

Abstract

Violent social conflict remains a major obstacle to nation-building and integration in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Regrettably, however, there has been an upsurge in socio-political and ethno-religious violent conflicts with mind-boggling consequences in the country since 1999 in spite of efforts by successive administrations to entrench democratic values and principles in the country. Albeit the history of these conflagrations is said to be rooted in our colonial history and the post-independence political system which tended to alienate the masses, the mass media and their practitioners who report these conflicts have not been spared the verbal howitzer regarding the exaggeration of conflict-generating issues resulting in the escalation of social conflicts and the attendant reprisal attacks. This paper makes case for continuous education and training of journalists to cultivate in them the hallowed principles of peace journalism necessary for sustainable peace building amongst the diverse peoples of Nigeria. It argues that the media should not only be truthful and accurate but must always judge their reportage in terms of their value to the general good of the nation as espoused by the social responsibility press theory.

Keywords: *conflict, violent social conflict, peace-building, communication education, alternative education*

Introduction

Conflict is a multi-referential concept which does not lend itself to an apt or precise definite. Social conflict often serve as a catch-all phrase for every form of dysfunctional contest, strife, fighting, quarrel, destruction, coercion, etc. But the word conflict does not entirely carry with itself overtones of negativities and disaffection. (Chandan 1987, p.278; Das & Choughury 1997, p.214; Isard 1992, p. 1; Mullins 2007, p.941; and Otite, 1991, p.1). According to Mullins,

Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. Properly managed, it can have potentially positive outcomes. It can be an energizing and vitalizing force in groups and in the organization. Conflict can be seen as a ‘constructive’ force and in certain circumstances it can be welcomed or even encouraged. For example, it can be seen as an aid to incremental improvement in organization design and functioning, and to the decision-making process. Conflict can be an agent of evolution, and for internal and external change. Property handled, it can help to minimize the destructive influences of the win-lose situation.

Das and Choudhury identified the “advantages of social conflicts” even as Isard opined that conflict is a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence. There is also the view by Weeks (1992, p.10) that conflict is “a natural part of our daily lives”. This latter view is in sync with the one advanced by Faleti (2005:35) that conflicts are common feature of every society whether rural or urban, developed or developing, agrarian or industrialized and may be the result of several factors.

In defining the term ‘conflict’, Coser (1968) identified the major factors that precipitate conflict situations, the likely parties in crisis situations as well as their motives when he stated as follows:

Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life.

The above definition draws heavily from the views of Marx Weber and Karl Marx amply encapsulated in liberal philosophy and radical perspectives respectively to the effect that the primary causes of conflict in human societies are (a) power relations and (b) the economy of resources and the attendant class struggles. In other words, conflicts result either from the desire to control the reins of the state or to dispel obstacles likely to impede the attainment of set goals. As Otite (1999:1) put it, changes in the social environment such as contestable access to new political positions or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment are fertile grounds for conflicts involving individuals or groups.

The chief concern in this paper is to underline the necessity of proper training of journalist on the rudiments of peace journalism to obviate escalation of violent conflicts and concomitant reprisal attacks.

Nigeria in the Realm of Social Conflicts

At the signing of the declaration of independence in 1776, a frontline American politician, Benjamin Franklin, enjoined Americans thus: “We must indeed all-hang together or most assuredly we shall all hang separately” (Fika, 1998, p.1). Americans listened, ditched their differences and united. Today, Americans are better for it. Also emerging from the ructions of fetid animosity occasioned by ideological logjam and political bickering of the last century, Russians and Germans have since coalesced.

