

Full Length Research Paper

# Many 'sins' of the mass media in Nigeria: A critical appraisal of the media in a decade of nascent democracy

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The thrust of this paper has two foci. First, a critical insight into the media as a political resource in both developing and advanced democracies. This glaringly forms the theoretical anchor for this paper. Secondly, the paper takes a cursory look at the performance of the mass media, within the first decade of civilian rule in Nigeria. The paper, however, infers that hardly do the media hold themselves down to the standards of conduct and decency they set for others. Indeed, one confronts the irony whereby those whose professional preoccupation and social mandate touch on the criticism and scrutiny of others become overtly defensive, aggressive, panicky or retaliatory when they are criticized. The paper recommends a more boisterous media devoid of the well-known impediments for sustainable democracy in the next decade.

**Key words:** Press, mass media, democracy, 'sins', resources.

## INTRODUCTION

*The...press qualifies as one of the many invisible governments. The press is capable of making or destroying governments given appropriate conditions; it can cause war or create conditions for peace. It can promote development or create difficulties in the way of development (cited in Tusa, 1992:16).*

- Kennet Kaunda (1968)

In the extant literature on political communication generally, the mass media is regarded as a political resource. Indeed, this has also been corroborated as cited above by Kennet Kaunda – a long time president of Zimbabwe – no doubt, one of the more common political uses to which the media is put is that of moulding the citizens' perception of political reality in line with the

preferences of the political leadership. This is not unconnected with the fact that leadership groups want to be able to mould the 'political world view' of their citizens. They, as it were want their ideas to be the ruling ideas of their age and society. They are better able to achieve this if, among other things, they have monopoly of control of the mass media in their society. And challengers to this leadership group too will necessarily attempt to prevent the ideas of the leadership from being the ruling ideas. Again, they cannot succeed in this bid if they do not own or control some parts of the mass media unless they have 'faith' in the use of force (Onyeoziri, 1982:2).

The reason why leadership groups want to dominate the political ideas of those they rule is simple. Human beings would normally prefer their freedom to decide how to live their lives, they do not like being ordered about or

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told what to do. Then, suddenly, there comes a group which acquires enough power to constitute itself into something called government and begins to tell everybody what to do, how to live their lives and how much of their hard-earned money they should surrender as taxes. The cooperation of people with this kind of imposition cannot be compelled through coercion alone but some special effort in securing citizens' cooperation (Wit, 1953:6-8).

There are at least three ways of securing that cooperation – one is the use of force to compel the cooperation, and the other is the offering of material rewards and incentives in exchange for the people's loyalty. The third is through ideological persuasion, which is, influencing the political ideas of the people, moulding their political reality as part of the attempt to persuade them that the government serves their interest and therefore deserves their support. This strategy is usually the most convenient and stable basis for keeping the loyalty of the citizens. And the mass media has come to be one of the most important instruments through which those in power seek to influence the political thinking of their subjects and also persuade them to see the government as legitimately serving the public interests and therefore deserving of public support (Ojo, 2003:829). They do this in a number of ways: (a) they deliberately distort the information they disseminate to their audience, the citizens. (b) they knowingly exclude some vital pieces of information, especially if those pieces are likely to lead the citizens into drawing a conclusion that the leadership does not favour (c) they can remain simply quiet over some crucial issues where the population is thirsting for information; and (d) they seek to divert the peoples attention from very important issue, by crowding the people's mind with trivialities. They can couple these with trying to prevent opposition elite groups from acquiring control of some mass media for fear that those media could be used to neutralize the government's political control efforts (Ojo, 2003a:829).

Government groups use the media not only to portray the government as legitimate but also to persuade the public that what the government defines as the public interest should be accepted by everybody as such. They also use the media to advance their particularized narrow interest while clothing that interest with the label of the public interest. They do this more effectively where they have monopoly control of the mass media. Ideally, elites in power desire to have complete control on the media, but in practice they are not always able to achieve that degree of control. Non-governmental elite groups also desire such a control to be able to present to the public a view of the political reality that is different from the one the government wants to force on the public. To the extent that they are able to do this effectively they may succeed in discrediting the power wielders thereby preparing the way for the displacement of those power

wielders (Onyeoziri, 1982:3).

