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Post-colonialism and Beyond:  
Cultural Production and Social Sustenance

Special edition in honour of **Dele Layiwola**, *FNAL*

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Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC)

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# Motivated by Public Interest or Private Gain: An Investigation into Newspaper Reportage of Code of Conduct Tribunal Trials in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*Studies have shown how political affiliation of newspapers affects coverage of corruption trials of politicians. This study investigated the different frames in newspaper reportage of the Code of Conduct Tribunal trials of two prominent political figures in Nigeria (Bukola Saraki and Bola Tinubu). Using Framing Theory, three newspapers (The Nation, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune) were purposively selected based on national spread, sustained publication of the trials, and party-affiliation. Four hundred and eighty-four editions from 2015 to 2017 of each, totaling 1,552 were selected and content-analysed. One social commentator and one media scholar, both based in Ibadan, Oyo State were interviewed. Findings revealed that 83.1% episodic frames focused on sensationalism and elite/party squabbles while 16.9% thematic frames were based on structural causes, and solutions to corruption. However, political-affiliation and ownership pattern determined how the corruption trials were framed. The portrayal of the two individuals was affected by the ownership pattern and political-affiliation of the newspapers. Therefore, the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) should promote ethics and social responsibility for proper professionalism of journalism practice in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian newspapers, CCT trials, framing, political-affiliation, anti-corruption

## Introduction

The media has been regarded as the fourth estate of the realm. This implies that in addition to the other arms of government, the media is an important institution in the society. Elizabeth Kramer notes that the media is crucial in shaping public discourse and debate (61). In many countries that have transitioned from totalitarianism to democracy, the media has played an important role in the democratic process by building a culture of openness and disclosure which makes

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democratically elected governments accountable, and engaging citizens in the business of governance and by informing, educating and mobilizing the public (Cela, Erebara, Bej, Selmani, Likmeta and Voko 6).

Stein and Kellam note that although it is due to this powerful role the media plays in democratic societies that has endeared it to the politicians who may wish to communicate directly with voters about certain matters – such as popular policy decisions to the media – politicians are clearly not disposed to using the media to advertise their wrongdoings. As a result, the mass media have the potential to play a crucial role as watchdogs, informing citizens about any improper conducts by those in power. One example of the abuse of political office is corruption. David Enweremadu notes that although corruption is a major challenge for several developing states, very few countries have been so ravaged by graft as Nigeria. This was underscored by the fact that Nigeria was declared as the world's most corrupt nation in 1999 (1). Though it is difficult to estimate exactly how much Nigeria has lost to corruption since its independence from Britain in 1960, the business magazine, *The Economist*, estimates that Nigeria has lost about \$400 billion to corruption for the period 1966 to 1999. Similarly, Transparency International (T.I) corruption perception index of 2016 ranks Nigeria 136 out of 176 countries, making Nigeria the 37th most corrupt country in the world.

