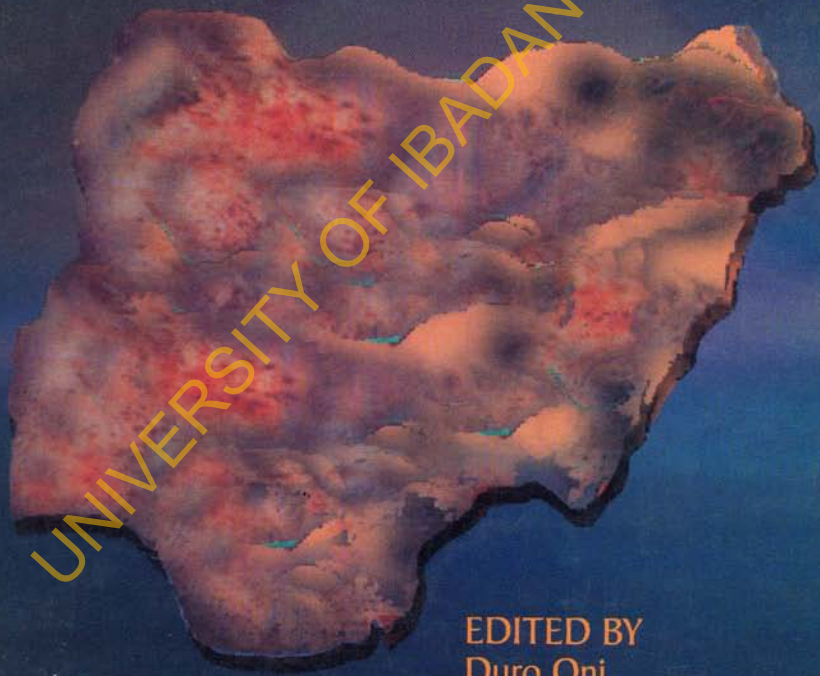


Nigeria and Globalization

*DISCOURSES ON IDENTITY POLITICS
AND SOCIAL CONFLICT*



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Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Foreword	vi
1 Introduction	
- <i>Duro Oni</i>	1
Section One - (General Theoretical Approaches)	
2 Identity Politics, Globalization and Socio-Political Engineering in Nigeria	
- <i>A.U. Iwara</i>	19
3 Ethnicity, Ethno-Class Relations and Crisis of Nigeria's Enduring 'National Question' and Political Instability	
- <i>Inya-A. Eteng</i>	37
Section Two - (Ethno-Linguistic Perspective)	
4 Globalization and Hegemonic English in Nigeria: Identity Conflicts and Linguistic Pluralism	
- <i>Segun Awonusi</i>	85
5 Identity Politics Strategies Among Oko-Osanyin Speakers: A Resistance of Marginalization Through Globalization	
- <i>Efurosibina Adegbija</i>	103
6 Acts of Identity: The Role of Language in Actualizing Globalization	
- <i>Christine I. Ofulue</i>	121

Section Three - (Texts and Discourse Analysis)

- 7 **Disputing the Postcolonial Subject: Abdelkebir Khatibi's *Amour Bilingue / Love In Two Languages***
- *David Richards* 137
- 8 **"Ours is Ours but Mine is Mine"? : Reflections on Identity Politics and the Forging of a National Literature**
- *Hope Eghagha* 151
- 9 **Identity Constructs in a Contested Borderland: The Bakassi Peninsula**
- *Tope Omoniyi and Dipo Salami* 171

Section Four - (Media and Culture)

- 10 **"Indigene" and "Settler" Status and Identity Politics in Nigeria: Lessons from the Jukun-Tiv Crisis and the Role of the Media**
- *Alexander Nyitor Shenge* 197
- 11 **The Caste Phenomenon and Social Conflicts in Oweland in the Context of Globalization**
- *Dele Adeyanju* 217
- 12 **Cultural Identity and Globalization: The Nigerian Experience**
- *Abi A. Derefaka* 231
- 13 **Globalization, Society and Culture: Whither Nigerian Youths**
- *Olukayode O. Taiwo* 241
- 14 **Identity Politics and the Indigenous Language Press: A Case Study of the *Alaroye* Publications**
- *Abiodun Salawu* 257

“Indigene” and “Settler” Status and Identity Politics in Nigeria: Lessons From The Jukun-Tiv Crisis and the Role of the Media

