



GODFATHERISM, OWNERSHIP INFLUENCE AND MEDIA TREATMENT OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Media coverage of political crises, especially in a terrain fraught with the increasing influence of godfatherism, ownership and political affiliation has a serious consequence on the society. The political feud between Late Chief Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu and his 'political son', Senator Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja in Oyo State, Nigeria (2005-2007), provided a typical example of godfatherism, and media coverage of the conflict typified ownership influence on news media operations. Anchored on the framing theory, this study employed content analysis to examine how *The Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation* newspapers treated the political conflict in terms of the degree of prominence accorded the two principal actors and how ownership factor and political affiliation shaped the contents of the newspapers. Findings show that *The Nation*, a newspaper believed to be owned by a stalwart of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), was less critical of Senator Rashidi Ladoja and reported more of anti-Adedibu stories. *The Nigerian Tribune*, on the other hand, reported more of anti-Ladoja stories, and was less critical of Chief Lamidi Adedibu. This paper concludes by urging media actors to free themselves from the web of partisan politics and be more objective in the discharge of their duties as societal watchdogs.

KEY WORDS: Content Analysis, Framing Theory, Godfatherism, Ownership Influence, Political Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media are regarded as sacred institutions that service the democratic process. They reconstruct, interpret and report issues that happen in human society. What the mass media produce is considered the representation and images of the social world (Ojebuyi, 2012). As the media describe, explain and interpret events, they simultaneously provide the platforms

for the public to perceive the social reality as described by the mass media (Norris, 1995; Vreese, 2005).

Naturally, some events, by their nature, attract public attention more than others. Examples of these events that naturally interest the public are those about disaster, damage, conflict, negative consequences, and scandals of any type. Consequently, such events always have a better chance of being

selected and reported ahead of others by media actors (Watson, 2003; Schwarz, 2009).

In the modern democratic society, political conflicts constitute substantial proportion of the media contents, and the patterns of reporting these conflicts have a serious implication for the democratic institution. As Baran and Davis (2009, p. 28) argue, “many intense political conflicts affected thinking about the mass media, and these conflicts shaped the development of mass society theory.” What the foregoing assertion implies is that the media have the power to undermine and destabilise the existing social order, yet they also constitute a possible solution to the social disorder they generated. This means that the mass media can serve as a potent tool that could be employed to sustain the old order or institute a new one.

One of the principal roots of political conflicts and violence, especially in Nigeria, is godfatherism - a phenomenon that has remained pronounced in the Nigerian polity since the commencement of the Fourth Republic (Adebanwi, 2005). The emergence of godfatherism cannot be totally divorced from the long years of military rule that created a class of Big Men or ‘Big Man’ rule in Nigeria. Moss (2007) describes Big Man rule as a cliché underscoring a system dominated by individuals and personal relationships, which ensure peace by the distribution of money, jobs and

favour. This is reinforced by the cultural attitude in Africa that encourages deference, (sometimes fear) for the wealthy or the powerful, with the hope that the Big Man, whether a local chief, warlord, party chieftain, political office holder or a president will protect and provide all forms of political empowerment for those in his political camp and punish those who seem to belong to opposition group.

As Alchukwuma (2007) puts it, godfatherism is a form of landlord-tenant relationship that exists between the godfather and his godson. In this context, the godfather acts as the power broker because he can deploy his political and material resources to influence party policies and decisions in favour of his godson. He also has the capability (most times, in a negative way) to manipulate general elections in favour of his godson.

Since political conflict is one of the greatest inhibitors of the development of democracy in the Third World countries, communication researchers, have sought measures over the years, to nip this cankerworm in the bud. The press (mass media), unlike any other, has been found to play significant roles in managing conflict situation in the society. The press all over the globe is regarded as a political instrument and in advanced societies, an integral part of the political life, serving as the major link between the people and the government and providing for them the information,

which they require to make political judgment based on their political attitudes. Or put differently, the press is often in libertarian theory called the “Fourth Estate” and the “watchdog of the society”, meaning that the press exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, education, promotion, social enlightenments and mobilization (Day, 2006; Baran and Davis, 2009). These functions set the press apart as an important link/factor in the relationship between the government and the governed, and make it a *sine qua non* to societal growth and development.

