

Notes on Media and the Nigerian conflicts

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Nigeria has Africa's largest population, a population of 120 million people, and more than 350ⁱ different tribal based ethnic groups scattered around the country's 36 states. The country has been affected by larger independence conflicts as the Biafra war and for decades, the country has been the scene for numerous communal conflicts. The communal rural conflicts have their root causes in issues like ownership to land, water, agricultural opportunities and socio-economic differences. "Today most riots that take place in villages across the country are described in the international media as religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims because many of the inter-ethnic conflicts also take place along a religious divide. While most conflicts are rooted and triggered by other causes, they often end up with religion being a "rallying cry" during the conflicts. As the number of riots exploded with the election of a democratic government in 1999, many suggested that the riots were provoked by parts of the former military regime, wanting to destabilize the new and quite weak democratic government. We shall, however look a bit closer on the reasons for the increasing number of communal conflicts.

History

While Nigeria in 1960 gained its independence as a country, the area consisted in the last half of 19th century of three different British colonial territories. One protectorate centred around Lagos, one, which originally was divided into two - the Niger Coast Protectorate or later the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria - and finally the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.

During the first decade of the 20th century, the British colonial rule decided to amalgamate the 3 protectorates into one administrative unit with the British governor of the Northern region on top. "The move was informed not by a desire or a quest on the part of the British to create a Nigerian nation-state. The concern was still with the old quest for efficiency and rationality in colonial administration"ⁱⁱⁱ The Northern part of the country had indirect rule at the level of local governments, while the Southern part was managed through a relatively westernized, modern central bureaucracy.

Through several constitutional revisions up until the 1954-constitution a political system was established with a centralised House of Representatives and similar political institutions for the 3 regions plus the separated capital Lagos. The new system lasted until Nigeria's independence in 1960. It was developed to give a strong centralised power and a politics of delegated fields of responsibility to the regions, out of which the North was bigger than the others were all together.

By the end of the British colonial rule, the area of Nigeria had a multiplicity of diverse ethnic groups, diverse cultures and diverse stages of development. Before the colonization, these groups had had their own governance systems but no nation state.^{iv} The old governance systems were ignored by the British rulers until the constitutional changes began in the 20th century and integrated parts of the traditional indirect rule in the political system in particularly the North. However, not before the 1950'es the native Nigerians got more than an advisory role.

Up through the century and particularly after Second World War the many tribal, local and regional interests became politically active and often rebellious. While Nigeria in 1959 was preparing for its independence, it became clear that in order to provide for the rights of the minorities at local state level or below it was necessary to write their rights into the constitution. Below the regional level, states and even smaller entities were formed along ethnic lines. Today the country has abolished the regions and instead established 36 states and not less than 774 local governments to give space to the many tribes and ethnic minorities.^v

However, in spite of catering for numerous local entities since the 1960 independence, the country has had larger conflicts like in Western Nigeria, the Biafran struggle for secession as well as the Ogoni revolt. Further it has had numerous communal inter ethnic conflicts.^{vi}

3 levels of potential conflict have co-existed since the independence. At one level there is still in the country a clear distinction between North and South with North being the poorer, more rural and predominantly Muslim part of the country, dominated by the Fulani and Hausa people. The South is predominantly Christian, has a complex tribal structure, rich oil resources and a Westernized business sector.

At another level, the multitude of tribes and ethnic groups interested in keeping their own independence has posed a threat to the coherence of the country. The Biafra war from 1967-70 was a result of the Ibo people's desire for first extended self rule and when this was rejected by the federal military regime then for national independence. The conflict started, when Ibo's who were known as tradesmen and entrepreneurs in North Nigeria were persecuted and exposed to killings from the Fulani and Hausas.^{vii} Later the 8 million Ibo's in the South East Nigeria tried to expel the 5 million non-Ibo's from the area of Biafra^{viii}, but had to surrender to the federal troops in 1970 after the killing of around 2 million people.

At a third level more than 350 tribes each with their ethnic and linguistic characteristics as well as general social dissatisfaction has posed a risk for communal conflicts across the country.

N. K. Obas^{ix} describes the situation right after Nigeria's independence by quoting Chief Obafemi Awolowo from James Coleman's "Nigeria, Background to Nationalism"^x:

"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 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not."