In view of this, as Kenny Manara says, as corruption continues to take centre-stage in policy discussions in developing countries, the role of the media becomes all the more important. The media play an important role in the fight against corruption leading to both tangible and intangible results. The tangible results are often associated with investigative reporting, which contributes to the launch of a criminal investigation against a public official, the resignation of a corrupt politician or the scrapping of law or policy that fosters corrupt practices (103). The intangible results are associated with their watchdog role in reporting on corruption cases, which heighten the sense of accountability among elected officials and public bodies; those checks on corruption which arise from the broader social climate of enhanced political pluralism, enlivened public debates that are inevitably the by-product of a hard-hitting independent news media (Cela, et al. 6). Consequently, the media foster debate in a way that encourages members of the public to become politically active, thus serving as an indirect counterweight to the lack of mass participation in politics often associated with high levels of corruption (Manara 104).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars have focused attention on the media coverage of the trials of accused corrupt politicians (Puglisi and Snyder, Jr.; Giglioli; Baumgartner and Bonafont; Murchison). Pier Giglioli studied the newspapers and television coverage of “Tangentopoli,” a corruption scandal involving politicians from the Socialist Party (PSI), the Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) of Italy. He discovered that the image they offered of “Tangentopoli” was biased and amounted to witch-hunting. Furthermore, the media did not bother to throw light on the structural factors favouring corruption. Also, Benny Murchison examined attitudes towards media coverage of the Fitzgerald Inquiry on corruption in Queensland, Australia. He found that journalists were steadfast in the belief that journalistic practices are responsible and effective and disagree with opinions that reporters chase voyeuristic angles or that stories lack solid research. However, there were strong reservations regarding the media's competency. Puglisi and Snyder, Jr. examined newspaper coverage of 14 corruption scandals involving Democratic politicians, and 21 involving Republicans by approximately 200 U.S. newspapers. They discovered that Democratic-leaning newspapers gave significantly more coverage to scandals involving Republican politicians than scandals involving Democratic politicians while Republican-leaning newspapers do the opposite. However, all these studies have examined the scandals at a general level without critical examination of the frames of the scandals. Given the importance of framing in influencing public opinion, course of justice, legitimacy of government and public policy, this study examines framing of the Code of Conduct Tribunal trial of two political public figures, Bola Tinubu and Bukola Saraki, in selected Nigerian newspapers, and the image ascribed to the public figures.

## **Literature Review**

### **Corruption and Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) Trials in Nigeria**

Corruption in both the public and private sectors of the economy adversely affects the Nigerian economy with more devastating effect on the public sector. The Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) is a court specially designed for fighting public sector corruption and abuse in Nigeria. Though the CCT is not a court of law in the strict sense, it plays a vital role in the fight against corruption by public officers.

The current Vice President of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Osibanjo, in a paper titled,

“Strengthening the Code of Conduct Bureau” (*This Day*: 15) argued that the code of conduct for public officers is an organ of the Nigerian anti-corruption and transparency framework. He also states that it is perhaps the first formal legislation creating offences and sanctions for official corruption and other acts in breach of the prescribed ethics for public officers. The Code of Conduct Tribunal is statutory, being a creation of the Constitution. It was established in 1989 and the tribunal is a strikingly unique adjudicatory body created to strengthen integrity in public service by enforcing the code of conduct for public officers.

The former governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), was accused in April 2007 of operating foreign bank accounts while in office between 1999 and 2007. His trial before the CCT did not begin until September 2011, while he was subsequently freed on November 2011. The count against him was that he allegedly operated 16 foreign bank accounts between 1999 and 2007 when he was governor of Lagos State. Bola Tinubu was charged with lying under oath and failure to declare his bank accounts domiciled in the United States and the United Kingdom as mandated by law when he served as governor of Lagos State. Justice Danladi Umar, chairman of the CCT, in his ruling, freed Tinubu of the charges and declared that the prosecution failed to establish a *prima facie* against the politician. In addition, he declared that the prosecution lacked jurisdiction on the case. He not only declined to exercise further jurisdiction in respect of the case but also accused the Federal Government of abusing judicial process by dragging the accused to court without adhering to the rules governing criminal prosecution (Ajani).

On the other hand, the federal government in the charge suit No: CCT/ABJ/01/15 alleged that Dr Bukola Saraki was accused of making a false/anticipatory declaration of assets before the Code of Conduct Bureau, and operating accounts while in office as Kwara State governor between 2003 and 2011. He was also accused of collecting salaries for four years after his tenure had elapsed. The CCB, on September 16 2015, filed a 13-count charge – which later increased to 18-count – against Saraki. Meanwhile, on June 14, 2017, the panel headed by Justice Danladi Umar, held that the Federal Government failed to prove essential elements of the allegations leveled against Saraki. The tribunal upheld a no-case submission of the defendant and he was therefore discharged and acquitted (Nnochiri). Both electronic and print media gave the trial a lot of coverage. The question is, “How did the media report and frame the trials?”