Furthermore, democratic culture has placed on the media the privilege of setting the agenda of political discourse and other forms of socio-cultural cum economic discussions (Ekeanyanwu, 2007). This invariably makes the media powerful and influential. As suggested by Baran and Davis (2009), agenda setting empirically demonstrates links between media exposure, audience motivation to seek orientation, and audience perception of public on issues. It also integrates a number of similar ideas like priming, story positioning and story vividness. With this theory in mind, the media are expected to raise conflicts to the plane of discussion and should do everything possible to see that the public gets the right information that will enable them take an informed decision. The agenda setting function of the mass media is an important aspect of the

institutional linkage between the mass media and politics (Umechukwu, 2001).

In addition to providing information about the political process, the mass media can confer status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues. This refers to the status conferral function of the mass media. This makes it obvious that the media have a lot of influence on politics through the presentation of politically crucial information to huge heterogeneous, transitory and anonymous audiences. Decisions made by the media professionals determine what information becomes available to the media audiences and what remains available. By putting stories into perspective and interpreting them, media personnel assign meaning to information and indicate the values by which it ought to be judged.

From the discussions so far, it could be summarized that among the roles of the mass media in society - surveillance, interpretation, linkage, transmission of values and entertainment (Dominick, 2002; Sambe, 2005), surveillance and interpretation are critical to conflict reporting. In its surveillance function, the press plays the role of an observer, which is “a necessary component for enforcing economic, political, cultural and even moral stability” in the polity (Mu’azu, 2002, p. 47). In this role, the media highlight aspects of society—events, people and issues—which they gather as information and report as news.

Hence, there is the need for the interpretation function of the mass media, which is fulfilled by editorials, commentaries and opinion articles. In fulfilling this essential responsibility to society, how does the journalist provide adequate, truthful and objective coverage of a conflict situation without escalating the situation?

Although the media have been found to play significant roles in resolving political conflicts, its fidelity is sometimes questioned. This is because the media are sometimes used as proxies between rival political groups. Therefore, presenting an objective and balanced report becomes impossible (Allan and Zeiller, 2004). While complementing the foregoing perspective, Oyovbaire (2001) says that the media are powerful instruments and agents for setting and executing their own agenda for the mass audience. These agenda setting roles may sometimes be guided by some sense of bias and sentiments (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000) which are reflected in how the media frame social realities. Instances of this subjective framing by the mass media include deliberate suppression of otherwise issues of public interest, gross diversion of public attention, selective target of issues and/or personality for public and national discussion, and deliberate imposition of particular images and contents about public policy on the public. Some of the factors responsible for violating the

ethical principle of truthfulness by the journalists are influence of the proprietors (McAllister & Proffitt, 2009) and the market-place forces (Day, 2006). The mainstream media have fallen captives of the profit-driven economy (Ojebode, 2009, Moemeka, 2009) to the extent that it has become grossly impossible for them to report issues that have positive significance for the democratic institution.

The above phenomenon is highly evident in Nigeria. As Galadima and Enighe (2001) posit, the evolution of Nigerian politics is inseparable from the emergence of the Nigerian press. The nation's nationalist used the press as one of the basic tools for their struggle for independence. This trend has been sustained. Many politicians today see the press as a potent tool to articulate their political agenda and achieve their political ambitions. They have invested massively to have firm grip on the media. The extent of control and nature of relationship that a politician has with a given media organisation determine how the media organisation portrays the politician especially in a sensitive and controversial issues that is of public significance. In 1999, for example, most Nigerians alleged, "the same media that were so vociferous on the certificate controversy of Alhaji Salisu Buhari, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Chief Evans Enwerem, former Senate President, were strangely silent over the

inconsistencies in Tinubu's biodata.” *The News magazine* was specifically criticised of being biased in handling the two cases. It was further alleged that the magazine maintained such a biased stance because Tinubu is a Yoruba man from the south-west and “is one of the proprietors of *The News magazine* and that he had helped out with funds when the journal was forced underground during the Abacha years” (Olukoyun, 2004, pp. 83-84).

