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SOUND OF WAR-DRUMS AND EXPLOITS OF BRAVE FIGHTERS: NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF OBASANJO'S SPEECH AT THE 2019 SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN COMMUNION), DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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CHAPTER EIGHT

SOUND OF WAR-DRUMS AND EXPLOITS OF BRAVE FIGHTERS: NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF OBASANJO'S SPEECH AT THE 2019 SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN COMMUNION), DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Nigeria is a diverse and multi-cultural country with over 200 million people and over 250 ethnic groups. The diverse ethnic composition, cultural differences, religious diversity and linguistics variances have often led to ethno-religious conflicts in the nation. It is not uncommon to find violent outbursts by Nigerian public figures, columnists, online forums and sectarian media outfits enmeshed in ethno-religious controversies. Falode (2011, p. 1) says “this ethno-cultural heterogeneity has made the task of building a viable, functional and cohesive polity an uphill task for the different administrations that has ruled the country since 1960”. Mutual suspicion and fear of dominance of one group or class over others remains a constant feature of the Nigerian polity. Jennifer (2013, p. 1) corroborates that “these differences have been a source of tension beginning from the colonial era under British rule”. The implication of all these is that Nigeria is getting more divided along religious and ethnic cleavages.

The press have often been implicated in the conflicting relationships among the different ethnic, religious and political groups in the country just as it has given expression to these diversities and ensuring cleavages. While due largely to these conflicting cleavages, Nigeria enjoys a pluralistic press, it has also served as an instrument of various divergent and parochial individuals and groups. In this context, Adigun has rightly observed that the Nigerian press has “found it difficult to rise above the divisive personal and political acrimonies of the colonial and post-colonial state and society” (Adigun, 1993, p. 459).

Though Nigeria is more or less in perpetual conflict situation, simmering conflict between the main ethnic groups and powerful individuals often boil over during periods of elections. During such periods, various political alliances or “marriages” are forged while some powerful actors make all kinds of pronouncements to further their interests. The press as the main organ of the public sphere becomes the organ of publicizing such pronouncements. The 2019 Presidential election was no exception. Though there were many groups on the political field, the two main political parties were the ruling APC and the opposition PDP. Besides these two parties, some powerful groups, often called socio-cultural organizations notably Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Ohaneze Ndigbo, Ijaw National Congress and individuals like ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo, Chief Edwin Clark and Rev. Father Kukah were quite active.

Between January 2018 and January 2019, Obasanjo issued three “open letters” to incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari which were very critical of the administration. The letters provoked a lot of debate in the country. Just as his previous letters to President Shehu Shagari and President Goodluck Jonathan, many viewed Obasanjo's intervention through his letters as not just an attempt at political interference and meddlesomeness but to undermine the legitimacy of the government. In one of the statements, Obasanjo called to the establishment of a “Third Force” to contest the 2019 presidential election against the APC and the PDP. He later supported one of the fringe parties to realize this plan. He also tried to bring together the faction of Afenifere led by Chief Ayo Adebajo and the Ohananeze Ndigbo to support the PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar. This was seen as a desperate move by Chief Obasanjo to unseat the APC, having torn his PDP membership card, declared that he was no more a partisan politician and much earlier denounced Atiku Abubakar as unfit to lead Nigeria. Despite all the scheming, acrimonies and bitterness that attended the 2019 Presidential election, President Buhari won and was returned to power. But before the swearing-in ceremony on May 29, Chief Obasanjo delivered another controversial speech on May 18, 2019. Apart from the forum, a religious gathering (synod of the Anglican Communion), the ethnic and religious aspect of the speech, as usual provoked a lot of controversy.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe (1988, p. 123) said “it is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence”. History shows that dangerous speeches precede wars but the stories of the wars outlive the speeches, the wars and the fighters, thus serving as warning to the living and unborn generations who may want to toe the path of war.

Using qualitative approach, this chapter examines newspaper framing of former President Olusegun Obasanjo's keynote address delivered at the Synod of an Anglican Communion in Delta State on May 18, 2019, with the title: “Mobilising Nigeria's Human and Natural Resources for National Development and Stability”. This chapter examines if the speech by Obasanjo (published on May 18 and May 19 2019 by *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers) contains hateful or dangerous elements capable of furthering divisiveness, disaffection and war among the differing religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria, with implications on Nigeria's fragile democracy, with analogies from one of Nigeria's foremost literary icons, Chinua Achebe. Accordingly, this chapter is guided by two research questions:

1. What frames did newspapers adopt in the reportage of Obasanjo's speech at the Synod of the Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria?
2. What is the political orientation of the reportage of Obasanjo's speech at the Synod of the Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria?

