RE-DIRECTING THE NIGERIAN MASS MEDIA TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract
National integration has remained elusive in Nigeria for several decades now. This unhealthy trend has been partly blamed on the activities of the mass media in the country. The media united Nigerians to fight for the country's independence. The same media tore the citizens apart, shortly before the attainment of independence. The seed of mutual suspicion and discord sown among the ethnic groups by the pre-independence press is still the bane of the country's national life. The media have continued to fuel ethnic rivalry in the country. The paper adopted the library research method. This paper centres on re-directing the Nigerian media to achieve national integration. It argues that the mass media can still be used to preach and achieve national integration rather than parochial ethnic and regional identities and loyalties in Nigeria. The study recommends that national integration should be included in journalism education curriculum in Nigeria; Nigerian journalists should be sensitized by media organizations and the civil society on the need to uphold national integration in journalism practice and media reports that fuel national disintegration should be sanctioned by relevant regulatory bodies.

Introduction
The mass media occupy a very strategic position in the history of Nigeria's political development. This is unarguable, given the outstanding role of the media in the struggle for the country's political independence. It is no over statement to say that it was the media that achieved independence for Nigeria. So, the fight for the country's independence was, indeed, a litmus test for the awesome power of the media to unite disparate elements to fight a common cause.

Yes, the media did not fail in its onerous assignment to oust the colonial overlords. However, the lyrics experienced an unfortunate twist when independence was obviously in sight. Discordant tunes began to emerge among the nationalists who were the early indigenous journalists in the country. The fears of ethnic domination on one hand and subjugation on the other hand, at the imminent dawn of self-governance, tore the media apart, along ethnic and regional lines.

Then, there was a paradigm shift in mass media use, ownership and operations in Nigeria. Media attention was shifted from championing national ideals and objectives to fashioning and pursuing regional, sectional and ethnic interests. It was rivalry that gave birth to the rat race for the establishment of regional and ethnic media whose mission was to champion ethnic interests. As a result of this unhealthy state of affairs in the media circles in

Nigeria, the media in the country have been perceived as agents of national integration at one time and disintegrative tools at another. But, of course, the pre-independence experience of Nigeria has clearly demonstrated the double-edged nature of the mass media. That is, the media can be integrative tools or organs of disintegration, depending on how their tremendous powers are used. Well, the media should not be seen as possessing the magic wands to single-handedly bring about national integration in Nigeria. The other agents of socialization – family, religious organizations, civil society, schools, etc, have to help the media in this assignment.

The possibility or otherwise of attaining genuine national integration in Nigeria is a big national question that requires thorough examination. The mass media have vital roles to play in finding an answer to the perplexing question of national integration in Nigeria. This explains why Ikpe (20022, p.134) asserts that "doubt about the survival of the entity, Nigeria, has been mentioned too often through the mass media to a near convincing level. Interestingly, that narrative has been as intense as the efforts the same media apply in canvassing unity for the country." This contrasting role places the mass media as a catalyst as well as an antidote to the crisis within the country (Uzuegbunam and Omenugha, 2018; Ikpe, 2022)

This paper explores the various ways the mass media can be harnessed to foster national integration in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study
The general objective of the study is to re-direct the mass media to achieve national integration in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:
1. Ascertain the nature of national integration in Nigeria
2. Identify the challenges to national integration in Nigeria
3. Examine the roles the mass media have played in national integration in Nigeria
4. Identify how to re-direct the mass media to be properly primed to achieve national integration in Nigeria.

Literature Review/Conceptual clarifications
The concept of national integration has attracted the attention of many researchers who attempted to define it. Onyeakazi and Okafor (2018, p.52) see national integration as "mainly the process of bringing the various peoples of different cultural and social backgrounds together in a given social context or polity for their collective interests and good." Ezeobi, Mbachu and Chukwuji (2019) define national integration as the creation of feeling of oneness where the diversities are recognized and respected by imbibing a sense of nationhood. They further opine that national integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. In a similar vein, Onwuasoanya (2014) defines national integration as the process of creating awareness of a single identity by which people from different socio-economic, political, religious and cultural groups are being identified for the purpose of achieving a national goal. Similarly, to Kaur (2013), national integration refers to a sense of territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties.
Mazrui (1972) identifies five interrelated aspects of national integration as follows:
1. The fusion of norms and cultures (including the sharing of values, mode of expression, lifestyle and a common language);

2. The promotion of economic interdependence
3. The narrowing of the gap between the elite and the masses, the urban and rural areas, rich and poor, etc;
4. The resolution of emergent conflicts;
5. The sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they have undergone some important experiences together.