Similarly, the media industry in the South West has recently witnessed a number of new developments, prominent among which is the emergence of newspapers, which are reportedly owned by politicians who use them as political weapons, since there exist stiff competition and intense rivalry among the political parties in Nigeria. Former Lagos state governor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for example, is said to be the major stakeholder in *The Nation* and *National Life*, while former Ogun State governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel, is believed to be behind the *Nigerian Compass*. Already, these papers have been identified as toeing the lines of the political parties to which their sponsors belong. In addition, during any political conflicts or at elections, the papers presentations of the social reality represent the respective perspectives of the political ideologies of their proprietors. These claims, however, remain mere academic conjectures

until they are empirically proven or otherwise.

Through a comparative content analysis of the selected newspapers (*The Nation* and *Nigerian Tribune*), this paper aims at assessing the roles of the South Western press, as the public parliament, in intensification or de-escalation of the conflicts between the godfather, Chief Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Senator Rashidi Ladoja. The paper investigates how *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers reported the political conflict in terms of the degree of emphases in the reports, and the level of fairness, objectivity and balance as indices of constructive and responsible journalism that is devoid of ownership influence.

ADEDIBU AND LADOJA: THE MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE OF TWO POLITICAL GLADIATORS

The relationship between Chief Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja offers a classical example of how godfatherism can constitute a menace to governance, participatory democracy and public peace. At inception, the relationship between the two was very cordial dating back to the truncated Third Republic when Ladoja became a Senator allegedly through the singular efforts of Chief Adedibu. Due to the financial assistance offered to the gubernatorial candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Chief Kolapo Isola, at a very dire period,

Chief Adedibu decided to reward Ladoja by making him a Senator (Adebisi, 2009). When the two of them had to work together under the same party prior to 2003 gubernatorial election, they were not total strangers. Subsequently, the PDP won overwhelmingly at the 2003 elections in Oyo State with the substantive contributions of Chief Adedibu. His client and political godson, Senator Rashidi Ladoja, became the governor of the state.

No sooner had he assumed office than the relationship between them went sour because he allegedly refused to honour the agreements reached before he was supported to be the governor (Adegbamigbe, 2007). This conflict between the two parties threatened peace, security and participatory democracy in the state particularly in Ibadan. It led to a violent polarisation of the Oyo state branch of PDP. This also introduced another form of patronage because each faction tried to increase its number of followers through a combination of patronage and violence that resulted in the death of some people. In this context, the two leading actors who offered support and protection to those who accepted and supported their interests sought after thugs and influential party members at all levels. This degenerated into “factionalisation” of thugs, mostly evident in the state arm of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). The conflict dragged the political thugs of both actors into bloody

confrontations that claimed several lives and resulted in the illegal impeachment of Senator Rashidi Ladoja by lawmakers loyal to the godfather, Chief Lamidi Adedibu (Aladelokun, 2005; Lawal and Kassim, 2005).

Any keen observer of politics in Oyo State and the performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (P.D.P.), the nation’s ruling political party, during the general elections of 2003 and 2007, could not but see the colossal influence of Chief Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu in these processes. He assumed a very controversial position based on his political style that thrived on godfatherism. The alleged use of violence as one of his strategies made him similar to someone who was above the law (Adegbamigbe, 2007). This situation implies the absence of a normative order (Adebanwi, 2005) and the rudimentary nature of the polity in the age of globalization. The public space in Ibadan, which is supposed to be an arena for debates of ideas supportive of democracy and safe participation, came under the siege of a godfather who represented the symbol of sheer tyranny and totalitarianism in the polity of Oyo State.

THE MASS MEDIA AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS REPORTING

Contemporary societies, especially those in the developing countries like Nigeria, cannot downplay the significance of the mass media in

creating social cohesion in the polity. New communications technologies such as mobile/video phones and laptop computers especially through the platform of the Internet, are allowing journalists to gather and disseminate information with ease from many parts of the world (Dominick, Messere and Sherman, 2004).

The digitization of the news industry, which has led to a compression of time and space, means we see news images of demonstrations, riots or coups within minutes of their occurrence. These images not only inform global audiences, but also may instigate further campaigns of violence at home. Yoon (2000) cites an example of this in India when the BBC World Television News Service relayed, almost instantly, footage of violent clashes during an attack on a Hindu shrine by Muslim fundamentalists. A large number of Indians saw the horrific scenes. These triggered widespread clashes around the country. This is why Ekeanyanwu (2005) cautions that we should exercise care in the coverage/reportage of politically motivated conflicts in developing societies. This view also receives the support of Mahatma Gandhi cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001, pp. 62-3) thus: "The press is a great power but as an unchained torrent submerges the whole country side and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy." This situation as described

by Mahatma Gandhi many years ago is also applicable in Nigeria of today.