Obasanjo: The messenger

While this study is interested in how the press reported the message, it may not be out of place to say something about the messenger. General Olusegun Obasanjo came into national limelight when he received the instrument of surrender from the Biafra Army in 1970 and thus brought an end to the nation's infamous civil war (1967-1970). He was later appointed Federal Commissioner for Works by General Gowon. Following the over-throw of Gowon in 1975, he was appointed Chief-of-Staff, Supreme Headquarters, effectively the second in command to the Head of State, General Murtala Muhammed. He became the country's Head of State in 1976 following the assassination of General Murtala Murtala in the aborted coup led by Col. Dimka. His handing over power to Alhaji Sheu Shagari as the first Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1979 boosted Obasanjo's political profile not only in the country but in Africa and beyond. After relinquishing power, he became very visible and vocal on the global stage. In 1995 he was jailed by the dictatorial regime of Sanni Abacha in a phantom coup plot and later released by the General Abubakar Abdu Salami's regime after the sudden death of Abacha. On return to civil rule in 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo was elected President of the country haven contested under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). He ruled for eight years, though there was an alleged plan for a third term. He more or less imposed his successor, President Yar'adua and his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan.

Just as he did after leaving power in 1979, Chief Obasanjo has loomed very large in Nigeria's political landscape. With his bucolic and controversial personality, he is arguably the most visible, vocal and controversial former President in the country. Not only does he have opinion on all issues, he often expresses his views in very strong and evocative statement which he circulates far and wide through the press. A not too flattering portrait of Chief Obasanjo was recently painted by another stateman, Deji Fasuan:

Since he emerged hero in the 1966-170 civil war, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo has continued to be in the public space, sometimes espousing his leadership qualities, many times preaching and displaying his democratic credentials. There is hardly a country in all Africa where the renowned General has not carried the message of freedom of democracy and good government. To be fair to him, many leaders in Africa, indeed in the world have listened to him and have numbered him as a world leader worthy of emulation...in Nigeria Obasanjo has cut a mixed figure of a true statesman and an opportunist. Here he has entered into controversy over every conceivable issue, dancing to the right and to the left when it pleased him...the nation is assailed regularly by OBJ preaching, lecturing and telling Nigerians and especially its (sic) rulers how to behave and how not to run an administration (Fasuan, 2020, p. 18).

Obasanjo's Speech

The speech delivered by Dr. Olusegun Obasanjo at the Synod of an Anglican Communion in Delta State on May 18, 2019 is a 70- paragraph address titled "Mobilising Nigeria's Human and Natural Resources for National Development and Stability". In the second paragraph of the address, Obasanjo commended the Church for its concern for both the spiritual and physical welfare of its members and Nigerians at large. In his explanation of what development is, Obasanjo said the welfare and overall advancement of people must be at the center of all developmental efforts. After definition and explanation of some of the key concepts of the topic, Obasanjo delved into the main issues of the address which include under-development and under-utilization of Nigeria's natural resources, low human development index, poor state of the

economy, crime and insecurity as well as corruption . Obasanjo then traced Nigeria's development plans from 1944 and observed that instead of having the fifth development plan in 1985, Nigeria adopted IMF and World Bank motivated Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which led to gross devaluation of naira and stringent economic measures. Despite all the various economic plans and policies, Obasanjo said “as at 18 May 2019, (a few months to the targeted and long anticipated 2020), instead of improvement, the quality of lives of Nigerians has degenerated even more in all aspects of human development'. Specifically in paragraph 60, Obasanjo raised *allegations of planned 'Islamisation and Fulanisation' of Nigeria (and sub-Saharan Africa) through Boko Haram/Islamic States for West Africa (ISS) movements, banditry and herdsmen attacks*. In his closing remarks, Obasanjo said Nigeria can overcome its challenges with good governance and right leadership.

Sound of War-Drums and the Story

In chapter nine of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Nigeria's iconic novelist, Chinua Achebe figuratively describes the importance of freedom of speech as well as the effects of inflammatory and hate speeches. Ikem, the editor of the Gazette sends a reporter to the Presidential Palace as Chris, the Commissioner of Information had been instructed to cover a story-the visit of the Abazon leaders to the president. Later, Ikem himself goes to the Presidential palace “in search of personal enlightenment” on the event. When he arrives, he does not find the crowd, but only six of the elders of the village, sitting in the courtyard of the Harmony Hotel. Ikem is honored by the elders as a titled man and given a special seat at their table. The elder then launches into a speech about each person's place in this world and roles being played by Ikem as the editor of the Gazette who voiced his opinion about the corruption in the Republic of Kanga. At the meeting with the Abazon leaders, one of the men perfectly describes his role by saying that in battle the most important aspect of it is the story because it is everlasting. He compares Ikem to a rooster that belongs to the neighbors the same way he belongs to its owner. The battle is not important as the story that comes out of it. Excerpts:

The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards—each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we could do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story.....So why do I say the story is chief among his fellows?....Because it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from the cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbours” *Anthills of the Savvanah* by Chinua Achebe, pages 123-124)

What then is the Nigerian Story?

Nigeria is a complex multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. It is a colonial creation brought into being through the 1914 amalgamation of Southern and Northern territories by Lord Lugard. Since then till now the country, its rulers and people have found it difficult to create a nation out of the various sub-nationalities that were forcefully brought together by British colonialism. The expression attributed to Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Premier of Western Region) that Nigeria is “a mere geographical expression” still rings a bell in the consciousness of vast majority of

Nigerians. Instead of closing, the various primordial fault lines dividing the country are getting wider and solidifying. In the face of many challenges, regional disparity, worsening poverty in the midst of wealth, corruption, insurgency and banditry and other violent crimes, the Nigerian state seems to have become very weak and powerless.