No doubt, nothing underscores the urgency and necessity for cooperation and peaceful co-existence for a nation than such experiences. People are exhorted to hang together despite their diverse ethnological and political background, despite the devastation of war, the slave

question, the biting discrimination of race, religion and culture, and despite the orgies of hunger and privation or else each one of them would hang from a different noose. Indeed, exhortations as these are important because development is virtually impossible without multiple layers of cooperative efforts by the populace in any society. Though even America of today is characterized by what Hunter (1991, p.46) describes as “war between the Christian fundamentalists, conservative Catholics and orthodox Jews and their liberal counterparts for the control of the secular culture,” and as a result, reaffirming the universalism of social conflicts, the basis and nature of such conflicts differ markedly from place to place. In Africa, for instance, similar conflicts have not only inflicted untold havoc on the state but were caused by trivial and parochial ethnocentric and primordial factors. Geertz (1962, p.222) clarifies thus:

The new states are normally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments. These primordial ties to community, ethnicity, language, religion often come into conflict with the newer, more diffuse demands of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments that give rise to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism and so on.

With particular reference to Nigeria, Anifowose (1982, p.1) observes that “violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power, and by groups in the process of losing power.” According to him, violence has been pursued in the defense of order by the privileged, in the name of justice by the oppressed, and in fear of displacement by the threatened.

Conflicts have become a living reality in Nigeria. As Tagowa & Garba (2007, p.244) put it, “The Nigerian political landscape is replete with forms of conflicts of various dimensions.” One of such conflicts, which has become a constant feature in the history of the country is ethno-religious conflicts. They are conflicts that arise from irreconcilable disagreement among people of different religious faith and/or ethnic origin.

Nigeria has had enormous records of conflicts with serious socio-economic implications, especially since independence. Conflicts in the country prior to 1960 were merely political as the political parties that then existed (Action Group (AG), National Council for Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC)) were ethnically based as a result of which pockets of skirmishes arose in reaction to socio-political issues.

Ironically, more ethnic and religious conflicts with enormous consequences have occurred in the country in the last twelve years in spite of the unprecedented growth of ecumenism and more importantly the entrenchment of democratic government on 29 May 1999. Between July 1999 and August 2003, Adebani (2003) compiled a total of 40 such conflicts making it an average of ten conflicts per year. The compilation is presented in Table 1 below:

S/N	Date	Site	Belligerents	Cause	Casualty
1.	July 3, 1999	Alaba International Market Lagos	O.P.C. versus Alaba traders	That the Ibos had taken over the market	Unknown
2.	July 18, 1999	Sagamu Ogun State	O.P.C. versus Hausa traders	Alleged defilement of the Oro (spirit) festival by an Hausa woman	More than 120 people
3	July 20, 1999	Aguleri/Umuleri Anambra State	Aguleri versus Umuleri	Long drawn communal dispute	Unknown
4.	July 25, 1999	Kano	Hausa Fulani versus Yoruba	Retaliatory attacks over the Sagamu clash	Unknown
5.	Sept. 9, 1999	Apapa Lagos	O.P.C. versus Ijaw/Egbasus boys	Some Egbesu boys were allegedly killed for armed robbery	28 people
6.	Nov. 3, 1999	Festac town Amuwo-odofin,	O.P.C. versus Ijaw youths	Continuation of the OPC/Ijaw clash few days earlier	7 people
7.	Oct. 2000	Aguleri/Umuleri Anambra State	Aguleri versus Umuleri	Long drawn land dispute	Unknown
8.	Nov. 2000	Nasarawa	Tiv versus other ethnic groups	Inter-ethnic rivalry between Tiv (Settlers) and indigenes	Unknown
9.	June 18, 2001	Tafawar Balewa and Bogoro, Bauchi State	Safawa versus Hausa-Fulani	Crisis over Chieftdom for the Safawa	Over 408 people
10.	Sept. 7, 2000	Jos	Native Birrom Christians versus Hausa Fulani Muslims	A woman who had disagreement with Muslims who were observing Friday prayers along Congo-Russia area Jos	Over 1000 people
11.	Oct. 10 2001	Va'ase Zakibiam Benue/Taraba State	Tiv Militia men against soldiers	The Militia men mistook the soldiers for disguised Jukun militia men	19 soldiers
12.	Oct. 2001	Kano	Muslims versus Christians	Protest over US war against Talibans in Afghanistan	20 people
13.	Oct. 15-16 2001	Ajgunle Agege, Obalende, Mile 3, Ojuelegba, Lagos Island	OPC versus Hausa, Hausa versus Igbo	OPC arrested, killed some alleged robbers who were Hausa youths. The Hausa attacked the Yorubas and the Igbo in the ensuing crisis	Unknown
14.	Oct. 2001	Ilorin	OPC versus Hausa Fulani	OPC was supporting Yoruba in Ilorin, who want Yoruba Kingdom	Unknown
15.	Feb. 2002	Taraba State	Jukun/Fulani versus Tiv	Unknown	Unknown