Alexander Nyitor Shenge

Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation, which is blessed with abundant human and natural resources. These resources provide different avenues and platforms for the various ethnic, religious and socio-political groups in the nation to come together. Although the Nigerian nation came into being only in 1914 following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates, history has it that the various ethnic nationalities in what is now known as Nigeria co-existed before the amalgamation. As it is today, perhaps in different proportions, there were a variety of activities among the different peoples of Nigeria. Problems, conflicts, and misunderstandings existed here and there among the different cultures. However, different ways of resolving the problems and misunderstandings were always found by the parties involved in the conflicts. Over the years, the zeal, zest and need for survival and improved quality of life have precipitated the movement of persons and groups from their areas of origin to new areas, thereby instituting the phenomenon of “settlers” and “indigenes” dichotomy. But the problem arises: these settlers in these various areas, having lived therein, sustaining and sustained in and by the environment are considered yet not qualified to be indigenes, thus caught in the crisis of identity politics. This paper attempts to examine as a prototype the problems created by the Jukun-Tiv crisis. The paper proposes the “justification criteria” as conditions for resolving the “settlers” / “indigenes” dichotomy taking lessons from the Jukun-Tiv identity politics. Beyond this, it attempts an insight into the functional role of the media in assessing these problem.

Introduction

Nigeria is, undoubtedly, the most populous nation in Sub-Saharan Africa. With a population of about 120 million people, the nation has over three hundred ethnic groups or nationalities. The cultures of the different peoples that make up the Nigerian nation are as diverse as the number of ethnic groups to which the peoples belong. Although there are diversities in the cultures of the Nigerian people, there are commonalities and similarities too.

From pre-independent days, the peoples of Nigeria had co-existed with one another. Although there had been problems here and there, there similarly have been ways of resolving them. Before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 to form what is today Nigeria, the peoples within this geographical location lived in powerful empires or kingdoms that stretched over wide expanses of land. Such kingdoms and empires as the Oyo Empire, the Kanem-Bornu Empire, and the Bini Empire, just to mention a few, were powerful, well organized and known well beyond the shores of what is now known as Nigeria.

The peoples of the area that is now Nigeria fought internal wars as well as external wars. They intermarried and even migrated to live with and among one another as it suited them. One thing that is worth remembering is that even as these activities and exchanges were going on among the peoples, there were no central laws or governments to regulate the people's conduct. With the possible exception of the so-called stateless societies then, each community or empire had its laws and government. Basically, disputes were settled, marriages contracted, and cultures shared between and among communities based on bilateral as well as multilateral agreements among the communities and people concerned.

Again, one exception to this rule or understanding was when a people were defeated in a war and their sovereignty eroded by their invaders. Then came the amalgamation in 1914 and later on the independence in 1960. As opposed to the pre-amalgamation and, to some extent, the pre-independence times, the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria no longer had laws and governments exclusively for their peoples. Although there had been and there still have been traditional leaderships and governments, the constitution of the nation has not yet officially recognized them.

At the level of government (both central and regional), a lot of functional and structural developments have taken place since the entity

called Nigeria came into being. From two protectorates in 1914 came three regions, namely, Northern, Eastern, and Western. A fourth region, Midwest, followed this a few years after. It was with this regional structure that Nigeria experienced serious political turmoil during the mid 1960s, which consequently led to the civil war in 1967.

What typified the problems of the mid 1960s were political disagreements and killings, which were ethnic-based. On January 15th, following the protracted ethnic and political problems that led to the overthrow of the then civilian central government headed by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the selective and regional-based killings of key officials of that government (including Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa himself), the nation witnessed its first military administration. It should be noted that the activities of the 1960s and those before that time changed the nomenclature and character of the Nigerian nation: the regional structure gave way to twelve states which were created in 1967 by General Yakubu Gowon; a civil war broke out and lasted from 1967 to 1970; military coups pervaded the nation's body polity and led to the dominant military rule in the country; amidst all these and after, the nation's psyche has been dominated by ethnicity, nepotism, religious intolerance, and regionalism.

