

**THE NIGERIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN A
PLURALISTIC SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates Nigeria's press coverage of political crises and conflicts during the President Obasanjo (Second Term) regime of 2003-2007. The major focus of this paper is to assess the role of the Nigerian press in the struggle for political positions, which breeds crises and conflicts especially in a pluralistic society. It is the position of the paper that the Nigerian press has not fared very well in reporting political conflicts and crises because of the advocacy position adopted by most of them. It is also observed that editorial influence on the part of publishers may not be unconnected with this trend. Using the content analytical research method as the main instrument of data generation, this paper submits that the Nigerian press has operated more as active players in political crises and conflicts than as an impartial judge of such crises and conflicts. This has negatively affected the management of such crises and conflicts. The paper therefore cautions against advocacy journalism in the Nigerian media industry and suggests more public participation in the media industry through "people" ownership. The press should also strive towards better professional and ethical practices in the industry and ensures that it only engages in constructive and balanced reporting of conflicts and issues.

KEY WORDS: Pluralistic Society, Advocacy Journalism, Political Conflicts, People Ownership, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

One sure way of keeping in touch with our contemporary world is through the media. Communication is a vital component of our lives and existence and no society has been known to exist without it. It is the exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and the sharing of meanings between persons, nations, societies and cultures. This necessitates the continuous study in the area of mass communication and how it affects different societies and people.

The media are often in liberal theory referred to as the "Fourth Estate" and the "watchdog of the society", meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important link/factor in the relationship between the government and the governed and make them a sine qua non to societal growth and development.

The understanding of the place of communication becomes more imperative in the 21st century for obvious reasons. The 21st Century is the Age of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICTs) powered by the developments in computer technology. The Age of ICTs has taken science and technology to another level. Nations, societies, peoples and even businesses are now run with the help of technology; those that are not technology complaint lose their touch, influence and essence. Most of these developments are made possible through the instrumentality of the media of communication.

Furthermore, democratic culture has also given the media/news media in general the privilege of setting the agenda of political discourse and other forms of socio-cultural cum economic discussions. This invariably makes the media powerful and influential. As suggested by Baran and Davies (2003), 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. The agenda setting theory implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at any given time in a given society. This theory does not ascribe to the media power to determine what the public actually thinks, but to them the power to determine what the people should be thinking about. This assertion is associated with Bernard Cohen's statement that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think but what to think about. With this theory in mind, the media is 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. Therefore, the posers that should preoccupy our attention in this paper are-did the Nigerian press coverage of political conflicts reflect any bias that could have contributed to the management of such conflicts? What roles have they played and what positions and sides have they taken in reporting political conflicts, which may make or mar the management and resolution of such conflicts? Considering the fact the Nigerian polity is made of numerous ethnic nationalities, did ownership patterns (which in many instances are ethnic based) affect the quality of reportage given to political conflicts? These posers (in the Nigerian context) expose the actual link between political conflicts and the press.

The development of the Nigerian democracy [which is our study focus] and politics is closely linked with that of the press (Umechukwu, 2001; Egbon, 1994). In the Nigerian First Republic for instance, the late multi-billionaire, Chief MKO Abiola established the National Concord to advance his political interest in the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in 1979-1983. The newspaper was then used to demystify the person of Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was politically anointed to win the Nigerian Presidency when and if it was zoned to the South-West of the country. This objective was to pave the way for the emergence of Chief MKO Abiola as leading candidate in the elections. The Zik group of newspapers was also established to advance the political interest of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who openly used the newspapers for his political ends. There are many other instances that suggest a link between the development of Nigerian democracy and the press. The Nigerian Tribune of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the New Nigeria were some of the media organizations established to advance certain parochial political interests. However, they all contributed in one way or the other to the development of the Nigerian democracy.

Furthermore, the nationalists used the press as an instrument of struggle during the pre-independence and military era. Since then, the Nigerian press has continued to participate in the political setting of the country. The opening up of the political space with the introduction of MacPherson constitution of 1951 also opened up ethnic and sectional politics which was

sparked off by a feud between the Daily Service of Ernest Okoli and S.L. Akintola and West African Pilot of Nnamdi Azikiwe between 1939-1944 (Galadima and Ehighe, 2001:64). Graham Mytton (1983) cited in Galadima and Ehighe (2001) also notes that when the British colonial government assured Nigeria of political independence, further party newspapers appeared as it became clear that publishing a newspaper was part of a successful political campaign. This made Nnamdi Azikiwe of NCNC to control 10 newspapers while his closest rival, Obafemi Awolowo of Action Group controlled 14 newspapers.

The question that arises from this assertion is how does the press do this? The press all over the globe is regarded as a political instrument and in advanced societies, the mass media are actually an integral part of political life, serving for most people as their major and only link with the government and providing for them the information which they require to make political judgment on the basis of their political attitudes. In every society, the mass media plays important roles in the society or social system. That is why no government can do without the mass media. In addition to providing information about the political process, the mass media can confer status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues. This is known as status conferral function of the mass media. The mass media can also set the political agenda for the society by deciding what political topics the people talk about. The agenda setting function of the mass media is an important aspect of the institutional linkage between the mass media and politics (Umechukwu, 2001).

From the discussions so far, it is obvious that the mass 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 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.

The media also have the power to control much of the raw material needed by political elites and the general public by thinking about the political horizon and planning political action. At times, media professionals can generate political action directly through their own investigations or indirectly through their capacity to stimulate pseudo-events.

By creating and sustaining political values, the mass media are also important tools for political stability and social equilibrium. The Nigerian mass media are expected to avoid the practices of fraternization with political aspirations of their owners. They are expected to eschew all forms of subjective or biased reporting of political events and issues.

The media also influence accurate and timely reaction from the populace for a better political change by raising accurate and timely alarm on such issues of public concern.

In conclusion, the roles of mass media in reporting politics and ensuring political stability are summarized below:

The mass media can serve as behavior models for the political class by indicating which behaviour patterns and attitudes are acceptable or not.

The mass media can set the agenda for civic concern and action.

The mass media call attention to issues of potential public concern and they also provide clues to the public about the degree of importance of such an issue.

The media could also function as agencies of social legitimation-as forces that reaffirm those ultimate value standards and beliefs, which in turn, uphold the social and political status quo.