Already in 1948, one of the leading members of the Northern Peoples Congress, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, raised the question:

"I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial and it ends outside this Chambers. The Southern tribes who are now pouring into the North in ever increasing numbers, and are more or less domiciled here, do not mix with the Northern people... and we in the North look upon them as invaders" (Coleman 1964)

The threat from the Northern region right after independence to pull out of the federation and the three-year long civil war with Biafra was significant signs of the vulnerable national unity. N.K. Obas, however, describes the defeat of Biafra as a clear notion of the indivisibility of Nigeria.

It is quite interesting to see, how consciously the various civil and military governments have tried to work with the potential internal conflicts while keeping the nation together.

At one level, the imagination of a common nation has been nurtured. A new imposing federal capital is built in Abuja – right in the centre of the country. Football stadiums, airports and other apparent signs of national strength have been constructed. The minister responsible for culture and media works with the title Minister for Information and National Orientation, and the national public media are under constant expansion though the budget allocations are limited.

While the imagination of a nation has been stimulated, a Federal Character Commission has been established with a view to ensuring equity among the nation's constituent units. The commission has suggested to the government a set of guidelines providing for an equal share of federal appointments and amenities to all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory – meaning that no single group will become dominant also in federal appointments.

The number of states and local government areas has multiplied between 1967 and 1996. Strong demands from still more local ethnic and political groups to maintain their degree of self-rule within the nation state was put to the succeeding federal governments. To reduce the risk for new regions breaking away from Nigeria to become independent countries and to reduce tensions between the many local ethnic groups and the national government a system of smaller federal states was established.

N.K. Obasi is certain that "...creation of states has given a measure of autonomy to the minority ethnic groups that were hitherto victims of discrimination and selective development; thus making them feel politically reassured and secure within the Nigerian family."^{xi}

Besides decentralising political power, the governments have established a system for mixing the various ethnic groups through inciting them to work together across the country. One significant scheme has been the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), which since 1973 has involved hundred thousands of the younger generation

"...to work in states other than their states of origin and away from their geographical, ethnic and cultural backgrounds; organise them to work in groups that are as representative of the country as possible; and, to expose them to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming, at first hand, the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups."^{xii}

Likewise, Nigerian law required the army to recruit equal quotas from among the states and to mix recruits in units.

The Media up to 1999 and Present 4th Democratic Republic

The Nigerian media have undergone significant changes – first after the end of the British colonial rule, then during the various civilian governments who have tried to decentralise the public media, and finally under military regimes, who generally have tried to grasp a centralised control.

In 1932, the BBC Empire Service established its first Radio in Nigeria – primarily to propagate colonial views and to advance British commercial interests in the country.^{xiii} Up to and after the independence the regional governments had established regional radio and television services in all three major regions, and in 1962, the federal government started the first federal television service in Lagos.

Through the succeeding military regimes, many of the newly established state governments started their own radio and television services. The federal and state broadcasting services worked together through the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria. By 1976, the country had widespread state-based radio and television services, building the popular image of belonging to individual states, and providing for national cooperation when needed. The period up to then was on one hand marked by extensive freedom for the states to run their own media, but the state broadcasters on the other hand had a pretty weak coverage of the national issues as such.

In 1976, the military government put a halt on the state-run television stations – officially as a matter of saving resources – and put them all under the umbrella of the federal television service - NTA, which soon had local TV-stations in all 19 states.

The second civilian government (1979-1983) marked the end of NTA's monopoly, as state governments – particularly those in which the opposition parties ruled - accused the Federal Government of misusing the network for political gains, and the 1979-constitution consequently gave each state its autonomy over its own television stations alongside local federal stations.

For radio, the development had also changed from government to government. In periods the federal radio system FRCN or Radio Nigeria as it more popularly is called was encouraged to establish local stations in each state. During military regimes, all state stations had become part of the federal system. In other periods – particularly under democratically elected federal governments, the state governments were also encouraged to establish each their public stations outside the FRCN-system.

However, the original division of broadcasting in Nigeria based on the three major regions was and is still reflected through the zonal stations.

Radio Nigeria has four zonal stations in Enugu, Lagos, Kaduna and Ibadan, as well as the headquarters in Abuja. Each of the zonal stations broadcast via short wave transmitters across the whole territory of Nigeria in the dominant local language of the zonal station as well as in English and minor minority languages. From Kaduna the languages include Hausa, Fulfude, Kanuri and Nupe. From Enugu Igbo, Tiv, Efik and Izon. From Ibadan Yoruba, Igala, Urhobo and Edo. From Lagos Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The philosophy being that everybody speaking one of the larger local languages will be able to listen to radio in his/her language, no-matter where in the country he/she is. Consequently, each of these radios has correspondents covering the various states in their region plus rest of the country.