Besides, these two basic interests other interests of a party or ethnic nature may also use their ownership and control of the media to champion their own narrow interests while discrediting those of their opponents. Whether such ethnic/party interests are pro-government or anti-government depends on what side of the divide they find themselves. All told there are a variety of self-serving political interests which the ownership and control of the media can be used to serve too. But there are public interest political goals, which the media can be used to serve. Such goals include the following: information to the public, public enlightenment, social criticism and exposing governmental arbitrariness, national integration and political education. But the more the media is used to serve the narrow self-serving group of interests, the less able they can be used to serve the other group of public interests. For instance, if those who control the media use them to champion ethnic and party interests, then the capacity of the media to promote national interest goals will suffer; if they use the media to build legitimacy for those in power (the government) then the media cannot perform well as instruments for social criticism. If the media are used to distort information to uphold a preferred view of reality, then the ability of the media to provide the public with accurate information for intelligent decisions will suffer. If the media are used to make people think what the government wants them to think, the media will blunt the edge of the people's political consciousness. The only guarantee that the media will be used to promote the public interest is to prevent their being owned and controlled only by the group in power.

Be that as it may, if the group in power has monopoly control of the media, it would usually bend that instrument to its purposes rather than the public interest. One very common practice is for those in power to equate the public interest with keeping themselves in power and then using the media to zealously pursue that goal.

It is imperative to note further that part of the democracy we credit countries of the Western Europe and North America can be traced to is the fact that in those societies, governments do not have monopoly control of the media. The fact that the government does not have any unilateral right to construct unchallenged whatever reality it likes, forces it to operate with restraint and tolerance, and this is all what liberal democracy is all about. It is nothing other than governing within a framework of limits and restraints, the limits and restraints imposed by the preference of the citizens rather than that of governing elite. On the other hand, countries where governments have monopoly control of the media are always tempted towards excesses and arbitrariness (Onyeoziri, 1982:4).

Nigeria is neither here nor there. If the successive governments have not achieved monopoly control of the

media, it is not because of any fundamental commitment they have towards tolerance and democracy. After all, in the words of Onyeoziri (1982:4), “a government that readily uses the media supposedly the tax payer’s money to advance narrow partisan interests is not likely to care very much about public opinion or the public interest. Rather it is Nigeria’s federal and multi-party system that has created structural obstacles to those in power who would want monopoly control and domination of the media. In this regard, the presence of many parties and government-owned media is helpful for preventing domination in one set of hands.

But the proliferation of government and party-owned media is not the best arrangement for promoting the public interest. Party and government owned media have the major weakness that it is easy not to take them seriously because of their interests as even when they are saying the most serious things. This is why the country should be moving in the direction of non-partisan independent mass media. These kinds of media have a greater legitimate claim for promoting the public interest. This is one reason why a government which aims at total political domination will see those kinds of media as a bigger threat than the government and party owned media.

In the final analysis, the ability of independent and non-partisan mass media to promote the public interest should not be taken for granted. After all, their owners have their own narrow self-serving interests to advance. However, the country will be politically poorer without them. The government may not always listen to them but their role as articulators of alternative political world views, as social critics and as symbols of society’s readiness to check political arbitrariness is a major political asset.

The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to review dispassionately the role of the mass media in Nigeria’s nascent democracy in the last one decade. To achieve this aim the paper is divided into a number of sections. With a profound theoretical exploration of the mass media as a political resource, the paper proceeds to a brief analysis of the roles of the mass media (both print and electronic) in a polity. The third part dwells on the operational problems of the media within the context of their existential realities vis-à-vis underdeveloped society in all ramifications. The paper infers that for the mass media to be a catalyst to democratic sustenance, media practitioners, owners and the state needs to brace up for the challenges of the future in another decade of democratic experiment in Nigeria.