The mass media survey the political events of the day and make them the focus of public and private attention. They also interpret their meanings, put them into context and speculate about their consequences on the society.

The mass media also promote political socialization and education.

The mass media, should also function as a watchdog of the society and as a crusade dog by exposing political evils and corruption in government and political circles.

Lastly, the mass media coordinate news stories and supportive political activities to bring about desired reforms in the socio-political life of a nation.

However, Nigeria as a developing nation needs a press more attuned to developmental reporting than with conflicts and crises (Egbon, 1994). Ekeanyanwu (2005) also notes that caution should be exercised in the coverage/reportage of politically motivated conflicts in developing societies. Nwuneli (1986) further notes that too much crises journalism can have a disturbing effect on the rationality and dedication needed in a developing polity. This view also receives the support of Mahatma Gandhi cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001:62-3) 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 Gandhi many years ago is also applicable in Nigerian of today.

This makes this paper relevant at this point in Nigeria's march to true democratization and development. Nigeria's democratic march has not been without problems and challenges and the press has had its own fair share of these challenges. Taking some lingering political crises in Nigeria as the point of focus, the paper aims at ascertaining the role and involvement of the Nigerian press in political conflict reporting. The primary purpose here is to identify where the press has done it wrongly in terms of quality, prominence, tone and frequency attached to such reports; praise their genuine efforts, suggest a better way forward and help the sustenance of democratic values and culture inspite of these challenges.

Some of the issues analyzed are the media coverage of "Godfatherism" or political patronage, election rigging and judicial handling of election petitions, the numerous impeachment threats and actual impeachment of State Governors, their Deputies, Speakers of State Assemblies and Local Government Chairmen; and of course the judicial interpretation and handling of the conflicts arising from all these.

Godfatherism is a lingering factor in the Nigerian political scene. What is happening in Nigeria today is also happening in most other developing nations in different forms and realm [A pilot study by the author suggests that godfatherism syndrome is also visible in some developing West African nations]. Godfatherism is a common conflict amongst the political class. It (godfatherism) could be described as politics of sponsorship to political positions, control of political power, political patronage and the ultimate control of state treasury, personnel and resources.

With regards to the impeachment saga in the Nigerian political scene during the period under investigation, Nigerians witnessed how only four members in a twenty member Plateau State House of Assembly sat and purportedly impeached a Governor from office in 2006. In Ekiti (one of the six western states in Nigeria), Nigerians also saw the emergence of two incumbent Governors before the declaration of a state of emergency in the state by President Obasanjo in 2006. The Constitutional amendment debates, the “Third Term” agenda and political succession disputes left sore points in the Nigerian political history as a nation. These issues caused a lot of political tensions in Nigeria and some actually generated conflicts of enormous proportion. The media being the watchdog of the society and agenda setter had little or no other option than to ensure that these issues are adequately reflected in the news of the day. There were streaming and bullet headlines and some of the media organizations even resorted to sensationalism.

Rigging is also another major political problem associated with developing societies democracies as well as the adjudication of political conflicts by the judicial arm of government. The four newspapers under review were content analyzed to find out how the newspapers reported and managed these issues.

Finally, under this section, there is need for us to have an understanding of the pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society and media. Nigeria came into being in 1914 when Lord Lugard amalgamated the northern and southern protectorates. Before the advent of colonial rule, Nigerians belonged to numerous different autonomous ethnic nationalities and as at now, records show that there are about 200 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria with Yoruba, Hausa and Ibos as the dominant ones. Nnoli (1995) cited in Umechukwu (2001) defines ethnicity as “a social phenomenon associated with some forms of interaction between the longest possible cultural linguistics/communal groups (ethnic groups) within political societies such as a nation or state. It arises when relations between ethnic nationalities are competitive rather than cooperative. It is characterized by cultural prejudice and socio economic and political discrimination.

The encyclopedia of sociology (2003) also cited in Umechukwu (2001) defines ethnicity as primordial affinity, part of a person’s basic group identity that asserts itself whenever social or political organization runs counter to the ways in which people have been programmed. From the definitions above, it will be seen that ethnicity makes people to be eccentric in their mode of thinking and action and this is easily displayed when matters involving the ethnic origin of such persons are involved.

The different ethnic groups in Nigeria have their unique peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, and different linguistic and cultural patterns. Infact, the Nigerian society is diverse and heterogeneous. It is a conglomeration of forces, each buried within its frame of reference, sworn to its various eccentric ideals and exerting pressure and demands from the totality of the populace or the various institutions within or outside the government. These forces could be centrifugal (moving away from the centre) or centripetal (moving towards the centre). It is this society that makes politics much more complex than it could be in a more homogeneous society. This society also contributes to the type or nature of the Nigerian media, which toe the line of ethnic colouration thereby influencing editorial policy and content.

A critical look at Nigeria's political situation since independence paints a picture of a political instability. Nigeria has witnessed series of political structures, namely parliamentary system in the first republic, military dictatorship (1966-78), Civilian Administration (1979-83), Military Dictatorship again (1983-1999), Civilian Administration (1999-?). Also, the nature of the Nigerian society, which is highly pluralistic easily breeds political conflicts necessitating this study to help the media industry in a developing society to play a constructive and balanced role in the resolution of such conflicts or crises.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study is generally aimed at finding out how some Nigerian newspapers covered/reported political conflicts and crises during the Obasanjo administration. Specifically, the study hopes to:

1. Find out the quality of reportage given to certain specific political conflicts in some Nigerian newspapers.
2. Determine the frequency of coverage given to some certain specific political events in some Nigerian newspapers.
3. Determine the methods these newspapers used in gathering information in writing these reports.
4. Determine the direction/slant or tone of these reports
5. Find out the level of prominence given to specific political conflicts in some Nigerian newspapers.
6. Determine the story types in which the reporting of these specific events appeared most often.

HYPOTHESES

To help focus this study, some hypotheses were formulated. They include:

1) The quality of the reports published in the newspapers would depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers, because the history of the Nigerian press suggests that the establishment of media organizations have always had ethnic leanings. This is why most newspapers in Lagos, for instance, are regarded as the Yoruba press. By selecting four different newspapers from the four major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, this particular hypothesis aims to determine if such ownership patterns affected the quality of reportage.

The newspapers would depend more on investigative journalism/interviews than interviews or investigation alone in their coverage of political conflicts in Nigeria.

