

Book Review: Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria

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In their edited book titled “*Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria*” Umaru A. Pate and Lai Oso have x-rayed issues bothering on multiculturalism, diversity and conflict reporting vis-a-vis the role communication, and specifically, the media play in facilitating social cohesion, community resilience, peace, unity and understanding in the Nigerian society. The chapter one which is the introduction of the collection, espouses hate and dangerous speeches, insensitive dishing out of unsubstantiated and unverifiable facts, demonization of certain ethnic, religious or political groups in an already tensed and divided society, attributing statements by individuals as collectives, using of inflammatory, sensational, misleading and inciting words in news reporting, use of cartoons to malign a group, community or individuals, un-objective and biased reportage, total blackout on some ethnic groups, shallow and lopsided coverage as some of the challenges the mass media face while reporting multiculturalism, diversity, and conflict related issues in Nigeria.

The anthology which is divided into twenty-five chapters, written by seasoned, experienced and very vast media scholars and public commentators from both within and outside Nigeria has different theorizations and case studies of the role mass media play in either resolving or exacerbating violent conflicts in Nigeria and even beyond. The subject matter’s diversity in contexts and case studies attests to the degree to which the media have performed creditably or otherwise.

Based on the categorisation of the book into distinct chapters, the second chapter provides an overview on multiculturalism, diversity and reporting of conflict in Nigeria. Written by Zebulon Suifon Takwa, the chapter explores some of the challenges associated with multiculturalism and diversity in Africa with particular emphasis on a complex country such as Nigeria from an outsider’s point of view. Takwa states that as long as the mass media in Africa depends on the coinage of news from France, UK, USA and other developed world, the issue of North-South regional sentiments, Christian-Muslim divide, ethnic and clan interest will be grappled upon for quite a long time. Similarly, in the chapter three, Lai Oso assesses the age-long debate on the

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effect of the mass media in the society. Though the debate has been quite controversial and unsettled, there seems to be the general assumption that the media, through their various functions, do have some effects on attitude, behaviour, ideas and perception of social reality. Oso states that it is by virtue of the media power that both parties to a conflict scramble for media space in order to influence public opinion and public policy formulation as well as the call for the media to imbibe the culture of peace journalism and conflict-sensitive journalism for the interest of the society has become necessary.

Furthermore, in the following chapters four, five, six, and seven; Mohammed Musa, Godfrey N. Danaan, Toyosi Olugbenga Samson Owolabi, Chinyere Stella Okunna and Muyiwa Popoola respectively discuss how the media report conflicts and diversities in Nigeria as well as the challenges of objectivity towards building a culture of peace. Musa avers that the catastrophic consequences of conflict around the world have placed moral and professional burden on the media to open the public sphere for a rigorous debate that would expose the danger that accompanies violent and militarised conflicts and that the media seem to have such military tendencies in handling conflict issues in Nigeria. Danaan, states that conflict often emerges from poor management of diversities mainly because of the competing interests of social groups which attracts the attention of the media as well as the human nature of content providers (journalists) as they also belong to a given social group. Owolabi establishes the trinitarian relationship between media, conflict and violence with their concomitant security implications. Despite the destructive consequences of violent conflict, they are believed to be attractive to the media, hence the need for fairness and objectivity. Okunna and Popoola opine that the media have a critical role and responsibility to play towards achieving a peaceful society and sustainable development in a conflict-ridden world.

In chapter eight according to Umaru A. Pate and Hamza Idris, journalists in Nigeria have not experienced high level of risks and dangers to their personal, professional and institutional security until around 2009-2015 when Boko Haram launched a war of terror on the Nigerian state. However, despite the violence, bombings, maiming and killings, Nigerian journalists covered and reported the happenings in the region without insurance cover and training on safety skills, compounded by poor and irregular salaries and incentives. In chapter nine, Musibau T. Akanni discusses the oil-induced conflicts in Niger Delta communities, how the region has been fraught with unsettling developments over the years that range from peaceful protests to the violent intervention of the militants in the recent time, how the media have been reporting the issues and the effects of the conflicts on Nigeria's survival.