The country's elite class, constituted by the colonial regime along ethnic and religious lines have often used such primordial divisions and cultural symbols as tools of political recruitment and mobilization. This has led to political uncertainty and instability the country has witnessed since independence. The struggle for power and hegemony among the contending ethnic based political parties led to the collapse of the First Republic (1960-1966), the civil war and even the Second Republic (1979-1983).

It has been difficult for the Nigerian press to rise above these key dividing lines in Nigerian politics and society. For one thing, the press depends on some of the powerful individuals and groups for political support and revenue (advertising and readership/audience). Audience reception and support (e.g newspaper circulation) seems to reflect geo-ethnic and religions' affiliations. So the editorial orientations of media organizations may not be too far from their proprietorial interests, geographical location and ethno-cultural and religious orientations (Pate and Oso, 2018).

The Nigerian press is enmeshed in the intra-elite ethnic based struggle for supremacy and power. In a study of press behavior in the first ten years since the return to civil rule in 1999, Adedayo and Agbaje concluded that "...it would seem that a newspaper's treatment of an issue was largely dictated by its ethno-proprietorial leaning. The media and their contributors heeded appeals to ethnic constituencies more than the national interest" (Adedayo and Agbaje, 2010, p.116).

The Nigerian story therefore is that once upon a time Nigeria launched into a civil war that claimed over two million lives, including women and children. The 30 months old civil war (6 July 1967 - 15 January 1970) was preceded by a configuration of pre-independence and post-independence crises (Thomas, 2010). The origins of the civil war could be located in a complexity of factors ranging from military coups d'état of January 15, and July 29, 1966; the regional election crisis in Western Nigeria in 1965; the Tiv riots of 1964; the Federal Elections of 1964 to the killing of the Igbos living in Northern Nigeria from May to September 1966 (Akpu, 2019). The structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation and most importantly, the asymmetrical distribution of power among the various ethnic and geopolitical groups were other remote causes of the civil war. The conflict resulted from political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions which preceded Britain's formal decolonization of Nigeria from 1960 to 1963.

Almost half a century later, the upshot of the violent Boko-Haram sect is gradually leading the country into a state of anarchy. The term 'Boko-Haram', loosely translated as 'Western Education is forbidden' refers to a terrorist sect from the North-east. The group's expression of its main goal as the 'Islamization' of the Nigerian nation is another expression of ethnic and religious intolerance that largely pervades social interaction in Nigeria. Thrown into the security conundrum is the farmer-herdsmen's problem which has led to the death of many Nigerians and the destruction of villages and farmlands in many parts of the country. Debates and discussions of these problems and others have featured very extreme and dangerous speeches, based on the identity differences and construction, group and individual interests.

Jennifer (2011) asserts that an interesting fact about hate-speech in Nigeria is the absence of a set of aggressor and victims. She explains that in different frontiers, these roles shift depending on the part of the country an individual hails from and resides in. While the Northern manifestations of intolerance and hate-speech are often accompanied by violent acts, in the South, it is more subtle. In the South, hate-speech is manifested more in stereotyping and abusive denotation of mannerisms of other ethnic groups, particularly Northerners. While it can be argued that there exists stereotypes about every ethnic group, the vitriol and violence that pervades its manifestations between Northern and Southern Nigeria is unequalled. Ethno-religious intolerance and hate-speech is so pervasive in Nigeria, that it is sometimes difficult to identify or classify, especially when it is delivered as a form of comedy routine, in book publications and sometimes by the media.

Hate and dangerous speech: An overview

Hate speech broadly refers to any speech made to incite the public order or cause disharmony between the government and its various constituents, usually with potentials of violence and published or broadcast in the mass media. However, the term remains widely contested. According to UNESCO (2015), multilateral treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) have sought to clarify the concept. Yet, “hate speech continues largely to be used in everyday discourse as a generic term, mixing concrete threats to individuals' and groups' security with cases in which people may be simply venting their anger against authority” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7).

Hate speech is universally used to describe any communication that denigrates a particular person or a group on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristics. It can be in the form of speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display. The link between a rise in hate speech and violence is therefore easy to make. Ironically, the mass media have been found to be the highest purveyor of hate messages (ACSPN, 2018). This portends a challenge to the Nigerian democratic process and the desire for a hitch-free election and avoidance of post-election violence.

According to Jibrin, Pate, Charmaine, Pereira, Agbanyin and Bagu (2017), although the term “hate speech” is popularly used to mean all speech acts that incite or condone violence against others, scholars interested in the deployment of speech for violent purposes have found the term “hate speech” too broad and difficult to be useful in monitoring the phenomenon. For instance, Saleemet *al.*, (2014) noted that the word might refer to the speaker/author's hatred, or his/her desire to make the targets of the speech feel hated, or desire to make others hate the target(s), or the apparent capacity of the speech to increase hatred.