3) The slant/direction taken by the newspapers on a specific conflict issue in which there are ethnic tensions will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publisher.

4) The prominence attached to the coverage of some specific political conflicts in Nigeria in which there are ethnic tensions by the newspapers will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers.

THE POLITICAL CONFLICT REPORTER

Conflict is an intractable and polymorphous concept, hence the inherent vagueness of most of the proposals for its management. Folarin (2004) notes that conflict is the outcome of opposing or opposed interests, concerns, needs and positions of individuals, groups, organizations/institutions and societies that have to interact whether in ad-hoc or permanent relations, usually with a view to achieving specific, quite often selfish objectives and interests. Conflict can also be seen from another angle as a situation in which an individual, group or

organization is compelled by circumstances to make a choice between two opposing courses of action, which are both unfavourable to the one compelled to make the decision or choice. When the situation described above is about political issues or politics in general terms, it is then regarded as political conflict.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle described man as “a political animal”. For the purpose of this paper, this description then also applies to reporters with political emotions which can taint their political reports. This could be very dangerous in a third world nation and in a nation of multi-ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and so on like Nigeria. Therefore, political conflict reporting should not be left in the hands of the cub reporter or the inexperienced, unchallenged, and neophyte reporter.

Politics strives at building a stable nation, not a nation of instability. Therefore, the political reporter is supposed to play an ombudsman (middle man or mediator) role between the major players in the political field and conflict. He is also expected to play the role of a “go-between” between the political class and the entire society in his political coverage and reporting (Umechukwu, 2001). He is never expected to be biased and subjective, although he could be objectively opinionated; he should play down on advocacy journalism and only strives to give the society the facts the way it is and allow them to take their individual positions (Galadima & Enighe, 2001).

In political conflict reporting, the reporter should never be a player or combatant no matter the level of provocation or involvement of his personal values. Infact, the political reporter in reporting conflicts, especially in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, must remain aloof so that the players can see him as being in the centre and consequently listen and heed to his call. The political conflict reporter must therefore uphold the principle of “The Fairness Doctrine” in his coverage of political conflicts. The Fairness Doctrine states that media organizations must get the views of opposing forces or parties in a conflict before going to press. This doctrine helps to maintain the sanctity of objectivity in media business. The political conflict reporter must therefore make concerted efforts to hear from every side in the controversy and see to it that their opinions are adequately presented even if they run contrary to the reporter’s values and personal stand on the issue. This way the press in a pluralistic society could be seen as an unbiased umpire in the analysis, interpretation and subsequent resolution of political conflicts and crises.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Many theories exist to address media influence through coverage. Some of these theories are offshoots of the minimal effects and the all-powerful effects theories of the press. However, for this study, we shall hinge our discussion on two related theoretical constructs. These constructs are the Gatekeeping and the Agenda – Setting theories of the press. The rationale for selecting these theories is obvious. The two theories address media surveillance/coverage and therefore help to determine media role in specific social situations. Therefore, the theories that arose from the accepted media functions of gatekeeping and agenda setting have continued to remain relevant in addressing media coverage of national and international issues.

The Gatekeeping theory is a child of the gatekeeping function of the mass media of communication. Kurt Lewin formed the term “gatekeeping” at about 1951. He used the term to

describe those individuals who control the “gates” or channels through which information or news passes from the source to the final consumers. Lewin’s point here is that no media house, no matter the size and level of operation, can transmit all the messages it receives in the course of a day’s business. Some persons have to decide which news to transmit, which to defer its transmission to another date and time, which to modify, which to delete completely or which to kill outrightly. Such persons, according to Lewin (1951) open and close the gate that stands between the news sources and the receivers. Note, gatekeeping as a mass media activity and function does not stop at opening and closing the news gate, or rejecting and accepting news/information for publication or broadcast, it also involves the shaping and reshaping, display, timing, repetition etc of the news and information in the various media establishment. According to Okwudiba Nnoli, cited in Attah (2006:42), “the media provide a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt the media version of social reality of fact and norm, value and expectations”.

The journalist is first and foremost a gatekeeper and may have to perform this role at different periods in the news process. According to Folarin (2002), the factors influencing gatekeeping decisions include timing, ownership pattern, management policy, perceived needs and preferences of the audience, editor’s perception of reality, views held by editor’s colleagues, influence of advertisers, appraisal of offering by the competition, availability of photography or film footage, legal consideration, professional ethics and ideological perspectives and political orientation. The media decide what millions will learn of, and indeed how they will interpret the day’s events in the nation and in the world. They create national issues and icons overnight, and can make or mar by their coverage and the slant they give to issues. The Gatekeeping Theory, therefore, revolves around the media role of news selection and dissemination in line with the influential factors listed above.

The second theoretical construct, which will also help us to analyze the performance of the Nigerian mass media industry in reporting and managing crises and conflicts, is the Agenda-Setting Theory of mass communication. According to McComb and Shaw (1974), the media emphasis on an issue influences the audience to also view the issue as important. The media attach certain weights to news stories through placement, size and frequency of appearance of such stories. Agenda setting posits that audiences learn these salient issues from the news media, thus incorporating a similar set of weights and importance into their own personal agenda.

Shaw (1983:132) reaffirms this view when he posits that the media, by focusing repeated and major attention on an event or set of related events, can transfer that event into an issue. Umechukwu (2001:148-150) and Folarin (2002:75-76) also agree that the mass media have an impact on agenda setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topics as important. This implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are considered as important at a given time in a given society. Agenda Setting Theory, however, does not give to the media the ultimate power to determine what the public actually thinks; but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking about. The above view is a reaffirmation of Bernard Cohen (1963) statement that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they may be very successful in telling them what to think about.

Sandman et al (1976:19) sees agenda setting as the editorial decision that a particular event is not news if the news media ignores it or says so. Globally any event given major emphasis in the mass media ultimately becomes a major event. This is referred to as agenda setting, which gave birth to the Agenda Setting Theory of the press.

The literature on the role of the mass media in political reporting (Nationally, locally and internationally) abounds in published materials. McCombs and Mauro (1977), Gerbner et al (1982), Chaffee et al (1970), Sandman et al (1976) and Umechukwu (2001) all agree that the media are agents of political communication and propaganda. Fred Omu (1978) notes, “The early Nigerian press was essentially a political press which took on the opposition to the government” Galadima & Enighe (2001:64) supports this view thus:

The press was owned and run by nationalists to confront the colonial government. It was “press of protest” in which, Babatunde Jose said, seditious and criminally libelous articles were written against the colonial government in the name of nationalism. However, this helped in the constitutional reforms and the granting of self-government to the nationalists.