## **ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY**

The mass media in virtually all democratic systems generally is regarded as the ‘fourth estate of the realm’.

The other three estates are the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature. As I have argued elsewhere, the mass media educate the public on state affairs, disseminate information on the activities of the government – which are most often secretive in third world countries – expose wrongdoing, including corrupt practices which impacts negatively on economic development, and keep the government on its toes, all to ensure ‘accountability, transparency, probity and integrity’ (Ojo, 1999, 2000, 2003). These virtues are well known norms of democratic systems across all regions and climes of the world. Further, it is the role of the mass media in a democratic setting to keep the citizenry well informed. Unless citizens have adequate and accurate information on all issues and problems confronting them; they will be unable to take enlightened decisions on them. Without such information, they will be unable to comprehend the day-to-day workings of the government and to participate in same. Nor will they be able to hold those in authority responsible for their acts of omission and commission. In other words, in the absence of full truthful information, they can perform none of the functions that citizens have to perform in a democracy. Secondly, the mass media can act as a channel between the people and the authorities. The media may convey to the authorities, the grievances, the needs, the problems, the hopes and aspirations of the people and the responses of the authorities may in turn be conveyed by the media to the people. The media can thus make up the major deficiency of indirect or representative democracy; the lack of a direct dialogue between the people and the authority. Third, because of the role they perform, the media can also act as a day-to-day parliament of the people, which may be more attentive than the actual parliament. Fourthly, the media can perform the task of the watchdog of the people’s interests. The media can expose the corruption, waste, inefficiency and negligence on the part of the authorities. Through investigative journalism, scams and scandals can be unearthed, anti-social activities exposed and implementation of the policies and programmes monitored and pursued. The mass media can thus act as an ombudsman on behalf of the people almost every day (Sawant, 2002:9-11). In the words of Olukotun (2009:56), of the media’s several celebrated, edifying roles in society, two stand out namely that of an agenda setter, highlighting issues germane to overall development and progress, as well as that of an interlocutor in which the media take on the role of an informed partner in social and political dialogue, responding to questions in an interactive way.

Considering the nexus between the mass media and democracy the *Freedom of Expression Community*, identifies three glaring roles of the media viz:

a. They inform citizens in matters of public policy and

politics by presenting and debating alternatives;  
 b. They act as watchdog by covering political, economic and corporate corruption as well as other forms of abuses of power or inept policies;  
 c. The media helps empower citizens to be aware and vigilant of civil and political rights and how to exercise these rights (The *Nigeria Freedom of Expression Community's* advertorial in *Tell*, September 20, 2004:47).

In the same vein, Akinfeleye (2003:31) highlighted imperatives of the press in sustainable democracy as including but not limited to the following;

- Common carriers of ideas;
- Representative picture of the society;
- Truth and meaning of truth in a democracy;
- Classification of the values and goals of the society.
- Uncover and never to cover-up;
- Make the government accountable to the people;
- Inform, educate and entertain the people;
- Promote the concept of accountability, integrity, honesty, fairness and equity;
- Give voice to the voiceless in the society;
- Society Agenda-setter;
- Forging National Unity and Integration;
- Promotion of society cultures, and the moral value systems and;
- Promotion of sustainable National Interest at all times.

With the aforementioned roles of the mass media, one only needs to add that they help to build and sustain a participatory, transparent and accountable governance structure. This is manifest in the sense that "Nigerian press is by far the most outspoken, competitive, largest and freest in the African continent" as observed by a one-time Nigeria's military president - General Ibrahim Babangida (cited in Akinfeleye, 2003:32). This section of the paper will be incomplete without taking cursory note of divergence views vis-à-vis media role in a democratic polity. More so, that the nature and form of government only condition the extent to which the roles are performed from one polity to the other. A sample suffices to buttress this point. Nana Konadu Aggeman Rawlings, former First Lady of Ghana, was unequivocal when she noted that:

*The state-owned media are supposed to support the government, because they are paid from government resources (cited in Temin and Smith 2002:585 also cited in Ojo, 2006:4).*

On the contrary, Kofi Annan one-time Secretary General, United Nations, also speaking on the media said inter alia "... The media must actively seek the truth in the public's behalf and be free to tell it as they see it", (cited in Temin and Smith, 2002:585 also cited in Ojo 2004:4). The snag, however, is that the mass media in Nigeria suffers a lot of

limitations which we term 'sins' in this paper. It is to those operational hindrances that we now turn to.

### **'SINS' OF MEDIA IN NASCENT DEMOCRACY**

The primary focus of this segment of the paper bothers on the negative roles of the media within the first decade of democracy. As watchdog of the society the media seem not to have been able to effectively watch it. Whereas, if not properly managed, the mass media may eventually become agent of destabilization rather than integration in a plural and deeply divided society like Nigeria more so, with a fledging democracy and convoluting federal system. This is not unconnected with the fact that where the state is underdeveloped, the media cannot transcend and grow beyond the society. This has been pointedly put by Akinfeleye thus:

*A nation that is socially responsible in concept, structure, ideology and governance, its press would tend to be responsible in their practice of the profession of journalism. But on the other hand a nation that is socially irresponsible, its journalist would be contaminated with irresponsible instincts and thus would practice irresponsible journalism, sensationalism, bias, outright lies, propaganda journalism and unethical practices which if not quickly checked may lead the fourth estate of the realm to metamorphose into the fourth estate of the wreck (Akinfeleye, 2003 also cited in Tell, September 20, 2004:2).*

For instance in 2008, the International Press Centre, a media resource centre in Lagos, commissioned a report on media coverage of three significant issues: development, democratic institutions and governance. Using four national media, the *Guardian*, the *Tribune*, *Champion* and *Daily Trust*, the centre reviewed the coverage of the issues in November 2008 and came to the conclusion that matters of development took the backseat (Adebisi, 2009:56). The report confirmed widespread perception that the media pays more attention to governance than development issues. It found that the four media devoted 52% of their attention to governance, leaving 28% for development and 20% for democratic institutional issues. In fact, in terms of space allocation 86% went to governance while a paltry 15% was devoted to development-related issues (Adebisi, 2009:50). For instance, 68.04% of the stories in the month under review were sourced from government while expert opinion formed the basis of 4%. The man in the street provided information in 6.35% of the stories (Adebisi, 2009). With this kind of bias, it is obvious that social issues that affect developments are bound to suffer in the hands of the media. This is obviously not a healthy development ordinarily, the media should have been

praised for its attention to governance, but section 22 of the 1999 constitution obligates them to monitor governance and hold the government accountable to the people. It states "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people" (FGN, 1999 Constitution).

It is important to note that the case for the shift in the focus of the media is made by the urgent need to reverse the backwardness of the country. The 2008 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country fact sheet tells this more succinctly. Out of the 177 countries ranked by the world body on Human Development Index Nigeria is at the bottom 158 (Adebiyi, 2009; *National Life*, September 13, 2008:8). Its life expectancy is 46.5%, adult literacy rate of 15 and above is 69.1% combined primary and secondary school enrolment ratio is 50.2% while the per capita income is \$1,128. Poverty level is still high as evident in high infant mortality rate, unemployment and low access to health care. Social infrastructures are in ruins and yearn for restoration. The point that has been made is that in the face of these challenges the media need to play more of agenda setting role by highlighting these social needs and committing government to take its responsibility more seriously. Take the issue of the provision for the power sector in the 2009 Appropriation Bill. Government proposed to spend almost a trillion naira to cover power generation, including the completion of the National Integrated Power projects, transmission and distribution. The government expects that this investment will produce 6,000 MW by December 2009. But the bill also contains two billion naira (N2b) for the maintenance of generators for ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). Interestingly, the latter provision on generators which is for government officials and offices got more headlines and editorial commentaries than the former which is the generality of Nigerians.