Dele Odunlami in chapter ten assesses how newspapers have been covering the herdsmen/farmers clashes in Nigeria in terms of direction and prominence of the stories, the dominant frames and the actions taken against the perpetrators. Jimoh Jide in chapter eleven explains that in spite of various attempts to bridge the gap in gender equality, only little progress has been recorded as substantial inequalities still remains across all sectors of human endeavours.

In conflict situations, women and children are usually the major victims of the act, hence the need for gender-sensitivity by the media becomes pertinent. Similarly, Hadiza J. Ibrahim in chapter twelve also raises the issues of the plight of internally displaced women and how the media have been giving them under-coverage, while in chapter thirteen; Ruqayyah Y. Aliyu talks about how the media can be used in restoring the hopes, confidence and aspirations of IDPs considering the influence of the media on public opinion and its power of agenda setting.

The anthology's chapters fourteen and fifteen look at the social media and conflict discourse as well as online newspaper coverage of "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign in Nigeria. Sharafa Dauda, Abdulmutallib A. Abubakar and Aisha K. Lawan lament that, although social media have been used in anti-corruption campaign and mitigating conflicts in countries like Kenya, in a diverse society like Nigeria; social media are increasingly being employed as tools for complicating and fuelling conflicts and championing retrogressive causes especially among the youth population. Abubakar Jibril examines how online newspapers aided "BBOG" campaign. Bakut T. Bakut and Olympus G. Ejue in chapter sixteen explore the cultural and artistic dimensions of conflict resolution i.e. how arts and popular culture can provide a powerful source of peace building when well harnessed.

Similarly in chapter seventeen, Rasheedah Liman addresses how Theatre for Development can be used as a tool for combating Boko Haram insurgency through creating awareness on conflict management and education. Also in chapter eighteen, Mainasara Y. Kurfi establishes the interrelatedness of film and conflict as he espouses the role of film in conflict resolution in a multicultural society like Nigeria using examples of *Hotel Rwanda* and *Sometimes in April* on the Rwanda Genocide. On his part, Abubakar Jibril in chapter nineteen examines the efficacy of community radio as a tool for conflict management as it was found to be participatory, broad-based, people oriented, accessible and contextually relevant.

In chapter twenty of the collection, Gausu Ahmad and Kabiru H. Isa assess the contestation for religious space in media platforms, particularly radio by different Islamic groups to construct their identity, hold their followers and respond to criticisms from opposing groups within Kano metropolis. Lauratu U. Abdulsalam in chapter twenty-one examines the centrality of the media as one of the multiple strategies of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) in managing conflict non-violently among Nigerian population. It also reawakens the consciousness of the media professionals on the need to conform to conflict-sensitive journalism principles in discharging their duties.

Nnanyelugo Okoro, Ijeoma Ajaero, Chidiebere Nwachukwu on their part in chapter twenty-two, explore the concept of war and peace journalism and how selected Nigerian newspapers orchestrated war rather than peace in their headlines. The chapter distinguishes between war and peace journalism as thus: in war journalism, media personnel tend to be reactive, mainly reporting the visible effect of conflict, elite-oriented sourcing of information and dichotomizing

conflict in terms of “winners” and “losers.” While in peace journalism, media personnel are proactive, people-oriented, report area of agreement as well as avoid labelling parties to a conflict as “winners” and “losers.”

Nosa Owens-Ibie and Ifedolapo Ademosu in chapter twenty-three examine how the ethnic peculiarities of multicultural Nigeria can be appreciated in terms of language, dressing, occupation, lifestyle, food and how they can be harnessed to resolve conflict using a Nigerian movie *Phone Swap*. Akeem M. Adeyanju x-rays the import of strategic communication in handling security issues in Nigeria. The chapter which is the twenty-fourth in the book underscores the need for Nigeria to have a distinct and clearly spelt out National Communication Policy as wars around the world are often settled at round-tables through sound Communication Strategy which usually appeals to the psychological makeup of people instead of heavy armament and military resolution of conflicts. Chapter twenty-five concludes the book and is written by Mohammed Haruna in a more or less journalistic style establishing the link between the media and civil liberties.

In conclusion, the book is a resourceful one that can help both students and academics in understanding the role media can play in harnessing Nigerian diversity as well as how the media can help in resolving conflicts through their agenda-setting role. Also, considering the limited corpus on conflict and diversity reporting in Nigeria, this anthology is good for all and sundry in the field of mass communication.