Many scholars are in agreement about the role the media could play in political reporting which is a primary area of development in any polity. Politics without so much emphasis determines the well being of a society. Even development communication has a political undertone or colouration. Politics in this part of the globe is simply concerned with acquiring or exercising political power within a group or an organization or a state. In the view of Uzoegbunam (1977) cited in Umechukwu (2001), discussing the concepts of power, dominations, control, influence, society and class brought together for the working of a people in a territory means discussing politics. We shall, therefore attempt a summary of literature review here.

Shaw and McCombs (1977:106) did comprehensive work on agenda setting and are in acknowledgement of the fact that media surveillance of events and issues revolves around setting agenda for civic concern and action. This is politically significant. Generally, it is held that media professionals or reporters determine what is news, which political happening or condition will be covered or prescribed and which to downplay or give prominence in their daily coverage of national and international issues. Undesirable political conditions that may be tolerated while they remain obscure may quickly become intolerable in the glare of publicity (Umechukwu, 2001:103). McCombs and Mauro (1977) on their part note that the media also provide clues to the public about the degree of importance of an issue. Political issues covered more prominently by the media are likely to be considered most important by media audience.

Blumler cited in Umechukwu (2001:104) points to the fact that the mass media, while surveying the environment, functions essentially as agencies of social legitimation – as forces, which reaffirm those ultimate value standards and beliefs, which in turn, upholds the social and political status quo. Since the media are the eyes and ears of the citizens, their means of surveillance which tell them about political conditions, economic and social conditions, journalists need to be more objective in news reporting and imbibe a crusading posture in order to influence public opinion. It is through the gathering and dissemination of information that the people are assumed that their political system is still relevant despite the predisposition to trial

and error mechanism. This is very vital if the people must have peace of mind. This is the hallmark of good journalism.

The Nigerian mass media could also perform the function of promoting political socialization and mobilization. Gerbner et al (1982:101) in this line, view the mass media as “the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates the most widely shared conceptions of reality”. Kraus and Davies (1976), and Chaffee et al (1970) empirically support this. These mass communication scholars and media researchers all agree that the mass media are the primary agents of political socialization. To corroborate this view, Umechukwu (2001:106) notes thus:

This being the case, the Nigerian mass media should present political values that will lead to reforms since media-cultivated facts and values are standard by which we can judge. Once basic orientations towards the political system have been formed, attitudes usually stabilize and later learning largely supplements and refines earlier notions. Much of what the average person learns about political norms, rules, values, and events...necessarily come from the mass media. People’s opinion, feelings, and evaluation about political system may spring from the their own processing of facts supplied by the media. It is, therefore, imperative that journalists should task themselves with supplying the right political values, which would create response from the people.

Still on political socialization, which the mass media is expected to promote, Okunna (1998:108) notes that through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behaviour pattern of the society. They provide a common body of knowledge, the internationalization of which enables people to operate as effective members of their society.

It is also important at this point to briefly summarize some findings on Nigerian press coverage of conflicts and crises. Galadima and Enighe (2001) analyzed Nigerian press coverage of political issues and came up with the following conclusions:

The Nigerian press are always used by their owners- private party or government – for the propagation of the interests of such owners, especially in the struggle to gain power or monopolize same. There is recklessness and partisanship on the part of the press during elections and transition to the civil rule programmes instead of restraint and responsible reporting of events. The principle of objectivity is always abandoned by the championing of the causes of their masters political struggles. Manipulations of the press to report false election results, which caused violence, mostly in the western region, have been a common trend since independence. Proscriptions, banning and closures of media houses with the aim of reducing (or avoiding) courses, as a result of the points mentioned earlier is another recurrent trend since the first republic

Galadima and Ehighe (2001) study focused on the press in Nigerian politics with emphasis on the historical analysis of issues and patterns of news coverage. The study assessed the role of the

press in the struggle for political positions by Nigerians since independence and concluded that the Nigerian press has operated more as players in political issues than as impartial reporters of such political events or issues. Four newspapers and four newsmagazines were content analyzed to arrive at this conclusion. This study by Galadima and Enighe are essentially alike but a major difference between it and the present study is that the former is generally about the press in Nigerian politics while the latter is about the press and political conflict reporting. The focus on political conflict is the slant that distinguishes this current study.

This trend of press intimidation also manifested in the now sacred June 12 crises of 1992. June 12 1992 was the date Nigerians participated in the widely accepted and termed freest and fairest election in Nigerian political history. Unfortunately, the military President then, Ibrahim Babangida annulled the results for personal reasons. This annulment led to numerous protests and crises which increased the political tension in the country. The authors cited above note that when the Babangida political programme became an unending one; the Nigerian press abandoned their partisanship against and among the different political leanings and unanimously faced that military regime. This led to what Alade Odunewu (1994) of the Nigerian Press Council called “Suicide Squad Journalism” in Nigeria. This term was used to refer to the relentless and continued mounting of pressure on the military over the lack of sincerity of purpose in the management of both the economic and political reconstructing programmes. The press also attacked the political class for joining the military in thwarting the efforts towards true democratization.

A further look at the performance of the press after the annulment of the June 12 presidential election revealed a complete relapse to the style of coverage which saw them tackle issues from tribal, ethnic, biased, opinionated and personal perspectives. This trend has continued to define the pattern of news coverage even today. That is why the press is now involved in the promotion of issues of marginalisation and domination of one tribe over another (Galadima and Ehighe, 2001). In the same vein, the Nigerian Press Council (1994) supports the above views when it notes thus:

The press had in a bid to sell, rattled the sensibilities of decent people in the society, not just by the bold exhibition of lack of finesse but, more unfortunately, by blatant publication of unverified allegations of a nature even bordering on criminality

Similarly, the Guild of Editors also berated the press for taking rigid stand, for or against. the June 12 crises. The body claims this made it very difficult for both the military and political class to resolve the crises of that annulment of 1992. The Nigerian Union Of Journalist through its past president Mr.Zanni Zoro have also openly acknowledged the “dichotomy and recklessness” among its members in the day to day carrying out of their job of news gathering, analysis and reporting (Galadima and Ehighe ,2001).