Religious and Ethnic Identity Politics in Nigeria

Even as one recounts the ethnic and political killings that characterized the Nigerian body polity in the late 1950s and mid 1960s, it is difficult to say if, as gruesome and worrisome as these events were, they are more worrisome than the post-war events in Nigerian history. Over the years, successive leaderships in Nigeria have had to battle with all manners of violence and hostilities. It is sad to note that most of these hostilities were and have been ethnic- and religious-based. Ethnicity and religion have become very fundamental considerations in Nigerian politics that they have forced even the hitherto dogged and patriotic Nigerians to learn to observe and indeed play the politics of "ethnic and religious" identity either as voters or election candidates or both. The happenings in the ongoing electioneering process in the country buttress this point.

In the past fifteen to twenty years, one can recount very many religious and ethnic clashes of varying magnitudes which befell the

nation: the Maitatsine religious riots in Kano, Yola and Bauchi at different times; the persistent religious riots in Zaria, Kaduna, again in Kano, and much more recently in Jos; the June 12 killings and upheavals; the Ife-Modakeke war; the Umuleri-Aguleri war; the Niger Delta crises including the Ijaw-Ilaje crisis and the Odi killings; the Shagamu religious violence; and most recently the Jukun-Tiv crisis and the Benue-Nassarawa border disputes.

So much devastation and killings have taken place in Nigeria (especially within the present civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo) that critics have given the government (most especially the Chief Obasanjo-led government) the hardest of knocks.

Writing from Abuja in the same manner and summarizing the current status of Nigeria in the (Vanguard Monday, May 6, 2002, Page 14), Mr. Effik concluded as follows:

The past three years of Obasanjo's presidency has (have) been characterized by the following catastrophic events: the massacres in Odi and in Tivland where the blood of innocent Nigerians is probably still crying for vengeance, the incessant bloody ethnic and religious clashes in the country; the bomb explosions at the Ikeja Military Cantonment, massive unemployment, inflation, failed promises over NEPA, the Police strike, prolonged strike by University and Polytechnic teachers, massive corruption in government in spite of anti-corruption crusade, emergence of militant ethnic nationalism, the manipulations of the discredited Electoral Act 2001, the attempt to cover the murder of Chief Bola Ige -the nation's slain Justice Minister, the rise in crimes and ritual murders, unchecked favouritism and godfatherism in the employment of Nigerians into government agencies perpetuated by ministers and other top officials, despite newspaper advertisements and fraudulent aptitude tests. The list is endless.

The Jukun-Tiv Crisis: A Historical Background

According to the account of Abubakar (1986), the Jukun-speaking people are located mainly in the middle Benue region, between Djen in the north and Abinsi in the south; and from the lowlands of Plateau State in the west to the piedmont of the Mambila Plateau in the east. It is difficult to determine their antiquity in this region largely because

while available oral traditions do not go far enough into the remote past, the limited archaeological work in the area is yet to be fully published. It is quite possible that all the modern Jukun groups within this vast region of the Middle Belt were possibly part of the legendary KWARARAFI – an ancient Kingdom, possibly an empire which is believed to have flourished in the Benue region several centuries before it was succeeded by the kingdom of Wukari.

On their part, the Tiv are a very populous ethnic group (the most populous in the Middle Belt region and, according to the 1963 and 1973 census figures, about the fifth or sixth largest in Nigeria) whose people are dominantly located in Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa states. There is equally a large number of Tiv people located in Plateau states and other states of Nigeria. Historical accounts have it that Tiv people who are predominantly farmers migrated from the central African region several hundreds of years ago and, stopping over at several points in the course of their migration, came to occupy the Middle Belt region where they have been since their arrival. The Tiv are of the Bantu race whose agricultural prowess and, until recently, stateless (non-central) administration have earned them a unique identity as a people. They are among the very few ethnic groups in Nigeria that have never been conquered by any force. The Tiv have several neighbours on all sides of their geographical location. Among the numerous neighbours of Tiv are the Jukuns with whom the Tiv have co-existed for several centuries.