16.	Nov. 2002	Kaduna	Muslims versus Christians	This Day's articles on Miss World Beauty Contest considered disparaging to Holy Prophet Muhammed	Over 200 people
17.	August 2002	Wase	Hausa Fulani versus Tarok people	Land and resources	Unknown
18.	Nov. 25, 1999	Ketu, Ojota, Mile 12 Market Lagos	OPC versus Shukura Yam Sellers (Hausa)	Disagreement over the collection of royalty in the market	14 people
19.	Jan. 10, 2000	Bariga, Lagos	OPC versus Hausa	Unclear	Unknown
20.	Feb. 21, 2000	Kaduna	Muslims versus Christians	The planned Sharia law in Kaduna State	Over 2000 people
21.	Feb. 28, 2000	Oba, owerri	Igbo versus Northerners	Reprisal attacks over the Kaduna riots	Unknown
22.	Mar. 3-4 2000	Ile-Ife	Ife versus Modakeke	Signpost on a mosque describing its location as Modakeke and not Ile-Ife	Unknwon
23.	June 5, 2000	Ibadan	Yoruba versus Hausa Tanker drivers and others	A Kano bound trailer driven by a northerner hit a commuter's bus killing all the commuters. The driver fled and hid among the Hausa who refused to give him up to the mob.	Unknown
24.	June 5, 2000	Mushin, Lagos	OPC factions	OPC factions challenged another faction which had entered its territory	6 people
25.	July 14. 2000	Alaba Market	OPC and Igbo traders	Control of the market	5 people
26.	August 2000	Wase, Pische Mojontabo Zanban Dadinkowa and Wainem, Plateau Sate	Tarok and Langtang versus Hausa Fulani	Age old ethnic rivalry	Unknown
27.	Oct. 15. 2000	Ajegunle Lagos	OPC versus Hausa	Some Hausa were allegedly caught stealing	More than 100 people
28.	August 2002	Oyo-North	Yoruba farmers versus Fulani Herdsmen	Herdsmen were accused of allowing their cattle to destroy farmlands	Unknown
29.	Sept. 2002	Ife-Madakeke	Ife versus Modakeke	Old dispute on indigene versus settlers claim	Unknown
30.	Sept. 2002	Nasarawa	Loku, Ugede and Agatu	Access to lake used for fishing by Agatu people	Unknown
31.		Numan	Numan versus Demsa LGS	Long standing dispute over boundaries	Unknown
32.	Sept. 2002	Adamawa	Fulanin versus indigenes	Land	Unknown
33.	Oct. 2002	Idi Araba Lagos	OPC versus Hausa	Religious dispute	Unknown
34.	Jan. 31, Feb. 24, 2003	Warri	Itsekiri versus Urhobo	Rumours of impending demarcation on the	More than 20 people

				local electoral wards	
35.	Mar. 1 2003	Song, Adamawa State	Yungur versus Fulani herdsmen	Grazing land	Over 100 people
36.	May, 2003	Inyimagu Abakaliki Ebonyi State	Inyimagu versus Agabaja	Misunderstanding between two youths with one stabbing the other to death	Two
37.	May, 2003	Uruan, Cross River State	Iving Itiayong versus Mbiakong villages	Land dispute dating back to 1910.	Unknown
38.	May 8, 2003	Edda and Afikpo, Ebonyi State	Nguzu Edda versus Ekoli Edda communities	Land dispute	Over 6 people
39.	May 12-14 2003	Warri	Itsekiri versus Urhobo	Ownership of Warri local council locations	More than 10 people
40.	August 15-18, 2003	Warri	Ijaw versus Itsekiri	Offshoot of 1999 crisis over location of the headquarters of Warri South West local council	More than 100 people

Source: Adebani (2003)

The last eight years have equally had their fair share of conflicts. From Kaduna to Kano, Shagamu, Lagos, Aba to Bauchi and Maiduguri as well as from Ibadan to Jos Plateau State and the Niger Delta region to mention this few, the knells of ethnicity and religious violence are far from sounding. With the emergence of such deadly Islamic sect as Boko haram, the security of the inhabitant of many northern cities hangs on the balance.

