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**The Nigerian Press 1984 – 1999: ‘Magnificent  
and Heroic’?**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Finally, I acknowledge all intellectuals on whose shoulders I leaned on to carry out this study.

This thesis is dedicated to: The God of my heart.



## Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Cornelius Segun Ojo

Doctor of Philosophy

The Nigerian Press 1984 – 1999: ‘Magnificent and Heroic’?

Summary

Against the background of ‘the global resurgence of democracy’ (Diamond and Plattner 1996), and focusing particularly on the democratic waves that swept through Africa in the 90s, scholars have acknowledged the central role of the press in the restoration of democratic governance in Africa. The Nigerian press in particular has been touted as Africa’s symbol of a liberal press (Seng and Hunt 1986, Ogbondah 1994). It is said to have played a significant role in the battle against military dictatorship, leading to Wole Soyinka’s trophy: the press as ‘magnificent and heroic’ (Soyinka 1998). Yet in spite of the ‘adversarial and lively outspokenness’ of the press (Olukotun 2002, 2010), the military had a sixteen-year reign. How can this paradox be explained?

The thesis explores four military regimes during the sixteen-year period focusing on specific events of national significance in each regime, with a view to establishing what role/s the press played in restoring democracy; and whether it deserved the award of ‘magnificent and heroic’.

Methodologically it adopts a critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough 2013, Van Dijk 1991), particularly analysing headlines, news reports, editorials, photographs, political cartoons and articles; across seven national newspapers and two weekly magazines. Additionally it draws on interviews with state officials and editors with knowledge of the periods to provide a further interpretation of the press at particular historical moments.

It opens up the issue of a liberal press to suggest that there are serious questions about the press’s relation to the various military regimes and thus the degree to which the press really was ‘magnificent and heroic’. Indeed an argument can be made that much of the press was complicit with these regimes and contributed to delaying the realisation of a democratic rule.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ABN – Association for Better Nigeria

AD – Alliance for Democracy

ADC - Association of Defence Correspondents

AFP - Agency France Press

AG – Action Group

AIT - Africa Independent Television

CBN - Central Bank of Nigeria

CBS – Columbia Broadcasting System

CDS – Centre for Democratic Studies

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CIMA – Centre for International Media Assistance

CNC - Congress of National Consensus

CNN – Cable News Network

DPN - Democratic Party of Nigeria

EC – European Commission

EU – European Union

FRSC – Federal Road Safety Commission

GDM - Grassroots Democratic Party

GNPP – Great Nigeria's Peoples' Party

IBB – Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida

IMF – International Monetary Fund

INEC – Independent National Electoral Commission

ING – Interim National Government

MKO – Moshood Kashimawo Olawale

NAP – National Advance Party

NCNC – National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroons

NCPN - National Centre Party of Nigeria

NEC - National Electoral Commission

NECON – National Electoral Commission of Nigeria

NLC - Nigeria Labour Congress

NNPC -Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation

NPN – National Party of Nigeria

NRC – National Republican Convention

NUJ – Nigeria Union of Journalists

PDP – Peoples Democratic Party

PRP – Peoples Redemption Party

SAP – Structural Adjustment Programme

SDP – Social Democratic Party

SMC – Supreme Military Council

UAC – United Africa Company

UK – United Kingdom

UNCP - United Nigeria Centre Party

UPN – Unity Party of Nigeria

US – United States

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Learning to Question the Press: A Personal Story

For all intents and purposes, the *New York Times* or CBS News can best be understood as departments of the federal bureaucracy....In the end, the government is fine, thanks to the media; and the men in the media are heroes, thanks to their relationship with the government.

Tom Bethell (1990) 'The Myth of an Adversary Press' (cited in Tom Koch *The News as Myth: Fact and Context in Journalism*)

Daniel Lerner contended that 'the connection between mass media and political democracy is especially close (Lerner 1963, p. 342), and that the media mature the political systems so that they are able to respond and adapt to change. In somewhat different terms, John Merrill and Ralph Lowenstein argued that 'media systems are closely related to the kinds of governments in which they operate; they are, in essence, *reflective* and *supportive* of the governmental philosophy' (Merrill and Lowenstein 1971, p. 173).

Seemingly adopting Lerner's view, in Africa generally, and in Nigeria particularly, scholarly debates have been advanced that the press is a potent institution for realizing national goals and aspirations (Udoakah 1988; Uche 1989; Ogbondah 1994; Ette 2000; Olukotun 2002; Uko 2004, Oyeleye 2004; Enemaku 2005; Mano 2005). Gabriel Almond and James Coleman (1960) in 'The Politics of the Developing Areas' for example, drew on the press in illustrating African nationalist motivations, objectives and organizations and Seston Humphreys suggested that even before Nigeria's independence 'the press was independent... vigorously so. There is perhaps no press anywhere in the world so outspoken as that of this emerging nation' (cited in Ogbondah 1994, p. 4). Further, in his discussion of the comparative roles of the press, William Hatchen described the 'Nigerian press of 1960 to 1965 as a unique phenomenon for black Africa: diverse, outspoken, competitive, and irreverent' (1971, p. 165).

From independence (1960), this view of the Nigerian press tended to continue right through the periods of military rule, such that in 1998 shortly before the handing over of power to a democratically elected government on May 29 1999, Wole Soyinka, radical literary professor, 1986 Nobel prize winner and an opposition figure during the years of military rule, acclaimed in a media interview:

The press and let me seize this very opportunity to stress this, the press has been magnificent, really magnificent, heroic and one of these days, when there's more pleasure, we are going to erect a statue. I am going to see personally to this, that a statue for heroism of the press is erected at a prominent place in this country; we must never ever forget (*The Guardian*, Saturday October 17, 1998, p. 5).