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This study is primary meant to find how some Nigerian newspapers have fared in reporting specific political conflicts in Nigeria between 2003-2007. To achieve this, the study adopted the content analytical approach by analyzing the reportage of some political conflicts and crises in Nigeria. The cases studied, as pointed earlier on in this paper, are typical cases of political

conflict in the Nigerian political scene and so, the case study approach will enable a holistic analysis of the issues so that the recommendations will address the problem, which this paper seeks to address.

The content analytical study method is therefore adopted as the major tool of data generation. Subsequently, content categories were developed for the analysis of the newspapers studied. Four Nigerian national daily newspapers were selected for this study. These are the Guardian, Champion Tribune and Daily Trust. The selection of the newspapers and a 6-month study period was made purposively. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was to meet the study objectives set by the researcher. Nworgu (1991:78) supports this reason thus:

In purposive sampling, specific elements, which satisfy some predetermined criteria, are selected. Although the criteria to be used are usually a matter of the researcher's judgment, he exercises this judgment in relation to what he thinks will constitute a representative sample with respect to the research purpose.

Based on this argument, the author selected the above newspapers because of their ownership patterns, circulation strength, availability, and their wide range of coverage of both national and international political issues. For the ownership patterns, the Guardian publisher is from the South geo-political region of Nigeria, the Champion publisher is from the South-East geo-political region of Nigeria, Tribune publisher is from the South-West, while the Daily Trust is from the North. The reason behind this selection is to determine the extent to which the nationalities of the publishers of the newspapers influenced editorial content and quality of reportage.

This study further developed some content classifications to determine and analyze the nature of the coverage. Consequently, the newspaper content that dealt on the crises were classified according to the following divisions:

News stories

Features

Interpretative Articles

Editorials

Others

To determine the nature of prominence attached to the crises by the newspapers, the following divisions were also made:

Front page (FP) stories means very important stories.

Back page (BP) stories are next in prominence .

Inside Page (IP) stories are least in the order of importance placed on the reports.

For Slant/direction or tone, the following labels were created:

Favourable: This indicates stories or reports in the Nigerian press which present or support the public opinion on the issues raised in the reports. Both in language and content, favourable reports are positive oriented towards the public interest.

Unfavourable on the other hand represents reports in the Nigerian press that do not support the public opinion on the issues raised in the reports. Rather, such reports take sides with the political class in both language and content. Unfavourable reports are negative in perspective towards public opinion .

Neutral: This is used in this study to indicate such reports that do not betray their stance or take any of the earlier positions both in content and the language of the presentation.

For the sources of the reports, three categories were developed:

In-house Staff: These refer to news sources that are within the Nigerian media industry. These include all staff employed and paid by the newspaper under study.

News Agency Reports: These refer to those political conflict reports in the Nigerian press that are written with the help of news agencies bulletins, news flashes etc.

Unidentified sources: This will specifically refer to news stories written without a known by-line and the sources used in writing the stories are also not identified.

We also sought to determine the methods used in gathering information for the reports as indicated in the content of the stories. The following labels were established:

Personal Interviews

Investigative Journalism

Interviews and Investigative Journalism combined

Unspecified in the reports.

For the quality of the reports, four labels were developed for this level of analysis. They are:

Very High: These are reports adjudged by the author as excellent in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the reports.

High: These are reports adjudged by the author to be very good in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the reports.

Very Low: These are reports adjudged by the author to be very poor in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the reports.

Low: These are reports adjudged by the author to be poor in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the reports.

Finally, the frequency of coverage was determined by measuring the total reports on political crises against the total reports on non-political conflicts.

STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The population of this study consists of all the issues/editions of the selected newspapers published in Nigeria within the 6-month study period. This amounted to 612 issues for the four newspapers. From this figure, three editions were randomly selected per week for the four newspapers. This amounted to 78 editions per newspaper. Therefore, the sample size for this study amounted to 312 issues.

However, we must also note here that the selection of the six-month study period was purposively made. The reasons or criteria for this have been made earlier in this paper. The major criterion was the citing of incidences of political conflicts within the Nigeria body polity at that period. The so-called godfathers were busy fighting their political godsons, impeachments were going on in the states and local governments, the third term agenda and constitutional amendment debates were awash in the media and the former President Obasanjo and his vice were locked in a dirty political battle of their live. Many more of such related issues could easily be identified within this period.

METHODS OF DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES.

Simple frequency tables were used to present data gathered for the study. These tables also helped in satisfying the objectives of setting out this particular study and assisted in the analyses of the hypotheses. However, the hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square Test of Independence at the 5% level of significance (i.e. $\alpha=0.05$). Chi-Square Test of Independence was used here because it is a standard measurement test instrument. Secondly, whenever we want to establish relationship between two variables or establish independence, chi-square becomes the most reliable and convenient test instrument for such measurements (Wilmer & Dominick, 2003). These tests were done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to create the frequency distribution tables, cross tabulation tables, and the Chi-square result tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Prominence

Page Placement	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Front Page	79	21.4	21.4
Back Page	54	14.6	35.9
Inside Page	237	64.1	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 2

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Newspapers

Newspapers	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Guardian	110	29.7	29.7
The Champion	61	16.5	46.2
Tribune	84	22.7	68.9
Daily Trust	115	31.1	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 3
Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Story Classification

Story Classification	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
News Story	200	54.1	54.1
Features	10	2.7	56.8
Interpretative Articles	30	8.1	64.9
Editorials	20	5.4	70.3
Others	110	29.7	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 4
Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Story Slant/Direction

Slant/Tone	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Favourable	210	56.8	56.8
Unfavourable	60	16.2	73.0
Neutral	100	27.0	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 5
Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Sources of the Reports

Sources	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
In-house Staff	231	62.4	62.4
News Agency Reports	19	5.1	67.6
Unidentified Source	120	32.4	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 6

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Method Used in Gathering Information

Method Used in Gathering Information	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Personal Interviews	48	13.0	13.0
Investigative Journalism	32	8.6	21.6
Interviews and Investigative Journalism	115	31.1	52.7
Unspecified in the Reports	175	47.3	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 7

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Ethnic Nationality of Publisher

Ethnic Nationality of The Publisher	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
South-South	110	29.7	29.7
South-East	61	16.5	46.2
South-West	84	22.7	68.9
North	115	31.1	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 8