## **The Nigerian Media and the Quest for Accountability in Governance**

Cela, et al. highlight five roles the media plays in ensuring good governance and accountability. These include:

Expos[ing] and report[ing] the facts related to corruption cases and involved individuals; keep[ing] up public pressure to guarantee accountability and follow-up, and hence fight[ing] impunity; expos[ing] legal gaps and loopholes and assist[ing] in addressing them; confirm[ing], qualify[ing] or even contradict[ing] popular perceptions on corruption; exercise[ing] alertness regarding its own ranks, by fighting corruption within (6-7).

The role of the media in promoting good governance is obvious. All aspects of good governance are facilitated by the existence of strong, pluralistic and independent media within the society (United Nations Scientific and Cultural Org.). In view of this, the Nigerian media terrain to a large extent could be adjudged to qualify. The significance of the media in how well or not governance can be executed in the society is best captured in the words of Joseph Pulitzer, which he pronounced in 1904:

Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together. An able, disinterested, public-spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it, can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and a mockery. A cynical, mercenary, demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself. The power to mould the future of the Republic will be in the hands of the journalists of future generations (640).

That is, the media can make or break a society by the way and manner they function. The media are the only institution with the capacity to allow and facilitate regular checks and assessment of the activities of government and assist in bringing public concern and voices into the open by providing a platform for public discussion.

Tsegyu Santas says countless examples abound where the media exposed hidden corrupt practices among Nigerian public office holders, hence, the promotion of accountability and transparency in the country. The media set agenda for public discussion. Through the agenda setting function, the mass media are able to guide the public on issues they should think of or regard as important, by frequently reporting



such issues (187). Since the return of democracy in May 1999, the Nigerian media have raised the issue of corruption to the plane of public discussion. They have reported corruption cases involving high profile civil servants and politicians in the country. Jingles, adverts and programmes about the damaging effect of corruption are frequently seen and heard in broadcast and print media across the country. The public is now educated and enlightened about the menace of corruption. All these successes were achieved because the Nigerian media have zero tolerance for corruption (188).

Specifically, Ifeoma Dunu says within the democratic dispensation, the media have exposed high profile cases of corruption which involved highly ranked public office holders. For instance, the efforts of the media led to the removal of Alhaji Salisu Buhari, on July 22, 1999, from office for age falsification and certificate forgery. Others include the former Senate President Chuba Okadigbo who was accused of misappropriating N67 Million car and office furniture money; Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, a former speaker, House of Representative was accused of misappropriation of 628 million naira; Professor Adenike Grange, a former Minister of Health, was accused of misappropriation of 300m naira unspent funds; Iyabo Obasanjo, a senator was indicted in cases of graft in the health and power sectors. Other cases include House of Representatives N23 million car scandal, the Halliburton corruption scandal, the Vaswasni brothers scandal and many other improprieties in government circles at different times (188). Similarly, Ifeoma Dunu claims that the fight against corruption that was intensified in the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo can, perhaps, be regarded as a direct fallout of the intense reportage, coverage and exposure of corruption by the media within the Nigerian polity during that period. This led to the establishment of such bodies as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) (Dunu 188).

However, Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine argue that although the media have exposed corrupt acts in some instances, these have usually been after the demise of the administration under which those acts occurred. For instance, they cite the government's poor record of accountability amongst public officers between 1986 and 1993 which was evident among others at the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL) Plc., and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), but which were reported only after the demise of the President Ibrahim Babangida's administration (180).

## **Framing Theory**

Framing theory was first conceived by Erving Goffman in 1974. Framing theory has received so much attention and expansion by scholars from media, psychology and sociology (Pan and Kosick). Framing theory is built on this assumption: how an issue is presented in the news always has much influence on how it is perceived and interpreted among the audience (Scheufele and Tewksbury).

The major premise of the theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue. However, the interesting influence of framing on public opinion is what occurs when changes (often small) in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes large) changes of opinion. To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or solution recommendation” (Entman). The idea of 'news frames' refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context. The essence of framing is selection, to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.