According to Dzurgba and Tyokumbur (2001), Tiv-Jukun crisis has been a long struggle since the creation of Taraba State. Since 1946, Tiv population in Wukari division made up of Wukari, Takum and Donga towns of Jukun was over 40,000. Kuteb took the second position with a population of over 20,000 people while Jukun occupied third position with a population of over 10,000. Tiv, Kuteb and Jukun were followed by Ichen with a population of over 6,000, Hausa with a population of over 5,000, Chamba with a population of over 4,000 and 62 other micro-ethnic groups with a total population of over 20,000 people with an average population of over 300 people each. Britain created the Northern Protectorate from 1900 to 1910 through a military campaign led by Sir Frederick Lugard who later became Lord Lugard. The military campaign was colonially called pacification

while nationalists called it conquest. Later on, the Northern Protectorate was renamed as Northern Region as well as Northern Nigeria. The creation of Benue Province brought together the Tiv, Wukari, Nassarawa Lafia and Idoma. Makurdi in Tiv division was the capital of Benue province. Without ethnic prejudice, suspicion, distrust, lack of confidence, hatred and discrimination, Lord Lugard, with provincial officials excised some parts of Tiv land and merged them to Wukari, Nassarawa and Lafia divisions. This was not an arbitrary policy decision because such an action had taken place in Europe, America and Asia. Thus, it was done with a good intention. Basically, it was meant to strengthen the economies of Wukari, Nassarawa and Lafia divisions. The incorporation and integration of the peoples of Northern Nigeria were also important in the British colonial policy. Today, some Nigerians with their African ethnic parochialism, non-nationalism and non-patriotism, see the existing political boundaries as "accidents of history" and, consequently, the united Nigeria as "a mere geographical expression". This is the context in which the Jukun-Tiv problem could be located.

While the remote causes of the crisis could be related to the colonial policy in Wukari division, the immediate causes are related to a struggle for economic and political power in Taraba State. Politics is a game of numbers, so the Tiv people with a high population in Taraba are known to hold the ace. But the Jukun, who have a much smaller population than the Tiv, and who believe that the Tiv are the tenants and they (the Jukuns) are the landlords, would not accept this numerical principle in their politics. Without the majority population in Taraba State, the Jukun still want to have dominant economic and political power over the rest of the ethnic groups in Taraba State. It is the Jukun's ambition to subdue the rest of the ethnic groups in Taraba State that has been responsible for the Tiv- Jukun crises. In the words of Dzurgba and Tyokumbur, "Jukun dreams of a possibility of eliminating the Tiv ethnic group because the Tiv ethnic group has constituted the biggest obstacle in their quest for dominance in Taraba economy and politics. This is simply because the Tiv ethnic group had the largest population in the former Wukari Division and now exerts a large influence on contemporary politics in Taraba State."

Past colonial accounts have it that a large portion of Tivland and population were sliced and merged to Lafia division and Nasarawa division. Thus, since 1900-1910, part of Tivland and population became part and parcel of Lafia division and Nasarawa division. As Wukari division, Lafia division and Nasarawa division were also the components of Benue province with its capital at Makurdi. At the end of colonial rule in Northern Nigeria, the provincial structures were discarded and the divisions became directly linked to Northern Regional Government based in Kaduna. All these years, Tiv had lived in peace with other ethnic groups (including the Jukus) in the two divisions.

The phenomenon of an ethnic group having a politically significant population in several states is not unique to the Tiv people. For example, the Igbo are found in Delta state, Rivers state and Bayelsa state. Ijaw are found in Delta, Bayelsa, Ondo and Lagos outside Rivers state. In addition, the Yoruba are found in Benin Republic outside Nigeria. So the case of the Tiv and indeed any other ethnic group should not be different and at the expense of their land, lives and property.

The Jukun-Tiv crisis is a matter of great concern to all nationalist and patriotic Nigerians. But not being the only crisis in Nigeria, it did not and does not deserve the kind of attention and suspicious publicity the Nigerian media gave it. While the crisis and its victims enjoyed the goodwill of patriotic and humanitarian Nigerians, other Nigerians were and are still happy and rejoicing over the military violence that has consumed hundreds of lives and properties in the affected areas. Dzurgba and Tyokumbur (2001) informed Nigerians of the current religious, ethnic and communal crises in Nigeria. Altogether, they identified twenty-seven (27) other crises in Nigeria. The details of the 27 crises are presented in table 1 below. These ethnic, religious and political crises have consumed human lives and property.

Table 1: Other violent crises in Nigeria.