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Quality of Reportage

Quality of Reportage	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very High	230	62.2	62.2
High	50	13.5	75.7
Very Low	40	10.8	86.5
Low	50	13.5	100.0
Total	370	100.0	

TABLE 9

Distribution of Political Conflicts Reports According to Frequency of Coverage

Frequency of Coverage	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Political Conflict Reports	370	67.2	67.2
Non-Political Conflict Reports	181	32.8	100.0
Total	551	100.0	

These frequency distribution tables clearly show the treatment and analysis of political conflicts stories as reported in the Nigerian press within the study period. However, to test the research hypotheses as stated, cross tabulation tables containing the dependent and independent variables under investigation were also constructed with the aid of SPSS software. The four research hypotheses gave rise to four different cross tabulation tables. These were followed with the Pearson Chi-square table result. All these tables are presented below:

TABLE 10

Quality of Reportage * Ethnic Nationality of Publisher Cross Tabulation

		Ethnic Nationality of Publisher				
Quality of Reportage		South-South	East	West	North	Total
Very High	Count	91	38	48	53	230
	% of Total	24.6%	10.3%	13.0%	14.3%	62.2%
High	Count	19	17	4	10	50
	% of Total	5.1%	4.6%	1.1%	2.7%	13.5%
Very Low	Count	0	0	12	28	40
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	3.2%	7.6%	10.8%
Low	Count	0	6	20	24	50
	% of Total	.0%	1.6%	5.4%	6.5%	13.5%
Total	Count	110	61	84	115	370
	% of Total	29.7%	16.5%	22.7%	31.1%	100.0%

TABLE 10b
Chi-Square Test Results for Hypothesis 1

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	95.382(a)	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	121.014	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	55.255	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	370		

(a) 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.59.

The chi-square value of 95.382 at 9 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.000. Therefore, the research hypothesis that the quality of the reports published in the newspapers would depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers is upheld at 5% alpha level of significance.

TABLE 11
Newspaper * Method Used in Gathering Information Cross Tabulation

		Method Used in Gathering Information				
Newspaper		Personal Interviews	Investigative Journalism	Interviews & Investigative Journalism	Unspecified in the Reports	Total
Guardian	Count	48	32	30	0	110
	% of Total	13.0%	8.6%	8.1%	.0%	29.7%
The Champion	Count	0	0	0	61	61
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	16.5%	16.5%
Tribune	Count	0	0	0	84	84
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	22.7%	22.7%
Daily Trust	Count	0	0	85	30	115
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	23.0%	8.1%	31.1%
Total	Count	48	32	115	175	370
	% of Total	13.0%	8.6%	31.1%	47.3%	100.0%

TABLE 11b
Chi-Square Test Results for Hypothesis 2

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	450.669 (a)	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	514.937	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	104.993	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	370		

(a) 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.28.

The chi-square value of 450.669 at 9 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.000. Therefore, the research hypothesis that the newspapers would depend more on investigative journalism/interviews than interviews or investigation alone in their coverage of political conflicts in Nigeria is upheld at 5% alpha level of significance.

TABLE 12
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher * Slant/Direction Cross Tabulation

		Slant/Direction			
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher		Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral	Total
South-South	Count	77	13	20	110
	% of Total	20.8%	3.5%	5.4%	29.7%
East	Count	21	20	20	61
	% of Total	5.7%	5.4%	5.4%	16.5%
West	Count	44	20	20	84
	% of Total	11.9%	5.4%	5.4%	22.7%
North	Count	68	7	40	115
	% of Total	18.4%	1.9%	10.8%	31.1%
Total	Count	210	60	100	370
	% of Total	56.8%	16.2%	27.0%	100.0%

TABLE 12b
Chi-Square Test Results for Hypothesis 3

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.874(a)	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.374	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.483	1	.062
N of Valid Cases	370		

(a) 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.89.

The chi-square value of 37.874 at 6 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.000. Therefore, the research hypothesis that the slant/direction taken by the newspapers will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publisher is upheld at 5% alpha level of significance.

TABLE 13
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher * Prominence Cross Tabulation

		Prominence			
Ethnic Nationality of Publisher		Front Page	Back Page	Inside Page	Total
South-South	Count	16	15	79	110
	% of Total	4.3%	4.1%	21.4%	29.7%
East	Count	29	11	21	61
	% of Total	7.8%	3.0%	5.7%	16.5%
West	Count	12	5	67	84
	% of Total	3.2%	1.4%	18.1%	22.7%
North	Count	22	23	70	115
	% of Total	5.9%	6.2%	18.9%	31.1%
Total	Count	79	54	237	370
	% of Total	21.4%	14.6%	64.1%	100.0%

TABLE 13b
Chi-Square Test Results for Hypothesis 4

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.189(a)	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.058	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.002	1	.963
N of Valid Cases	370		

(a) 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.90.

The chi-square value of 44.189 at 6 degrees of freedom is significant at 0.000. Therefore, the research hypothesis that the prominence the newspapers attached to the coverage of political conflicts in Nigeria will depend on the ethnic nationality of the publishers of the newspapers.

DISCUSSIONS

From the data generated from this study, the review of related and relevant literature, observations and experience, it is obvious the Nigerian newspapers still have a lot to learn in the reportage of crises in a pluralistic society. They have not entirely done very badly but have left much to be desired. This is because of various inhibitions that the press has allowed to influence their professional performance. For instance, the Nigerian journalist have allowed his employer, his family and relatives and friends as well as the type/nature of society to influence the way and manner they carry on with their professional duties. This in turn affects the handling of crises to the detriment of efforts to resolve them.

An analysis of the study findings shows that over 50 % of the entire reports were mainly news stories, which is devoid of sound journalistic analysis. Conflict reports really need to be interpreted by the experienced journalist. That is why the people regard him as a watchdog of the society. One wonders how mere reports can help manage crisis in such a pluralistic society like Nigeria. There is a glaring lack of investigative reports, which could have revealed so many hidden facts that could have helped to quicken the resolutions of the conflicts.