Framing is pivotal to journalism because it is one of the journalistic tools to organize complex communication context in a way that will make a situation clear and understandable. Media frames provide shape to a news story. Media organisations use framing to construct or determine what is considered news worthy or not to them and their perceived audience. Ezekiel Asemah describes the weight the media carry by pointing out that what most people understand about events that occur around the world on a daily basis is as a result of the power the media control. The media present information about events in different forms, and the information is mostly framed to meet the goals of the source. Ezekiel Asemah shows that in communication, framing defines how news media coverage can help to shape mass opinion by using specific frameworks to help guide their audience to understanding. Therefore, since framing leads to the creation of versions of a story which has effects on balance, equality, fairness, objectivity and accuracy, the frames that the media created based on the trials might have affected the way the public viewed not only the anticorruption campaign of the government and the image of the individuals but also the legitimacy of the government.

## Methodology

The study combined quantitative and qualitative research designs. McTavish and Loether point out that using both qualitative and quantitative methods of research provides a way of assessing the accuracy of findings. Content analysis was used to measure variables identified in the contents of three Nigerian newspapers (*The Nation* and *Nigerian Tribune* and *Guardian*) purposively selected for their national outlook. An in-depth interview with a purposively selected social commentator and a media scholar was conducted to gain insight into their views on the framing of the trials. The CCT trials' stories published in selected Nigerian newspapers with national outlook and within the study period were considered for review (Nigerian Press Council; Nwammuo, et al.). Specifically, *Guardian NG* was selected because of its sustained publication of the trials and its perceived political neutrality (Nwammuo, et al.); *The Nation* was selected because it is a political affiliated newspaper linked to Bola Tinubu, the former Governor of Lagos State. *The Nation* is alleged to be sympathetic towards the cause of its founder and the ideology of the APC (All Progressive Congress) (Ademilokun and Taiwo 452), *Nigerian Tribune*, though not necessarily a political party newspaper, supports the interests of the Yoruba faction of the PDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) (Nwammuo, et al). The time covered by the study was September to December 2011, for the trial of Bola Tinubu and September 2015 to June 2017 for the trial of Bukola Saraki. From the two year trial of the President of the Senate, Bukola Saraki, seventeen specific points were selected. Furthermore, the study content-analysed 484 (1552) editions of the selected newspapers, which were purposively selected because they contained stories or content on CCT trials. As units of analysis, news stories, features, advertorials, editorials, cartoons, letters to the editor, speeches/interviews and opinionated essays on the CCT trials of the two personalities were examined. Frames for the study were selected deductively from the reviewed literature and through a qualitative analysis of some news texts and were then coded as variables through content analysis. While quantitative data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages with results presented in tables, qualitative data were analysed by explanation building technique with excerpts used to substantiate quantitative findings.

## Results

**Table 1: Frame type in the coverage of the CCT trials of Bola Tinubu and Bukola Saraki**

Frame type	Bola Tinubu			Bukola Saraki			
	Episodic Frame	Thematic Frame	Total	Frame type	Episodic frame	Thematic frame	Total
Newspaper	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq(%)	Newspaper	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)
<b>Nigerian Tribune</b>	10 (100%)	-	10 (100)	<b>Tribune</b>	42 (95.7%)	2 (4.3%)	44 (100)
<b>Guardian</b>	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	14 (100)	<b>Guardian</b>	72 (78.9%)	23 (24.2%)	95 (100)
<b>Nation</b>	34 (94.4%)	2 (5.6%)	36 (100)	<b>Nation</b>	61 (83.6%)	12 (16.4%)	73 (100)

**Table 2: Framing Condition/Dominant Frame of Bola Tinubu trial**

Newspapers	Anti-corruption	Witch Hunt/Smear Campaign	Anti-Opposition	Distractive / Legally Flayed	Selective	Total
<b>Nigerian Tribune</b>	9 (90.0%)	1 (10.0%)	-	-	-	10 (100)
<b>Guardian</b>	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	-	-	-	14 (100)
<b>The Nation</b>	3 (8.3%)	12 (33.3%)	17 (47.2%)	-	3 (8.3%)	35 (100)