The Abuja National station provides news and programmes in Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Gwari, Gabe, Koro, Bassa, Egeura, Gnagna and Gwangara. All stations do broadcast in English, but the philosophy behind the variety of languages broadcasted is a desire to target not only the elite of the country, which understands English, but to be able to educate and inform also the larger poor and illiterate parts of the Nigerian population.

Additionally Radio Nigeria has as a significant part of its new strategy to establish rurally based FM stations across the country and gradually obtain at least one FRCN radio in each state.

Each of the zonal and FRCN-based stations in the various states has partly its own programming, partly national programmes produced by the federal broadcaster.

Besides the public system, a dozen private TV broadcasters and more private radio stations have been established since 1992 – primarily in the South, where the consumer market is strongest. The financially biggest TV-broadcasters are distributing via satellite.

The de-colonialization in 1960 had led to a flourishing print media sector - either as private family and ethnically orientated papers or as mouthpieces for the growing number of state governments.

The biggest growth in Nigerian press history took place during the military regime from 1983. Lots of newspapers and specialised magazines started, and thousands of new journalist jobs were created. Professionally run omnibus-newspapers reaching beyond political or ethnical sympathies grew in parallel with a number of news papers closely linked to political parties or personalities, investors and business men. With this flood of new initiatives also came publications which in dealing with sensitive issues like ethnic, religious or different ethnic groups were rather unprofessional.

Some outstanding journalists and editors have up through the Nigerian history criticised the shifting military regimes and under hard circumstances contributed to the development of a democratic Nigeria. However, the journalism practised by other parts of the private press in numerous cases has been of a dubious nature with un-proven, personalised and biased allegations against one or the other target.

Particularly private print media without professional owners and managers have tended to sensationalise their stories including stereotyping other ethnic groups. As almost all the private print and broadcast media are located in the South it is very often the Northern dominantly Muslim population that is described with prejudices.

“Attempts were made in the past to float similar print media into the North but it was a colossal fiasco not only attributable to lack of patronage by advertisers but also in terms of readership. Private broadcasters are not interested in the North either because of the religious sensibilities. You cannot for instance advertise alcohol in some if not all parts of the North, even though some of them drink.”^{xiv}

3.2.3.2 Democracy, Sharia, and Communal Conflicts

Up through the 1990'es Nigeria experienced military governments, which were corrupt, mismanaged the economy, ignored an increasing drugs production, created wide spread poverty and not least were isolated by the important international partners in North America and Europe. Only with the short ruling of General Abdulsalami Abubakar from 1998, a quick transition to democracy was initiated.

The international community in the 1990'es added to the bad economy by putting economic sanctions and stopping all development aid to the country because of the totalitarian regime. With the transition of power from 1998 to the democratic elections planned in May 1999, the international policy changed.

According to Kevin H. Ellsworth's study "Identities' Conflicts: Wedding Nigeria's Subnational and International Identities and the Conflicts they Enable" on the communal conflicts in Nigeria^{xv} numerous carrots were offered to Nigeria.

"On a visit to Kano Nigeria, US Ambassador, Williams Twaddell, promised that if Nigeria returned to democracy, sanctions would be relaxed. In the Nigerian media, references were made to sanctions being lifted and trade being increased. Rumours circulated throughout Nigeria that direct flights might resume. Nigeria, they felt, would lose its pariah status with the advent of democracy and numerous economic benefits would consequently flow."

Ellsworth does explore in a later study "The Global Ideational Origins of Nigeria's Communal Conflicts: Democratic Discourse & Sharia"^{xvi} the consequences of the newly established democracy for the apparent rise in numbers and death tolls of communal conflicts.

Democracy becomes in his analysis the *empty signifier*^{xvii} through which *all* struggles are expressed, so that the chains of equivalences, which are unified around this signifier, tend to empty it.

While Ellsworth finds that the many promises from the West were socializing Nigeria into a capitalist democratic society one could question whether such a behaviourist approach can produce the deep social changes necessary for a consolidated democracy.

This is echoed by O.E. Uya^{xviii}:

"It is conceivable, however, that in the euphoria and optimism, one may forget that democracy, though unarguably the best form of government for any nation, is also perhaps the most difficult to manage. Democracy, it should always be remembered is not a potted plant which can be transported into any soil and grown without work or effort. In the peculiar circumstances of Nigeria, as aptly observed by Professor Sam Oyovbaire:

The problem of democracy revolves around how to forge a developmental process which is simultaneously participatory for individual citizens, sensitive to, and protective of individual rights, freedoms and liberties; accommodative of multiple and competitive loyalties; and generative of economic growth and distributive justice (Oyovbaire, 1992)"

Democracy, however, became the discourse for first the Nigerian elite, and soon after all parts of the populations. Based on the international socialization and later the promises from the democratic government, the population believed that democracy was not only synonymous with international support but also with eradication of poverty and growing wealth for everybody. Democracy became a discourse in which many expectations were raised.