Based on the foregoing, Ezeobi, Mbachu and Chukwuji (2019, p.222) aver that:

> For national integration to occur in a nation, a significant number of the citizens must develop identification with the nation that supersedes identification with ethnic, cultural or religious groups, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favourable to the display of integrative behaviour among people of different groups.

National Integration in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic entity, with claims of unity in obvious diversity and dichotomy. For decades, the systemic dislocation in the country has defied attempts at resolution. The constituents of the country have failed to co-exist harmoniously. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. Some other countries in Africa share the same lot. Amienyi (2005, p.1) writes that "The problem of social disintegration is so recurrent in Africa that the existence of many of its countries as viable national entities is subject to doubt." He explains that "The threats to national cohesion assume many forms, including ethnic, regional, religious and class cleavages, to name a few."

But, what does national integration mean? This question is necessary because the concept of national integration does not seem to have been properly understood by many development communicators and planners. It can be misconstrued to convey the sense of an Eldorado – that perfect system that is devoid of strife, conflicts and confrontations. Amienyi (2005, p.10) explains that national integration does not mean the absence of tensions or conflicts in a society, in whatever forms they may appear." According to him, "sociologists have well established that tensions and conflicts are the elements that lend dynamism to a system…. Since a society is dynamic, it cannot be devoid of tensions or conflicts. The essence of national integration, therefore, is the establishment of institutions and modalities for the peaceful and satisfactory resolution of the societal conflicts, whatever form they may take: class, ethnic, religious, regional, etc."

Many scholars have attempted to define national integration. John Coleman and Carl Rosberg, cited in Amienyi (2005, p.8), see national integration as "the progressive lessening of ethnic, cultural and regional discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community." To David Smock and Kwamina Bentsi-Echill, national integration is the "development of identification with the national community that supersedes in certain situations more parochial loyalties." (Amienyi, 2005, p.8).

Expatiating on the foregoing, Amienyi (2005, p.8) states that "… for national integration to occur in a nation, a significant number of citizens must develop identification with the national that supersedes identification with the ethnic, cultural or religious group, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favourable to the display of integrative behaviour among people of different groups." This is far from being

realized in Nigeria. Ekanola (2006, p.280) regrets that "Today, rather than integrating into a cohesive community with a common sense of national identity and destiny, citizens of Nigeria are returning more and more to primordial affiliations for identity, loyalty and security." This is unhealthy for national integration, peaceful co-existence and development.

Over the years, the need for national integration and peaceful co-existence has been recognized in Nigeria. The Prime Minister of Nigeria's first republic, the late Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa, observes that "It is self-evident that planning and prosperity can thrive only in conditions of peace and orderliness." (Tafawa-Balewa, 1962, p.31). Also, section 15(1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that, "The motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress." Section 15(2) of the constitution stipulates that "Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited." But some disintegrative elements have perpetuated the systemic dislocation in the country. National integration has remained elusive.

Factors responsible for national disintegration in Nigeria
From the beginning of times, Nigeria has never existed as a perfectly united entity. The sub-units of the country have their different origins, progenitors and ancestors that they pay allegiance to. The disintegration in Nigeria has often been blamed on the amalgamation arrangement of the colonialists in 1914. Ekanola (2006, p.297) concludes that "many of its (Nigeria's) problems stem from its origin as an artificial colonial construct which lumped together a variety of separate peoples." He perceives fragmentation as "a distinct possibility unless its (Nigeria's) citizens can be induced to accept a new sense of national identity, involving a commitment to the survival of the present state as cohesive entity."

Toeing the same line of thought, Benedict Anderson, cited in Ekanola (2006, p.279), writes that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English", "Welsh", or "French." The word "Nigeria" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not." Anderson's claim is, of course, an allusion to the different origins and identities of the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The strong attachments that these ethnic groups have to their ethnic origins heighten national disintegration in the country.

Another factor that makes national integration seemingly impossible in Nigeria is ethnic politics. Politics in Nigeria is played along ethnic and regional lines. The politicians align themselves to their ethnic affiliations and champion ethnic and regional interests. This problem became pronounced when Nigeria was on the verge of political independence. The perceived inequalities, especially in western education and civilization between the North and the South created fears in the supposedly disadvantaged region – the North. In his response to the 1953 motion for independence by 1956, Sir Ahmadu Bello argued:

> As representatives of the people, we from the North feel that in all major issues such as this one, we are duty bound to consult those we represent…. If the Honourable members from the West and the East speak to this motion for their people, I must say here and now, sir, that we from the North have not been given such mandate by our people…. We were late in assimilating western education,

yet within a short time we will catch up with other regions and share their lot. (Ekanola, 2006, p.286).