From the foregoing emerged such appellations of the press as: 'virile'; 'vigorous' and 'independent'; these promising phrases in turn lead to some pertinent questions: is the press really independent, partial/impartial, objective/subjective? As further discussions will make clear, the notion of the press being 'independent' is generally mythical. There are tonnes of scholarly works that have debunked this notion of a free press. Where there is freedom from the state control (if partial), the freedom from the market clutches appear a mirage. James Curran contends that the period when liberal argument held sway was when the state was viewed as the 'main source of oppression', noting that 'market liberalisation has seen new sets of power blocs emerging with dominant ideologies being reinforced' (Curran 2002, 2005). Specifically in the case of Nigeria, the 'independence' of the press can be characterised as being more of a perception than a reality. Even, from the 'glory' of independence from where these flattering phrases arose, were compelling misgivings about the press, which though seemed adversarial of the colonial regime, but yet, is tied to the apron-strings of its business men – proprietors who hid under the agitation for independence to pursue their narrow interests (Coker 1960, Chick 1971, Uche 1989). Under the civilian regime between 1979 and 1983 when newspapers flowered, their independence from direct state control was then compromised indirectly by the fact that they were established by the party men who used them to advance their political and commercial interests (Uche 1989, Olayiwola 1991), the upshot of which was that, the democratic state became a victim. Thus, here, I mark out that the press has been historically problematic than being free or independent.

Yet the history of the Nigerian press, especially during the years of military rule, might also be thought of in the terms offered by Tom Bethell in my opening quote or those of Merrill and Lowenstein above: less 'magnificent and heroic' or committed to Nigeria's democratic development, than supporter of 'government philosophy' and sometime collaborator with 'anti-democratic forces' (Agbaje & Adebaniwi 2004, p. 73). Agbaje and Adebaniwi do not quite refute the notion that the press might have contributed to the restoration of democratic rule in

Nigeria, but they do seriously doubt the steadfastness of the Nigerian press in advancing democratic culture. They reason further:

In this often overdrawn fact (of press responsibility), there is the tendency to occlude not only the fact that a significant portion of the press has always collaborated with anti-democratic forces, but that there are many tendencies in this important institution in the Nigerian civil society which are patently anti-democratic and expressive of flagrant violations of the known canons (Agbaje and Adebaniwi 2004, p. 73).

Similarly, Mercy Ette while not underestimating the contribution of the press, avers that the notion of the press as 'a pillar of democracy is uncertain' (Ette 2000, p. 1) and that the press may actually not have had a proper understanding of the workings of democracy. She argues:

It is an undeniable fact that the Nigerian press has resisted moves to have its voice silenced by the military and has often occupied the position of an opposition party in its relationship with those who wield political power. However, the press has not been a consistent champion of democracy or its values (Ette 2000, p. 8).

These interesting lines of debate by Ette, Agbaje and Adebaniwi drew my attention to the fact that the military reigned for sixteen years (1984-1999), in spite of what Odia Ofeimu touted as the capacity of the press for 'advocacy and adversarial haggling' against Nigeria's rulers during the period (Olukotun 2002, p. 22). Germane to these ambiguities, my political background as a son of a First (1960 – 1966) and Second (1979 – 1983) Republics politician and my personal experiences during the years under study, also later aroused my interest to revisit the period of military regimes, this time in the form of a proper intellectual inquiry.

As I was growing up, my interest in politics and news was that of excitement to hear what happened when and where. My father told me stories of uprisings of the late 1950s before independence. As a member of the ruling National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroons (NCNC), he had experienced political persecution under the opposition regional government of Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG). In the aftermath of the riots that attended the death of his friend and member of the NCNC, Adelabu Adegoke, in a 'suspicious' car crash 'linked' to the AG in 1958, he was arrested and jailed for three years at the Ilesa Prison, in the present Osun State, Nigeria for being one of the masterminds of the riots.

Then between 1979 and 1983 when he was a member of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), I was in primary school and I was always taken along to political meetings. I vividly recall the home of the national chairman of the ruling party, Adisa Akinloye, and got to know many notable personalities. In the 1983 general elections, I was in primary six (the final of primary school in Nigeria) and the School's Senior Prefect (Boy). By then, as a result of the violence building up to the general elections, I was no longer following my father to meetings. Coincidentally, at this time, my class teacher, Mr. Tunji Taiwo resigned his post to contest a seat in the State Assembly under another party, National Advance Party (NAP). That offered me another practical experience during the electioneering as I followed my teacher around the communities.

The elections ended in chaos, with interparty rivalries bringing arson, killings and hooliganism, as in the First Republic (Olayiwola 1991, p. 41, Nwosu 2000, p. 156). However, the electoral violence was also exacerbated by press partisanship: the tendency of many papers to pursue the various political goals of their respective proprietors (Agbaje 1990, p. 223; Olayiwola 1991, p. 40, Uko 2004, p. 55). In the violence that trailed the election, my father had a lucky escape into the bush but not the party's Urvan Bus allocated to him which was burnt by Awolowo's party, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) political thugs, protesting their party's loss. Later he took me to the scene of the arson attack in Apatere Town, near Ibadan city.

Unfortunately, the Second Republic (1979 – 1983) did not survive the lingering violence: the military intervened on December, 31, 1983 (Uche 1989, Agbaje 1990). But perhaps not surprisingly, although I did not wholly understand the events, it was an exciting period for me. It laid the foundation for my active political involvement.

Prior to my enrolment at the University of Lagos in 1995 to study mass communication, I had been enmeshed in politics. As an activist, albeit I did not think of myself in this way at the time, between 1991 and 1992 when General Babangida's 'transition without end' (Diamond et al 1997, p. 1) started causing civil unrest, I was following and participating in many anti-state demonstrations by civil society organisations. Moreover, as a school leaver without a job, the first self-imposed assignment every morning was to visit the newsstand along with other members of 'Free Readers Association of Nigeria'<sup>1</sup> so as to know where the next protest would take place, who the organisers were and what we protestors were expected to do.

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<sup>1</sup> During the period under study and given the poor state of the economy, the majority of Nigerians gathered at



The often chaotic scene at the newsstand was always characterised by arguments and counter-arguments precipitated by newspaper headlines and cartoons. There were moments when blows were exchanged between pro and anti-state supporters leading, at times, to the arrival of police who used tear gas to disperse and then arrest 'trouble makers'. As I recall, security operatives often arrested journalists and seized newspapers from vendors, claiming they were inciting violence with their false reports. At some point, when a journalist was arrested, or a media house closed down, we poured onto the streets the more to call for their journalistic freedoms. We saw journalists as sources of inspiration who illuminated our paths, and thus should be defended. Indeed, we believed the press was promoting democratic change.

