

Chapter 24

Nigerian Media's Poor Representation and Negligence of Minorities as a Breach of Ethical Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The plights of Nigerian ethnic minorities, arising from marginalisation, account for various national issues, such as ethno-religious intolerance and crisis, ethnic militia, civil unrest, terrorism, banditry, among others. The study reveals that Nigerian media play crucial roles in the marginalisation, dehumanisation, and plights suffered by peoples branded 'ethnic minorities'. The poor representation and negligence of the minorities aggravate the plights of the minorities. The study argues that by breaching media ethics, the Nigerian press violates African indigenous ethical principles. Also, media's misdeeds against the minorities amount to breach of ethical journalism. The chapter concludes that besides paying little or no attention to matters concerning ethnic minorities, Nigerian media aggravate the plights of ethnic minorities by continuously exhibiting misdeeds against them.

INTRODUCTION

It is quite problematic to emphasize only three major ethnic groups along with only about ten or more others, where there are over four hundred and eighty ethnic groups (Evwierhoma, 2007; Robert, 2015; Robert, Besong & Dibie, 2016; Ugwu & Ozoemena, 2019). Also, it is quite regrettable that Nigerian media most often place undue emphasis on the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) in Nigeria, to the near exclusion of the rest over four hundred ethnic groups. Hausa is the most populous ethnic group and language in Nigeria, spread across the whole of Northern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria is divided into North-East, North-West and North-Central. The Yoruba are the indigenous people of Southwestern Nigeria. Yoruba states in Southwest are Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo. The

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Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria are the indigenous people of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and Abia. South-South has clusters of ethnic groups and languages along with six states viz: Cross River, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Edo. In view of problems arising from the strained emphasis on the three major ethnic groups along with the allied ten or more, this paper argues that the Nigerian mass media engages in the practice of making the image of and giving prominent attention to the three major ethnic groups and a few others, leaving out little or nothing about the other ethnic groups christened 'ethnic minorities'.

It is quite surprising that despite affirming that Nigeria has over five hundred languages (Evwierhoma, 2007; Robert, 2015; Robert, Besong & Dibie, 2016; Ugwu & Ozoemena, 2019), ethnic groups are underrepresented as being two hundred and fifty, over three hundred, or about or over four hundred ethnic groups. It is surprising because each tribe has a language and vice versa. Thus, if the languages are over five hundred, the tribes (ethnic groups) are over five hundred. The numerous other ethnic groups are perpetually silenced, disregarded, endangered and eroded (Evwierhoma, 2007; Robert, 2015; Robert & Besong, 2016). It is an indisputable fact that whatever and/or whoever pays attention to and make its (and/or his/her) image with significant media contents and jingles automatically becomes well known, relevant and prominent (Ahmed & Chiakaan, 2011; Chiakaan, 2013; Robert & Besong, 2016; Robert & Besong, 2017). The simple reality here is that once the media makes the image of the ethnic minorities with significant media contents, programs and jingles, these ethnic groups are undoubtedly bound to become prominent, relevant, formalized and (more) developed. In view of the foregoing reality, this study rises to describe the poor representation and negligence of ethnic minorities by the Nigerian mass media as a breach of professional ethics. In other words, the paper considers media misrepresentation and negligence of ethnic minorities as a breach of media and journalism ethics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded by the agenda setting theory of the media. This theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, describes the ability of the media to influence the audience to give significance or importance to whatever or whoever they (the media) have made significant or important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Chiakaan and Ahmed, 2011; Robert and Besong, 2016; Ojie, 2020). The theorists postulate that the influence of the media on the public is so strong that the media instill in the audience what they should think and not what they think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This means that the frequency of media information, programs, and jingles about anything, person or group determines the attention, regard and relevance the audience gives to it/them. Again, agenda-setting revolves around creating public awareness and the concern of salient issues by news media (Ojie, 2020, p. 443). Given this expressed concern of the agenda-setting theory, there is no gainsaying that it aptly suits this study. This study advocates a reasonable level of public awareness about ethnic minorities. Also, the salient issues behind the agitations of the ethnic minorities have to be given due media coverage and reportage. Currently, the reverse is the case. Doing so would not only address the issues of marginalization and conflicts over the contestation for resources and power, but also bring the minorities to limelight and also pave way for their betterment, wide recognition, development, wellbeing and continuity/sustenance across ages.

Also, the two basic assumptions of this theory aptly theorize the central gist of this paper. The first assumption is that the media do not objectively reflect and present reality but rather filter and shape it

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