During one of my visits to Nigeria in May 2001 the federal television – NTA – ran a 5-days series of one hours' prime time programmes called Dividend of Democracy, celebrating the 2nd anniversary of the new democratically elected government. The programmes were planned from the office of the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Professor Jerry Gana, and let journalists and a selected audience put critical questions to various ministers about, whether they had provided concrete results that the Nigerian people had benefited from. This was down to issues like the repair of holes in the roads. The government put it's destiny to the concrete results of democracy as such.

Nigeria has always had a tradition for communal conflicts, which most often have started as a result of local boundary or political conflicts between different ethnic groups. Ellsworth, however, did make a survey of number and death toll of communal conflicts from 1997 to 2002 through the archives of the Nigerian *Post Express*.^{xix} The survey shows very significantly a rise in number and death toll immediately after the introduction of democracy. This subsided after a year, but began again in terms of death toll with the introduction of Sharia laws in the North, from third quarter of 2001.

In a discourse analysis making use of statements from politicians, people and religious persons in media and in other sources Ellsworth illustrates that democracy as discourse becomes the argument for all struggles – political representation, a fair share of Nigeria's economic resources and of religious freedom.

Samuel G. Egwu^{xx} did examine a number of rural communal conflicts in the late 1980'es and early 90'es. He stresses that struggles about land and equal access to markets are key issues to understand the conflicts, but continues:

“While the land question remains paramount in explaining the phenomenon of rural ethnicity, the conflict is exacerbated by elite manipulation and the jostling for power and privileges among the political class. Thus, in addition to the prevailing economic decline, the return to competitive politics since the commencement of the transition from the Babangida dictatorship to civilian rule seemed to have increased the intensity of such ethnic conflicts and cultural polarisation.”

After the re-introduction of a limited civil rule with the dissolve of previous state and federal legislators and establishment of new political parties the struggle among the elite for political positioning began. While Egwu appreciates the consociational model of conflict resolution seeking ethnic balancing through quotas, creation of more states, encouragement of cross-cultural networks etc. He finds that the public policy so far

“...has reflected the desires of the ethnic fractions of the ruling class to haggle for privileges, and not the regulation of political conflict so as to fashion a harmonious political community”.

Official analyses of the background for several communal conflicts have shown that retired civil servants, army and police officers were actively involved behind the scene.

To illustrate the division of identities in Nigeria Ellsworth did a survey among 335 students enrolled at universities in respectively North and South about their ranking of identity.^{xxi} Interestingly both North and South have religion as first ranking identity. North has ethnicity as number 2, state as number 3 and Nigerian Nation as number 4. South has Nigerian nation as number 2, ethnicity as number 3 and state as number 4. In other words, the representatives for the South stressed the national identity beyond anything, but religion, while the North only places it after ethnicity and state. The survey was carried out before the Christian Southerner Obasanjo in 1999 was elected as president.

Ellsworth's analysis of the communal conflicts immediately after the election of a democratic government in 1999 shows that most of them are rooted in either conflicts about economic resources or in conflicts about democratic representation for minorities. The population of Nigeria with its very short and limited experience from democracy was particularly in the North more centred about local ethnical and state identities than about an identity as individuals in a democracy representing the common interests of the population.

“Speaking with a focus group of Ibo before the cabinet appointments were made, they all voiced deep confidence that this democratic government would have to incorporate them into the government. “What if they do not?” I would ask. Their final response was “There could be war.”^{xxii}

Egwu stresses the necessity to address ethnic conflicts based on competition for farming and grazing land and

“proceed from the premise that these are conflicts at the level of production and relations of production. They are manifested in ethnic symbols for mobilisations and organisation of political life.”^{xxiii}

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Several conflicts took place in local struggles for representation in local governments or for changes in local boundaries.

Since democracy had been sold to the Nigerian elite and to the Nigerian population as a system closely connected to increased prosperity the economic resources of the country also became a focus for conflicts. As explained elsewhere these conflicts could both be between local population and state governments on one side and the federal government on the other – each claiming that democracy meant that the revenue of oil should stay with the local community or should be of benefit to all the country. But also on a much smaller scale the right to and possession of land with natural resources could lead to communal conflicts about the boundaries.