Communication researchers have attested to the fact that media can play constructive roles in peace building. For instance, Thompson (2008) says that the media can engage in peace journalism based on comprehensive and accurate conflict analysis of the situation. This could be done by engaging in reliable reporting, presenting reliable, diverse and independent opinions and editorials, establishing communication channels among disputant parties, indentifying and articulating without prejudice the underlying interests of the combatants, and offering solutions and building confidence among warring parties.

Apart from playing the role of umpire between parties embroiled in a conflict, media play a critical role in sustaining peace in affected community by simply being a 'voice' for the 'voiceless'. The mass media function as rallying points for the people. They help in creating a sense of community, a sense of *esprit-de-corps*, a sense of shared identity (especially in suffering), a sense of shared purpose and shared destiny. McQuail (2005, p. 439) explains this as "affiliation", a "concept that refers to the dynamics of social relations in which people want to be socially close to people with whom they share the same physical space. This is equally applicable to people who share the same cultural, political and economic

circumstance. Bajraktari and Parajon (2007, p. 3) put it thus:

[the] media play a social responsibility role in conflict prevention. Often, media can contribute to peace merely by restoring levels of trust and self-worth in a population on the brink of or emerging from violence...where the media can occupy space in the grassroots of civil society there is potential for healing and community building. Such activity not only rebuilds societies after conflict, but also prevents against future resurgence of violence.

In this wise, the mass media also assume a cathartic role. Here, the media provides a vent by which parties engaged in conflict expel pent-up emotions. Folarin (2004) highlights the frustration generated among non-dominant (non-elite) groups in society when the mass media are concentrated in the hands dominant groups and advance only elite interests. The media provide opportunity for increased media access to advance the interest of dissenting voices in society. This way, they help to dispel frustration, create a platform for dialogue and an environment for effective management of conflict.

In fulfilling their critical roles, the media need to avoid the risk of oversimplification of conflict by classifying opposing views into

the two extremes of good or bad, inferior or superior (McCormick, 2004). The mass media should approach conflict discourse with the understanding that there are far more than two sides to every story. Hence, McCormick (2004, p. 7) warns against representing "the image of conflict as a two-sided tug of war," but rather as the image of a "prism with many facets that are at once interconnected and distinct and also change with the angle of light and the angle of the viewer."

A graphic example of oversimplification is seen in the handling of the American war on terrorism. As it turned out, it was a dangerous decision by the Bush administration in assuming that the appropriate response to the threat of terrorism was to unleash maximum military might in the very homeland of the terrorist. Obviously, the American government did not anticipate the huge cost it has incurred – the lives lost, and the foreign policy crisis it has suffered because of the war (Moeller, 2004). Therefore, the mass media should see the principles of balance and objectivity as imperative in conflict reporting.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media Framing is the theory upon which this study is anchored. Framing is a concept that means different things to different scholars. McCombs (2004, p. 87) defines framing as "the selection of, and emphasis upon, particular attributes for the news media agenda when

talking about an object (the fact of cutting and trimming news stories in order to filter it and shape it as the sender wishes).” This means that the media could frame objects, placing various degrees of emphasis on the attributes of persons, public issues or other objects when they think or talk about these issues. In other words, it is not just what is said in news reports, but how subjects are characterized and presented. It is through this unique characterization or presentation of issues that the media communicate certain meanings to audiences apart from just stating facts.

Furthermore, Tankard (2001) defines framing in news media as the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is using selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. When the news media supply the context, select what to emphasize or exclude information, they show us how to think about an object/issue/candidate. The implication of this is that the news media could manipulate readers’ cognition or sense of judgement when reporting certain issues of public interest, say a conflict between two prominent politicians, by providing false benchmarks with which the readers gauge the stands of the political actors in the conflict, hence making the readers take side with the favoured party. Therefore, the theory infers that through selection, emphasis, treatment or description of an issue or a person,

the news media influence the audience to perceive the social reality in a way that might be different from how such issue or person would have been perceived outside the media lens.