Location / State	Crisis Identity	Frequency
Zangon-kataf kaduna	Ethnic	Occasional
Kaduna	Ethno-Religious	Perennial
Kano	Ethno-Religious	Perennial
Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi	Ethno-Religious	Perennial
Bauchi, Bauchi	Ethno-Religious	Occasional
Jos, Plateau	Ethno-Religious	Occasional
Jukun-Kuteb } Jukun-Ichen } TARABA Jukun-Hausa Jukun-Chamba	Ethno-Religious	Perennial
Border Towns of Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Jigawa, etc	Foreign Marauders	Occasional
Ogoni, Rivers	Self-Actualization (Ethno-Environmental)	Perennial
Bonny-Eleme-Egbema Degema, Rivers	Ethno-Economic	Occasional
Ijaw-Urhobo, Delta	Ethnic	Occasional
Ijaw – Ilaje, Ondo	Ethnic	Occasional
Urhobo – Itsekiri, Delta	Ethnic	Occasional
Ife-Modakeke, Osun	Communal	Perennial
OPC, Lagos State and Ilorin, Kwara	Ethnic	Perennial
Massob-Aba, Abia and other Eastern States	Political	Perennial
Aguleri-Umuleri, Anambra	Communal	Perennial
Akwa Ibom – Abia Borders	Communal	Occasional
Owo, Ondo state	Leadership	Perennial
Cross River-Akwa Ibom Borders	Communal	Occasional
Okrika / Bush Boys River State	Communal	Occasional
Suleja, Niger State	Leadership	Perennial
Shaki, Oyo State	Religious	Occasional
Cross River State	Communal Crises	Perennial

Source: Newspapers, Radio and Television in Nigeria and foreign countries, especially Britain and U. S. A.

Looking at **table 1**, it can safely be concluded, that Tiv-Jukun crisis is not the only ethnic crisis in Nigeria. Through the listed ethno-religious and political crises in Nigeria, lives and properties are equally lost. Therefore, what makes them different from the Tiv-Jukun crisis? Why should media reports give a different consideration from one ethnic group when the two ethnic groups are fighting in one and the same crisis? What makes an ethnic group good and another bad? The answer lies in ethnic prejudice, suspicion, distrust, hatred, discrimination, and irresponsible media practice. Whose moral misbehaviour has tarnished, distorted, obscured and spoilt Nigeria's reputation and image abroad? Nigerians are no longer trusted anywhere in America, Europe and Asia because of Nigerian fraudsters. To what extent has the Nigerian media fought this war beyond the home front?

Lessons from the Jukun-Tiv Crisis

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria allows that every Nigerian is free and should be free to live and carry out legitimate social, political and economic activities anywhere in his country without any hindrance or molestation. This writer, while submitting to this constitutional provision as many Nigerians do and should do, also believes very strongly in a united, prosperous, and democratic Nigeria, under a multi-ethnic system. In particular, it is the writer's thinking that the essence of state creation in this country, was certainly not to create an avenue where any group would uproot the original inhabitants from their ancestral lands for whatever purpose. Wherever this happens, good governance and the need for peaceful co-existence demand that everyone in this country should condemn this.

The leadership of this country should not be unaware of the grave consequences that these acts of labeling some Nigerians "settlers" and "visitors" in their country portend for the peace, unity, and prosperity of this nation and the survival of the emerging democratic order.

The problem of the Tiv people in Taraba is defined by their relationship with their Jukun Neighbours. The two ethnic groups have lived together from time immemorial, long before the advent of colonial rule. During the colonial era, they were always grouped together in the same political units. From *Munchi* Province to Benue Province,

the Tiv and the Jukun co-existed. The position then, was the Tiv was the majority tribe; while Jukuns were and still are lesser in number. In fact, the 1947 census put the Tiv population as 34% of Wukari Federation, while the Jukun were listed as 8% among the others, who jointly were 64%. Under the Benue-Province, and in fact, for some time, Ambassador Jolly Tanko Yusuf (now deceased), a Jukun son, was Benue Provincial Secretary. In 1959, a Tiv man, Hon. Tangur Gaza, was elected to represent Wukari Federation in the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos.

At the creation of 12 States by the General Gowon's Government in 1967, the Jukun and Tiv were all under Benue-Plateau State. They lived peacefully all this time and there was never a time the Jukun and the Tiv fought tribal wars.

Why then should state creation exercise bring about the problem between the Tiv and the Jukun? This is where a lesson needs to be learned. And that lesson is that of avoiding the reckless balkanization of the Nigerian people in the name of state or local government creation.