The results from the table show that all the 10 (100%) stories in the *Nigerian Tribune* stories published on the trial of Bola Tinubu were episodic: *Guardian* published 7 stories (50%) as episodic while *Nation* published 34 (94.4%) stories as episodic. In the Bukola Saraki trial, *Nigerian Tribune* published 42 (95.7%) stories, *Guardian*, 72 (78.9%) stories while *The Nation* published 61 (83.6%) stories using the episodic frame. On the thematic frames with regards to the trial of Bola Tinubu, *Nigerian Tribune* published no story, *Guardian* 7 (50%) and, *The Nation* 2 (5.6%). For the trial of Bukola Saraki, *Nigerian Tribune* published 2 (4.3%) thematic stories; *Guardian* 23 (24.2%) and *The Nation* 12 (16.4%). In both trials, there were more stories published using the episodic frame (83.1% stories) than the thematic frame (16.9% stories). The results show that the selected newspapers gave prominence to episodic (that is, the selected newspapers focused on vivid, sensational aspect of the trials) than thematic frame (the structural causes, impacts and solutions to corruption).

In Table 2, 90% of stories from the *Nigerian Tribune* were in support of government anticorruption war (anticorruption frame) and only 10% stories were framed as a retributive attack (witch hunt frame) on the accused. *The Guardian* framed 12 stories (85.7%) using the anticorruption frame and 2 stories (14.3%) of the trial framed as a retributive attack on the accused (witch hunt frame).

However, *The Nation* published 3 stories (8.3%) framed as anticorruption; 12 stories were published (33.3%) using the witch hunt frame and 17 stories on the trial (47%) framed as an attack on the opposition (anti-opposition frame).

**Table 3: Framing Condition/Dominant Frame of Bukola Saraki**

Newspapers	Anti-corruption	Witch hunt/ Smear campaign	Anti Opposition	Distractive/ legally flawed	Selective	Total
The Nation	63 (86.3%)	7 (9.5%)	1 (1.4%)	-	2 (2.7%)	73 (100)
The Guardian	60 (63.2%)	31 (32.6%)	4 (4.2%)	-	-	95 (100)
Nigerian Tribune	7 (16%)	36 (81.8%)	1 (2.3%)	-	-	44 (100)

**Table 4: Tone of Stories on the CCT trials of Bola Tinubu and Bukola Saraki**

Newspaper	Nigerian Tribune		Guardian		The Nation	
	Tinubu	Saraki	Tinubu	Saraki	Tinubu	Saraki
<b>Tone</b>						
<b>Positive</b>	30	6.7%	85.7	30.5	-	49.3
<b>Negative</b>	10	45.5	14.3	22.1	86.1	11.0
<b>Balanced</b>	60	47.8	-	47.4	13.9	39.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

Table 3 revealed *The Nation* framed 63 stories (86.3%) under anticorruption, 7 stories (9.5%) as witch hunt/smear campaign, 1 story (1.4%) as anti-corruption and 2 stories (2.7%) as selective. *Guardian* framed 60 stories (63.2%) as anticorruption, 31 stories (32.6%) as witch hunt/smear campaign and 4 stories (4.2%) as anti-opposition. Also, *Nigerian Tribune* framed 7 stories (16%) as anti-corruption, 36 (81.8%) as witch-hunt and 1 (2.3%) story as anti-opposition.

Table 4 shows that *Nigerian Tribune* had the most balanced stories (60%); *Guardian* had the most positive stories (85.7%), while *The Nation* had the most negative stories (86.1%). For the trial of Saraki, *The Nation* had (49.3%) positive stories, *Guardian* had (22.1%) negative and (47.4%) balanced stories. *Nigerian Tribune* had (47.8%) balanced and (45.5%) neutral stories. The *Guardian* had (47.4%) balanced stories, while *The Nation* had (49.3%) positive stories

Table 5: T-test of the content of the trial to determine their pattern of framing by newspapers

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed(Tinubu)	.054	.817	-1.086	95	.028	-1.72524
Equal variances assumed(Saraki)	3.323	.072	1.326	34	.045	1.2856