THE STUDY

This purpose of this study was to examine how *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation* newspapers covered the protracted political conflicts between the godfather, Chief Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Senator Rashidi Ladoja in Oyo State during the Fourth Republic (2003-2007). It intended to investigate the prominence given to the political conflicts; whether the political crisis of such magnitude was rated important or downplayed, and establish the validity of the claim that ownership affiliations of the two newspapers influenced how they reported the crisis and presented the two prominent actors in the crisis. To achieve these objectives, we pose these two research questions to guide the study:

1. What is the extent of prominence given to Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja inspired political conflict in the selected newspapers?
2. What is the relationship between ownership pattern and the image ascribed to the political figures - Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja - by the selected newspapers?

METHOD OF STUDY

Research Design

This purpose of this study was to find out how the South Western Press of Nigeria through the lenses of *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation* newspapers covered the protracted political conflicts between the godfather, Chief Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Senator Rashidi Ladoja in Oyo State during the Fourth Republic. Consequently, the research design used for this study was content analysis. This research design was chosen because it is the most appropriate methodological approach for discerning patterns, making statements about specific media contents, and identifying trends in communication media over an identified period of time.

Study Population

The two newspapers whose contents were comparatively analyzed are *The Nation* and the *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers. Editions of these dailies published within the period of the conflict constituted the population of this study. The choice of these dailies was hinged on the facts that *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation*, enjoy wider coverage, and are presumed to be owned by separate people/groups in opposition political parties. Besides, the newspapers were purposively selected because of their proximity to the conflict scene (Oyo State).

Sampling and Sample

The purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample

for the study. This technique was employed because it is best suited for selecting subjects on the basis of specific qualities thereby ignoring those who failed to meet the criteria. We also considered the nature of the conflict event under study, which appeared for a while and ceased. Specifically, this technique helped in selecting conflict issues ranging from godfatherism, elections rigging, election petitions, impeachment threats, impeachment, and court judgment present in all the editions of the selected newspapers published within the study period (December 14th, 2005 through January 31st, 2006 and November 1st to 11th, 2006).

Out of the 60 editions drawn from the *Nigerian Tribune* within the study period, 38 editions covered reports on the political conflict between Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja. Likewise, out of 60 editions selected from *The Nation*, 42 editions covered the conflict. Therefore, out of the study population stated above, 80 editions of the two selected Nigerian national dailies contained the reports of the political conflict between Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja in Oyo State. It should be noted that the difference in the number of editions of publications by the two newspapers did not constitute any significant error to the study.

CONTENT CATEGORISATION AND OPERATIONALISATION OF CONCEPTS

Communication scholars such as Wimmer and Dominick (2003) have defined unit of analysis as that part that is actually counted, and which is different from the units of observation. Therefore, for this study, the units of analysis were all reports (in the editions of the selected newspapers between December 14th, 2005 through January 31st, 2006 and November 1st to 11th, 2006) relating to the political conflicts (and non-political conflicts covered at the locale of the conflict). These reports were presented in various formats such as news story/straight news, feature story, editorial, and interpretative articles. The basic instrument used to collect data was the coding sheet, which contained the content categories. These content categories are operationalised as follows:

(1) **Prominence:** This refers to the degree of importance given to the two characters (Adedibu and Ladoja) in the Oyo State political conflict that served as the focus of this study. Prominence in this current study was measured by considering placement of the stories on the two individuals in terms of Front Page, Back Page, Editorial Page, and Inside Page stories. By *Front Page*, we mean the first page or the front cover page of a newspaper. *Back*

Page is the last page or the back cover page of a newspaper. Other pages apart from both the front page and the back page are *Inside Pages*. The *Editorial Page* is the inside page that contains the editorial position (i.e. ideological perspective or intense comments on a certain public issue or policy) of the newspaper. How or where the editor places a news story always suggests the degree of prominence accorded to such a news story. For instance, stories on the front page of a newspaper are seen as the most important news stories of the day followed by stories on the back page. On the other hand, stories placed on inside pages of a newspaper are considered having lesser degree of importance compared with stories on either the front page or the back page. However, the editorial page content is given more prominence than other inside page stories.

(2) **Image Framing:** Image framing in this context refers to how the selected newspapers organised, constructed and presented the editorial matters that described the political conflict and the central actors involved in such a way capable of dictating how the

mass audience think about, or react to, the social reality as presented by media gatekeepers. Hence, in line with the focus of this study, such categories as 'Pro-Ladoja', 'Anti-Ladoja', 'Pro-Adedibu', 'Anti-Adedibu' and 'Neutral' were used as indicators of how the images of the principal actors in the political conflict were framed by the selected newspapers.