Rosenfeld (2012) observed that much comparative research on hate speech, for example, has focused on the divide that exists between the American and European approaches to regulating hate speech. While the United States has protection of freedom of expression that stretches well beyond the boundaries of speech that is tolerated in Europe, numerous European countries, including Germany and France, have adopted instead an approach that not only bans forms of speech because of their likelihood to lead to harm, but also for their intrinsic content.

Other societies have developed unique mechanisms to identify and counter hate speech, which may variously combine customary law and formal law. In Somalia for example, where poetry constitutes a popular vehicle for the dissemination of information and ideas, poets who are seen as repeatedly composing poems which community elders consider to be derogatory of individuals

or groups, can be banned from composing new work (Stremlau, 2012). In Nigeria, the National Broadcasting Commission has a general guideline on political reportage. Article 3.5.2 of the NBC guideline for example states that: “A media organization shall not publish or air political adverts; advertorials and sponsored political news that seek to create hatred or incite violence”. Article 4.3 of the same guideline states that, “A media organization shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by parties, candidates and other interests that contains hateful or inciting words and messages” while Article 4.4 expects that: “A media organization shall refrain from publishing or airing abusive editorial comments or opinions that denigrate individuals or groups on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief”.

Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD, 2016:17) defined hate speech as any speech act that is aimed at inciting the audience to denigrate people on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, geography and any other socially conceived parameter with the purpose of marginalizing them or placing them at some disadvantage that is contrary to the provisions of the universal declaration on human rights as well as the international covenants on rights of the people.

According to CITAD (2016), the dimensions of hate speech include insults of people for their religion, ethnic or linguistic affiliation, contempt against people's place of origin, discrimination on gender and disability basis, abuses or desecration of symbols of cultural or religious practices, ridiculing of traditional or cultural institutions of other people and the spread of falsehood or rumours that demean or malign or ostracize other people on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or place of origin and disability. Jibrin et al (2017) also attempted to distinguish hate speech from dangerous speech. According to the authors, hate speech can be harmful, directly or indirectly, or both while dangerous speech has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it is made or disseminated. A speech act in this context includes any form of expression, including images such as drawings or photographs, films, etc. Jibrin et al (2017) later submitted that dangerous speech is part of hate speech, which is capable of mobilizing people to action. In her opinion, Benesch (2014) explained that some hate speeches do not increase the risk of mass violence, although they may cause serious emotional and psychological damage. Therefore, those concerned with this specific segment of hate speech that invites or condones violence prefer to use the term “dangerous speech” or even “hateful speech”. To a large extent, the two terms seem to be mere synonyms describing the same or very similar phenomenon.

Benesch (2013) developed a set of guidelines to identify hate or dangerous speech. These guidelines, according to Jibrin et al (2017) have so far remained the most widely used criteria in identifying hate speech. The five guidelines include a powerful speaker with a high degree of influence over the audience; an audience that has grievances and fear that the speaker can cultivate; a speech act that is clearly understood as a call to violence; a social or historical context that is propitious for violence, for any of a variety of reasons, including long standing competition between groups for resources, lack of efforts to solve grievances, or previous episodes of violence and lastly, a means of dissemination that is influential in itself, for example because it is the sole or primary source of news for the relevant audience. The schema does not require that all five elements must be present for the speech act to be classified dangerous. Benesch (2014) also identified the signs of dangerous speech by studying the patterns of wordings and cataloguing what she called the hallmarks of dangerous speech. The signs include the fact that the speech must describe another group as invaders, foreigners, or interlopers; suggest that the other group will besmirch, pollute, or despoil the audience group; dehumanize its targets, e.g. compare them to

vermin or insects and the speaker has to use 'accusation in a mirror' or assert that the target group posed or poses an existential threat to the audience.

Historical Manifestations of Hate and Dangerous Speech in Nigeria

Hate and dangerous speeches are often made along some key divides in Nigeria. They include religion, ethnicity, regionalism, political affiliation, among others. Politicians have often deployed religion to either mobilize support for or oppose certain candidates. In the process, their use of language has incited followers to commit violence against others. The charge of apostasy declared against ordinary people, who often were not Muslims, for example has resulted in the killing of many people by mob action.

Political parties are historically organized largely around ethno-cultural associations, which transform into parties. From the pre-independence period, politicians have deployed ethnicity to protect their "home" constituencies even as they try to win other constituencies. More so, discourse within the country tends to polarize the citizens along regional and ethnic lines. The three major ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba tend to dominate other ethnic groups, though there is a general perception, particularly in the South and Middle-belt of an Hausa-Fulani hegemony. That had fuelled a sense of the right of entitlement discourses from the different ethnic groups, which often leads to separatist agitation, violent militancy and the campaign for resource control and/or restructuring or true federalism.

There have also been several communal-ethno-religious conflicts in several parts of the country, of which the farmer-herdsmen conflict is the most current and persistent. These conflicts were not originally triggered by hate speech but hate speech has since become the keg with which the fuel for these recurrent conflicts are being ignited. Elsewhere in the country, hate speech has often featured in mobilization by youth in several communal conflicts such as the Ummuleri/Aguleri, Ife/Madakeke, etc. Lastly, Nigeria's 30 month civil war did not only lead to loss of lives and property, it also left bitter memories that remain a key reference point for hate speech in the country.