Mass Media Responsibility in Peace Building

Obviously, the consequences of violent conflicts are quite enormous both in terms of men and materials. While we may not say that the problem of underdevelopment facing the country derives from the spate of ethno-religious and other conflicts that have occurred, their impacts both on national integration and efforts at developing the nation are well known. For instance, it is estimated that since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, there has been over seventy ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria in which over 35,000 lives were lost and properties worth billions of naira destroyed (Tagowa & Garba, 2007; Tempo, 2002; and The Week, 2004). Since, therefore, large proportion of her productive population together with infrastructural facilities were lost through the conflicts, the prospects of Nigeria's development remain bleak. Okafor (1997, p.60) elucidates further:

Nigeria is the most populous nation in the African continent. Its population of about 100 million people is constituted by diverse ethnic nationalities....Nigeria is often looked upon for leadership in Black Africa. Unfortunately, the political crisis, civil war and ethnic

conflicts that characterize her history since it gained independence... have marred these potentials and in recent times brought her once flourishing economy to ruins.

Conflicts in Nigeria as we have shown is principally a function of attitudinal and behavioural orientation biased towards misguided ethnocentrism and primordial cravings. In corroboration of this stance, Akinteye, Wuye & Ashafa (1999, p.222) said of the Zango Kataf conflict of 1992 thus: "The crisis only served as an outlet to several idiosyncrasies that have long been buried in the minds of the communities against one another." In view of this, therefore, we are of the firm belief that any potent panacea for sustainable peace building amongst the diverse nationalities in the country must be aimed at helping Nigerians imbibe the patriotic virtues of unity and brotherly relationship as well as help them jettison all vestiges of "*we-before-others*" syndrome among the linguistic, ethnic, religious and most importantly, the political class through aggressive media campaigns and advocacy programmes. In other words, mass communication is expected to be actively put to use in managing, controlling, and building mutual co-existence and trust in Nigeria.

It is therefore our candid belief that journalistic savvy founded on nationalistic feeling and buoyed by social responsibility rather than on inordinate pecuniary passion, rigid observance of professional codes or ethical judgement and the much taunted "public right to know" should constitute the yardstick or parameter for news judgement. This does not in any way suggest the demeaning or flagrant severance of code of ethics from practice; instead, we make case for a paradigm shift in the business of information gathering and management such that primacy should always be on the effect of what is published for public consumption. As Owens-Ibie (2000, p.10) aptly submits:

There is no doubt that news judgement is most often a victim of self-interest, whether of the reporter or the editor; whether of the proprietor or the advertiser. But in line with a standing commitment to the audience of any media output, loyalty should always rest with media audiences.

News should be sought, written and published that does not precipitate social implosion either within the government or between the people, groups or nations. Prominence should be on issues, events and subjects that reinforce the ties that bind us than fast track the attainment of the pecuniary intention and egoistic posturing of the reporter and his medium at the expense

of the society. Journalism practice, by this token, should be driven by a genuine quest for human and societal growth and development.

Development journalism is for growth, for stability, for peace and for enhanced goal-attainment (McQuail, 2005). It should and must not be viewed as instrument for meeting the varied desires and tastes of the audience per se, but as a cementing factor, a binding force and a catalyst for promoting national consciousness and spirit of togetherness in the diverse nationalities and social groups in a society.

