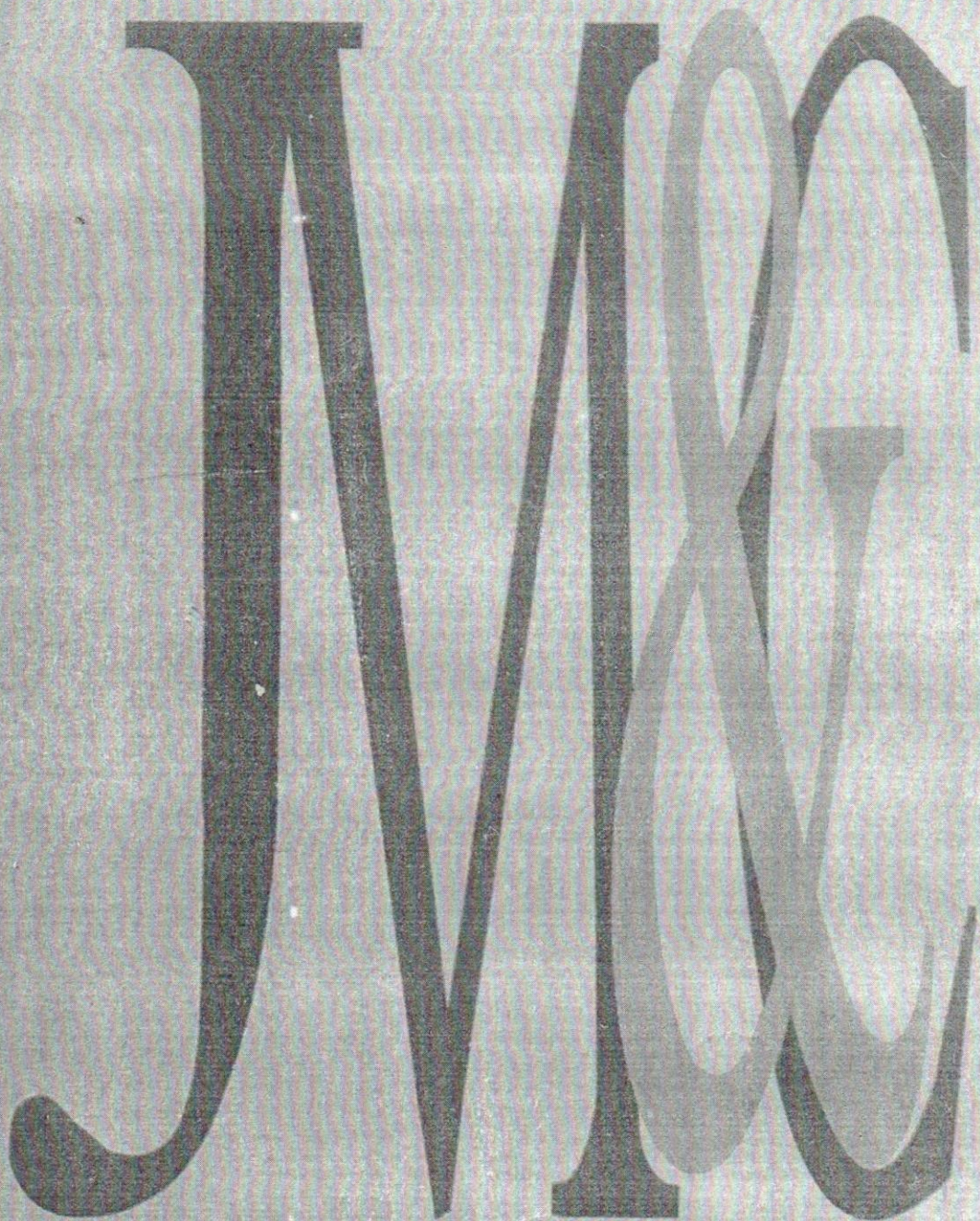


# Journal of Media & Communication

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A forum for research and inquiry



# Journal of Media & Communication

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# Politico-personal conflict reporting in the Nigerian press

Olamuyiwa Popoola  
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## Abstract