The democratically elected government wants to further de-centralise the public broadcasters Nigerian Radio and Nigerian Television Authority – maybe among other things as a consequence of the widespread communal conflicts reflecting dissatisfaction.

The Director General of Radio Nigeria, Abuja, Eddie IROH explains: “The government is establishing the FM Stations across the country because it believes that the rural people and the masses of the people should be sensitized of the benefit of democracy. They are, however, also put in place because of the need to mobilize them for the defence of the democratic political system and culture, like a widespread system can become a vehicle to implement the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme of the government.”^{xxiv}

The political decision to further establish new NTA- and FRCN-stations was not well received by officials inside the actual broadcasting organisations because it was not followed with additional new money. In reality most new transmitters would go to replace old transmitters and establish relay stations for a greater coverage. The benefit for the rural population might because of limited resources end up being primarily a better signal and a better coverage of the national radio and TV programmes.

Pre-Conflict Media

Today Nigeria has a system, where most states both have a radio and a TV-station run by the federal system as well as a radio and in many cases a TV-station run by the state government.

The public broadcasting system does possess a number of risks and possibilities at the 3 levels of potential conflicts.

The zonal radio system, in which the dominant population groups in one zone of the country, can be reached where ever they are in other parts of Nigeria – in their own language and with a focus on the society “back home”, is a system that on one side supports tribal belonging as more important than national belonging. On the other side this system also facilitates geographical mobility by allowing people to move to other parts of the country without losing their tribal identity. In this way it strengthens the possibility for mixing up different ethnic identities across the entire country and by this strengthens the national coherence. However, the zonal short wave radios might lead to a lack of interest from newcomers to a region to become integrated through also the consumption of local media.

In Nigeria the very big contrast between the Northern and Southern parts of the country ranges back to the colonial rule and has been reflected in the structure of media. The commercial media are for market reasons much stronger and many more in the wealthier South than in North. In spite of the fact that most government leaders have been from the North also the federal and state broadcasters are more widespread in the Urban South than in the Rural North. The majority of print media are produced and published in Southern Nigeria, and as there is not a conscious balance between the number of journalists employed from respectively North and South, Rural or Urban, Muslim or Christian the media are rather easy victims for voicing prejudices and stereotypes. Earlier attempts to exchange programmes between broadcasters in the various states have ceased and mutual knowledge about each other is now mostly depending on the federal radio and TV-organisations and their news programmes, while programmes offering personalised identification possibilities normally are produced by the central studios.

In terms of content, the electronic media seem in the religious programme to carefully balance between the Christian and Muslim communities. The federal media do in their coverage provide numerous points of national identification i.e. in sports events, protocol news about government politicians, pride of Nigeria’s size and significance etc.

What could be discussed in a country like Nigeria is, whether media, which largely focus on local issues and a local market, are providing the critical questions to local identities’ interests compared to larger regional or national interests. Generally this is seldom the case for local media.

While it in most contexts is strongly desirable to have a closely knitted network of local or community media to engage and involve all the population in the democratic process, it is less simple to claim the same in an unstable and vulnerable environment. National unity in an artificial state might not be a goal per se, but it is difficult for local media without external facilitation to contribute to a wider understanding of the potential conflicts.

The parallel system of federal and state public broadcasters across almost all Nigerian states is another issue to consider. On one side, the federal broadcasters in each state distribute national programmes combined with local programmes of a limited duration. Carried out in a professional manner this would normally add to building a national identity with respect for the regional belonging. But it hardly provides a comprehensive reflection of the local diversity of political, ethnical and tribal interests within each state. The ultimate responsibility for the programming and the news lie with the federal editors, who give the local stations the general ideas of outlook of programmes and news, but the stations at state level do produce their own news and develop their own programmes.

The state broadcasters, which in many cases are closely linked to the individual state governments, should ideally reflect the diverse interests of their own societies, but its structure is not contributing to the nation building. In some cases the managers of state broadcasters expressed to the undersigned the view that it is their right and duty to represent through their media the opposition to the federal government and the federal broadcasting system. Earlier the state broadcasters had an extensive programme collaboration and exchange, which would provide at least for a mutual knowledge about each other across the population. This was, however, mostly carried out between stations in states of the same political observation. To what degree both the federal and the state based broadcasters to fulfil the above functions and contribute to democracy is also a question of the editorial independence from the federal and state governments as well as the professional ethics implied.