CODING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

We constructed a coding sheet incorporating the relevant content categories relevant to this study. The coding sheet was used as the instrument to content analyse the contents of the newspapers selected for this study. We consulted the Kenneth Dike Library and the Academic Staff Union of Universities' Research Library (both in the University of Ibadan) to get the editions of the newspapers we analysed. The researchers did the coding personally to ensure consistency and reliability. Frequency count and percentages were used to analyse the data which were presented on tables. In order to ensure that the instrument was reliable, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. Holsti's (1969) inter-coder reliability method as explained by Wimmer and Domonick (2003) was used to calculate the reliability

index. The formula is given as $2M \div N_1 + N_2$, where M is the number of coding decisions agreed upon by all the coders, N_1 is the number of decisions by first coder and N_2 is the number of decisions made by second coder. The two coders agreed on 18 items (M) out of a sub-sample of 22 units (N). This gives the equation: $36 \div 44$. The test gave a reliability index of **0.818**, which was judged significantly high to make the instrument capable of generating credible results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1:

What is the extent of prominence given to Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja inspired political conflict in the selected newspapers?

This research question aims at finding out the prominence or the degree of importance the selected newspapers accorded the political conflict issue under study. The issue of prominence is measured based on the newspapers' placement of the reports on the front page, editorial page, back page, and inside page. The enumerated categories are sequentially arranged in accordance with their degree of importance with the first bearing the highest level of importance and the last, the least level of importance. Table 1 below shows the data.

Table 1: Extent of Prominence the Selected Newspapers Accorded the Political Conflict

CATEGORY	PROMINENCE	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	<i>The Nation</i>
	%	%
Front Page	34	23.7
Editorial Page	3	3.6
Back Page	0	0.7
Inside Page	63	72
TOTAL	100% n=64	100% n=139

Source: Authors Field work

Table 1 shows that both newspapers (Nigerian Tribune and The Nation) published 203 stories. Out of this figure, the *Nigerian Tribune* had 64 reports while *The Nation* published the remaining 139 reports. The *Nigerian Tribune* published 34% of its total stories of the conflict on the front pages and 63% on the Inside pages. *The Nation* published 23.7% on the Front page 72% on the Inside pages.

One major noticeable trend in the patterns adopted by the selected newspapers to report the political conflict related-stories is a subtle bias for stories that were likely to intensify the conflict and aggravate public reaction by placing such stories on the front pages of the newspapers while those that appear neutral and less inciting were placed on the inside pages. The two categories of reports are tagged *potentially inciting stories* (bad quality reports) and *non-inciting (neutral) stories* (good quality reports). The following headlines

and the level of prominence accorded them in terms of their placement by the newspapers are presented to substantiate this trend:

Potentially Inciting Stories (Bad Quality Reports):

I. War in Ibadan

- Ladoja in gun battle
- Adedibu takes on...

(*Nigerian Tribune* Friday, December 23, 2005 p. 1)

II. Will Adedibu Remove Ladoja Today?

(*Nigerian Tribune* Thursday, December 29, 2005 p. 1)

III. Revealed: ‘Thugs’ Sat to Impeach Ladoja

(*The Nation* Wednesday, January 4, 2005 p. 1)

Non-Inciting Stories (Good Quality Reports):

I. Ladoja’s Impeachment: The Roles of the Bar and the Bench

(*The Nation* Monday, January 23, 2006 p. 33)

II. The Context of the Oyo

Contest

(*The Nation* Friday, January 27, 2006 p. 11)

III. Open Letter to Mr President on the Political Crisis in Ibadan –

The Teachers of Oyo State

(*Nigerian Tribune* Saturday, December 24, 2005 p. 17)

The headlines above have shown the varieties of report qualities in the two newspapers. This category of news headline under the good quality reports, according to Pate (2002) and Waisbord (2002) are those that are constructive, responsible and capable of resolving the political conflict, whereas those of the bad quality reports are capable of heightening the crisis they portray.