If, for instance, in an effort to inform the public, a report on a conflict elsewhere in the country touches off reprisal attacks with even more petulant and horrendous effects in other parts of the country (as we saw with the Prophet Mohammed cartoon saga and other conflicts in Nigeria), will the media in all fairness and truth claim to have kept faith with their central duty to the society which is to always sustain the environment of their operation? If again, beclouded by humanistic foray and journalistic frolics, information managers abdicate broad national goals for parochial and pecuniary gains in the performance of their information gate-keeping function, thereby paving the way for social upheavals through violence conflicts and crisis, where then lies the power, the virtue and the vivacity for which Thomas Jefferson and his compeers ranked the press above other social institutions and described the media as the engine of democratic system? (Obiorah, 2004). Therefore, from initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement and termination or resolution of conflicts (these, according to Sandole (1993) are the stages of conflicts), the media, through the instrumentality of development journalism, should be actively involved in the following ways:

- a) By directing the focus of government at all levels so as to meet the yearnings of the people and checkmate the rising rate of poverty, ignorance and unemployment, which are three key factors in the prevalence of violent conflicts in the country;
- b) By always upholding principles, views, acts, programmes, and policies that promote the stability, unity, mutual existentiality of the disparate ethnic groups and the development of the nation.
- c) By promoting ideas that would help in moulding the political culture of Nigerians;
- d) By providing correct and accurate information necessary for engendering patriotic feelings in Nigeria;
- e) By directing attention away from negative political attitudes and dispositions; and

- f) By downplaying or rejecting outright, stories that have the propensity of generating conflicts, not just controversies among the peoples of Nigeria.

Communication Education and Peace Journalism

The issue of manpower development is more acute in developing countries than in the developed world. The shortage of qualified manpower is one of the major characteristics of underdevelopment. As in other sectors of society, the field of journalism is affected by lack of well trained and skilled personnel. The need to train Nigerian journalists becomes more glaring considering the present revolutions in the field of mass communication occasioned by emergence of novel technologies and the need to build the capacities of media practitioners to creditably discharge the functions of gathering, processing, managing and disseminating messages meant for the public.

The inevitable expansion of the print and broadcast media and government information services meant that media practitioners were needed at all levels and in larger numbers than ever before. But unfortunately, African governments and educational institutions could not easily establish programmes or schemes for the training of media personnel. In English-speaking Africa, for instance, the old British traditional idea that journalists were born and not created was strong. There was, therefore, resistance in some official and educational circles to the idea of formal training for journalists (Nurkse 1953; Lewis 1960; Pearson 1969). Many of the old African journalists who were trained on-the-job during the colonial period also supported the idea that formal training for journalists was neither necessary nor good. African academics, true to their British upbringing and educational values, could not easily accept the idea of formal journalism training especially in the universities. They gave the conservative, elitist and anti-development argument to the effect that a university was a centre for satisfying the 'academic and intellectual' rather than the 'vocational' needs of society.

Mass communication was also not seen as an independent academic discipline. It was anathema even to suggest that mass communication studies should be introduced in secondary education as a long-term strategy for increasing public access and participation in the communication process. They could neither accept that it was another effective way of increasing awareness among the people about the nature and uses of mass media nor could they understand that if mass communication was included in secondary education curricula,

recruitment for future media trainees would be made easier. Opposition to these ideas and attitudes persist to the present day.

Mass communication education needs to be included in the curricula from at least the upper secondary level right through to the university. The mass media have grown to be a force in society whose role and power is immeasurably important. Society, for its own good, cannot afford to ignore the need to understand the nature, role and use of the modern media. Apart from that, if media studies were introduced at secondary and university levels alongside other subjects, the problem of lack of good and potential media trainees would be drastically reduced. The problem of media human resources would not be as acute as it is at present. The inclusion of communication studies in the education curricula in Africa at all levels should, therefore, become a part of national communication policy.

The other impediment to introducing or strengthening communication training, education and research after independence has been lack of resources. The arrangement of development priorities and allocation of resources is a problem which is still to be sorted out. Most elements in the leadership of Third World states is unconsciously obsessed with prestige 'development' projects because of colonial 'hang-ups'. They have a love-hate relationship with their former colonial masters — constantly denouncing them as imperialists and, at the same time, continuously seeking advice, consultants and economic 'aid' from them, including resources for communication education. Their anti-imperialism is unclear and development priorities distorted.