During this period, I knew many leading activists, including lawyers, labour leaders, clergy and student leaders at the University of Ibadan and The Polytechnic, Ibadan (my city). However, a moment came towards the end of 1992 that confused me further about the process of governance and the relation between leaders and the led. A community leader and retired civil servant, one of those who used to caution us each time we went on demonstrations, but also the father of a close friend, invited me to his house, counselling me that the government was not always wrong and that perhaps citizens could also partly be blamed for the crisis of democratization. He offered me what turned out to be a 'big job' as a member of the Caretaker Committee of the Transition to the Civil rule programme<sup>2</sup> in my Local Government. At that point of the conversation, and unlike previous occasions when I would refute any suggestion that agitation against the state might be wrong, partly because my friend had encouraged her father to approach me, I could not respond. Feeling I had no space or time to think through the implications, I simply accepted the job, though not without a moment of paralysis: a concern that my appointment was a form of patronage by the government to reduce the number of state 'enemies'.

Specifically, the job involved the implementation of the newly introduced system of balloting tagged 'Option A4' or 'Open Ballot System', a system where presidential candidates were required to go through party primaries from the ward through to local and state congresses and

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the newsstands to glance at papers' headlines or beg the vendor to read for free. In some cases, some could offer the vendor a tip to read specific items such as cartoons, editorials and articles by notable columnists, if the vendor refused free reading. I personally did this many times. That gave rise to the nomenclature 'free readers association of Nigeria' to describe those who were unable to buy papers, but yet yearned for information.

<sup>2</sup> This was General Babangida's third revised transition programme. The previous two pledges to hand power back to civilians were not honoured leading to accusation that Babangida was trying to perpetuate himself in power. It was in the midst of public distrust that this particular revised transition timetable was announced.

finally emerging as candidates at the national conventions (Nwosu 2000, p. 157; Campbell 1994, p. 183). We were allocated to communities to educate, enlighten, convince and mobilise a sceptic populace that the new system would lead to a democratic government. While there was an element of doubt within me as to whether the new approach would indeed deliver that, it was nonetheless a matter of honour for me to pursue this with commitment. For me personally, it offered a leadership role – I had advanced from newsstand chaos and street protest to state/community duty. After a period of campaigning, the nationwide committee test ran the new ballot system to elect executives to the offices of the two government's sponsored parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). The process was not without its critics but 'not as cantankerous as before' (Nwosu 2000, p. 157) and it was celebrated nationwide as a success: the system was to be used for the general elections in June, 1993. Yet my own experience highlighted a corruption at the heart of this celebrated 'democratic' process.

After the election, when we had filled in the necessary forms, and were ready to leave for the collation centre at the Council headquarters, a guest drove into the community polling centre. By then the voters had dispersed and party agents, having authenticated the results, had also left the venue. The mission of this 'big man' (later identified as a serving commissioner in my state) was simple and straight forward. He called the three of us to a corner, handed us a sheet containing the names of candidates he wanted us to complete on the forms as 'winners', claiming this was an 'order from above'.

This was strange; because these were the names we didn't know. Of course we had forms left in case we made genuine mistakes. 'But how do we reproduce the signatures of the party agents?' I queried! 'Forging wasn't difficult', he answered. We resisted and told him our appointment letter stated that the post we held was 'a call to national service' and that if we did not follow procedure, could end up in jail if caught. He insisted we were safe, then opened the boot of the car and showed us a stash of cash meant to compensate us, with a promise of more goodies to come. At that point, the atmosphere was charged but we did not give in and eventually managed to escape. Whether there were similar attempts to abuse the polls nationwide, I could not tell, but certainly the poll was judged a success nationwide and in the press.

This first hand episode of how the electoral process could be undermined, juxtaposed with my earlier position derived from the newsstand, confused me even here: my belief that the civil

society was committed to the ideals of democracy was challenged though my belief that the military might not be committed to the course of democracy was hardly dispelled. If this event had not occurred, I might have remained intransigent in my view that the military was solely responsible for the crisis of democracy. My involvement in advocacy for the election process and the encounter with the 'big man', was a critical moment in that I became uncertain about, and turned away from the 'democratic' protest of the street and the consensus of the newsstand.

In a further twist, and not long after this political event in March 1993, I secured another, unconnected appointment as a clerk in the Federal High Court. In June, 1993, the presidential election was held, as scheduled. Acclaimed by General Babangida's own admission to be 'free and fair and peaceful' (Campbell 1994, p. 191), it was won by business mogul and newspaper proprietor, Chief MKO Abiola. But my happiness over the success of the election was short-lived: the electoral commission stopped announcing further results of the election midway in the process, owing to a court injunction obtained by the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) - 'a shadowy pro-military group' (Lewis 1994, p. 326) whose leader Chief Arthur Nzeribe canvassed for an extension of Babangida's regime. Dramatically, the election was annulled on June 23, 1993 by the Federal Government, citing various court litigations, electoral malpractices and other security issues as reasons (Lewis 1994, Campbell 1994, Kwarteng 1996, Ojo 2007).

As a civil servant at this time, I could not openly be part of the struggle against this annulment, but as violence spread, another episode occurred that pushed me back into political activism. From June 23, 1993 after the annulment, students, politicians and journalists, as well as activists were arrested and detained, in what turned out to be, in Olukotun's words, a period of 'heavy repression' (Olukotun 2002, p. 86). Coincidentally, many of the cases to free detainees were brought to the Federal High Court, Ibadan where I worked. That brought me in direct contact again, with human rights lawyers, activists and students. As soon as the detainees arrived, each time, we exchanged banter, discussed the state of the nation, with many calling me out loud, 'comrade'! When the Registrar in charge of the court got to know of my affiliation, he called me and warned me to stop 'hobnobbing with government enemies', or I would be dismissed. Provocatively, I would tell him they were not government enemies but patriotic citizens fighting for democratic change.

When these exchanges continued, I was eventually removed from the open court and posted to the court library, so I was no longer in contact with 'government enemies'. But the arrests and

detentions of activists continued, particularly under General Sani Abacha, who took over November 17, 1993 after violent protests forced Babangida and the Interim Government he had put in place, out of power (Lewis 1994, Alimi 2011). During this latter period, I felt that my civil service job was hampering me from being part of the struggle for democracy and reform so that after enrolling to study mass communication at the University of Lagos, in 1995, I voluntarily left the court.