*People depend, to a very large extent, on the information obtained from the mass media to create images, form opinions and find their ways in the midst of baffling statistics in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres and ramifications of life. It is thus logical to hypothesise that with these attributes, the way volatile and sensitive phenomena are reported by the media is crucial to the understanding of such phenomena. This article focuses on the enduring presence of conflict in the mass media content. The article examines the influence of the mass media, in particular, the newspaper, in exacerbating political conflicts in general and politico-personal conflicts in particular. Politico-personal conflict is conceptualised here to suggest interactions, associations and relationships between or among individuals, based on political interests and motives. The article cites the best-known examples of this type of political conflict in Nigeria and suggests that the newspapers appeared to have contributed in some measure to the escalation or de-escalation of these conflicts. The author suggests a more ambitious research to establish this supposition.*

## Introduction

The literature on the mass media and the survival of every human system demonstrates distinctly that the mass media are endowed with the ability to generate, crystallise and mould opinions, reinforce beliefs and attitudes, and set agenda for public discussion. One reason for this is that the mass media are often the major practical means available for transmitting information quickly and effectively (McQuail, 2000, p. 47). The mass media have thus seemingly won the prestige of being regarded as indispensable instruments for expressing the wishes, aspirations, opinions and fears of the people. People depend, to a very large extent, on the information obtained from the media to create images, form opinions and find their ways in the midst of baffling statistics in political, social,

economic and cultural spheres and ramifications of life.

It is thus logical to hypothesise that with these attributes the way volatile and sensitive phenomena are reported by the media is crucial to the understanding of such phenomena. It stands to reason that media presentations affect positively or negatively the views and opinions of the media audience about the reported issue, but also about the individuals directly and indirectly involved in the issue.

## Conflict and the news

The interests of the audience appear to be kindled when reported issues bear elements of conflict. That is why journalists, media practitioners and syndicates in print journalism and mass communication have for long acknowledged conflict as a news determinant. Indeed, as Owens-Ibie (2002, p. 32) notes, the use of the conflict criterion to determine the newsworthiness of every event has been one of the factors fueling the Third World's agitation for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The Third World and other proponents of NWICO accuse the Western press of qualitative imbalance, which finds expression in the reporting of predominantly "negative" and "bad" sides of events taking place in the Third World. But Owens-Ibie (2002, p. 33) submits that since conflict is not restricted to any part of the globe, the trend is that where there are conflicts, there is a guarantee that such events would be reported. Not just the events, but the parties involved as well as the manifestations and dimensions of the conflict would be detailed.

It is in this context that Tehranian (1996, p. 3) argues that the media are naturally attracted to conflict; and, as Botes (1996) affirms, "conflict is the bread and butter of journalism..." (p. 2). In short, conflict sells. As observed by Umar (2002, p. 125), in everyday life, millions of simultaneous events occur in societies: deaths, plane crashes, armed robberies, kidnapping, wars, and assassinations, ethnic and religious clashes. All of these events constitute news. However, only an insignificant number of these events are reported, partly because of the editorial policies of mass media organizations, air-time and space constraints, and partly because news is defined and identified in accordance with specific criteria. Umar provides data which show further that the stronger the element of conflict, crisis, unpleasantness and inhumanity in a story, the greater the probability that it would be reported and given prominence. Undoubtedly, this is rooted in the appetite of mass media audiences for events that have any element of conflict. Buttressing this, Arno (1984, p. 2) adds:

I would go far to assert that news is defined by its conflict focus and that there is nothing deplorable about the fact. It is sometimes argued that the predominance of conflict stories in

the news gives a distorted picture of the world, but people do not read (listen) or watch the news to gain a picture of the world that is "undistorted," where what is good and positive is portrayed in realistic proportion to what is evil and dangerous.

Since conflict then is a source of news, the mass media are bound to play very important, if sensitive, role in conflict situations all over the world. Considering their characteristics of breaking the barriers of time and distance and dealing with large, scattered and heterogeneous audiences, the media are able to reach destinations that parties to a conflict do not have the resources to reach, not to talk of penetrating.

However, there are divergent views with regard to how influential the mass media are as far as conflict reporting is concerned. Baumann and Siebert (2001, p. 14) argue that the media have the capacity to handle conflict pre-emptively, restoratively and mediatoryly. This implies that, as they may determine, they (the media) constitute one of the factors and variables which account for conflict management, containment, transformation and peace building.