According to Dzurgba and Tyokumbur (2001, p 14), the Jukun-Tiv crisis started with the creation of additional states in 1976. In the exercise of that year, Benue Province was balkanised: Wukari Federation, which had always been part of Benue, was excised and merged with Muri and Adamawa Emirates, to form Gongola, Lafia and Nassarawa Divisions of Benue Province, were also excised and merged with Plateau Province, to form Plateau State and the Igalas were, surprisingly, brought from Lokoja Province, to form Benue State. This marked the beginning of hostilities apparently targeted at ethnic groups which had high populations so that their numerical strength would be downplayed and diminished.

In such conflicts as the Jukun-Tiv crisis, people look up to the state for protection. This is why, when the police and the army are called upon, people respond or are expected to respond with total submission. In this case, unfortunately, the Nigerian army, which was supposed to keep the peace, ended up clashing bloodily with one of the warring factions. This was uncalled for, and lesson here is that government and her agencies as well as personnel should at all times be fair, resolute, prompt, and reasonable in all crisis situations. There

should be no room left for any suspicion by any party. With what happened in Zaki-Biam, of late, the Tiv and indeed other ethnic groups will for a long time be suspicious and distrustful of the army and other law enforcement agencies whenever such agencies are sent to crisis points to keep the peace. The authorities must do something to restore lost confidence.

Since the pattern of the Jukun-Tiv crisis is clearly discernable (it occurs each time an election is about to take place, or census conducted, or registration of voters is to take place) government should learn to maintain law and order at all times, but most especially during such critical periods.

As electioneering campaigns are on now and elections soon to take place, as well as a National Census Exercise, attempts should be made by government and all concerned to guard against another outbreak of hostilities between the Jukuns and the Tiv as well as between any other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Principal financiers of the Jukun-Tiv war were alleged to be retired military officers, who not only provide money, but source for arms and ammunition and induce military personnel deployed to the area, to assist them. Government must, as a matter of duty, now begin to monitor the activities of retired as well as serving military and paramilitary officers all over the country.

As a multicultural and multi-religious society, Nigeria can only survive by tolerance: by our accommodating each other's religion and culture. Certainly, violence begets violence. If not properly handled, small violence degenerates into a bigger conflagration. By this reasoning, government and all concerned should learn to nip intra and inter ethnic problems in the bud. As a way of doing this, recommendations made by various committees on crises should be studied carefully, and where and when possible, implemented.

Since it appears that Nigerians know little or nothing about their rights and the rights of others as citizens of Nigeria, government should put in place a Presidential Committee on Provisions and Practice of Citizenship and Rights in Nigeria. This should be operated at various levels of government.

Based on these and other lessons which were learned from the Jukun-Tiv crisis and, indeed, other crises in Nigeria, the Presidential

Retreat on Peace And Conflict Resolution in some central states, met in Kuru, Jos from 24th to 26th January, 2002. They noted that:

- i. Conflicts are typically conceived, planned and executed by men and women, and that solutions to them can and must be found by men and women of goodwill;
- ii. Conflicts of these nature cannot be won by anyone, and their only effect is to leave everyone in grief, fear, insecurity and hate;
- iii. Elite roles have been in some instances less than honourable, but still retain their capacities to be positively deployed towards securing peace with dignity for all their communities;
- iv. Issues which cause conflict around "indigene", "settler" etc must be resolved, because they violate the constitution and make everyone a victim;

Further, the retreat observed that:

- i. Historical and other anthropological evidence which are often advanced to justify claims to "indigene" and "settler" cannot stand close scrutiny, and in any case, are irrelevant to the contemporary realities of our nation;
- ii. References to "indigene", "settler" or "stranger", represent instruments of elite in-fighting, and hide the fact that very often, elites face more competition from their own kith and kin than from elites from other states, local governments or Communities;
- iii. Communities invariably exhibit fear of strangers, and have a tendency to limit access by strangers or outsiders to the full privileges, which they claim as a group. In the realities of our existence today, however, it is possible to both live with and among strangers and retain our dignities and rights;
- iv. There are grounds to believe that constitutional provisions on the rights and privileges of all citizens may be inadequate in themselves to eliminate conflicts over claims and counter-claims to rights of all peoples to equal treatment. It is also

obvious that these conflicts are being fed by ignorance and mischief, as well as insensitivity to the need to recognize the imperatives of peaceful co-existence.