The communication media as a sector need to be upgraded as a development priority. This is where international agencies and organizations can also play an important role. They have the resources and the experience to supplement national resources and efforts. All this leads to the realization of the world information and communication order. Newspapers and broadcasting stations have always carried out some form of training on-the-job. Many formal courses have also been held, usually with foreign instructors or experts. International Press Institute, Thomson Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Commonwealth Association organized, and still organize, some training courses for media personnel. But most of the training schemes in various parts of Africa were *ad hoc*, intermittent, haphazard and uncoordinated (Minkinen 1978).

From the beginning of the independence era, a significant number of media personnel were trained in the developed countries. The trainees faced the problem of using equipment for training purposes which was not in use in their own countries. The syllabi were not geared to the needs, values and aspirations of developing societies. The Western emphasis on professionalism led to the avoidance of questions concerning the objectives and orientation of communication work which were important in the context of a developing society.

Those which are part of the university system offer both professional and academic training in mass communication studies at advanced level. They try to combine and integrate the theory and practice of communication work coupled with a firm academic base in different disciplines for the students. Government-sponsored media institutions specialize in mid-career professional training with a technical bias. The broadcasting, newspaper and film organizations which carry in-service regular training programmes for their staff or future staff concentrate on professional training.

The debate as to whether professional training in mass communication is best done in a university environment or in a special independent institution or on-the-job within the media organizations is a continuing one. If a special institution is the best place, then there is a further question on which there is much disagreement among those who prefer professional training in journalism to be outside the University. The question is whether or not a non-university institution for such training should be under a government ministry. If it is outside the university and not under a government ministry, who would finance it? Another unresolved question is: Can a non-university institution under a ministry of information be able to engage in communication research of a high standard? Students also prefer to study for qualifications which are internationally recognized such as universities give.

There is no continental policy on the nature and distribution of media education centres in Nigeria and as a result, the practice has been to intermittently organize refresher and other courses for practicing media professionals. Senior media personnel who are academically and professionally well trained are necessary for the fast development of a mass communication system capable of playing an effective role in the education and mass mobilization of the people for national development. Most of our present senior media professionals reached that high level through in-service training and working experience. This process is slow and cannot produce enough media professionals as required in big numbers. While in-service

training should not be done away with, formal training should also be established. Sometimes these two forms of training can be combined, and this would be the ideal.

The establishment and strengthening of African national news agencies and the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) will require more and well trained journalists and other media personnel at both the lower and advanced levels. Crash courses are a temporary solution. The real solution would mean that both university and non-university centres be strengthened through infusion of adequate financial resources and facilities. These institutions would then provide journalism training to new-comers to the field and continuing education and skills training to practitioners who wish to improve their qualifications.

Many trained journalists leave their profession for related or, sometimes, entirely new jobs quite unrelated to their training and experience. Some, especially those who prove to be good in their work, are promoted to either managerial or administrative positions in the media or in government and state institutions. On the surface, this looks like a loss to the country, but on further examination, and while such defection may be a loss to the communication field, it does not usually constitute a loss to the country.

Communication training and education in its wider sense does not only prepare people to work in the media. It improves one's performance and chances in other fields of work which may be equally valuable to society. The content of communication studies itself is highly interdisciplinary. As a result, the opinion which is gaining currency among journalists, media trainers, scholars and administrators is that training people in communication work not only prepares them for work in the mass media but also for service to the country in other ways.

Conclusions

The level of communication education and media expansion in society is a product of the development of that society. It reflects the level of the country's socio-economic development. The media do not exist in a vacuum. They are established by society like any other social institutions to perform certain supportive functions. Society maintains them only when they carry out their designated functions.

The development of the communications system is an integral part of the development of the nation as a whole, communication systems being part of a nation's social institutions.

Moreover, each social institution has a task of contributing to the development of the nation and all other social institutions. While the mass media are developed by society, they must help to develop the society by promoting peaceful co-existence of the various groups within the country. However, to creditably discharge their function of peace-building, journalists must be properly trained to imbibe the skills and acquire the requisite ethical orientation for professional engagement.

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