Be that as it may, one major reason the media pay huge attention to governance is because of the dominance of government in the affairs of state and the impact of its activities on the people. Because government controls state resources and determines its allocation, virtually every section of the society relies on it for sustenance. It is not only the largest employer of labour; it is also the biggest source of patronage. Indeed it is safe to say that outside government nothing happens. Businesses, even the big ones, queue up for big government contracts and patronage, and the media themselves are not immune from this as for a long time they relied on it for advertisement revenue. Two major and related reasons: the commercial interests of media owners and their crusading pretension. Although, the media derives its freedom and establishment from section 39 of the

constitution which grants every Nigerian the right to receive and impart ideas, the drive for profit has since become the major consideration for the establishment of media houses. This drive is manifested in several practices of the media which in fact violate the ethics of journalism. The most abused ethics is the publication of advertisement as news. This abuse has taken a more monstrous form, the killing of stories for commercial reasons.

In the last five years, the editorial content of the prosperous media has not only shrunk profoundly it has also lost prominence to advertisement. The situation has become so ridiculous that the commercial departments of media houses not only sit in editorial conference but also determine editorial inputs including headlines or even lead stories. This is how mastheads, the symbols and pride of newspapers, have lost prominence to the extent that they are now overshadowed by advertiser's logo called wraparound (Adebiyi, 2009:56).

Explaining why the media in Nigeria at times do perform undemocratic roles, Dare (2006:82), was of the view that "these are not best of times for the Nigerian press. The inflation and declining purchasing power and disarticulated economy have turned the press into an industry in distress" One consequence of the economic down turn is that as at now the combined circulation of all newspapers barely reaches half a million in a country of close to 140 million people. If we add the circulation figures of magazines and other publications, to those of newspapers, they barely hit the one million mark. *The Punch*, a privately owned newspaper is perhaps the most widely read newspaper and its print run is between 60,000 and 80,000 copies per day. *The Guardian*, a favourite of the intellectuals and respected for its independent, sober views, had a print run in 2006 of between 50,000 and 80,000 copies per day other newspapers, such as the privately owned *Nigerian Tribune*, *This Day*, *The Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Nigerian Compass* as well as until recently state-owned *Daily Times* and the *New Nigerian* do less well in circulation terms than the *Punch* and the *Guardian*. The magazine market is dominated by three giants namely: *Tell*, *The News* and *Newswatch* and had circulation figures in 2007 about 40,000, 20,000 and 15,000 respectively (Olukotun, 2009:13).

As in Kenya, Ghana, and much of Africa, publications rise, fall and are sometimes reborn with dizzying regularity. Between 1999 and 2007 several prominent titles such as the *Concord*, *National Interest*, *Tempo*, *The Anchor*, *Post Express* and  *Eko Today* have gone off the streets although one of them *National Interest* was re-launched in February 2005 without much success. It is equally for this reason that Nigerian mass media has fallen into the trap of let-them-pay syndrome (LTP). In this LTP concept truth as the basis of effort and responsible journalism was thrown out and the lure for

overt and covert advertising revenue and brown envelope became the order of the day.

The media are often caught in the very contradictions that they pinpoint, chief among them corruption, ethnicity, political partisanship and ideological narrowness. A recent Washington Post report pinpoints the society-wide nature of corruption when it said:

*Police call it a kolanut, journalists call it the brown envelope and politician call in welfare package whatever the name, the almighty bribe has long lubricated the Nigerian society as it has a few others on earth (cited in Olukotun, 2009:13; Smith, 2007).*