The foregoing argument by one of the foremost nationalists showed that the stage was set for ethnic political rivalry in Nigeria, shortly before independence. From Bello's position, it is clear that the North preferred colonialism to independence at the time, given its perceived limitations that might impede its favourable participation in national politics. With that development, Nigeria that had almost suppressed the challenges of amalgamation was torn farther apart. That seed of discord planted by the nationalists in Nigeria is still alive and healthy. Contemporary politicians in the country still emphasize and champion ethnic and regional interests. This, as long as it remains the order of the day, will make national integration unattainable in Nigeria.

Religious bigotry is also a factor responsible for national disunity in Nigeria. It was Karl Marx that described religion as the "opium of the masses." This assertion finds obvious expression in the Nigerian situation. From the time of independence to date, Nigeria has recorded numerous religious upheavals that resulted in wanton destruction of lives and properties. These incessant religious conflicts have made religion a disintegrative tool in Nigeria. Kuna (2005, p.2) states that 'Beside their frequency and intensity, the conflicts raise serious questions of the constitution and future of the country as a single nation. More than anything else, these conflicts underscore the role of religion and other particularistic identities – ethnicity and indigienity- in either forging the various constitutive identities within Nigeria into a broader, more inclusive national identity, or in further fragmenting these into smaller sub-national identities." The latter – fragmentation – appears more plausible, given the current trend of religious activities in the country.

The age-long stereotypes against ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are another problem that discourages national integration in the country. The stereotypes are deep-seated derogatory aspersions that are trans-generational in Nigeria. For instance, the Igbos are seen as money lovers; the Yorubas as shrewd and "oil soup" people; the Hausas as unhygienic kola nut eaters and people from Niger Delta as militants. These stereotypes have idiomatic meanings that transcend their literary meanings. They have, therefore, caused mutual distrust and disaffection among the ethnic groups.

The mass media in Nigeria: Integrative or disintegrative tools?
The mass media are the instruments of mass information dissemination such as radio, television, newspaper and magazine. All over the globe, the mass media are regarded as strong agents of socialization. The media can either be agents of national integration or agents of national disintegration. Iredia (2005, p.143) states that "The media have tremendous power. This power can be potentially destructive or constructive, depending on what use is made of it."

It has been noted in this paper that the mass media in Nigeria were integrative elements in the fight for the country's political independence. But at the tail end of the struggle, the same media that brought the nationalists together to pursue the noble national cause tore them farther apart. Well, for the greater part of the struggle, the tremendous power of the media was positively appropriated. Iredia (2005, p.137) observes that "Many researchers confirm that the media of the time were generally patriotic, competent and well informed; they helped

to educate Nigerians about the evils in colonialism and the virtues of independence; they constituted a factor for unity and contributed to national integration." He further explains:

> Not only did the media of the time contribute to uniting all Nigerians in the struggle against colonialism, but they also helped to extract concessions from the colonial authorities and criticized the excesses of the settlers and the local collaborators. Journalists forced the indigenous authorities at that time – such as the traditional authorities in Northern Nigeria – to be accountable to their communities for their actions and to adopt a less oppressive line.

The pre-independence media in Nigeria were interested in the general well-being of the citizens. They were objective as well as constructive in their reportage and criticism. Before the game changed, the pre-independence media in Nigeria were agents of national integration. They were able to unite Nigerians from different regions and ethnic groups to sing the same song of national unity and champion the same national interest. Then, the media were not established by selfish individuals and groups to pursue their selfish agenda. Considering the early pre-independence activities, one can boldly state that the media can serve as agents of national integration and development in Nigeria. However, the latter days of the struggle for independence in Nigeria and the experiences in some other countries in Africa show that the mass media have not always been integrative in Africa. Some development communication scholars have blamed the media for national disintegration in Africa and even beyond.

Amienyi (2005, p.14) writes that "the attempts to use the mass media to forge the sense of nationhood in African, Asian and Latin American countries have been largely frustrating. The mass media have continued to play the role of the devil's advocate throughout Africa." The researcher regrets that "Since independence till now, they (mass media) have continued to contribute significantly to the disintegration of African societies." This means that the mass media have been used to preach disunity in Africa. It is now he who pays the piper that calls the tune. Now, very wealthy individuals in Nigeria established media organizations in the country to project and pursue their political interests. Their personal interests may not even support national unity and integration. The divergences in the political interests of the owners and operators of the media in Nigeria have made it very difficult for the media in the country to collectively champion national interest, as it was the case in the early days of the struggle for the country's political independence.