Testing the hypothesis of strong mass media effects on the audience in conflict situations, Slone (2000, p. 508) suggest that most individuals have access to potential threats to personal and public security not on the basis of any direct experience but on some indirect forms of exposure to the conflict situation through the coverage given by the mass media. Reinforcing this paradigm, Albert (2002, p. 3) posits that "the public generally believes that the media are at the vanguard of accurate reporting of events since they (the media) have the facts and they often have access to the scene of events."

## Review of literature

This brief review of literature provides a background for the analysis of the influence of the mass media in conflict situations, especially in the political environment. The review covers such traditional areas as media effects, media and violence, and media ownership and control and how they impinge on media performance in conflict situations.

## Mass media effects

Scholarly works abound of respect of mass media effects. Devoting a slice of this review to such works is recognition of the fact that any study which attempts to establish a relationship between newspaper coverage of conflicts and the escalation and de-escalation of such conflicts belongs to media effects scholarship. Media effects study has been a subject of enduring interest and controversy among scholars ranging from behavioural scientists to mass media researchers. McQuail (1976, p. 44-50) points out that despite frequent comments on the relationship between the

media and their audiences, attempts to measure the exact effects of mass communications on audiences have for long lagged behind conjecture. Berelson and Janowitz (1953, p. 27), writing long before McQuail, attributed this difficulty to the apparent variety and complexity of the effects of mass media. According to these scholars, "the topic probably represents the most neglected area of mass communication research."

McQuail also argued that the neglect of research on media effects has much to do with this complexity, "since there are almost no fixed points of reference". He noted that even in inquiries that lend themselves easily "to the formulation of precise and testable hypotheses (such as media campaigns designed to produce attitudinal and or behavioural outcomes), the difficulties are still considerable" (1976, p. 17). Still, there have been research activities in this area, which McQuail (1977) demarcates into three stages. According to him, the first phase in media effects research, which was developed in Europe and America, began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and ended in the late 1930s. The conclusions attributed considerable power to the media to shape opinions and beliefs, change habits of life, actively mould behaviour and impose political systems even against resistance. Typical of the theoretical constructs emerging from this era was Emmett's assertion that:

The mass media... exert such a steady pressure on us all that it is hardly doubted that they constantly modify our behaviour, alter our attitudes and opinions, extend the range of our cultural experiences, increase our stock of information and even affect such personal individual characteristics or our initiative and ambition. (1966, p. 36).

He further states that: "any change in our society, real or imaginary, could be traced to the baleful influence of one or other of the mass media." The **Hypodermic Needle Theory** which holds that "the media have direct and immediate effects on their audience", was one of the theories propounded in support of this direct mass media effect concept.

The second stage was shaped as by the growth of media effects research in the United States, and included studies conducted by Lazarsfeld (1944) and Berelson (1950). Research findings at this stage were said to affirm "the ineffectiveness and impotency" of mass media and their subservience to other more fundamental components in any potential situation of influence. In his analysis of media's influences on voters' decisions in the 1940 United States presidential elections, Lazarsfeld (1948, p. 47) found out that only a negligible number of voters (8%) were totally influenced by media communication while the majority of voters (53%) were reinforced in their earlier beliefs. Okigbo has asserted that "the dominant paradigm in media effects scholarships is the influential voice

lent to Berelson's position by Klapper (1960) who argues that "media effects are conditioned by the interplay of other factors" (1990, p. 89).

Even though Klapper's submission of limited media effects appears to serve as a rallying point of emphasis in the study of media influence, the third stage of the scholarly work on media effects, according to McQuail (1977), brings into focus some communication scholars who have made a solid case for powerful media effects through sound scientific rationales, careful pretesting, objective and systematic post hoc evaluations. Studies in this era culminated in a major step away from the simplistic and pessimistic notions of media effects by some researchers.

In fact, earlier antagonists of the powerful media effects such as Nolte-Neumann (1973) came round to advocating a return to the belief in the concept of powerful mass media: "The decisive factors of mass media are not brought to bear in the traditional laboratory experiment designs which were mostly employed by earlier scholars in their bid to measure mass media effects on audience" (p. 64).

She argued that a true picture of the extent of mass media effects is painted through long term and real life evaluations of audience behavioural changes arising from mass media contents rather than laboratory experiments. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) subscribe to that position in contending that "there are many effects that do not show up in laboratory experiments or in before or after studies of persons involved in information campaign" (p. 61).