In simple terms, the reports did not fully reflect the news events. If the Nigerian President for instance did not confess (in his monthly media chart on national television) through an outburst in his historic reply of the letter by the former PDP national chairman Chief Audu Ogbe, Nigerians would not have heard that both Governor Chris Ngige of Anambra State (South-East of Nigeria) and his erstwhile godfather Uba have owned up before him that they collaborated to rig the gubernatorial elections in Anambra state in 2003. The ruling party chairman then, Chief Audu Ogbe, has written a letter to the President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who is also the “Party Leader” to personally intervene in the Anambra crises by cautioning Chris Uba (the estranged godfather of Governor Chris Ngige). In the letter Chief Ogbe accused some federal politicians of supporting Uba. In his reply, the Nigerian President then, Olusegun Obasanjo felt fingered in the crises and said the Governor and his godfather had a pre-election agreement

which the Governor is bound to honour. He also said that both of them owned up before him that the gubernatorial election in Anambra State (which ushered Chris Ngige to office) was rigged to favour PDP. So, based on this confession, the President told the media audience that the Governor lacks the moral authority to continue in office and that since he cannot remove him he will choose not to deal with him until that moral burden is lifted.

In the same vein, if the political disagreement between the former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar, did not get out of hand, Nigerians will never have known about the PTDF scandal because the media failed to perform. This scandal exposed the illegal dealings of the Vice President through a government agency called PDTF. Monies from this agency were either used for personal benefits of the Vice President or his cronies or misappropriate for party campaigns (although the Vice President showed the media evidence that the President knew about all the financial dealings of the agency and the President personally signed the controversial Cheque for contested withdrawals.

Even after the scandal was blown open, the Nigerian media are yet to conclude on the issues raised in their follow-up reports. In US, two reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, exposed the hidden facts about the “Watergate Scandal through investigative journalism. Their journalistic exploits brought the criminal investigation of the “Watergate Scandal” to a successful conclusion. It also helped settle the political quagmire that was about to engulf the US. To help reduce the political tension in the country then, the US President had to resign from office. That is the power of investigation journalism which was found missing in most of the newspapers under study

In investigating journalism, you investigate and get true facts because you are not satisfied with what is said. But in interviews, you only get people’s views on the cases and these views are most of the time coloured with biases, prejudices, half-truths and in extreme cases, blatant lies. This can never help in press management of conflicts; rather, they will help to prolong such cases. Stakeholders in any political conflict need the assurances from the media that their facts are sacrosanct otherwise the players will loose confidence in the industry itself and therefore, refuse to heed to the call or accept solutions from the industry. Therefore, for effective management of political crises and conflicts, the media industry must go behind the news through investigative journalism to expose the actual facts and unmask the truths. This is the only way they could remain relevant in crises and conflicts management.

On comparative analyses of the newspapers performance, The Guardian is rated highest amongst the newspapers under study. They gave more prominence to the reports, had more favourable reports, and had all its reports regarded as very high in quality. Other newspapers did well but still left much to be desired. However, the newspapers must be chided for allowing ethnic colouration and ownership influences to affect their professionalism negatively. This major conclusion is drawn from the fact that all the research hypotheses for this study were supported or upheld. The results from the Chi-square tests at the 5% alpha level of significant (as shown on the Tables above) were significant enough to validate or support the hypotheses. This again raises doubt about the level of professionalism in the Nigerian media industry.

To support the result of ethnic biases in press performance with regards to quality, Adio (1999) cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001) stated that the Nigerian press which was totally responsible

for the resignation of Alhaji Salisu Buhari (the first Speaker of Nigerian House of Representative of the Fourth Republic) in 1999 due to its exposure of Buhari's certificate forgery scandal (now regarded in media circles as Buharigate) and also forced the Nigerian Senate to impeach Chief Evan Enwerem as Senate President could not do same to Governor Ahmed Bola Tinubu of Lagos State. The issue here is that Buhari is from Northern Nigeria, which has very little presence on the ownership of the Nigerian media industry. Evan Enwerem is from the East part of the country, which also has very little presence on the ownership patterns in the Nigerian media industry. However, Bola Ahmed Tinubu is from the South-west part of the country, which practically controls the Nigerian media industry because the majority of the publishers are from this particular region.

The crux of the matter is that these personalities mentioned above were all principal actors in the Nigerian Fourth Republic accused of the same offence of certificate forgery and falsification of age to gain public office. Buhari was Speaker of the House of Representatives (lower legislative chamber), Enwerem was President of the Nigerian Senate (upper legislative chamber) and Tinubu was Governor of Lagos State (Nigeria's commercial capital). The press handling of the above scandals gave the impression that the Nigerian press was biased along ethnic lines. The former Nigerian Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha summarized this view when he noted "The Nigerian press was polarized along regional, sectional or ethnic lines with every side protecting and supporting their kith and kin (Abacha, 1996). This "protection" and "support" in my understanding based on the findings of this particular study affected negatively the quality and level of professionalism of the Nigerian media industry.

Another related issue that is adduced from this study is that at most times during crises, the newspapers usually focus more on personalities instead of the issues. The reports read by the author during the study suggest this. This compounds the situation. The Nigerian press should be more concerned with the issues at stake and give accurate, truthful and unbiased account that could help manage these crises to the benefit of all. Attacking personalities instead of issues have never been good conflict management approach.

The study further revealed that the newspapers were virtually intolerant of opposing viewpoints and therefore offered little opportunity for such viewpoints to be analyzed. This was evident in their featuring of only those who hold similar opinions with them on the pages of their newspapers. Thus the readers were daily bombarded with the views of only those who the particular newspaper subscribed to, to the annoying neglect of the other sides of the issue. This approach negates the principle of the market place of ideas, which the press was meant to be, and further alienates the opposing viewpoints and consequently, prolongs the controversies and crises.

From the analyses of the Oyo State crises, which have to do with godfatherism, control of state treasury and the apparatus of government, it seems as if the Nigerian press really gave enough attention to the issue and in fact condemned the action of Adedibu (the acclaimed godfather of Oyo Politics in South-West Nigeria) and his group vehemently. This is acceptable in crusade and watchdogs' journalism but smacks of advocacy journalism, which have some negative connotations towards conflict resolution and management because advocacy suggests the taking of sides or a particular stand on conflicting issues. Some biases may be displayed at this point. The Adedibu group may not subject themselves to any peace initiatives or suggestions from

Nigerian press because of this advocacy status or stance, or for a host of other reasons that may border on politics. They even dismissed the media reports on the crises as mere propaganda campaigns against the self-styled strongman of Ibadan politics, Chief Lamidi Adedibu. They probably have concluded that they cannot get justice or fair hearing from the press because of the obvious and noticeable stand against their camp by the Nigerian media. The common adage that a cockroach can hardly be innocent in the gathering of fowls was their argument in the dismissal of the press position on the issue. Cockroaches are food to fowls and no matter how they plead their case before a jury made up of fowl they will surely end up condemned to the bellies of the fowls as food. Therefore advocacy journalism should be practiced with caution, professionalism and objectivity if it must be practiced at all especially in a developing pluralistic society like Nigeria.