Inordinate political ambition and struggle for power pitched the press against national integration in Nigeria. Since ethnic and regional media emerged in Nigeria as products of political misunderstanding, the press in the country has always been anti national integration. Close to independence, the pro-Southern press became very impatient and vigorously challenged the Northern elements, who were seen as possible impediment to the independence dream. Then, the Northern region did not have its own press to represent its interest and tell its story. It was the development that gave birth to the establishment of the pro-Northern press, including the New Nigerian Newspaper, Gaskiya Tafi Kabo and Radio Television Kaduna. The aim was to enable the north fight back and project its regional interest. "In this way, the seeds of mutual suspicion and discord were sown. Since then, the press has always played a significant role in dividing Nigerians along North/South and East/West lines…." (Iredia, 2005, p.138). Iredia further notes that "After independence, the

role of the mass media has on occasion been harmful to national unity. Indeed, the prospect of independence badly shook the foundations of national peace and integration which had been laid when all Nigerians were united in the struggle against colonialism." These evil seeds are still the bane of the country today. Nigeria can rise above the level of its media. This is because Nigerians have learnt to blindly trust and depend on the media for information. Those who get more information from the media are opinion leaders in Nigeria villages. The political polarization of Nigeria makes Nigerians to choose the media they read, view or listen to based on their ethnic affiliations and interests. So, the major problem confronting national integration in Nigeria is mass media disintegration as well as misuse. Until this riddle is resolved, national integration in Nigeria will remain elusive.

Re-directing the Nigerian mass media to achieve national integration
Some efforts have been made to ensure that the mass media in Nigeria play positive roles in the country. One example of such attempts is the 1987 report of the Political Bureau. The report entrusted the mass media with functions like:
- Contributing to efforts to tackle underdevelopment, especially in rural areas;
- Contributing to efforts to combat tribalism, regionalism, and corruption and promote responsible governance, such as to guarantee economic self-sufficiency and the fair distribution of wealth;
- Campaigning for the appointment of competent, devoted and honest individuals to posts of responsibility;
- Promoting the unity of the Nigeria nation and combating division, hatred, sectionalism and religious intolerance;
- Conducting civic education campaigns through the mass media and working to ensure respect for the rights and duties of citizens;
- Encouraging dialogue and the exchange of ideas;
- Creating socio-political conditions which would enable people to watch over their interests more effectively;
- Bridging the communication gap between town and country. (Iredia, 2005, p.139).

Iredia (2005, p.139) explains that:
> In support of the Political Bureau, the national mass communication policy emphasizes the need to promote "the positive aspects of our national values, our image, our unity and our stability," to campaign for national unity and integration, in particular by publishing objective and balanced analyses on issues of national interest. The press is also expected to promote a Nigeria national consciousness and emergence of a just, humane and self-reliant society.

This paper advocates a stronger mass communication policy in Nigeria and a well articulated control mechanism in the system. The policy should specify the modalities for establishing media organizations and how mass communication should be conducted in the country. This is not another way of censoring or suppressing the media, but the media should be made to emphasize the points that bind the sub-units of the country rather than the ones that separate

them. It is not just any kind of thing that should be dished out to the Nigeria public in the name of mass communication. The enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria does not give room for senseless radicalism and endless filibustering.

Journalism is a noble profession. It is not for quacks. It has ethics that should be strictly adhered to by journalists and media operators. But this has not always been the case in Nigeria. The house style of a media organization does not substitute for the professional ethics of journalism. The house style should, in fact, be in line with the ethics of the profession. As a result of the unethical practices in media circles in Nigeria, some communication scholars wonder if the press in the country is actually the Fourth Estate of the Realm or "Fourth Estate of the Wreck." The high level of corruption in the country's media is a testimony to this. Ndolo (2011, p.7) notes that "there is a high level of corruption in the media. Journalists demand money before they write stories or give coverage. They collect "sandwich", extort gifts and gratifications either directly or indirectly all in attempts to influence news judgment. We now witness a lot of "cash and carry" or "Cajun-pepper" journalism. For the same reason they become chatter boxes and sycophantic megaphones of government." This irresponsibility in the mass media should be reversed for the press to be re-directed to realize national integration in Nigeria.

