerians whose past activities in government are immune to public enquiry. Although the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) seems to be committed to its job, there remain unsubstantiated allegations that the commission sometimes lends itself to government to be used as an instrument for intimidating and harassing the dissenting vocal groups among politicians who failed to align themselves with the government position on critical national issues. This is why it is necessary for the media to carefully investigate the cases of allegations of corruption levelled against public office holders by the EFCC, so as not to take sides against innocent citizens

whom the media are expected to protect. Prior to 2007 elections, the EFCC listed the names of some politicians, including governors, who were alleged to have been involved in cases of gross misconduct and they were pencilled down by the EFCC for trial, but the moment these politicians renounced their decisions to contest the elections as requested by the government, the EFCC withdrew their names from its red list. The campaign against corruption in the country can only be won progressively as journalists carefully disassociate themselves from corrupt public officers and agencies, and provide objective and dispassionate coverage of all cases of corruption notwithstanding the individuals or group of individuals alleged to be involved in corrupt practices.

Another major area of concern in Nigerian politics is the expensive version of the presidential system, which tends to encourage a lot of spending of public funds. For instance, the Annual Security Vote of the president and that of the 36 state governors in Nigeria put together is sufficient to finance the project of a national agricultural scheme that would absorb many unemployed Nigerian graduates. Come to think of it, how much of that money is actually spent on the purpose for which it was originally voted? A local government councillor receives the equivalent, if not more than the salary of a medical doctor. So, why would a politician without moral or religious restraints not rig elections to get access to power since it has become the easiest way to escape from the pains of poverty into affluence and prosperity? In fact, the fight against corruption in the country is complex as many people cannot boast of having clean records in public office. Curran (2002, p.217) believes that: “the media should monitor the full range of state activity, and fearlessly expose abuses of official authority.” Until politics is made a little less attractive monetarily, where politicians are paid a little above the salaries and allowances commensurate to their qualifications and experience like their counterparts in the government ministries and parastatals, the incidence of corruption and electoral malpractice will continue in the Nigerian political system.

Because of these leakages in the public treasury, most Nigerian governments with sincere intention to serve the public are not able to fulfil their electoral mandates to the people as their monthly recurrent expenditure sometimes exceeds their accruable revenues; such that they have little or nothing to invest into capital projects. So, most

of the media commentaries on the government programme of activities, which are often referred to by the media as ‘democratic dividends’ should be carefully appraised by the public as many such programmes are mere propaganda intended to laud the image of the government and to make the people to believe that the government is working in line with its electoral mandates.

This does not mean that there are no state governors and local government chairmen who are committed to public service. But the point we are making here is that most governments that are not performing sometimes feature more frequently in the media to advertise their success than the government with evidence of good performance in office. This is the paradox of a *‘work’* and a *‘word’* politician. A *‘work’* politician has no time to narrate the story of the achievements of his or her government because of the tight schedule of work he or she has to carry out; while a *‘word’* politician has no work but the time to discuss the programme of agenda of his or her government that may never be executed.

The media should be able to differentiate between these two categories of leaders in government in order not to mislead the public in its assessment of government performance since most people rely on the media to report and to determine the extent to which government is fulfilling its electoral promises to the people. It is the responsibility of the media to educate the people on the programme of activities of the government as well as to inform the government of the public assessment of its performance. In the view of Balkin (1999, p.396): “ When we use television to understand politics, we see things in the way that television allows them to be seen; at the same time, television creates new forms of political reality that exist because they are seen on television.”

Ethno-Religious Crises and the Media

Nigeria is currently being confronted with cases of intermittent violence in the Niger-Delta regions that are often sandwiched between religious unrest in the northern parts of the country. The problem in the Niger-Delta region is traceable to the neglect of the people of the region by the Federal Government and the transnational oil companies that operate in these areas. Although the Federal Government has implemented various economic measures to pacify the people of the region, none of these measures

put in place by government has actually solved either the immediate or the remote causes of problems in the region. The plight of the Niger-Delta people will be clearly understood when examined within the context of fundamental human rights. Among the inalienable rights of a people is the right to life. By extension, the right that someone has to engage in a lawful and legitimate profession or career in order to earn a living is one of the bases upon which the right to life is expressed. Most Niger-Delta people earn their living through fishing and other water-based professions. But due to the protracted oil exploration and exploitation in the region, coupled with the incessant oil spillage in the area, the inhabitants of the region are no longer able to fish in order to earn their living. Therefore, one would have expected the Federal Government to give urgent attention to the problem of the people and not to submerge their legitimate demands for basic needs within the politics of the revenue allocation formula. According to Popoola, (2008, p 130):

Thus, from the perspective of the Niger-Delta crises alone, the Nigerian experience of the authoritative allocation of values in the last 42 years (1966-2008) has been that of absolute application of coercive instruments of the state to back up illegal authoritative allocation of values.