My move to Lagos was a political tonic: Lagos was the centre of civil society activism (Kwarteng 1996) and the University of Lagos Students Union in particular was a hotbed of civil unrest. My political background in Ibadan enabled me to integrate into the student union almost immediately, and after just three months as a fresher, I was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the Faculty of Social Sciences Students' Parliament, a position that leapt frog me to the frontline of activism. But during this year, another episode, this time in the classroom, occurred which also led me to question my views.

It was a media class sometime in 1996, led by Dr X, now a professor and media teacher in the US. The course was 'Mass Media, Nigerian Peoples and Cultures' (MAS 101). The class digressed from the topic of the day to discuss the argument between the Minister of Information, Dr Y of the History Department, University of Lagos and the press. Dr X had counselled us not to become irresponsible journalists like those the minister had angrily criticised for a particular news story earlier that day. We responded to Dr X by saying that if bringing down repressive military leaders amounted to irresponsible journalism, then we were ready to be such journalists. As the tension rose, Dr X labelled us 'agents of western powers' paid to 'destabilise your country'. Some of us stood up and accused him and 'your minister brother' as 'military apologists' offered and accepting appointments to delay the democratic process.

Our effrontery jolted Dr X and in anger, he threw an object at a student and made an attempt to slap another (Dr X was known to be temperamental). The class erupted in frenzy with objects flying everywhere, bringing the class to an end. But neither Dr X nor us reported the matter. If we had done, under university regulations Dr X may have been dismissed and we risked being expelled too. This episode with Dr X was not a one-off event but occurred with many teachers, as current and controversial topics in the media were often the substance of discussion in media classes.

A further issue emerging from the encounter above was Dr X's claim that we were being 'paid' to 'destabilise' our country and our counter claim that the university teachers who accepted appointments were 'military apologists'. In our own case, funds utilised for pro-democracy activities (demonstrations, seminars etc.), did come directly from western donor agencies as part of their policy, allegedly, to strengthen civil society. Obviously without the monetary assistance from these organisations (which was not in short supply), it would have been impossible to sustain our violent agitation that led to several deaths and destruction of property (Kwarteng 1996, Lewis et al 1998, Myers 2009). At the same time, it was also a legitimate policy of the government to appoint university teachers to public positions, apparently as a way of reducing tensions, since the university students formed the bulk of activists in the pro-democracy movements. The government believed students could be easily swayed from their destructive agitation by seeing their teachers as some form of credible voice in government. However, the strategy failed: some teachers in government were seen as traitors, to the extent that for their own safety, some of them could not return to their universities.

For example, the June 12, 1993 elections, judged the 'fairest and freest' in the history of Nigeria were also midwived by a professor of political science from one of the universities. Sadly, the acclaimed professor, who was celebrated after the peaceful outcome of the election, became a pariah the moment the election was annulled. He went underground. Nonetheless, it was perhaps simplistic on our part to have suggested that the appointment of such figures was only to rubber stamp military rule and delay democracy.

For me personally, that episode with Dr X and our disagreements with many other teachers on the vexed issue of state/press relations, coupled with the earlier experiences I have recounted, presented me with a challenge: how to understand more about this period in Nigeria's political history. As I progressed to graduation, and my level of knowledge increased, I began to reflect further on the views I held. Were the assertions by our media teachers wrong? After all, what was the level of my knowledge compared to theirs such that I could feel that we were right and our teachers were wrong? Was the press irresponsible? At that moment, it became necessary for me to explore these aspects further, though I was not sure then, how or when I would do that. It was events in 1998, in particular the death of head of state, General Abacha that challenged me further.

When the latter suddenly died on June 8, 1998, confusion followed but activists and people, including me, again poured onto the streets of Lagos to celebrate. Professor Wole Soyinka, one

of the leading opposition figures returned from exile and made his declaration describing the press as 'magnificent, really magnificent, heroic', and we again celebrated the triumph of a civil society ably led by the 'patriotic' press (Olukotun 2002, p. 1). Yet back at the University after the celebrations and Soyinka's declaration had become a point of reference in the media, our teachers again faulted us for believing in Soyinka's speech which they termed an 'outpouring of emotions'. They claimed that Soyinka was a professor of English literature and thus could not make a valid claim on the subject of media. In the absence of an evidence-based study, his views, we were told, was subjective and should be disregarded.

Still when one considers Soyinka's affinity with the press on one hand, and his link with the state as a player on the other hand, his views become even more interesting. James Gibbs in: 'Tear the Painted Masks. Join the Poison Stains: A Preliminary Study of Wole Soyinka's Writings for the Nigerian Press' (1983) focuses on his political writings in the press which he stated 'accounted for most of the column inches he produced' (p. 4) at the time. In Gibbs's study of Soyinka and the press from the 1960s, I am most interested and concerned about his writings from the moment the military handed over in 1979. Up till the time the military sacked the democratic regime on December 31, 1983, Soyinka, just as some sections of the press loyal to the opposition's Obafemi Awolowo did, used every space in the media to despise President Sheu Shagari who he accused of electoral fraud. Not even the Supreme Court pronouncement could tame Soyinka's attack on Shagari.

As Gibbs chronicled, Soyinka's campaign against Shagari was clearer in a 1981 article 'The Bogus Revolution in our Time', in which Gibbs stated Soyinka was not forthcoming on his 'revolution' suggestion. On another occasion, he expatiated on this 'revolution' where he 'spoke so approvingly of violence as a way of bringing change' before admitting his 'faith in an inevitable revolution' (p. 40). Asked again at the same gathering 'Do you believe in a violent Revolution'? His answer: 'Look out of the window, the violent revolution is in full swing' (p. 40). Thus it was not a coincidence that blood, tears and sorrow trailed the 1983 general election (Olayiwola 1991, Agbaje 1992).

Out of the above extracts from Soyinka's political exploits in the press, and other various personal and politically unsettling engagements, and by the time I returned to study for my master's degree in 2002, emerged my interest in this set of issues about the press and democracy during Nigeria's long period of military rule. I no longer found Soyinka and other outspoken activists, whose claims hitherto I had supported, persuasive. I questioned them and the role of

journalism in the struggle for democracy. I wanted to explore further the role of the press during those 'definitive years' (Diamond et al 1997, p. 2); hence the subject of this thesis.

### **Outline of Chapters**

In order to begin questioning the idea of the Nigerian press as 'magnificent and heroic' I first explore the earlier anti-colonial protest tradition of the press, raising the issue of whether this history set the terms for thinking about the press once independence was achieved and, indeed beyond, into the military years.