The rot in the Nigeria system accounts for the misuse of the press and the disintegrative tendencies of the media in the country. Akinfeleye (2003), cited in Ndolo (2011, p.7) observes:

> A nation that is socially responsible both in concept, structure, ideology and governance, its press would tend to be responsible in their practice…. But on the other hand, a nation that is socially irresponsible, its journalists would be contaminated with irresponsible instincts and thus would practice irresponsible journalism, sensationalism, fatherhood bias outright lies, propaganda journalism, and unethical practice which if not quickly checked may lead the Fourth Estate of the Realm to metamorphose into the Fourth Estate of the Wreck.

Part of this problem results from the ill-training of journalists in Nigeria. Many journalists in the country lack the requisite professional training to effectively function as newsmen. This is partly because some of the journalism training institutions and departments of mass communication in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria are not adequately equipped with manpower and facilities to train journalists. Ndolo (2011, p.7) regrets that "There is a decline of professionalism- media owners are not interested in adding value to their human capital so, more often than not, those who should be in training are now trainers. Moreover, since media owners don't want to remunerate well they employ quacks." Journalists in Nigeria should be properly trained. If this is done, the professionals will know that their professional reputation is at stake. They will not like anything to damage their image and that of their media organizations. But a quack has nothing to fear. He is just in the media to make ends meet; not to make a career.

Journalism education curriculum in Nigeria should emphasize peace journalism. The trainees should be taught how to maintain and improve the precarious peace in the country. Nigeria is not at war. So, journalists in Nigeria should not be unnecessarily aggressive to unduly heighten tensions in the country. Peace building strategies and conflict resolution approaches should be prominently featured in journalism education in Nigeria. There are

issues to handle with caution. Such issues include ethnicity, religion, gender, diseases and handicaps. Politics has also become very controversial in the country. The politicians are touchy, especially when the press fails to sing their praises. Journalism trainees should be taught how to tread with caution when handling such matters.

The mass media play various functions in the society. But the one that is of interest here is the socialization function of the mass media. Ebeze (2002, p.275) writes that "The mass media help to unify society and increase social cohesion by upholding and teaching a broad base of common social norms, values and collective experiences." The media in Nigeria can return Nigerians to the path of national unity by socializing the people to imbibe and project national ideals.

Creation of integrative tendency (behaviour) is paramount to the attainment of national integration in Nigeria. The concept of integrative behaviour means the readiness of individuals or groups to work in an organized fashion for common purposes and to behave in a manner conducive to the achievement of those purposes (Abernetty, 1969). "It is essentially the process whereby diverse groups or individuals interlock their communication habits, share meaning, learn to predict each other's behaviour and coordinate each other's action" (Amienyi 1991, p.33).

The media should design programmes that will create integrative tendency among Nigerians. This will metamorphose into a sense of national unity and identity the will eventually over shadow and subordinate parochial ethnic and regional identities and loyalties. Stokke (1971), cited in Amienyi (1991, p.31), observes that the ability of the mass media to transcend divisions in a society at many structural levels makes them valuable to the process of national-building. He states that the media can create national identifications and loyalties by identifying and focusing on national symbols, interests, values, and aspirations.

Head has noted that broadcasting draws a nation together in the time of crisis, helps mutually hostile and disparate entities find a common ground and serves the cause of national identity by invoking "national pride and the sense of communal identity" (Amienyi, 1991, p.34). The media should be able to point up national linkages that unite Nigerians and diminish ethnic and regional cleavages. This can be achieved through socialization. There must be re-orientation if the media mean to refocus the minds of Nigerians on national identity rather than regional and ethnic interests and aspirations. Iredia (2005, p.143) cautions that "the mass media should learn to work to eradicate mutual suspicion and hatred both between ethnic, religious and regional groups and between the political parties."

The mass media have the awesome powers to re-orientate Nigerians to learn and support the nation's ideals. In this regard, development communication is necessary. While the media criticize where necessary, they should convey positive developments in the country.

Conclusion

The mass media in Nigeria have not been consistent in promoting national integration in Nigeria. Before Nigeria attained independence, the media in the country were united, worked to unite Nigerians. But the same media parted ways shortly before independence and turned around to divide Nigerians along ethnic and regional lines. Since then, national integration has remained elusive in Nigeria.

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914, without considering the peculiarities of the people has also been blamed for the national

disunity in Nigeria, among other factors. Well, this paper indicates that the media can reversed the trend by refocusing the minds of Nigerian on national identity. To achieve this, the media should forge a common front, once again.

Recommendations
These recommendations are based on the findings of the study.
1. National integration should be included in journalism education in Nigeria.
2. Nigerian journalists should be sensitized by media organizations and the civil society on the need to uphold national integration in journalism practice.
3. Media reports that fuel national disintegration should be sanctioned by relevant regulatory bodies.

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