The ambition of establishing community broadcasters under the umbrella of the federal radio and TV might in theory – if implemented – add to a strengthened democratic dialogue at tribal and community level. The General Director of Voice of Nigeria and Secretary General of Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria, Taiwo Allimi concludes that

“Nigeria is a multi political society; therefore various political groupings need their own medium to reach their supporters and to promote their views. But it is my candid conclusion that there are not enough radio stations especially with private owners in Nigeria.”^{xxv}

The vision of each political grouping owning its own medium to promote its views is, however, not without problems in a vulnerable society with numerous communal conflicts. Besides this it is hardly realistic to imagine a federally run system of community broadcasters with sufficient independence to reflect and allow for participation of the existing multitude of ethnic and political interests.

Nigeria's and other countries having protracted internal conflicts

It is tempting to compare with other countries, which for many years have had continuous internal violent conflicts and with strong regional implications. In Rwanda, Tutsi-refugees from the colonial period have in the neighbouring countries formed resistance movements, which frequently have intervened in Rwanda. Former Yugoslavia was built on the pre-second World War federation and had through the national, ethnic and religious population groups, direct historic links to or potential conflicts with Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Italy and Austria. In Afghanistan the different ethnic minorities were all linked to majorities in the surrounding countries and many of the internal conflicts are directly linked to other countries' interests. For Nigeria the regional linkages are less dominant because of the huge numbers of internal groupings. Nigeria is almost a region in itself, but still you will along the borders find tribal and ethnic relations to neighbouring countries.

Nigeria, Rwanda and Yugoslavia became independent states after centuries of colonial or imperial rule. The colonial or imperial rule often added to tensions between favoured or less favoured groups, broke down traditional patterns for co-existence and created countries across somewhat artificial lines. Afghanistan is a relatively young state, and as a united nation it has never been ruled by others.

Nigeria, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia have all been shaped as states comprising numerous nationalities and ethnic identities. Rwanda has been united as a number of kingdoms. It has had relative homogenous ethnic, religious, and cultural identities but a tradition for different social roles in society.

Nigeria, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan have all had a strong and over the years increasing de-centralisation of power, economy, and culture. Strong and increasing attention has been given to the ambitions of individual states, republics and provinces.

Nigeria has since its independence had variations of democracy. The first 45 years of its independence have shown 28 years of military rule and 17 years of democracy. Gradually the central federal institutions have allocated more power and competence to the 36 federal states and to smaller entities within the individual state. This has led to shrinking central authorities, which lately in the disputes about Sharia laws even could not uphold its superior authority in a few concrete cases of verdicts. Yugoslavia has since its creation after Second World War had a one party democracy with clear restrictions on criticism of the communist party, but with rather liberal personal rights. Through the 1970s and up to the beginning of the civil wars in 1991 the federal government and institutions gave away substantial political and economic competences to the federal states.

In Nigeria as well as in Yugoslavia one notices how the development towards democracy and towards more decentralised authority has resulted in an increase in communal conflicts and tensions between the different nations and ethnic groups within the country. This was also the case in Yugoslavia. In Nigeria the formal democracy had hardly any civil society elements to support it. Yugoslavia had a pretty strong tradition for civil society influence in companies, organisations and media. But the democracy was still limited to a degree, where everybody had to respect the superior power of the communist party.

In Nigeria, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan substantial differences in economic development and social standards between the different republics and provinces of the state as well as within each of them have created severe tensions in the country.

Historically Nigeria, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan have had a tradition for animosity or even hate or violence between different populations within the country. In Rwanda the Tutsi minority had ruled the Hutu majority and revenge from both sides were part of the motives.

The vacuum after Tito's era of Yugoslav independence during the Cold War and the vacuum after the withdrawal of the Russian troops in Afghanistan were triggers of armed conflicts. So was way back the leave of colonial powers in Nigeria and Rwanda and more recently the democratization in Nigeria, which gave space to new conflicts.

In Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan political power fights were triggering conflicts. In Rwanda the Hutu president was fighting a combined Hutu/Tutsi opposition by turning the Tutsi population into scapegoats. In Yugoslavia Serbia and Croatia both persuaded their own national interests as well as the personal political ambitions of Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman and Radovan Karadzic, representing the Serb minority in Bosnia.

Consequently there are a number of explanations that cover one or more of the chosen conflicts.