Thus Chapter two reviews relevant studies and periodises the period prior to 1984 beginning with the debates around the role of the Nigerian press in the struggles for independence, reflecting upon the protest tradition of the Nigerian press as it earned the accolade of 'diverse, outspoken, competitive, and irreverent' (Hatchen 1971, p. 165). I then consider the transition from colonial subordination to independent state and the first democratic government post-independence (1960–1966) when the potency hitherto associated with the press was said to have evaporated in exchange for the promotion of a 'parochial agenda' (Uche 1989, p. 100), culminating in the first military coup in 1966.

The chapter then focuses on the relationship between the press and the first wave of military rule between 1966 and 1979 when the second democratic republic was established after a general election. Interestingly, the advent of democratic rule between 1979 and 1983 saw to the flowering of the press, with individual politicians, groups and governments establishing new titles to pursue their respective political agendas (Uche 1989, p.102). Whilst it might be thought that this proliferation would contribute to a mediated public sphere and strengthen democracy, it went hand-in-hand with what might be described as media recklessness, hastening collapse of the regime and a return to military rule. Here, the chapter considers scholarship and debates around whether multiparty democracy guarantees press responsibility and greater participation in the political life by the citizenry.

Through engagement with this earlier period, I aim to establish how the alleged radical journalism became a thorn in the flesh of the colonial administration and how the outspokenness (Ogbondah 1994) of the press at the dawn of independence dissipated as the press retreated into regional enclaves (Uche 1989). A 'free' Nigeria with a national agenda failed to take off, with a civil war (1967) breaking out partly owing to press partisanship.

The chapter also reviews the works of academics with liberal and critical leanings, such as Francis Nyanmjoh; Hallin and Mancini; Luke Uka Uche; Adigun Agbaje; Golding and Elliot; Winston Mano; Fred Omu; Chris Ogbondah; William Hatchen; Ndaeyo Uko, Mercy Ette and others. While Olukotun believes that the liberal agenda of the Nigerian press was in full display during the years of military rule that I engage with, and that it overtly led to the ousting of the military in 1999 (Olukotun 2002, p. 1), Ette cautions that the role of the press as a pillar of democracy was unclear (Ette 2000).

Luke Uka Uche argues more firmly that the best of the press was during the colonial rule before 1960 independence and that the press lost the 'nationalistic orientation' it earned then to an ethno-political agenda after independence (1989). Francis Nyanmjoh in 'Africa's Media: Democracy and Politics of Belonging' is emphatic in his critical assessment of the alleged 'democratic winds' blowing across Africa in the 90s – and which some liberal scholars credited to the press – querying such optimism. Rather, he argues that 'media that have facilitated genuine democratisation may appear rare in Africa' (Nyanmjoh 2005, p. 272).

Further, the chapter reflects on Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', in relation to the Nigerian context. Stuart Hall in his analysis of the Gramsci's concept describes hegemony in political term as 'the various levels of the relations of force in the society' (Hall 1988, p. 3) because, 'in modern societies, hegemony must be constructed, contested and won on many different sites, as the structures of the modern state and society complexify and the points of social antagonism proliferate' (1988, p. 168). By 'relations of force', I will assume, in the Nigerian context, it refers to an array of political groups; civil society coalitions; traditional institutions and others involved in the battle for the soul of the Nigerian state during the periods of the research. As Cox further opines, hegemony 'centres upon the state, upon the relationship of civil society to the state, and upon the relationship of politics, ethics and ideology to production' (Cox 1993, p. 124). In these practices the news media are key. The concept of hegemony is thus mobilized in later chapters to raise how during many of the regimes hegemony was less won (via the media and other institutions) than there develops 'a crisis of hegemony or general crisis of the state' (Hall 1988, p. 168).

Chapter three explores methodological issues. Each of the regimes studied represents a 'definitive period[s] of democratic struggles' (Diamond et al 1997, p. 2) which reversed or delayed Nigeria's development efforts to establish a democratic state. During each of these periods, I wish to engage with journalistic news practice since it seemed that arguments about



the press as ‘heroic’ (or otherwise) were not based on any detailed analysis of news reporting but rather on the aura of the moment for example (death of Abacha). To this end seven newspapers were sampled: *The Guardian*, *National Concord*, *The Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Vanguard*, *Thisday*, and *Champion* and two weekly magazines, *Tell* and *TheNews*. These titles enjoyed national spread, but most significantly for my purposes were regarded as having political antecedents defining them (at least as far as most commentators were concerned) as seemingly healthy adversaries of the State with ‘a capacity for advocacy and adversarial haggling against those they consider guilty of malfeasance’ (Olukotun 2002, p. 22). Thus, as I will go on to explain, I selected the titles which at face value seemed the most likely to adopt a ‘fourth estate’ role and the least likely to be ‘corrupted’ or compromised by government or act in consort with a coercive military regime.

In this chapter I discuss reasons for selecting to analyse a particular range of newspaper items such as headlines, new stories, editorials, opinion articles, photographs and cartoons (partly related to the nature of newspaper reading in Nigeria, i.e. the ‘free readers association of Nigeria’). In addition, I engage with the methodological issues raised in interviewing journalists and state officials about events in which they were involved and which happened many years earlier and consider how to draw on this material.

In particular I explore the method I selected for analysing the newspaper items, i.e., Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which I broadly adopt in order to determine how language was used by the press in reporting events in the periods of study. I go on to argue in later chapters how the fine nuances of language are critical to how an event is constructed and interpreted by readers.

Chapter four is the first of four chapters exploring specific titles, *National Concord* and *The Guardian* and specific periods. In particular, the chapter engages with General Buhari’s regime, first exploring what seemed to be press support and justification for overthrowing the democratic regime (led by Alhaji Sheu Shagari) which Buhari replaced. I argue that the involvement of the press in this coup shaped Buhari’s view of the press as not to be trusted and needing to be tamed. Besides his uncompromising approach to government, he thus attempted to curtail ‘press freedom’, eventually generating a crisis which culminated in the collapse of his regime.

Analysis of the papers in the early days of the regime indicates a ‘honeymoon’ period between the press and the Buhari regime. Editorials in particular were not in short supply during this early period, justifying the emergence of Buhari, spelling out policy directions for the regime while castigating the deposed democratic regime of Shagari.