Describing selective perception as the process by which readers or viewers pick out those bits of information that reinforce their preconceived notions, Noelle-Neumann asserts that selective perception of the audience is one of the criteria through which a careful and undogmatic conclusion can be reached as far as media effects are concerned: "It is important to go a step further and look at the way the media operate in producing messages."

The three factors which work together to restrict selective perception and other seemingly intervening variables, according to Noelle-Neumann, are:

1. Ubiquity of the media - the ability to be everywhere to dominate the information environment
2. Cumulation of messages - periodical repetition of the message that tends to reinforce its impact
3. Consonance of journalists - with amazing agreement and harmony among journalists and others involved in the message, there tends to be sameness to the contents. This limits the options the public may have for selective perception.

By using a combination of content analysis of media messages and trend observation of public opinion polls over a long period of time, Noelle-

Neumann was able to make an assessment that led to her call for a return to the concept of an all-powerful media.

Clarke and Kline take the same line of argument: "What people learn from communication activity is a more rewarding topic for media effects research than attitude formation or change" (1974, p. 57). Robinson provides more support for the powerful media effects notion in his finding that the media greatly affect political behaviour unlike the conclusions of Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1972, p. 43). Based on surveys conducted in the 1968 General Elections in United States, Robinson concludes that, "The largely pro-Nixon coverage carried by the media in 1968 was associated with some shift in the vote in Nixon's favour."

Pertinent to note is that even though earlier studies of communication effects were mostly concerned with behavioural changes brought about by an unrestrained supply of information, objective and systematic as well as long term evaluations of media effects on their audience by Noelle-Neumann and many others support the notion that the mass media still operate with some powerful effects.

### Mass media and violence

There seems to be a general agreement among scholars that exposure to media aggression and violence could induce some negative behavioural reaction in individuals. Earlier researches in this area were directed into search for evidence of harm to young people from frequent exposure to crime and aggression in the media. It was suspected that such effects are generally unintended and short-term, although long-term consequences in the way of behaviour and cultural change may also occur. This appears to have been confirmed by the American Psychological Association Report, which states inter alia: "There is absolutely no doubt that those who are heavy viewers of television violence demonstrate increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behaviour" (APA, 1993, p. 26).

However, Groebel (1998) states in his findings that children from high aggression environment such as in crime and war, and who are in "problematic emotional states" are more likely to view and be attracted to aggression violence than were others. The rise in crime and violence in the society has often been suspected to surface as a result of exposure to the media. Linne (1998, p. 23) asked a group of scholars what their opinions were about the causal link between violence in the media and violence in society. Twenty-two percent thought there was an evident causal link; 33 percent claimed a vague causal link only for some children, while 4 percent said there was no causal link. The rest found the issue too problematic to be given simple answer.

The tendency to implicate the Internet in the cases of school mass murders in the United States in the late 1990s, as pointed out by McQuail (2000, p. 72), could be a classical instance of associating public violence with violence on the media, but this time, the new media.

There is also the issue of collective reaction effect, especially during civil disorders. Members of the public have often implicated the media in the search for causes of collective behaviour during riot or public turmoil. McQuail (2000) identifies three main kinds of effects that occur in situations of non-institutionalised and collective behaviours:

- (a) Widespread panic in response to alarming, incomplete or misleading information
- (b) Amplification or spreading of crowd or mob activity
- (c) Possible encouragement and aid given unintentionally to terrorists.

The first of these effects became evident, as confirmed by Cantril and his colleagues (1940, p. 41) in their study of the 1938 *The War of the Worlds*, when simulated news bulletins reported a Martian invasion of the Earth. This study confirmed that panic responses caused by anxiety and uncertainty often arises among the people in times of emergencies, due mostly to incompleteness or inaccuracy of information leading to urgent search for information through personal channels.

### Media ownership and control

The strong assumption that the mass media operate with effects of various kinds on the audience has also made media ownership an attractive proposition to entrepreneurs, especially the ones with political interests and ambitions. The tendency to make media business a lucrative enterprise is enough temptation to turn media owners into pro-systemic individuals and key players in the political and economic environment in which they are operating. The strong influence of media owners on media contents in Nigeria was tested in a study conducted by Sobowale (1974) and concluded just as McNair (1998, p. 34) that, most often, media owners use their media to support and preserve the socio-political system which allow them to make profit (p. 17). Giving the example of the powerful influence of the famous Australian media mogul, Rupert Murdoch, on the American and British politics, McNair describes as naïve the thought that media owners could completely hands-off editorial issues and day-to-day management of media organisations to professional journalists. In strict adherence to the commercial and competitive paradigm, Murdoch never hid his open support for the administrations of late President Ronald Reagan of the United States and Margaret Thatcher of Britain; yet his media empire prospered.