On the positive side, some of the conflicts were given enough/prominent attention in the media. This approach should be encouraged in such related conflicts. Any crises shrouded in secrecy never or hardly get resolved but experience has shown that the ones much talked about receive quicker attention in its management and subsequent resolution. This is where all the newspapers under study must be commended. Compared to other crises reported in the media within this period, political conflicts got about 67% coverage. But as pointed out earlier, more attention should be paid to feature reports, interpretative reports, editorials and investigative reports.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian media have rarely been found wanting in their coverage of conflicts and crises, but they have occasionally been found wanting in the way and manner the contents of their coverage are presented. The reasons for this have been exhaustively discussed above. However, the following reasons are also adduced for the press nature of coverage and performance:

Because the Nigerian media were actively involved in pre-independence and nationalistic struggles; they became part of the politics of that time. Since then, the press has found it difficult to alienate itself from partisan politics and the conflicts that do usually arise from it. What is glaringly noticed is the use of the media to achieve political ends at the detriment of public good as noticed in the history and reasons behind the establishment of some so-called national newspapers.

Editorial independence most of time is subjected negatively to ownership influence. Most of the thriving media organizations in Nigeria are individually owned. Some were even established to achieve political and economic ends of their publishers. The defunct National Concord of MKO Abiola was established primarily for political reasons. This is the major reason for the argument of this author in support of people ownership of media industries in Nigeria. People ownership encourages corporate ownership as against individual ownership. This way many more persons are in control of the media industry. The present situation in Nigeria where only individuals own and control the media industry in Nigeria has given rise to many unprofessional conducts and abuses on the part of media professionals. This has been dealt with earlier.

After the nationalistic struggles were over, there was no proper re-orientation of the Nigerian press away from militant/ partisan journalism in their protection of regional interests and promotion of the media moguls/ owners' political interests and objectives. This made Mytton cited in Galadima and Enighe (2001), to note thus: "The mass media in Nigeria have political

backers and therefore given political role which emphasizes the expression of opinion and places far less importance on the reporting of facts.”

The pattern of reporting crises, conflicts and its management by the Nigerian press since the nationalistic days seems to be continuing. This is clearly shown in the press handling of the crises that engulfed the principal personalities of this present civilian dispensation. Precisely, a noticeable bias was shown in the manner the former speaker of the House Of Representative, Alhaji Salisu Buhari, and the former Senate President, Evan Enwerem forgery scandals were handled compared to the manner the press handled the governor Tinubu’s case. It is believed that because the Nigerian press is more or less Yoruba controlled or dominated press, Tinubu survived (because he is a Yoruba man) while the other personalities got drowned in the political murky waters. This kind of perception or to some extent truth against the press cannot encourage the use of the media as a means of conflict management and resolution. Rather, it has potential to turn the media into a sectional media with its attendant difficulties in managing conflicts of national magnitude.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made to move the press forward in their reporting of crises and conflicts. Firstly as I pointed out in this paper, the Nigerian press should avoid advocacy journalism (journalism of taking stands on controversial issues and advocating the acceptance of such stands notwithstanding the feelings of the audience who have not been properly sensitized on all the sides of such an issue), or practice it with caution if and when it cannot be avoided.

Again, more people participation in the ownership of the Nigerian media system should be encouraged. By people ownership and participation, I am much more concerned about a situation whereby licenses to operate media organizations could only be given to more than five individuals for a particular media organization. This is against the present practice of giving just an individual the license to operate such organizations. Some of them even own more than one. Studies have shown that this practice has been abused in developing societies. However, the same argument may not hold in highly developed capitalist economies like that of the United States, France, and Britain, because such societies were birthed and built on the idea of freedom. They have also channeled their development efforts along such lines that any attempt to curtail such freedom enjoyed under capitalist structures will surely be resisted.

The conclusion here is that apart from private ownership, the public should also get involved through joint ownerships, corporate ownership, and group ownership to avoid the excesses of the private media moguls who may be hell bent on pursuing partisan political interests through their media houses (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:234). It is also the argument in this paper that more media houses owned and run by corporate individuals will ensure more access, more analysis of issues, better coverage, more reportage and more presentation of all sides of a controversy, conflict or crises.

Mike Egbon (1994), who is a renowned professor of communication, also compiled a comprehensive guideline to help media organizations in their reportage of crises and conflicts thus:

“Collective national interest must supersede parochial ethnic and individual interests.

Press freedom should be limited where national survival is threatened or where it conflicts with constitutional provisions and rights.

Sensationalism that could possibly blow up crises should be seriously avoided.

Suppression of the truth should be avoided as it will obviously escalate the crises and create a false sense of security.

Professionalism and ethical considerations must be held in high esteem or sacrosanct in the management and coverage of crises.

Maintain a healthy skepticism and provide socially responsible criticism, avoiding relentless hostility.”

In conclusion, the Nigerian press must rise above petty reporting and face the challenges of constructive and balanced reporting especially during crises/conflict periods. The press, however, should not support evil or help to perpetuate it and should therefore always take a stand against it. This must be done professionally, ethically, objectively, and cautiously. The public interest (the interest of the generality of people ascertained through democratic principles and structures) must be the guiding and overriding interest in such situations (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:234).

Furthermore, media organizations must ensure that only experienced and highly competent media professionals or journaled are assigned to political beats. This is very crucial especially in developing societies like Nigeria. Anything short of this could be catastrophic because the complex nature of politics may engulf the inexperienced reporter. Our perception of a political conflict reporter is that of a very experienced, sophisticated, diplomatic and professionally minded reporter. The generalist or the cub reporter has no role here.

Finally, Conflict and Diversity Reporting should be taught in institutions of higher learning where mass communication, journalism, broadcasting or media studies are taught. This will help the journalist to become more professional in his handling of conflict-based reports.

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