Table 6: Image ascribed to Bola Tinubu

	IMAGE						Total
	Victim	Hero of democracy	Ingrate	Corrupt politician	Schemer	Others	
Nigerian Tribune	1 (10.0%)	-	-	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0)	6 (60.0%)	10 (100%)
Guardian	1 (7.1%)	-	-	1 (7.1%)	-	12 (85.7%)	14 (100%)
Nation	29 (80.5)	3 (8.3%)	-	1 (2.8%)	-	3 (8.3%)	36 (100%)

From Table 5, the mean difference of the two newspapers in presenting the trial of Bola Tinubu is -1.72524 and the mean difference has a level of significance (sig. (2-tailed), 0.028 which is less than 0.05, at 5% level of acceptance. This implies that the political-affiliated *The Nation* newspaper supports the anti-corruption campaign of its political party which is in power, while *Nigerian Tribune*, in support of the opposition, derides the effort of the government. Therefore, each newspaper supported the anti-corruption campaign of the political party it is affiliated to when such party is in power and derides the anticorruption effort of the government when its political-affiliated party is in the opposition. However, the mean difference of the stories in the two newspapers as regards the trial of Bukola Saraki is 1.2856, with a level of significance (sig. (2-tailed)), 0.045 which is less than 0.05. This implies that the political-affiliated newspaper *Nigerian Tribune* supports the anti-corruption campaign of its political party which is in power, while *The Nation*, in support of the opposition, derides the effort of the government.

Table 6 shows that for the CCT trial of Bola Tinubu, *Nigerian Tribune* presented 1 story (10%) which portrayed Mr. Tinubu as a victim, 1 story (10%) as a corrupt

politician, 2 stories (20%) as a schemer while 6 stories (60%) did not present an image of Mr. Tinubu. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* similarly presented only 1 (7.1%) story which portrayed Mr. Tinubu as a victim, 1 story (7.1%) as a corrupt politician while 12 stories did not portray him in any light. *The Nation* newspaper presented 29 (80.5%) stories which portrayed Tinubu as a victim, 3 (8.3%) stories as a hero of democracy/not guilty, and 1 (2.8) story as a corrupt politician, while 3 (8.3%) stories did not portray him in any light.

**Table 7: Image ascribed to Bukola Saraki**

	IMAGE						Total
	Victim	Hero of democracy	Ingrate	Corrupt politician	Schemer	Others	
<b>Nigerian Tribune</b>	37 (84.1%)	3 (6.8%)	-	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.3%)	3 (6.8%)	44 (100)
<b>The Guardian</b>	33 (34.7%)	3 (3.2%)	-	17 (20%)	3 (3.2%)	38 (40.0%)	95 (100)
<b>The Nation</b>	9 (12.3%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	29 (39.7%)	4 (5.5%)	29 (39.7%)	73 (100)

Table 7 shows that *Nigerian Tribune* framed the image of Bukola Saraki more as a victim 37(84.1%), less as a corrupt politician 1(1.4%) and as a schemer (1 story). Meanwhile, *Guardian* did not portray Saraki in any light 38(40%), but portrayed him more as a victim 33(34.7%) stories), as a corrupt politician 17 (17.9%), and less as a schemer 3 (3.2%) and a hero 3 (3.2%). *The Nation* framed the accused more as a corrupt politician 29 (39.7%) and with no frame 29 (39.7%), less as a victim 9 (12.3%), hero 1 (1.4%) and ingrate, 1 story (1.4%).

## Discussion of Findings

On the frame type, results from Table 1 show that the selected newspapers published more episodic (83.1%) than thematic frames (16.9%). Investigation into frame types used is important because it reveals how the media plays its expected role in the society. This shows that generally, the press in Nigeria can be described as an instrumental press, concerned only about defending their interests than the concern for good governance, transparency, and accountability in the society. Based on this, they failed to do what Chang Park described as what the media ought to do: serving as watchdogs and mobilising popular opinion against corruption (3), playing the five

roles test the press must play in ensuring good governance and accountability, according to Cela *et al*, in the coverage of the trials.