In Nigeria, the roles played by the late politician, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, through his Concord newspapers is still fresh in memory, while currently in

Nigeria, it appears difficult to rule out the influence of Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the former governor of Lagos State on *The Nation*, Otunba Gbenga Daniel, the governor of Ogun State on *The Compass*, and James Ibori, the former governor of Delta State, on the *Daily Independent* - which they own. All these prove point that it is difficult to separate media proprietors' ideological and political values from their publications. Even though there are not enough studies to confirm media owners' influence on the media in conflict situations in Nigeria, the association of media ownership with media contents point to a positive causal relationship between ownership and the way political violence is depicted in the print media.

### The concept and nature of political conflicts

Gujbawu (2002, p. 73) observes that political conflicts are common in many democracies but especially the developing ones because of the pressures that are naturally exerted on emerging states. In Nigeria, long periods of military interventions have slowed down the inculcation of democratic ideals, but have also made the country susceptible to political conflicts. Perhaps, also, the return to democracy has provided opportunities for various interests to vent bottled-up political discontent, which manifests as conflict.

Politics goes beyond the public sector, elections into assemblies or parliament, appointments into cabinets and other positions of leadership as Ball (1981, p. 21) argues. It extends into many other spheres of human activity, or, as Godwoli (2002) puts it, it is a universal phenomenon that involves disagreements which can occur at any level. Thus, the essence of a typical political situation is "that of conflict and the resolution of conflict" (p. 1). Attempts to resolve disagreements in the political domain, therefore, are expressed in forms of violence, physical assaults, clashes and meetings. Put another way, the political environment is by nature characterised by competition and conflict between or among individuals, groups and interest groups, with all actors struggling to ensure the prevalence of their interests.

In a process where every political stakeholder wants to ensure, protect and promote his interest at the expense of other political players, Skjorshammer's (2001, p. 7-18) posits that the issue is not whether conflict is destructive or pathological *per se*, but rather how conflict is concluded. This implies that conflict transformation or the conflict experience can provide an opportunity for diverse political groups and actors to acquire skills for resolving conflicts, which will enable them to harmonise their interests and exhibit common differences simultaneously. This situation, according to Omoluabi (2001, p. 31), could advance the political process because those who are truly committed to the survival of the polity would strive to resolve the conflict in order to preserve the integrity of the political system. Isola, citing Deutsch (1973, p. 25) and Wilson and Hanna (1979, p.

31), has summarised seven major and fundamental causes of political conflicts (2002, p. 5) as follows:

- Struggle for control over scarce resources
- Incompatibility of values among individuals and groups
- Difference in the belief systems of different political blocs
- Clashes in the spectrum of choices and preferences in the socio-political environment
- Differences in expectations among members of political parties
- The struggle for acquisition of status
- The need for self esteem among political players.

Inherent in these submissions are some factors that catalyse political conflicts, such as resources, values, interests and needs. These factors, as Ochoche (1997, p. 13), Godowoli (2002, p. 4), and Isola (2002, p. 7) assert, result in the following dimensions of political conflict: Executive-Legislature conflict, inter-party squabbles, inter-governmental vendetta, corruption, electoral violence and politico-personal conflicts. Properly examined, politico-personal conflicts provide the roots for most of the conflicts listed here.

### Politico-personal conflicts

It is against the foregoing background that this essay explores politico-personal conflicts and their coverage by the press in the Nigerian environment. It is in order here to begin with an explanation of the concept of politico-personal conflict. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Seventh Edition, explains the term 'politico' to mean 'politics relating to something' or 'something grossly rooted in politics'. Politico is also explained by the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary as "noun and adjective combining form, denoting politics or political; as in **politico-economics, politico-industrial, among others**".

Politico-personal is thus conceptualised here to suggest *interactions, associations and relationships between or among individuals, based on political interests and motives*. Consequently, it is to be expected that politico-personal conflicts account as major subsets in political conflicts in Nigeria. A major dimension of politico-personal conflicts in the country is

also known as "political godfather-son face-off." It is indicated when rich and influential politicians sponsor candidates for political office and bankroll their (usually successful) elections. The sponsor becomes the political godfather and the candidate his political godson.