But once the promulgation of Decree 4 1984 (Public Officers, Prevention Against False Accusation) which the press claimed was designed to protect public officials from criticism, was in place, this relationship began to break down. Analysis of the coverage of the symbolic trial and jailing of *The Guardian* journalists ‘The Guardian Two’ under the Decree, in spite of public outcry against it shows growing criticism of Buhari. I argue that Decree 4 was part of Buhari’s war on corruption which permeated the entire society at the time, including the press. But in initially supporting Buhari, the latter, seemed to believe that its own corrupt practices should have been overlooked. They were not.

In Chapter five, I analyse the press during the longest of the four military regimes: General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's eight years of ‘transition without end’ (Diamond et al 1997, p. 1). To further his aim of ‘nation building’, Babangida managed the press by working in partnership, co-opting several journalists into his cabinet. This arrangement led to what I term an ‘agreed liberalism’ between the regime and press. However this seemingly beneficial arrangement also meant that rather than serve as the public watchdog, the press instead became a part of the regime as analysis of *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* suggests. When the June 12, 1993 presidential election result was annulled (only the most significant of many other acts of impropriety by the regime) the press was slow to criticise. In calling for the revalidation of the annulled election and an end to military rule, the Nigerian people sidestepped the press. They took action into their own hands, through organised protests, general strikes and civil disobedience. In the face of this popular revolt, unable to maintain its alliance with the regime any longer, the tenor of news reports and features shifted in support of the demands of the people. But jolted by what was regarded as press betrayal, the regime fought back, arresting and detaining several journalists without trial, proscribing titles and introducing a new decree demanding the re-registering of news media providers.

Though, Babangida did not survive the uprisings and was forced to stand down, analysis of these titles indicates that contrary to a commonly voiced account that credits Babangida’s fall to the ‘liberal press’, it was indeed the Nigerian people who took destiny into their own hands, with the press only belatedly following.

Chapter six focuses largely on General Abacha's regime (1993-1998) regarded by scholars as the most brutal of those studied here (Ogbondah 1994, Lewis et al. 1998, Olukotun 2002, Ojo 2007, Alimi 2011). When Babangida hurriedly put in place a civilian interim government the press seemed to support this move, at least that Babangida was gone. Yet analysis of the news titles *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* (and particularly the former) suggests that no sooner was Ernest Shonekan in office than the press agitated against him, inviting Abacha to seize power, on condition that he redressed the annulment of the June 12 election. But again this meant the press acted in unholy alliance with the military (though *Daily Champion* kept its distance).

However Abacha betrayed this promise, cracking down on the press by proscribing titles and arresting editors and journalists as he pursued his own personal ambition: transforming from a military head of state to a civilian president without first resigning. Under Abacha, so-called 'guerrilla journalism' (Maringues 1996) was at its height, with *Tell*, *TheNews*, *Tempo* and *Razor* magazines continuing to hit the newsstands even as journalists abandoned their newsrooms, homes, and other places where they could easily be identified by state agents. But although I discuss these titles in more general terms, I engage in detailed analysis of press accounts, including cartoons, in *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* over the period Abacha made his bid to become the presidential candidate. I argue that whilst both titles could be seen to be supporting Abacha, *Daily Champion* offered a more 'balanced journalism' whilst *Vanguard*, one of the newspapers that was generally accorded respect, did not. Its coverage continued, if not wholly to support the Abacha candidacy, not to query it. I would argue that Abacha was the first Nigerian leader to emasculate the press or at least instil such fear that sections of the press were unable to act as fourth estate. Abacha got very close to defeating the press when he mysteriously died on June 8, 1998 in the thick of the violent crisis that rocked his regime. His death brought an instant relief to the besieged press.

Chapter seven considers the short military regime of General Abdusalami Abubakar, and in particular press coverage during the 'extraordinary confluence' in the month of June/July 1998 (Robinson 1998, p. 136): the death of MKO Abiola (the anticipated next civilian president for many Nigerians) within a month of the death of Abacha, which again threatened national security. Exploring the newspapers *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune* and the 'radical magazines' *Tell* and *TheNews*, I discuss the possible Western conspiracy to ensure Abiola did not achieve power and also analyse press treatment of the regime's transition, leading to the inauguration of an elected government on May 29, 1999, after sixteen years of military rule.

Once in power Abubakar offered a welcome ‘olive branch’ to the press – the release of jailed and detained journalists as well as the reopening of the shut media houses. The press was also shocked by the death of Abiola and the impossibility of a return to the June 12 election, and thus the need to find another solution. Analysing headlines in particular I demonstrate the investment the newspaper titles placed in Abubakar as he took on the reins of power (though *Tell* and *TheNews* were more sceptical), and the ways the press rallied round Obasanjo. I argue that Abubakar’s olive branch made it hard for the press to properly scrutinise the transition: the military, in effect, ‘won’. It was their preferred candidate, Olusegun Obasanjo, who was selected as the next President. In some ways it could be said that there was a conspiracy between the new regime and the press on the need to find a permanent solution to Abiola and the June 12 crises. Or perhaps, in the aftermath of Abacha’s crackdown, the press was war weary. I suggest, following Diamond et al that the upshot was ‘a low quality democracy’ (1999, p. 2).

In the concluding chapter, the thesis critically appraises the sixteen years of military rule and re-engages with the liberal assertions that the press might have been responsible for the restoration of democracy in 1999. In particular, I question Soyinka’s proclamation of a ‘magnificent and heroic’ press by considering what specific newspaper analysis of each of the military regimes contributes to a counter argument that in key ways the press explicitly or implicitly supported the military and contributed to the erosion of democratic culture in those years.

## **Chapter Two**

### **From Protest to Ethno-politics: Accounts of the Nigerian Press**

Introduction

The anti-colonial press: protest and nationalism

Rise of an ethno-political press

A press undermined?

The playing out of partisanship: decline of national interests

Complicity with the military?

Conclusion

## Introduction

The notion that news has a kind of independent character or that stories tell themselves is simply wrong, just as it is incorrect to think that reporters and editors somehow stand apart from the political, economic, social and cultural system that has shaped them....To imagine that journalists are a breed apart, somehow able to be 'objective' about the world around them in ways others cannot is to believe in a logical absurdity.