In the same vein, in a special report by *Tell* magazine, entitled "Corruption in the Media", the news magazine reported that *TIME*, the international news magazine, published a story on Nigeria alleging that the Ministry of Information offered foreign journalists about \$400 inducement. The story went on to explore the thriving brown envelop tradition, concluding that "cash-filled envelopes are routinely handed out by government officials, oil companies, banks and just about anyone else giving a press conference" (*Tell*, May 6, 2002). Like *TIME* magazine alleged in its story, it is now the tradition to give 'brown envelope', 'keske', 'communiqué', 'handshake', as bribes are jokingly called by journalists at any function. It does not matter whether the function is called by government ministers, agency, ministry, individual or any private firm. Beyond this it has also become customary for state governors to call different categories of editors together more so, when elections are knocking at the door monthly, to offer them 'keske' so that they can continue to receive good press (*Tell*, May 6, 2001). The special report equally revealed that when Bisi Akande, was governor of Osun State (1999-2002), he cried out about the blacking-out of his government's activities for refusing to pay journalists in Osogbo the state capital a monthly stipend like his predecessor. Akande, said few weeks after he assumed office a voucher reached his table for the payment of journalists. He soon learnt that each journalist in the state was on the pay roll of the state government. The governor put a stop to it. That stop irked the journalists who refused to report any achievement of his administration (*Tell*, May 6, 2002).

Furthermore, to cover up their thirst for profit, the media have appropriated the genuine crusading spirit of their founding fathers, ensuring that they give abundant prominence to the failings of government. It is true that government over the years have not met the yearnings of the people. And the media have a constitutional responsibility to raise this issue for public discourse. But it is obvious that the media have taken undue advantage of this to feather their commercial interest. Since government by the conduct of its officials is less credible, the general assumption in the media is that the people

perceive government as never-do-well from which only negative things can come from. This has prompted the deepening of the concept of negativity of news as the only saleable commodity. This is why ever in their excessive coverage of governance what they look for is the negatives in the belief that that is what the people want to read (Adebiyi, 2009).

This misdirection of the crusading spirit is compounded by the character of the crusaders who are not only poorly trained and poorly paid but also largely inexperienced. It is an embarrassing fact that several media houses hardly pay their staff regularly and it is a notorious fact too that many people in the newsroom today are lacking in experience and exposure. Olukotun (2009a) puts it more succinctly thus:

*As at February 2008 various newspapers, state-owned and private, are owing their staff several months of salary, ranging from three months to 12 months as a result of the distress in that sector of the economy (Olukotun, 2009a: 13).*

One senior journalist observed correctly that:

*The Nigerian journalist goes out to work, armed minimally despites today's electronic age. Side by side with his foreign counterpart he is equipped like a stone age communicator amidst the clusters of sophisticated gadgetry presided over by his Japanese equivalent. Under these conditions, the Nigerian journalist is an unsung hero, deplorable low wages and delayed salary payments are common (cited in Olukotun, 2009: 13)*

The concomitant effect of lack of training, deficient skill, coupled with requisite exposure is reckless sensationalism of news coverage, features, editorial and even placement of pictures. For instance, how does one professionally explain headlines such as: 'Rivers of blood' (*The Sun*, June, 8, 2006), other examples as noted by Akinfeleye in his inaugural lecture includes (a) Islamization of Zamfara: A Reality, (b) OPC vs Ijaw Youth claims five (c) Zamfara governor dares Obasanjo (d) Yoruba and IJAW in ethnic Violence (e) Odua Republic Imminent – Igbo should ask for Biafra – OPC chieftain, among others (Akinfeleye, 2003).

Nonetheless, some journalists behave as if the press have no responsibility and obligation whatsoever to the state. Whereas, each of us owes duties and allegiance to the state because it is the state which defines and sustains our rights through the laws of the country. And it demands our loyalty because through the armed forces and the police, among others, it alone can defend us from invasion or anarchy. It is for this reason that Lord Annan, the distinguished British academic who was the chairman of the official enquiry into broadcasting on the United Kingdom in March 1977, emphasized the onus on the

powerful media, radio and television thus:

*... Broadcasters owe a duty to the state, broadcasters should remember that they owe a duty to the reputation of politicians ... statements which discredit not merely the reputation of politician but the whole concept of government without which a society cannot exist, destroy public confidence in the nation in a peculiarly poisonous way (cited in Tusa, 1992: 12)*

This destructive role is not unconnected with the jaundice perception of media function by the journalists who erroneously believe that they can operate as a law court trying politicians and other public office holders. Thereby, taking on the role of another realm of the estate, that is, the Judiciary. For Akinfeleye (2003), the media is and cannot be court of law. Adjudication is not part of the constitutional role of the press. "Therefore, let us leave the aspect to the other realm – the court of the land. Our role is to watchdog, and check-on, gate-keep to uncover and never to cover-up." No wonder, the media is more personality focused than issues. This is indeed antithetical to positive media role in a democratic setting. The implication of such a media which runs down politicians is simply contaminating public perception of the politicians and when this is persistently done government runs into serious legitimacy crisis (Ojo, 2003: 103; Popoola, 2003: 92-100). No doubt, this may eventually result into what Ake (1988:28-33) calls governmental instability. Thus media disposition may make the populace to prefer military autocracy to civil rule.

Moreover where national interest is not uppermost in the mind of media practitioners, media roles become dysfunctional in a nascent democracy like Nigeria. In a developing society the media needs to be ever conscious not to truncate the process of national integration, cum the safety of lives and properties. Irresponsible journalism can step-up the tempo of irredentist claims in a plural and ethnically divided society like Nigeria. Just as it can result into an external invasion too. Two examples readily come to mind. During the Nigeria/Cameroun Bakassi border dispute the Nigerian media was unable to discern between mere reportage and national interest. Classified documents that were to be used for the defense of Nigeria's national interest in International Court of justice (ICJ) were published with reckless abandonment. Secondly, any time ethno-religious conflict between and among ethnic groups occur, the way and manner headlines are cast usually wear the toga of incitement. A media like this is indeed dangerous to the state. It is not unconnected with the dangers interest in media recklessness that warranted the delay in passing the Freedom of Information Bill by the national assembly.

It is however apt to conclude this section of the paper vis-a-vis the danger of uncontrolled media with the position of William H. Thomas, former editor of the New

York Times who noted that the one thing the press cover more poorly today than anything else is the press itself" (cited in Akinfeleye, 2003:27).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The observable problems of the mass media in Nigeria are of great concern to media scholars, practitioners and policy makers too. The highlighted 'sins' of the media can be summaries in the words of Olukotun thus 'planted stories, spin, commercially driven, fiction writing, partisan driven and elegantly served nonsense masquerading as informed commentary have become the order of the day'. Politicians long caricatured by a hostile media or denied the right of reply are forced to state their cases in paid advertisements, found their own newspapers or television stations or simply carry on with their work hoping that orchestrated bad press will not count (Olukotun, 2009b:56). The gargantuan size of the media can only be translated to political advantage if a number of tips noted as follows are taken adequate cognizance of. First, media practitioners need to be trained and retrained on regular basis. If knowledge is not updated on regular basis the media and the crop of practitioners as we have them today may not be able to adapt and compete favourably with their contemporaries in the globalised 21<sup>st</sup> century world. The essence of the training will definitely take care of professional lapses like sensationalism and irresponsible journalism that is at variance with both national interest and national security.

Secondly, public office holders and politicians equally need to develop thick skin against reckless media criticisms. Over time, media practitioners will be mindful of their ethics and redress through internal mechanisms rather than state clampdowns which has been the way successive governments had been harassing the media once in a while.

Thirdly, Nigeria requires an investigative oriented media, rather than one that is merely rascally and corrupt. It is an investigative oriented media that can at best be transformed into a development focused one. This is where the Guild of Editors – Senior cadre journalists - should be a role model for their younger ones. Finally, journalists working in government owned media need to be more attuned to the ethics of their profession. This is because they are ready tools in the hands of the governing elite to turn their media to their megaphones and in most cases completely alienated the opposition elite.

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