In the Nigerian environment, father and son often wind up in a situation of politico-personal conflicts. Almost always, the conflict engulfs the entire political space of the two combatants, manifesting in loss of lives, destruction of property and political stalemates that paralyse the functioning of governments for long periods.

Another form of politico-personal conflict is a "clash of interest" between two individuals or among several individuals who may ever belong to the same political caucus. It is consistent with the saying that "in politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies; the only permanent thing is interest." This implies that whenever there is harmony of interests, peace, unity and tranquility are bound to prevail. When interests collide, as is inevitable in politics, what follows is conflict that may assume several dimensions. Since the return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999, the country has been plagued by politico-personal conflicts involving prominent actors in the political system and stalling the growth of democracy.

This study is devoted to analysing this brand of conflict and how the media (newspapers for this article) could influence such conflicts for good or ill by the way they are represented in the media. Classical examples of politico-personal conflicts have been characterised in this article as the ones between three pairs of prominent politicians:

1. The feud between Rasheed Ladoja, a former governor of the South West state of Oyo, and the late Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, a People's Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, who ran an efficient and coercive political machine in the State.
2. Dr. Chris Ngige, a former governor of the South East state of Anambra, who was pitched against his one-time benefactor and PDP godfather in the State, Mr. Chris Uba.
3. The long-drawn-out confrontation between Olusegun Obasanjo the former President of Nigeria, and Atiku Abubakar, his Vice President.

It may not be an exaggeration to assert that politico-personal conflicts have had a limiting effect on Nigeria's capacity to develop. This is because such

conflicts negatively affect cohesiveness and consensus with respect to organising, managing and driving the socio-political system to bring off its best. For instance, a conflict involving the President or the governor of a state on the one hand and a prominent individual or personality whose political stature cannot be discountenanced, constitutes political, emotional and psychological impediments to critical political, economic and social activities.

Politico-personal conflicts are potent enough to ignite other dimensions of conflict, not just political conflicts, in Nigeria. The confrontation between former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, in the second four-year term of the Obasanjo administration escalated far beyond the two politicians. These were not the personal troubles of two men. As Hale points out, "Troubles stem from private matters that lie within an individual's character. Issues, on the contrary, go beyond the personal, local setting, to broader social forces that affect the life experiences of many people" (1990, p. 5).

Both men were chieftains of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), but their feud went beyond the party. First, the PDP splintered, with the Vice President leaving the PDP for the Action Congress (AC). The party schism did not lead to a major disaster for the PDP, but that was certainly not because the party had the support that it claimed. Second, the disagreement between the two men almost became an ethnic feud between the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani peoples of Nigeria. Not only that, the face-off between the two political actors and national administrators aggravated to the extent that the Vice-President became the presidential candidate of Action Congress (AC) for the 2007 general elections. It has been argued by some political commentators that the alleged massive rigging of the 2007 elections by the PDP was motivated by its desire to ensure that Atiku was politically destroyed at the polls. Put another way, the irregularities of the 2007 general elections, which aggravated the image of Nigeria as a country that cannot organize and conduct successful elections, were rooted in the Obasanjo-Atiku crises.

Even though Obasanjo and Atiku are no more in government, they have continued to defend their political interest by constituting themselves into shadow parties to many political conflicts, thereby contributing greatly to heating up the country's democratic system and political order. By extension, the political conflicts in Oyo and Anambra States may linger as long as the vestiges of the Ladoja versus Adedibu and the Ngige versus Uba conflicts are discountenanced. All this is to say that the conflicts between the pair of actors involved in the 2003-2007 political dispensation discussed above may have manifested as politico-personal, but they have, occurring at a very high level of political performance as they did, grave implications for

political systemic peace, harmony, integration and overall national development.

Such a situation affects the confidence of the people in the workability of democracy in the country and ultimately leads to tension between the government and the governed and a crisis of confidence in the legitimate authority of the government.

### Nigerian newspapers and the reporting of politico-personal conflicts

As Gambo (2002, p. 107) conceptualises, it is a matter of expedience and necessity for the media to alert the society about these kinds of conflicts, not just because of the need to identify the conflict and the parties to it, but more importantly to point out the implications and consequences for the polity.