Theoretical Framework

As several studies have shown, news is created, "a social construction of reality". Schudson has said "...flesh-and-blood journalists literally compose the stories we call news. Journalists make the news just as Carpenters make houses or Scientists make science" (Schudson, 2005, p. 173). But as the scholar emphasized, journalists "do not produce news out of nothing. They act on 'something' in the world. The 'something' they work on are events, happenings, occurrences in the world that impress journalists' interests, their remarkableness, their newsworthiness" (p. 173). Parked into this view of Schudson is the selective process involved in the production of news (gate-keeping) and the intra and extra-organizational factors or interests that inform the selection of 'newsworthy' items. Journalists are no social or cultural eunuchs. They are human beings sensitive to their socio-political and cultural environment and economic and organizational constraints under which they work. Journalists do not select or pick just anything or anybody for the news. Studies have shown that the news is skewed in favour of the elite as sources (Oso, 2014). Prominence is a cardinal news value. In the words of Molotch and Lester, the media do not reflect "a world out there, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others" (Molotch and Lester, 1997, p. 206).

Therefore, this chapter is anchored on framing and gatekeeping theories. Historically, Entman (2004) notes that Walter Lippmann was the progenitor of framing theory in 1922. Since then, the theory has received some intellectual debates through the works of Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman. Bateson argues that statements do not have intrinsic meanings, but only acquire those in a frame that is constituted by context and style (Bateson, 1955). Media framing theory is built on the premise that how an issue is represented in the news always exerts some degree of influence on how it is understood and interpreted by the audience (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

Framing theory suggests that news coverage can have effects on how people think about social issues. Giltin (1980), who introduced the notion of frames in communication, describes frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion”(p.7). Media frames, in particular, have been defined as the core or central organizing idea of the news package that provides the means for understanding events or as “conceptual tools” used to convey, interpret, and evaluate information.

Although several interpretations of the concept have been suggested, Entman's definition remains the most widely used one. Entman (2004, p. 5) defines framing as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and or solution”. According to Riles, Sangalang, Hurley and Tewksbury (2014), journalists' use of frames facilitate the ease with which a news consumer can understand more complex issues in highlighting connections with pre-existing ways of perceiving of events or phenomena. When a particular frame is utilized, it influences how people think about a particular issue and what interpretive schema will become most applicable (Schuefele & Tewksbury, 2007). When constructing news stories, reporters use 'common' explanations to relate information to their audiences. The theory argues that frames are necessary to help people understand the world around them, particularly when they do not experience it firsthand (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Using frames does not necessarily imply that reporters are consciously writing biased reports; instead, reporters use frames as conventions of their profession to help interpret and relay information. Frames therefore help provide context so that news events can be presented in story form (Entman, 2004). However, while not intentionally presenting bias information, Scheufele and Tewksbury, (2007) assert that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. Thus, frames can shape people's interpretations of events in the world around them. Relating framing theory to this study, the way and manner journalists report ethno-religious matters may impact the perception of such matters among the audience. If the audience negatively perceives the reported story, it may further ignite violence or hatred in the nation. Thus, the onus rests on the journalist to apply discretion and wisdom in reporting conflict related issues.

Gatekeeping on the other hand, is the process through which information is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication. According to Shoemaker, Pamela and Vos (2009, p. 62), gatekeeping is the "process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it is the center of the media's role in modern public life". The theory was first instituted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943. Gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners

and even advertisers (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). Gate keeping is a “process of information control that includes all aspects of message encoding: not just selection but also withholding; transmission, shaping, display, repetition and timing of information as it goes from the sender to the receiver” (Shoemaker, 1997, p.57). Many factors affect the process; personal/individual, journalistic routine, the organization, the social institution and influential forces from outside the organization (ibid, p.62). Given the tenets of gate-keeping theory, journalists are expected to identify and eliminate all forms of hate messages and inciting ideas or words from their contents.

Method and Materials

The researchers used qualitative textual analysis to examine newspaper framing of the speech made by Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 18th 2019 at a synod of the Anglican Communion in Delta State. *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* Newspapers were purposively selected for the study. *Nigerian Tribune* was selected due to its popularity in the South-West where Obasanjo comes from. The paper more or less served as the mouth-piece of the Ayo Adebajo led faction of Afenifere which is opposed to APC, champions the agitation for restricting and supported the PDP during the 2019 elections. *Daily Trust* Newspaper was selected for its popularity in the North and its acclaimed objective of serving the Northern interest while *The Nation* Newspaper was selected based on its political affiliation with one of the leaders of the ruling All Progressives Congress, Bola Tinubu. The purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts. Qualitative textual analysis may involve consideration of the audience; attention to the visual, written and verbal language and assessing the text for what it is attempting to do. Critical case analysis was used to map out aspects of the speech that align with Benesch's (2013) guidelines of hate and dangerous speech. Critical case analysis is used in textual analysis to focus on aspects of the text that describes the claims or interpretations being made.