Furthermore, one of the interviewees stated that because people no longer count on the media for objective and informed analysis, social media thrives. He attributes this to engagement of the media in politics, stating that when the financial sponsors of newspapers, who oftentimes are politicians, are on trial, the media looks the other way and focuses on sensational stories instead of informed analysis. This submission confirms the preponderance of episodic frames, as it affects the quality of governance. He said:

The quality of journalism is low especially if you look at the quality of reports on politics and governance, law and order, quality journalism has taken the back seat, while the quality is high in issues of no risks to the media establishment, for instance, areas of science, environment etc.

Meanwhile, the media scholar from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan stated that although the press is often referred to as the watchdog of the society, especially to ensure accountability in government, an unresponsive government, even at the risk of being mobbed by the media, leaves the press hapless, hence, this makes the press docile in its functions. He further attributes the preponderance of episodic frames to politicians trying to leverage news organisations, either through ownership or through subsidies in form of financial inducements or patronage. This further substantiates Chang Park's opinion that the predominance of thematic frame stories over the episodic frame stories influences how people assign responsibility for corruption because episodic frame may confuse people's judgment for causal responsibility of corruption (18). She believes episodic frame stories lead readers to assign responsibility for corruption to individual factors, while thematic frame stories are connected to societal factors. She adds that corruption is less a question of individual morality, but more the consequence of structural causes such as the ever-increasing voracity of political parties, the symbiotic relationship between the corporate establishment and the politicians, the lack of change in government and the perverse institutional mechanisms that produce and reproduce the resources necessary for corruption (19).

Similarly, according to Tables 2 and 3, political affiliations patterned the perspective of the trials presented by the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nation*. For example, for the trial of Bola Tinubu, *Nigerian Tribune* published 9 (90%) stories which framed the



trial as a genuine anticorruption initiative, while *The Nation* published 32 (91.7%) stories which portrayed the trials as witch hunt, anti-opposition and selective. Equally, for the trial of Bukola Saraki, *The Nation* framed 63 (86.3%) stories as anticorruption; while *Nigerian Tribune* framed 36 (81.8%) stories as witch hunt. This indicates that the newspapers saw the trials as genuine when the man on trial is of the other political party or he is against the interest of their owner, even if he is of the same political party, evident in *The Nation* portrayal of the trial of Bukola Saraki. This finding supports Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine's submission that the coverage of corruption trials divides the Nigerian media, depending on who was accused of it (184). Moreover, the social commentator interviewee agrees that the press in Nigeria speaks with one voice only on low-risk issues such as science and the environment that do not tamper with the interests of their organisations.

Therefore, the press was more interested in protecting its interests above its function in the society. Interestingly, the revelation goes beyond the findings of Puglisi and Snyder, Jr., and Baumgartner and Bonafont that newspapers downplay the action of their allies and focus instead on publishing bad news about their rivals. But it reveals that political-affiliated newspapers support causes and/or politicians that do not necessarily represent their interests momentarily, if the interest at hand will bring to disrepute the opposition party. This is evident in how the *Nigerian Tribune*, a newspaper not of the same political affiliation as Bukola Saraki, portrayed the corruption trial against him as witch hunt (81.8% of their stories of his trial) even though he doesn't belong to the party the *Nigerian Tribune* is sympathetic to its interests. In addition, this view agrees with the submission of the view of the media studies scholar that “the right of ownership confers the right of propaganda”, and where that right is exercised in a capitalist society, it is likely to be towards conservative prejudice, either by assertion or exclusion of matters that the owners find undesirable to publish (Milliband qtd. in Onoja 76). The interviewee further stresses that “the press only watches what it has interest in watching so much that they put emphasis on certain issues while other issues are downplayed.” In relation to the agenda-setting functions of the press, this finding also agrees with the position of the social commentator who was of the view that there is no watchdog media because what we have seen is that the media itself by the 'so-called' agenda setting that it does has become political. He says:

In a country where you have political parties, the media is no longer the fourth estate of the realm but it is like a political party. We need to do some analysis of media employees. How do they get in there? What their linings

are, their ideological stance, what their interests are, because people who get in there have one interest or the other. So the idea of watchdog does not hold water. May be they are still watchdogs but they are watching for their owners.