1. The colonial or imperial rule has resulted in somewhat artificial states comprising multiple ethnic, religious, geographical groups or even historic nations and with tensions in the structure of society deriving from this rule. The result has been strongly divided societies with identity conflicts.
2. The historic animosity between parties in earlier conflicts or historic injustices at least in the public has played a substantial role for the mobilization of the broader population.
3. Vague democracies and de-centralisation of powers to federal states or provinces have not stabilised countries after the transition from colonial or totalitarian regimes, but rather de-stabilised along other conflict lines.
4. The vacuum after the Cold War or after national figures or totems, which kept the countries together has given space and triggered internal conflicts.
5. Finally political ambitions of persons or minorities have been significant in triggering wars.

The media's role in shaping parts of the triggers of conflicts has unfortunately been far from flattering.

Former Yugoslavia with its different ethnic, religious and national population groups had established a system of public media with an umbrella in the capitol Belgrade and republic broadcasters in each of the republic capitols. While the system in the initial phase was based on a close collaboration in which all republic broadcasters contributed with programmes to the national schedule and to the other republic stations, the programme collaboration up through the 1970'es and 80'es became a showcase for each republic.

The imagination of the Yugoslavia nation was in the media shown through common cultural identities – e.g. folk dance, folk music, sport and other cultural activities.

Until the independence of Rwanda and Nigeria as well as during the first decades of post-Second World War Yugoslavia the media were controlled by the central authorities to a degree that they were not allowed to call for independence or in Yugoslavia to question the ruling communist party and the president. Both print media and radio were focusing on protocol news and were – as it can be seen everywhere in un-democratic countries – focusing only on the political stuff. Every day problems and ordinary people were never in the focus.

There was, however, a space for smaller print media which in Rwanda could deal with the issue of independence and even question the Tutsis' leading role in governance without being stopped by the colonial power. In Nigeria a few privately owned newspapers which often had ulterior political motives could demand independence without serious sanctions.

In Yugoslavia the print media were publicly owned and their editorial line controlled by the ruling authorities – be it at country, republic or province level. There was a significant contribution to the imagination of the country as a united nation. Among the elements that were praised was the president, the independence from Eastern and Western alliances, the impressive economic results and not least the joint cultural life. Public rituals would focus on particularly cultural issues, but obviously also the seeming brotherhood of nations within the country.

The electronic media in all three countries were till 1960 only centralised national radio. In Nigeria and Rwanda the radio was run by the colonial authority. In Yugoslavia it was run by the state – meaning publicly owned, but under governmental control. It is clear that in the distant pre-conflict phase, where it would have been possible to make changes in society minimizing the risk for conflicts, the media have effectively not focused on any of the injustices, democratic deficits or economic conflicts that might have led to political action. The media have had all chances to be aware of the problematic background but have chose to keep the telescope to the blind eye.

In the pre-conflict phase we have on one side seen some media developing stereotyping and prejudices against potential opponents – the others - in their country. On the other side we have seen, how legislative initiatives have restricted the possibilities for the 'others' to raise awareness of their interests in most media. And we have noted, how state or private media voluntarily or under pressure have added to moral panic by suppressing the 'others'.

The media structure ahead of the pre-conflict phase has generally been under strong political control, whether from national, regional or local political authorities. The structure has in Afghanistan, Nigeria and Yugoslavia been highly de-centralised with media that in reality were almost independent from national authorities and on the contrary controlled by state-, republic- and provincial authorities. In all countries the media legislation had severely restricted the freedom of expression and during the conflict escalation still closer. In Rwanda the government claimed that media freedom should not be restricted and used the media freedom to give birth to media, which later should turn out to be the leading government party's most efficient tool in carrying out a genocide, killing hundred thousands of people.

ⁱ OBASI, N. K.: “Nigeria: The Road to National Unity” in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

ⁱⁱ EGWU, Samuel G. “Agrarian Question and Rural Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria”, pp54 in “Ethnic Conflicts in Africa”, edited by NNOLI, Okwudiba, published by Codesria, Senegal 1998

ⁱⁱⁱ AFIGBO, A.E., UYA, O.E., “The Evolution of Nigeria, 1849-1960”, page 36 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{iv} JAMES, I., “The Road to Independence”, p. 40 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^v JAJA, S.O., “Political and Constitutional Development Since Independence (1960), in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{vi} UYA, O.E., “The Civil Society and Democracy”, p. 60 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{vii} The Columbia Encyclopedia, Fifth Edition Copyright ©1993. Paragraph: Republic of Biafra

^{viii} “Den Store Danske Encyklopædi”, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1995, Paragraph: Biafra

^{ix} OBASI, N.K., “Nigeria: The Road to National Unity” p. 65 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^x COLEMAN, JAMES: “Nigeria: Background to Nationalism”, 1964, University of California Press, Berkeley, California.