Results and discussion

This study was set out to proffer answers to two research questions. The findings are therefore thematically discussed under the research questions.

RQ 1: What frames did newspapers adopt in the reportage of Obasanjo's speech at the Synod of the Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria?

Ethno-Religious Hate Frame versus Religious and Conflict Sensitive Frame

Hate speeches are often made and reported along ethnic and religious divides. *Nigerian Tribune* adopted the ethno-religious hate frame in its reportage of Obasanjo's speech being considered while *Daily Trust* Newspaper adopted a religious sensitive frame in its reportage of the same speech. *The Nation* Newspaper on the other hand adopted a conflict sensitive frame in its reportage. One of the evidences of this result lies in the use of headline by the three newspapers. The headline of *Nigerian Tribune* reads “Fulanisation, Islamisation Agenda Going On in Nigeria Obasanjo” while the headline of *Daily Trust* reads “Church'll continue to play critical role for Nigeria's growth, devt. -Obasanjo” (*Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Trust* Newspapers, May 18, 2019). The headline of *The Nation* Newspaper on the other hand reads “ICYMI: Obasanjo: Boko Haram is for Fulanisation, Islamisation”. The headlines shows that *Tribune* and *The Nation* intended to emphasize the ethnic and religious aspects of the speech. Otherwise, the editors could have used other non-sensitive aspects of the speech as the headline. However, *The Nation* Newspaper was more cautious and sensitive as it attributed the reported fulanisation and islamisation agenda to the Boko Haram terrorist sect. The implication is that the use of

sensational headline by Nigerian Tribune is capable of engendering hatred between Christians and Moslems and between Fulanis and other ethnic groups in Nigeria while Daily Trust's headline is capable of building love and religious tolerance between the two major religions.

The leads of the stories also attest to the use of ethno-religious hate frame and religious sensitive frame. The lead of *Tribune* reads:

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has revealed a grand plot by some elements to foist a Fulani and Islamic agenda on Nigeria and other West African countries, just as he called for global action against terrorism and other organised crimes. Obasanjo, a one-time military Head of State and two-term civilian president expected to be privy to local and global intelligence on terrorism, said lack of education and employment for the youths could no longer be advanced as the reason Boko Haram insurgency still festered. "It is no longer an issue of lack of education and lack of employment for our youths in Nigeria which it began as. It is now West African Fulanisation, African Islamisation and global organised crimes of human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, gun trafficking, illegal mining and regime change," he said (*Tribune*, May 18, 2019.)

The above introduction shows Obasanjo's grievance against the Fulanis and Muslims without provision of evidences to substantiate his claims.

Daily Trust Newspaper on the other hand adopted a religious sensitive lead in the reportage. It reads: "Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has said that the Church would continue to play very critical role in the overall growth and development of the country". *The Nation* Newspaper however adopted the conflict sensitive frame as it attributed the Fulanisation and Islamisation agenda in Obasanjo's speech to the Boko Haram terrorist sect. The lead reads: "Former President Olusegun Obasanjo on Saturday branded the aim of the terror sect Boko Haram as 'Fulanisation' of West Africa and Islamisation of Africa".

Using the guidelines of hate/dangerous speech identified by Benesch (2013), a number of the elements of hate/dangerous speech could be identified. First, there was a powerful speaker in the person of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is still regarded as a major political figure and an elder statesman across Nigeria and the African continent. Perhaps, this may be attributed to his long stay in power and contributions to African unity. He served as a military ruler from February 13th 1976 to October 1st 1979 and as a democratically elected president from May 29 1999 to May 29 2007, all together making 11 years. From July 2004 to January 2006, Obasanjo also served as the Chairperson of the African Union. If the current democratic era in Nigeria is sustained, Obasanjo would forever remain Nigeria's Head of State with the longest years of service. Despite being a widely criticized and controversial former Head of State, Obasanjo remains a figure to be reckoned with in Nigeria. Hence, a speech from such a person may sway the populace either to the right or wrong direction. Being a Christian may also appeal to his Christian audience.

Secondly, there was a grievance and fear that Obasanjo was exploiting. One of the popular narratives and beliefs among the largely Christian South against the largely Muslim North is that any Northern Islamic Head of State may Islamize the entire nation. Perhaps, the fear was cultivated when former Head of State Ibrahim Babangida changed the status of Nigeria from an observer to a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) in January 1986 against the wishes of most Christians in Nigeria. The Nigerian Christian Elders' Forum (NCEF) and

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) are examples of Christian bodies that often cry against the possibility of Islamization of the country. Obasanjo simply took advantage of such fears and grievances to preach his Islamization sermon.

The socio-political history of the Fulani Empire in Nigeria cannot be exempted from the fear of Fulanisation cultivated by other tribes in Nigeria. It is widely believed among Southerners that anywhere the Fulanis go, their next agenda is to take over, culminating from their “born to rule” ideology. The controversial Ruga settlement plan for herdsmen also provided some context for Obasanjo's speech. A classic example often cited is how the Fulanis annexed Ilorin, a Yoruba dominated town and became their Emir (king) till date. Hence the Yorubas believe that the Fulanis are land or territory grabbers. Obasanjo, being a Yoruba man might have held to such a belief.