Furthermore, he adds that it is a well-known reality that the watchdog role of the press itself is not without qualification if it is said that journalism is a watchdog in the political or the social-cultural sense. Hence, the media sets the agenda that only benefits its political interests. Similarly, in line with the framing theory which in essence is “to select, to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events” (Entman51), the media can shape a particular perspective it wants readers to accept on an issue. Therefore, the two newspapers tried to manoeuvre the perception of the public about the trials rather than to achieve accountability and good governance(Ciboh). Therefore, the selected newspapers did not carry out one of the major roles of the press which is to be socially responsible to the society where it operates. It was discovered that *The Nation* newspaper is owned by Bola Tinubu; therefore, some support is expected from the newspaper reportage on his trial. Similarly, *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper, though not a political affiliated newspaper, depends on the PDP (People's Democratic Party) for commercial revenue, hence a level of support is expected for PDP politicians and other interests against major opposition candidates. Thus, this shows that other interests which are politically motivated can still impede the watchdog role of the Nigerian press. On this issue, the interviewee submits:

Consequently, uniform reportage in a space where you have *Tribune* that has a totally different mission from *Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers is not attainable. For instance, during the trial of Bola Tinubu, the motive of the trial that was generally believed was that the PDP (People's Democratic Party) led government was trying to persecute Tinubu; of course you would expect a newspaper like *The Nation* to buy into that narrative because it is a newspaper sympathetic towards Tinubu's political ascendancy. Similarly, media organisations that are pro-PDP would report otherwise. It is only natural that the slant of reportage will not be uniform.

In a way, his submission affirms that the press framing did not necessarily affect the judicial process itself. He states that regardless of whatever issues came out in the newspaper, and it being over-flogged and discussed extensively before the trial

proper, he does not think it is possible for what goes up in the newspaper to affect the cause of justice. He stated that the cases were lost because of the inadequacy of both the judicial system and the incompetence of the prosecution, and not because of the press coverage of the trials. However, the other interviewee said that the media simply heated up the polity so as to gain political capital at the expense of justice and truth. He stated that since the press presented diverse opinions, the public was left confused, and that if it were in a serious clime, where you have a serious media, there would have been an informed analysis of the trials which would have spurred proper conviction of the accused.

Consequently, this was also reflected in the way the newspapers portrayed the two accused persons as shown in Tables 6 and 7 where *The Nation* and *Nigerian Tribune* portrayed the individuals with whom they were politically allied favourably and those to whom they were opposed unfavourably. Ralph Akinfeleye (cited in Ben Onoja) noted that through the use of carefully chosen words, broadcasters (the media) can discredit people or organisations they dislike and exalt those they want the public to respect. He stated further that they do this through the choice of just the right adjective or verb to sum a situation that evokes from the receiver the response the mass communicator feels should be adopted towards a story (160). In some cases, such words could be favourable or unfavourable to the news maker (Onoja 160). The submission underscores the tenet of the framing theory that the media constructs reports in the way it wants the public to respond to an issue.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Some media owners are into active politics while others are not. Those into active politics naturally have known political affiliation, ideology and aspiration, while those who are not may, however, have some vested interests in the political domain given the link between the political and the media spheres. The two require each other for growth and sustenance. The owner's political affiliation or interests may overwhelm the media's capacity to play the impartial umpire in political relations, which naturally are critical. Therefore, newspaper framing of the trials based on political partisanship preserved the corrupt political system. The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) should promote ethics and social responsibility for proper professionalism of journalism practice in Nigeria, while the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) should frequently organise workshops and seminars for journalists on crime reporting with particular attention to reportage of corruption stories,

moving beyond mere reporting to focusing on critical and informed analysis that will help anti-corruption initiatives and ensure development in the country.

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