Herbert Altschull (1984) *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs*

The sunrise of what is today's global media debate about press freedom can be traced to April 13, 1738. A law was passed by the British Parliament 'declaring it a "notorious breach of privilege" ' (Koch 1990, p. 1) to report parliamentary activities. *London Magazine* rebelled against the ban, publishing under another guise. Edward Cave, publisher of *Gentlemen's Magazine* also in June 1738, started publishing reports on the 'Parliaments of Lilliput'. Apparently realising the futility of the ban, the law was repealed in March, 1744 (Koch 1990, p. 1). The sunrise the other side of the Atlantic occurred with the adoption of James Madison's draft 'First Amendment'<sup>3</sup> by the United States' Congress on December 15, 1791 (Hamilton et al 2008). Debates about 'freedom of the press' grumble on but like a volcano, erupt from time to time, as evidenced in Siebert et al's *Four Theories of the Press* (1956), UNESCO's communication debate in 1980, *New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)* (Uche 1989) and in response to Jürgen Habermas's seminal work, *The Public Sphere* (Habermas et al. 1964). More recently, James Curran's illuminating dissection of the 'admirable and inspirational' American press which is like a 'shining city on the hill when viewing from a distance' but 'not so luminous' from inside (Curran 2011, pp. 16, 26) points to a further engagement with this debate.

The role of the media in a political context has been well documented. From its role in both the American and French revolutions, in the struggles to end colonialism in Africa and elsewhere, and the more recent frontline role in the democratic waves which continue to sweep unevenly

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<sup>3</sup> The First Amendment declares that the people of the United States are to be free — free from certain forms of government control. Its full citation is given by the *Harvard Law Review*: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of their grievances' See Zechariah Chafee, Jr's 'Freedom of Speech in War Time' *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 32, No. 8 (Jun., 1919), pp. 932-973

through Latin America and Africa (Oloyede 2004). Specifically, Kelly and Donway see the media performing the 'watchdog function of protecting against the tendency of the state to aggrandize its power and abuse the rights of its citizens' (1990, p. 70), or as an 'agency of information and debate that facilitates the functioning of democracy' (Curran 2005, p. 129).

Yet, on the other hand, McGuire (1986), Liebert and Sprafkin (1988) link the media to inciting violence and aggressive behaviour and regard it as biased in its stereotyping and instigation of antisocial behaviour (cited in Perse 2001). Other effects include serving as a tool for manipulation and social control (Lasswell 1927) and engendering a 'legacy of fear' (DeFleur and Dennis 1994). James Curran also writes about dominant ideologies being reinforced (Curran 2005) and of an independent watchdog role being undermined by corporate interests (Curran 2002). At times some sections of the media are also actively associated with patently anti-democratic forces (Agbaje and Adebaniwi 2004).

The Nigerian press from the period of colonialism, through post independent civilian and military governments is said to have been repeatedly linked with the promotion of self-interest on the part of owners with respect to their political interests. This inclination to 'politics of clientelism and Kingship Corporation' (Eribo and Jong-Ebot 1997, p. x111) or 'double allegiances to political and professional goals (Golding and Elliot 1979, p. 31) has had a profound effect on the attempt at integrating Nigeria into a developed nationhood (Chick 1971, Adesoji 2010).

Debates about press freedom or free speech have dominated much media discussion, not only in established democracies but also in semi-democratic or authoritarian societies. Broadly, views adopt liberal or critical (political economy) models (Curran and Parks 2000, p. 13). According to Daniel Hallin, the liberal view suggests a freedom from the state which is 'conducive to democracy', the expansion of commercial media markets enabling a separation from state and political parties. In this way the press can act as effective 'watchdog' of government (Hallin 2000, p. 90). Press freedom then, refers to a non-restricted arena where the press can freely air views without censorship or intimidation. As Eribo and Jong-Ebot describe press freedom it involves a 'free market place of ideas and information for all the citizenry' (Eribo et al 1997, p. 52).

From Asia, Erik Kit-Wai Ma argues that contemporary Chinese media provides 'breathing spaces for the general public and provides more opportunities for freedom of expression than

the authoritarian rule of the past era' (Kit-Wai Ma 2000, p. 26). From Africa, liberalists have been vehement that the media have been central to the aspirations of the people. Abeku Blankson in his re-examination of the state, media and the Ghanaian public believes that the Ghanaian press 'fosters the dissemination and free exchange of information leading to social, political and economic reforms' (Blankson 2002, p. 4.7), just as Helge Ronnings and Tawana Kupe allude to this liberal culture, arguing that despite constraints, the Zimbabwean press continues to keep the 'Zimbabwean society relatively open' and that it is the struggle over maintaining this open space and extending it, that is still a factor in the conflict between President Mugabe's government and the democratic agenda of the press (Ranning and Kupe 2000, pp. 160, 176).

Similar arguments also dominate Nigerian discursive space: 'the tradition of a vigorous and virile press dates back beyond the period of colonial administration' (Ogbondah 1994, p. 26). This point was also corroborated by Ekwelie that the press, despite obnoxious laws to stifle it 'remained relatively free in its 110 year history' (cited in Ogbondah 1994, p. 26). Thus, it was this culture of bravery by the press that made Robert Stevenson conclude that: 'Nigerian journalists face a daily struggle beyond the imagination of most Western journalists' (Stevenson 1994, p. 249), even as Martin Ochs noted in affirmation that 'Nigeria seems to have journalists who bounce back' (Ochs 1986, p. 67).

But those of the critical school believe press liberalism is mythical. In calling for a re-appraisal, James Curran contends that the period when liberal argument held sway was when the state was viewed as the 'main source of oppression', noting that 'market liberalisation has seen new sets of power blocs emerging with dominant ideologies being reinforced' (Curran 2005, p. 217). Hallin points to how critical political economy 'tends to portray the media and political democracy as essentially antagonistic' (2000, p. 90). Media markets less encourage democracy than concentrate ownership and control in the hands of the few, increase a dependency on advertising and delimit the range of content. German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas in his essay and extended work on the 'Public Sphere' also recognises the impact of the rise in market forces. His postulate of 'a realm of social life in which something of public interest can be formed by the coming together of individuals, without inhibitions, to hold opinions about matters of general interest and publish them' (Habermas 1991, p. 136), is compromised by various economic and political interests. The 'Public Sphere' is thus an ideal acting as a measure of the media's democratic 'health' not an already achieved process. Francis



Nyamnjoh's discussion on 'media and democracy in Africa' is critical of the relevance of a liberal framework for thinking about news media in the continent (Nyamnjoh 2005). He highlights that it focuses on the individual and an 'objective' and fair journalism, neglecting in the African context, the significance of 'ethnicity and belonging' (p.37) which places pressures on journalists 'to promote the interests of the various groups competing for recognition and representation' (p.39). He suggests, therefore, that 'media that have facilitated genuine democratisation may appear rare in Africa' (Nyamnjoh 2005, p. 272). This Nyamnjoh's view is consonant with Herbert Altschull's position quoted in the beginning of this section that, the notion about journalists being independent of the world around them is mythical.