There was a powerful and believable channel of communication through which his statement was disseminated. Established in 1949 by Obafemi Awolowo, *Nigerian Tribune* is the oldest private newspaper in Nigeria. In the colonial era, the newspaper served as the mouthpiece for Awolowo's western region programmes and also played an important role in defending the interests of the Yoruba people in a period when different ethnic groups were struggling for power. Hence, the paper still appeals to many Nigerians. This may contribute to the believability of the report.

In addition, the way Obasanjo was described by the reporter indicates a reminder of the status of the speaker and a form of endorsement of his credibility. Excerpts:

Obasanjo, a one-time military Head of State and two-term civilian president expected to be privy to local and global intelligence on terrorism, said lack of education and employment for the youths could no longer be advanced as the reason Boko Haram insurgency still festered (*Tribune*, May 18, 2019).

The emphasis in the statement above is on the clause “Obasanjo, a one-time military Head of State and two-term civilian president expected to be privy to local and global intelligence on terrorism...” In other words, the paper was saying that the person whose speech that was being reported (Obasanjo) had adequate experience and was expected to have access to both local and global information on terrorism and the so called Islamization agenda. Such description of the speaker as a highly credible source has the potential of persuading the reader to believe the source of the hate message.

Although there was no clear call to violence in Obasanjo's speech being reported, the speech contains elements capable of generating hatred between the Fulanis and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Such hatred may ignite conflicts among ethnic groups. Part of the report reads:

He knocked the Federal Government for allowing the Boko Haram and herdsmen's attacks to fester by treating the matter with kid gloves, urging President Muhamamdu Buhari to rally local and global stakeholders in seeking solution to the fight against terrorism. The former president tasked Buhari to take the issue of insecurity seriously at all levels and address it at once “without favouritism or cuddling.

The use of the adjective “kid gloves” and the phrase “without favouritism or cuddling” by *Tribune* may imply that President Muhammadu Buhari, being a Muslim and a Fulani man was perhaps protecting his religion and ethnic group from legal consequences or punishment that should be meted out against their involvement in terrorism and related offences.

Moreover, the use of the words “Islamization and Fulanization” is not only capable of generating hate, it is also capable of inducing fear of Fulanis and Muslims especially from the North. Such words could further exacerbate the mistrust, division and sentiments in the country. We must situate this concern within the historical context of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Examples include the Jos riot of 1945, Kano riots of 1953, Tiv uprising of 1959-1964, the 1966 ethnic massacres within the army preceding the civil war in 1967, 1981 Ife-Modakeke crisis, 1982 Maitatsine riots in Kano and 1982 religious riots in Kaduna (Akpu, 2019). Cses of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria include the 1999 clashes between Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and Hausa/Fulani traders in Sagamu, Ogun State, the 1999 communal clash between OPC and Hausa/Fulani traders in Lagos, 2000 Sharia riots in Kaduna, 2000 Yoruba farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Saki, Oyo State, 2002 conflict in Aguleri and Omuleri areas of Anambra State, 2006 conflict between Quan-pan people of Plateau State and Azara district of Nassarawa State among several others. According to Akpu (2019, p. 415), “despite measures taken to achieve some level of social integration and unity in Nigeria, political, ethnic and religious violence have continued to linger thereby threatening the very existence of the country..” It was in such a horrible context of violence that a former President of Nigeria, who was once a leading participant of one the deadliest violence in Nigeria (the civil war) made the speech which was capable of pitching Christians against Muslims and Fulanis against other tribes as reported by the *Nigerian Tribune*.

Criticism versus Commendation and Neutrality Frames

Nigerian Tribune adopted the criticism frame while Daily Trust Newspaper adopted commendation frame in the reportage of Obasanjos' speech. Tribune reported Obasanjo's criticism of the Federal Government of Nigeria led by President Muhammadu Buhari over issues ranging from security, citizens' welfare to economic development of the Nation. The fifth paragraph of *Tribune's* report reads:

He knocked the Federal Government for allowing the Boko Haram and herdsmen's attacks to fester by treating the matter with kid gloves, urging President Muhamamdu Buhari to rally local and global stakeholders in seeking solution to the fight against terrorism. He former president tasked Buhari to take the issue of insecurity seriously at all levels and address it at once “without favouritism or cuddling.” On the poor state of the economy, Obasanjo advised the Buhari-led government to wriggle itself out of the temptation of excessive borrowing and the attendant devaluation trap (Nigerian Tribune, May 18, 2019, paragraph 5).

Daily Trust Newspaper on the other hand used commendation frame by reporting Obasanjo's commendation of the Church for its role in the spiritual and physical development of Nigerians. It reads:

The former president noted that the Church in Nigeria has continued to provide the spiritual growth of the people as well as the overall physical wellbeing and welfare of Nigerians. Obasanjo who spoke on the topic, “Mobilising Nigeria's Human and Natural Resources for National Development and Stability” said the Church had in the face of daunting challenges continued mould opinions (Daily Trust Newspaper, May 18, 2019, paragraph 3).