Indeed, the Federal Government may need to change the above approach since the country operates within the context of global politics, where fiscal federalism guarantees the proportionate distribution of the proceeds from the national resources to the three tier system of governments, depending on the input and contributions made by each of the levels of government towards the federation account.

In addition to the problem of ethnicity, religious intolerance has equally become a part and parcel of the nation's politics. Thousands of people have lost their lives especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. The problem of religion in Nigeria is difficult to resolve because it is often interwoven within political issues. Some leaders usually hide under religion to fight their perceived enemies or political opponents. It has often been said that the religious conflict in the country is between the Christians and the Muslims. This is not true. The essence of religion is to promote peace and development in society; so neither the Christians nor the Muslims should ideally advocate for the use of violence in resolving human conflicts. Some unscrupulous individuals among Nigerian leaders are the ones that make use of fundamentalist and gullible youth under the guise of religion to cause crisis in the country, probably to

divert government attention. Unfortunately, several committees have been set up in the past by the Federal Government to investigate religious crises in the country, but it is most likely that no person today will live long enough to be around when the reports of these committees will be ready for public consumption. Each time there is a religious crisis, several people are usually arrested in connection with those crises but no one has ever been convicted publicly on the basis of his or her involvement in religious conflict. Since the government is passive about religious violence in Nigeria that usually claims lives, one may therefore have reason to suspect the secularity of the Nigerian Constitution on religious matters and have the option of believing that at any point in time, Nigeria is either a Muslim or a Christian state, depending on the religious inclination of the head of government at the state and federal level.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the media should avoid playing the role of advocate in support of ethnic nationality whose aims and objectives are detrimental to the national interest and religious tolerance among the Nigerian public. The press through its investigative reporting should identify and expose those people who hide under the platform of religion or ethnicity while fighting their political opponents. The government should equally publish the outcome of reports by past committees on religious and ethnic conflicts in the country and those that were behind the problems should be tried as that will serve as a deterrent to discourage subsequent religious and ethnic crises in Nigeria. The plight of the Niger-Delta people should be seen by the press as a national problem since it is a clear case of the abuse of the fundamental human rights of the people. A press conference should occasionally be organised for the people of the region to explain the reasons for their agitations. However, it is illogical to associate the cases of abduction and hostage-taking in the region with the campaign for the economic empowerment of the Niger-Delta people. It became clearer to everyone recently that kidnapping is an isolated case of criminality that has no bearing with the agitations of the Niger-Delta people for economic empowerment, when on 11th July, 2010, four Nigerian journalists and their driver were abducted: the Chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Lagos Chapter, Abdulwahab Oba; the Secretary of Zone G, Adolphus Okonkwo; the Acting Secretary of the Lagos NUJ Chapter, Sylva Okereke; a Lagos-based journalist, Shola Oyeyipo and their driver, Azeez Abdulrauf. If it is true that kidnapers in the Niger-Delta region are environmentalists,

the group that abducted Wahab and his colleagues would have understood that journalists are ‘lawyers’ in court of public opinion, who spend their lives defending the course of the oppressed as evident in the Nigerian press commentaries and editorials on the Niger-Delta problems. Therefore, the youth in the region should be advised through newspaper editorials and radio jingles to disassociate themselves from unwholesome activities and adopt peaceful means of resolving their differences with the government on the problems confronting the region. It is unethical however for the media to participate in crises by playing the role of advocacy journalism in support of one group or another in a conflict situation. Nigeria is an emerging democratic society that has many lessons to learn from the failure of the past governments as well as from the imbalance in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution that was recently reviewed by the national assembly. So, the media should be a good partner to the government and the citizens as they jointly look for amicable ways of resolving the nation’s problems

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