Reports on front pages are always deemed the most important, followed by those on back pages, and lastly by those with least significance on the inside pages (Adisa, 2003; Folarin, 2004). However, in conflict reporting, “since media-cultivated facts and values are the standards by which we can judge” (Umechukwu, 2001, p. 106), Aliagan (2006) notes that the editorial page which is considered as the sacred and most valued section by the newspaper, is next in importance to the front page. Therefore, it is not encouraging that the selected newspapers featured the political conflict reports more on the inside pages (the page with the least relevance) than other pages with greater relevance. Findings indicate

that a higher proportion of the political conflict reports in the selected newspapers were recorded on the inside pages totalling 140 (69%) reports, followed by 55 (27%) reports on the front pages, seven (3.5%) reports on the editorial pages, and one (0.5%) report on the back pages.

Moreover, more discouraging is the fact that the *Nigerian Tribune*, which is domiciled in Ibadan, the scene of the political conflict, despite the horrible realities of the conflict, did not accord the event more prominence than *The Nation*, a Lagos-based newspaper outfit, did. In the analysis of the findings, it is indicated that *The Nation* newspaper had a higher number of stories across all categories than the *Nigerian Tribune*. This lapse on the part of the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper could have been because of some perceived external and internal pressure on the editorial department.

The findings suggest that that the media could provide clues to the public about the degree of importance an issue holds. When the media cover certain issues more prominently, such issues are likely to be considered most significant by media audience. This further bears relevance with the Agenda-setting theory, which holds that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to this issue by the mass audiences (McCombs, 2004; Watson, 2003). The *Nigerian*

Tribune newspaper might have deliberately done this to limit the importance that the public accord the political conflict issue. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Chief Lamidi Adedibu whom it supports (as findings for research question 2 indicate) is involved in the crisis.

Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between ownership pattern and the image ascribed to the political figures - Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja - by the selected newspapers?

The research question intends to find out if there was any trace of

bias and advocacy journalism on the part of the selected newspapers, judging by their ownership patterns and locations. Specifically, the purpose here is to establish the extent to which ownership factor influences patterns of reconstructing the social reality (the political conflict in this context) by the selected newspapers. The categories used to answer the question are ‘Pro-Ladoja’, ‘Anti-Ladoja’, ‘Pro-Adedibu’, ‘Anti-Adedibu’ and ‘Neutral. Table 2 presents the data on the image ascribed to Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Senator Rashidi Ladoja.

Table 2: Percentage of Image Framing of the Political Conflict Actors by the Selected Newspapers

Story Frame	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i> (%)	<i>The Nation</i> (%)
Pro-Ladoja	0.0	15.8
Anti-Ladoja	12.5	1.4
Pro-Adedibu	15.6	0.0
Anti-Adedibu	0.0	10.1
Neutral	71.9	72.7
TOTAL	100% n= 64	100% n= 139

Source: Authors Field work

Table 2 shows how the conflict stories were framed in the two selected newspapers. The more significant aspect of the above analysis lies on the highly contrasting values recorded by the two newspapers on the identified categories. Both newspapers took a more neutral perspective in their

coverage; however, the *Nigerian Tribune* was Pro-Adedibu and Anti-Ladoja while *The Nation* was Pro-Ladoja and Anti-Adedibu.

The following headlines from the selected newspapers would further help portray this trend:

I. PDP's Garrison Mentality

(The Nation Sunday, January 1, 2006 p. 17)

II. "Why Adedibu remains a force in Ibadan politics"

(The Nation Sunday, January 15, 2006 p. 39)

III. Save us from Adedibu's Men, journalists write OBJ, others

(The Nation Friday, November 6, 2006 p. 6)

IV. Akala accuses Tinubu of fuelling crisis

(Nigerian Tribune Saturday, November 4, 2006 p. 2)

V. The Battle for Oyo

Akala: You want to pervert the course of justice –Tinubu

(The Nation Wednesday, November 4, 2006 p. 11)

This foregoing trend may not be unconnected with the fact that the two newspapers belong to opposition political parties. The PDP whose Ibadan branch controls the *Nigerian Tribune*, has been reportedly said to have been in a long-drawn acrimony with the AC whose Lagos branch controls *The Nation*. The researchers glaringly observed this trace of discord in some reports of the selected newspapers.