The Nation Newspaper on its part adopted neutrality frame as it neither reported Obasanjo's criticism nor praise. The third and fourth paragraphs read:

He urged an immediate and more aggressive approach by the federal government to deal with the current challenge of insecurity across the country brought about by the sect and its allies in ISIS. He spoke as a study emerged on how the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), is allegedly trying to form a 'jihadist pro-state' in northern Nigeria

The use of both criticism and commendation frames by newspapers may help to entrench democracy, free speech and feelings of affection if used with fairness but when criticisms or commendations are motivated by ulterior motives such as political reasons, proprietorial influence, financial inducement among others, it erodes the credibility of the medium at the long run. The most ideal way of reporting is to try to be as neutral as possible.

RQ2: What is the political orientation of the reportage of Obasanjo's speech at the Synod of the Anglican Communion, Delta State, Nigeria?

Sometimes, media reports are politically motivated. In fact, some media houses are built around the political ideologies of their proprietors. The following themes related to the political orientation of newspaper reportage of Obasanjo's speech are discussed:

Regional Bias

Nigerian Tribune and *Daily Trust* Newspapers reflected regional bias in their reportage of Obasanjo's speech. An assessment of the speech made by Obasanjo at the Synod in Delta State, Southern Nigeria shows that the Former President spoke about several issues including terrorism, insecurity, the economy, roles of the Church as well the need for the government and all citizens including religious leaders to collectively address the issues. However, *Nigerian Tribune* (located in the largely Christian South) chose to focus on the ethnic and religious aspects of the speech (Fulanisation and Islamisation). This is further reflected in the failure of *Nigerian Tribune* to mention those accused by the Former President, Olusegun Obasanjo. The introduction reads "Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has revealed a grand plot by **some elements** to foist a Fulani and Islamic agenda on Nigeria...". The use of the adjective 'some elements' leaves the reader wondering who those elements may be. Could they be the ruling or opposition Fulani elites? Could they be some Northern Islamic fundamentalists or could they just be terrorist groups? Such description may be a deliberate attempt by the *Nigerian Tribune* to accuse the Fulanis or Moslems of trying to impose themselves on the rest of the Country. The Nation Newspaper, unlike *Nigerian Tribune*, specifically reported that Obasanjo attributed the Islamisation and Fulanisation agenda to the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Daily Trust Newspaper (located in the largely Moslem North) on its part was completely silent about the allegation of Islamisation and Fulanisation as though Obasanjo never said anything related to that. The exclusion of this aspect of the speech by the newspaper could be seen as a deliberate political and ideological act. As already indicated above, the gate keeping and framing process in the newsroom involves "selection, withholding and shaping". Also, the agenda setting has shown that there is a connection between what the media publish and "the pictures in the people's heads" and issues raised in the public discussions and debates. Media representation is an exercise in symbolic power. Media representations as Orgad once noted are "instruments upholding the interests of the powerful" (Orgad, 2014, p. 143). According to the scholar, of interest are:

...the processes and effects of symbolic exclusion and inclusion; how certain people, places, social entities, objects, ideas, voices and relations are accorded visibility, authority, normality, legitimacy and “truthfulness”, while others are rendered invisible, deviant, and/or illegitimate (Orgad, 2014.p.142).

The important point to note here and one of the main concerns of this study is that the power of the media to represent and signify through what they publish as news is not a neutral force as Hall has asserted. He explained further:

The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over-and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized (Hall, 1982, p. 70)

The invisible, the unknown cannot be named or criticized nor acted upon.

In this case, the *Nigerian Tribune* is guilty of sensationalism; The Daily Trust is also guilty of the sin of deliberate exclusion and omission. All the newspapers are involved in what Hall called “the politics of signification” (ibid). Gatekeeping, agenda setting and framing are parts of these political and ideological activities in the news making processes. *The Nation* Newspaper (owned by a member of the ruling All Progressives Congress) reported all aspects of the speech without being critical of the government. This may be an attempt not to offend the political party of its owner.

Conclusion

It is instructive to note that substantial part of the speech was devoted to the historical and current trajectory of Nigeria's development and the challenges; corruption, low literacy rate, infrastructural deficit, citizens' alienation and mistrust for government, poor governance and election fraud. Surprisingly, these issues were neglected in the news reported. The commendation of the Church (in the opening two paragraphs) and reference to African Fulanization and African Islamization were made in one paragraph (paragraph 62) while developmental issues were raised in over 60 paragraphs. Yet, the newspapers concentrated only on paragraphs 2 and 62, neglecting the most important aspects of the speech in other paragraphs. They also excluded the problem of the country's underdevelopment and its causes and manifestations as comprehensively analyzed in the speech to satisfy their ethno-religious and political inclinations. Again, the newspapers excluded the aspect of the speech that concerns the whole country: the problem of underdevelopment, insecurity, insurgency, corruption among others. Hence, we recommend that journalists in Nigeria should rise above ethno-religious and socio-political disorientations and be wholly committed to the cherished principles of fairness, truthfulness and accuracy that guide journalism profession, with focus on developmental issues and self-distancing from issues that can further disintegrate the nation.

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