Based on the above, the retreat recommended that:

- i. The current efforts by the Federal Government to identify limitations to the full application of the rights and privileges of all citizens as enshrined in the Constitution should be pursued with more vigour;
- ii. Disputes over claims to the rights and limitations of “natives” and “settlers” cannot be settled by recourse to the law alone, indeed, they are essentially political and attitudinal in nature, and must be resolved by the demonstration of strong political will and a willingness on the part of all communities to be more accommodating and work hard to promote peace;
- iii. All States should set in motion a peace-making process, which should involve all communities in a free and genuine dialogue;
- iv. Issues relating to religion need to be handled with extreme caution, and very high levels of sensitivity, and persons who commit criminal acts under the guise of religion must be isolated and punished;
- v. All recommendations of Panels on conflict and disturbances must be implemented in a transparent manner and with dispatch;
- vi. All displaced persons must be adequately re-settled immediately and the withdrawal of the military in the crisis areas should be vigorously pursued in the context of demonstrated evidence of the restoration of lasting peace and security;
- vii. Governors who have initiated sound policies and programme to achieve peace and understanding should be commended and encouraged, and those who require to exercise courage and qualities of statesmanship in dealing with the peculiarities of their problems should be understood and encouraged;

- viii. The pursuit of economic development by all Governments is vital to the restoration of peace in this region, and all policies which should alleviate the crushing poverty among the people and unacceptable levels of unemployment among the youth must be pursued more vigorously;
- ix. Security agencies should improve their Standing Operational Procedures and community-relations in this area, and be firm but fair in dealing with individuals and communities which break the law;
- x. The structure, funding and operations of all militia must be legally sanctioned, and where they operate outside the law, they must be eliminated at all cost;
- xi. Boundaries between states and within states should be fully demarcated as early as possible and state and local governments as well as communities must support the demarcation of all boundaries;
- xii. The vital role of Traditional Rulers needs to be better appreciated and enhanced, particularly as they relate to conflict detection, conflict management and maintenance of peace;
- xiii. Conflict management agencies must have their capacities improved at all levels of government;
- xiv. Follow-up workshops and meetings to this retreat should be held at all levels of government and among communities.

In a memorandum presented by Engr. Peter Targuma Ter on behalf of the entire Tiv people of Nasarawa South Senatorial District (comprising Awe, Doma, Keana, Lafia and Obi Local Government Areas) of Nasarawa State on the denial of citizenship and Fundamental Human Rights of the Tiv people of the said area presented to the Secretary, Presidential Committee on Provisions and Practice of Citizenship and Rights in Nigeria on 12-2-2002 in Abuja, the establishment of Citizenship and Rights Commission, among other recommendations was made.

The Functional Role of the Media in Handling the “Indigene” and “Settler” Status Problem and Identity Politics in Nigeria

The specification of the functional role of the media is made here by this writer based on his belief in the popular saying that the pen is mightier than the sword.

Journalism, which represents media practice, is the practice and profession of producing material of current interest for press and broadcasting. Originally, journalism was limited to the written word (print journalism), but now it has been extended to the spoken word on radio and television (broadcast journalism). Journalism also refers to collecting, working up, and editing material, especially news. In an organized democratic dispensation, a tripartite arrangement for good governance and rule of law puts in place the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. These are collectively referred to as arms of government. Constitutionally, there is a provision for separation of powers.

Journalism is the “Fourth Estate” of the realm after the tripartite arrangement involving the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The Fourth Estate, journalism is, therefore, the watchdog of the society. It manages conflicts and checks excesses. Ethics refer to the branch of philosophy dealing with the concepts and principles of morality. It refers to “a set of standards” or code of conduct. Every profession has a code of conduct, and as such the journalism or media profession practice is not an exception. Principally, the chief functions of journalism or media practitioners are to educate, to inform and to entertain.

Media practice is communication to the very extent that it sets in motion an interactive process involving the imparting of ideas, information, values, knowledge, feelings and so on within the society. Journalism or media practice changes attitudes as well as behavior either for good or for bad. Communication is not a one-way affair. It entails critical feedback without which its effectiveness is incomplete. It can put a single idea (good or bad) to thousands, even millions of people at the same time.

The power of communication is a tremendous power that ought to be put to the collective interest of all if not the collective use of all. This takes us to the basic rules and ethics governing journalism or media practice. The rules include:

1. Objectivity: This has to do with separating issues from persons, removing sentiments and emotions, seeing things as they are.
2. Confirming issues and/or stories before reporting,
3. Ensuring justice and fair play or equity,
4. Demonstrating courage and,
5. Protecting the interest of the state or common good.