However, there is ample evidence to suggest that the press does not always handle conflict reporting with the fairness, accuracy and justice expected of a socially responsible press. Allegations of distortion of contents, biased reporting and inaccuracy continue to be made against the media, especially in their reporting of political conflicts. Gardner (2001, p. 26) suggests that since political leaders and warring factions are well aware of the power of the media, they have a tendency to manipulate the media to further their political agenda in conflict situations. Tehranian agrees with this indictment of the media by noting that:

In pursuit of the sensational, the scoop has come to define news. Peace, like war, is celebrated in the interest of profit and short term political gain. Politicians have come to recognise how essential mass-mediated celebrations are to their own ambitions to power. As a result, peace tends to be short-lived, temporary and tense (1996, p. 2).

The fallout of this apparent engineering of content and manipulation of public space in the struggle for power, using the instrumentality of the mass media, is that "truth becomes a casualty" (Owens-Ibie, 2002, p. 33). Tehranian elaborates on the point, noting that there is no longer is any serious attempt to provide in-depth diagnosis of contexts. "The focus of the media is on "the episodic and fragmentary accounts of the most dramatic moments, largely leaving out the preceding causes and antecedent consequences" (1996, p. 3). Isola suggests also that media perceptions of conflict situations are most often wrong, resulting in negative influence on their contents. He states that the media sometimes inadvertently report conflicts in ways that conflicts are escalated rather than being prevented

(2002, p. 3).

According to Isola, among the likely reasons for this questionable conflict reporting model by the media are the constraints of time and distance, which militate against thorough investigation and analysis of conflict theatres before such conflicts are reported. The same plea is made by Gardner who observes that in most cases, reporters are dispatched to cover a conflict without adequate time to study and understand the underlying history or context of the conflict at stake (2001, p. 26).

Politicians take undue advantage of such situational lapses and in most of the violent political conflicts around the world, what the media report and interpret to the public are often coloured, packaged and dictated by politicians and elite groups according to their prejudices, beliefs and stereotypes - all in order to suit their interest (Shaw, 1996, p. 47). The result of all these, as Giner-Sorolla & Chalken (1994, p. 165) observe, is the reporting of only the horrific and dramatic incidents of atrocities of the conflict, with no explanation of the background, histories and complexities of the conflict. This often gives a one-sided or distorted view of events which leads to conflict escalation. They attribute this phenomenon to lack of neutrality and objectivity by the media, with the attendant consequences of exposing the public to biased coverage of conflict events. This may influence public attitudes and feelings and structure public behaviours in particular directions in certain conflict situations.

Certain questions naturally arise with regard to what should be the appropriate relationship between the mass media and the conflict situations in political conflict reporting. Owens-Ibie (2002, p. 34) distills these questions into the following:

1. How should those responsible for public communication and education respond to potential and actual conflict?
2. What role should journalists play in covering conflict?
3. Should such professionals merely report, comment on and interpret it; or should they be actors in the resolution or, more importantly - the prevention of conflict?
4. In a mass-mediated world, what are the moral and social responsibilities of journalists involved in reporting conflict situations?

These may be captured in one fundamental over-arching question: What constitute socially responsible media? It is, therefore, important to devote a study to evaluating how socially responsible was the reporting by some

Nigerian newspapers of the politico-personal conflicts in Nigeria. Indeed, such a study should evaluate the extent of the contribution of some newspapers to the conflicts involving the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Vice President Atiku Abubakar; the former Governor of Oyo State, Sen. Rasheed Ladoja and Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, the late PDP king maker in the State, and the former Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Ngige, and Chief Chris Uba.

Such research should be conducted within the framework of the expectations of a socially responsible press, considering the role of the mass media in bringing about development as embedded in the Concepts, Assumptions and Propositions (CAP) of the Social Responsibility and Development Media Theories of Mass Communication.

## Conclusion

The issues examined in this article regarding the expectations of a responsible press system with particular reference to its coverage of political conflicts in general and politico-personal conflicts in particular, give credence to the surmise by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980, p. 24) on the somewhat questionable role of the media in democracies. They assert that the media are an integral part of the political power structure and that they (the media) serve some contenders in the power struggle while they injure others.

But the press, often touted as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm," has a positive role to play in the resolution and management of political conflict, especially in an embryonic democracy such as Nigeria's. It is in order to conduct more research and intellectual inquiry into press performance as well as how the great potentials inherent in a vibrant and responsible press can be tapped in such an endeavour.

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