During the time of the crisis, the selected newspapers, the *Nigerian Tribune* especially, were observed to have published most reports that were in support of their

own views about the conflict situation. In fact, the two newspapers both engaged in oversimplification of conflict by classifying opposing views into two extremes of good or bad, inferior or superior. Their activities confirmed Allan and Zeiller's (2004) assertion that the media are sometimes used as proxies in the battle between rival political groups, in the process sowing divisiveness rather than consensus, hate speech instead of sober debate, and suspicion rather than social trust; thus, contributing to public cynicism and democratic decay. For instance, the *Nigerian Tribune's* publication of November 4, 2006 p. 2 carried a story bearing the headline "**Akala Accuses Tinubu of Fuelling Crisis**". It pointed accusing fingers at the one-time governor of Lagos State and top stakeholder in Action Congress Party, Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu for being destructive in his judgment of the crisis. Four days later on November 8, 2006, *The Nation's* newspaper did a report, which seemed to counter *Nigerian Tribune's* story of November 4 thus:

Fear of Emergency in Oyo State

- Ex-Governor: Adedibu behind attacks
- Tinubu: Akala wants to dodge justice

These and so many other examples depict that the South West Nigerian press, despite being the pioneer of journalism in the country, still have a lot to learn about political conflict reporting, as some reports by

the selected newspapers were devoid of objectivity and balance which is imperative to conflict reporting. Scholars (e.g. Coleman, 2009 and Martin, 2005) have observed, however, that the profit-driven terrain where the media corporations operate tends to compel journalists to aid their financial supporters, thereby making reports to be driven progressively by free market rather than the truth. What is significant about this finding is that it bears relevance with Tankard's (2001) submission on Framing Theory. According Tankard (2001), the news media could manipulate readers' cognition or sense of judgement when reporting certain issues of public interest by providing false benchmarks with which the readers evaluate the stands of the characters or subjects in the issue, hence making the readers take side with the favoured party. This further confirms the findings of a study by Ekeanyanwu (2007) in which he noted that media ownership influence could affect editorial contents. This phenomenon is probably what Akinfeleye (2004) attempts to capture when he notes that news reportage and presentation from owners' stations may be skewed to protect owners' interests when situation arises, a case of he who pays the piper calls the tune.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that one of the two newspapers; *The Nation*, reported the conflict issue more

frequently and prominently on its front page, editorial page, back page and inside page than the *Nigerian Tribune* did. This sharply shows the level of importance accorded the conflict issue in terms of placement and the rate at which the selected newspapers want the people to assess information about the much-pronounced political conflict that rocked the city of Ibadan in the Fourth Republic. This irregularity on the part of the *Nigerian Tribune* by the virtue of its proximity to the conflict scene showed that editorial independence most of time is subjected negatively to ownership influence as the PDP, which Chief Lamidi Adedibu belongs to, is believed to largely control *Nigerian Tribune*.

Most importantly, the study has shown that in the area of conflict reporting, the South Western Nigeria press did not live up to their standard as role model to print media organizations in other geo-political zones, as the selected newspapers framed the image of the actors in the conflict from a biased angle. The *Nigerian Tribune* promoted the interest of Chief Lamidi Adedibu to the detriment of Senator Rashidi Ladoja, whereas *The Nation* was more involved in attacking Chief Lamidi Adedibu while demonstrating more support for Senator Rashidi Ladoja. In other words, the selected papers openly supported one political party against another and fuelled embers of sectionalism, and party chauvinism,

all of which culminated in fragmentation and disintegration, which threatened the stability of Oyo State polity during the time of the conflict.

As it was further observed, the media were completely immersed in the current partisan politics, and were unable to develop the required ethos of professionalism, impartiality, responsibility, objectivity and balance in reporting the political conflict issue. This nature of coverage of crises issues and the performance of the print media, especially in the South West has maintained a continuous trend. Because the media in the South West were actively involved in pre-independence and nationalistic struggles during the colonial era,

they became part of the politics of that time which characterized the use of media to achieve political ends at the detriment of public good.

We, therefore, recommend that the press should alienate itself from the vortex of partisan politics and the conflicts that do usually arise from it. Sensationalism, which has been known to blow up crises, should be seriously avoided. As well, suppression of the truth should be avoided as it is capable of escalating the crisis. Although healthy and socially responsible criticism may be tolerated, it should, however, be practised with no hostility. Journalists in the coverage and management of crises must constantly observe professionalism, fairness, objectivity and ethical considerations.

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