Media Practice Today: Where Do We Stand in Nigeria?

Over the years and especially since after journalist Lawrence Akapa popularized junk journalism in Nigeria, media practice in this country has moved from bad to worse. Areas of strength also exist among media practitioners, but the dark sides must also be talked about. We remember the difficult times journalists went through, especially during the military era. But we cannot afford to justify professional misconduct just because of hardships that have been experienced by media practitioners. Much more than the past, some strange factors now determine the role of media practitioners in Nigeria. These include: their mood, their orientation, the interest of the writer, editor or the writer's employer, and at times the level of intimidation and the size of the brown envelopes given out.

By way of reminder, junk journalism in Nigeria refers to the practice of sitting in the comfort of one's office or apartment and cooking up stories and reports and going ahead to publish them. This covers every issue – ethnic differences, power sharing, revenue sharing, etc. The above reflects the general decay in our national life. Of course, there are similar rots in our educational and other institutions now.

In the Nigeria of today, rumour mongering has become a pervasive activity. It stems from lack of adequate information on issues and happenings. There is no access to adequate information about the nation. Of course, where people are shielded from adequate information, rumour thrives.

Over the years, sensational reporting has led to loss of precious lives, much more than the sword can kill. After all, a sword is dangerous only when put to use. The Nigerian audiences also do not help matters.

More often than not, they have been rather too gullible and irrational. All said and done, one can state that media practice in Nigeria today is being hampered by the very problems, which confront the larger society, and these include corruption, nepotism, religious interests and other selfish interests as well as geographical and ethnic considerations. All the same, the achievements of the past and some present patriotic deeds of media practitioners are worthy of commendation.

What then should be done (Ethical Issues)

The basic goal of all media houses is education, information, and entertainment. The big questions are education for what and for whom? What kind of entertainment and for whom? Information on what and for whom?

Media practitioners must cease to be propaganda instruments in the hands of people (especially those in authority and the well to do). They should stop unduly developing and putting forth antagonistic attitudes towards government, its policies and agencies. Misinformation and distortion of facts and issues must stop.

Also, entertainment as a goal of mass media must have a focus. For example, it is immoral for media practitioners to promote foreign values at the expense of our cherished cultural values of hard work. Similarly, education must aim at influencing the thinking of the populace towards the goal of sustainable development. This cuts across sustainable consumption, sustainable lifestyle, etc. As communicators, media practitioners can inform and misinform, educate and miseducate, instruct and mis-instruct, advise and misadvise, solidify and disintegrate, gladden and sadden, boost morale and lower morale, elevate and distress, cultivate and antagonize.

In the course of their professional practice, media practitioners must observe objectivity and truth as their watchwords; for without objectivity and truth, they can go for the sensational and destructive. On the part of readers, the audience and the citizenry, the "sit on the fence" attitude of some of them must stop. There should be full and active participation in government programmes and issues that are raised by media practitioners.

Conclusion

The Concept of Sustainable Development

For there to be sustainable growth and development in Nigeria, there has to be in place what this writer calls “sustainable media practice”. Taking the path of development entails imbibing morally acceptable lifestyle, sustainable democratic and attitudinal disposition. How far we will go in this country, how peaceful we will live together largely depends on the activities of members of the Fourth Estate, the journalists or media practitioners. It is sad to note that the post-independence ideals of Nigerians have changed from national interest to selfish interest.

If the Fourth Estate must continue to be relevant, the definition and packaging of news has to change. In Nigeria today, news is government and government is news.

As I end this paper, let me paraphrase an NPAN (Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria) address by the Late Chief M.K.O. Abiola concerning the superiority of the pen over and above the sword thus:

“... for the past six hundred years, Africans have not been able to feel at home, whether because they have been wrenched away from homes and loved ones, or left behind to grieve for parents...”.

“Some fought with bare hands, with spears, axes, rifles, machetes and machine guns. But many fought with the pen... Today we honour them as heroes, just as we would have if they had smashed down the citadels of imperialism with TNT or grenades. How well they have succeeded!!! Today we can stand or sit here and discuss our destiny as free men and women because they put their pens and lives on the line and, against overwhelming odds, triumphed”.
Such is the power of the pen – to build or to destroy.

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