^{xi} OBASI, N.K., “Nigeria: The Road to National Unity” in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{xii} OBASI, N.K., “Nigeria: The Road to National Unity” p. 66 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{xiii} OBASI, N.K., “Evolution of the Broadcast Media in Nigeria” pp. 373 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{xiv} ALLIMI, TAIWO, Director General, Voice of Nigeria and BON, interviewed for BONDE, BENT NØRBY, ONASANYA, ABIM AND MAHMOOD, WASEEM “Nigerian Media – Overview, Evaluation and Draft Programmes for Change”, BMC, Bornholm, September 2002.

^{xv} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., “Identities’ Conflicts: Wedding Nigeria’s Subnational and International Identities and the Conflicts they Enable”, Draft to be presented at the 2000 Conference of the International Studies Association”, Arizona State University, March 16, 2000

^{xvi} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., “The Global Ideational Origins of Nigeria’s Communal Conflicts: Democratic Discourse & Sharia”, Draft for the 2002 Conference of the International Studies Association, March 27, 2002.

^{xvii} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., refers at page 5 in “The Global Ideational Origins of Nigeria’s Communal Conflicts: Democratic Discourse & Sharia”, to Laclau’s definition: An empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified”. In his footnote 3) he puts democracy instead of Laclau’s use of Order in one of Laclau’s examples and suggests: ‘If a pro-democracy struggle is successful, ‘democracy’ may become the signifier of all struggles against the nondemocratic’. ‘democracy’ also “becomes the surface inscription through which all (such) struggles will be expressed, so that the chain of equivalences which are unified around this signifier tend to empty it, to blur its connection with the actual content with which it was originally associated”’. Draft for the 2002 Conference of the International Studies Association, March 27, 2002.

^{xviii} UYA, O.W., “The Civil Society and Democracy”, p. 59 in “Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured”, Vol. 1, produced by Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. and published by Federal Ministry of Information, Abuja 2000.

^{xix} ^{xix} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., “The Global Ideational Origins of Nigeria’s Communal Conflicts: Democratic Discourse & Sharia”, Draft for the 2002 Conference of the International Studies Association, March 27, 2002. Figure 3, page 19. One should be aware that there is no guarantee that the 1200 articles skimmed by Ellsworth in Post Express Wired are accurate in their accumulation of death tolls in each conflict. As described in BONDE, BENT NØRBY,

ONASANYA, ABIM AND MAHMOOD, WASEEM “Nigerian Media – Overview, Evaluation and Draft Programmes for Change”, BMC, Bornholm, September 2002, there was at least among public media a tendency during a given conflict to keep the death toll as minimal as possible in order not to stimulate more killings.

^{xx} EGWU, SAMUEL G.: “Agrarian Question and Rural Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria”, p 69 in the book “Ethnic Conflicts in Africa”, edited by NNOLI, Okwudiba, published by Council for the Development Of Economic and Social Science Research in Africa in Dakar, Senegal 1998.

^{xxi} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., “Reimagined Communities – Democratic, Ethnic, and Violent: The Social Reconstruction of Nigerian Identities and Communal Relations”, Draft for the American Political Science Association, September 3, 1999. The survey of ranking of identities can only be seen as an indicative illustration for the popular identities. The group of interviewees is not representative to the population as such.

^{xxii} ELLSWORTH, KEVIN H., “Identities’ Conflicts: Wedding Nigeria’s Subnational and International Identities and the Conflicts they Enable”, page 16, Draft to be presented at the 2000 Conference of the International Studies Association”, Arizona State University, March 16, 2000

^{xxiii} EGWU, SAMUEL G.: “Agrarian Question and Rural Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria”, p 75 in the book “Ethnic Conflicts in Africa”, edited by NNOLI, Okwudiba, published by Council for the Development Of Economic and Social Science Research in Africa in Dakar, Senegal 1998.

^{xxiv} BONDE, BENT NØRBY, ONASANYA, ABIM AND MAHMOOD, WASEEM “Nigerian Media – Overview, Evaluation and Draft Programmes for Change”, BMC, Bornholm, September 2002.

^{xxv} ALLIMI, TAIWO, Director General, Voice of Nigeria and BON, interviewed for BONDE, BENT NØRBY, ONASANYA, ABIM AND MAHMOOD, WASEEM “Nigerian Media – Overview, Evaluation and Draft Programmes for Change”, BMC, Bornholm, September 2002.