To pursue this debate further some scholars have canvassed for a comparative media studies, with Curran and Park positing that this paradigm shift in media theorising is 'a result of growing reactions against the self-absorption and parochialism of Anglo-American media theories which view the rest of the world as a forgotten understudy or as if they stand-in for the rest of the world, or assume that their models and ways of thinking about media especially news media are appropriate to other countries' (Curran and Park 2000, p. 3). But as the African case demonstrates, and Nyamnjoh (2005) for one describes, the history of news media, and thus the appropriate ways of thinking about it, are very different to European or US developments. Hallin too, explains how neither a liberal approach nor critical political economy does justice to the development of Mexican news media and its place in the society (2000). I will return to this more comparative study in a moment (See p. 35 below).

Nevertheless to some degree scholars have still discussed the news media in Africa in terms of its contribution to democratic processes. They repeatedly pinpoint the very laudable role played by the media in the long struggle against colonialism and the battle against post-independent authoritarianism and military dictatorship. In the former, it is argued that the media played a significant role, not only rattling the colonialists, but also forcing them to accept the inevitable ending of colonialism. In the fight against authoritarianism and in the attempts to establish good governance, the media's role has also been described as crucial to uplifting the people of the continent (Ansah 1988, Omu 1978, M'Bayo et al. 2000, Amin and Napoli 2000, Oloyede 2004, Adhikari 2005, Adesoji 2010). Specifically, Winston Mano writes about African journalists and the media contributing to 'citizenship, entertainment and democratic processes' (Mano 2005, p. 57), while Festus Eribo and William Jong-Ebot echoing this view suggests that

‘the media are in the fore-front of the war for democracy in Africa’ (Eribo & Jong-Ebot 1997, p. x).

Charles Okigbo (2000) puts this role of the African media in perspective:

Africa’s media and civil society are at the epicentre of the efforts for a new social orientation directed at inaugurating a new politics in the continent. The role of the media in politics was clear to the pioneer nationalist journalists and publishers during the independence movements. They were helped in their efforts by a virile civil society that was organised along ethnic, religious and professional lines. These formed the rudiments for the eventual evolution of the earliest political parties. A closer examination of the development of the mass media in Africa will shed more light on their symbiotic relationship with civil society in the task of promoting political development (2000, p. 67).

In Nigeria, the press has been almost wholly credited with the success of the anti-colonial wars leading to the country’s independence in October 1, 1960. So ferocious were the press attacks on the Colonial regime that a colonial official complained that Nnamdi Azikiwe’s group of publications, in particular ‘are like a plague, afflicting the whole country’ (Uko 2004, p. 10). Azikiwe, who edited the influential *West African Pilot*<sup>4</sup> and later became Nigeria’s post-independent president, apparently understood the power of the press in anti-colonial campaigns, and thus deployed it, as did other nationalists, to gain victory over the colonial powers.

Interestingly, the birth of Nigeria’s political press, which later became a weapon against colonialists, was in fact orchestrated by these same colonialists, presumably inadvertently. Henry Townsend, a clergyman from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of England, seconded to Nigeria to propagate the Christian faith, established the first newspaper in 1859 – *Iwe Irohin*.<sup>5</sup> In a message to London, Townsend excitedly informed CMS that the objective of

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<sup>4</sup> *West African Pilot* was launched in 1937 by Nnamdi Azikiwe — described as the father of Nigerian modern journalism, with the ‘supreme task’ to promote human liberty. The paper’s popularity was such that it became the highest circulated daily at 9000 copies, becoming the rallying point for the propagation of nationalist ideas. See Fred Omu (2000) ‘The Nigerian Press: Milestones in Service’ in Tunji Oseni & Lanre Idowu (eds.) *Hosting the 140th Anniversary of the Nigerian Press*.

<sup>5</sup> The full title of the newspaper was ‘*Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba*’, which literally translates as ‘a newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba people’. It was the first newspaper to be published in an African language, with an English edition later on. See Omu, F. I. A. (1978) *Press and Politics in Nigeria 1880 - 1937*

the newspaper was to ‘get the people to read...to beget the habit of seeking information by reading’ (Uche 1989, p. 93). From publishing church programmes, *Iwe Irohin* gradually included community news and socio-political activities in its publication (Olorede et al 2013). Specifically, *Iwe Irohin* reported the sharp practices of the colonial administration against the indigenous people. Clearly people did more than ‘read’ and ‘seek information’; they were also engaged in political and social agitation leading to ‘cultural nationalism’ or ‘cultural renaissance’ (Omu 1978, Alimi 2011). The increased activities of the paper to enlighten the people concerned the colonial powers, leading to Townsend’s recall by London. But political dynamite was already laid. Nationalists latched on to this foundational practice by *Iwe Irohin*: a series of publications emerged with the sole aim of combating the colonial powers.

Yet many scholars bemoan what became of the patriotic role of the press after the attainment of independence. The very weapon – the press – used to end colonialism became the same weapon that undermined the solidarity of the people and stifled their socio-political and economic development. Thus, from the time of independence, whilst some have lauded the press’s contribution to nation-building and democratic debate, the press has also been critically appraised: as an institution that has engendered ethno-religious polarisation of the people, less than steadfast in promoting democracy and good governance and whose integrity and professional standing have been severely undermined by bribery and corruption (Golden and Elliot 1979; Uche 1989; Agbaje 1992; Ette 2000; Uko 2004; Adesoji 2010; Fayemiwo 2012).

Indeed, in virtually all the regimes since independence (military and civilian), the press has always been at the epicentre of the struggle for power. The configuration of Nigeria, as a conglomerate of over 250 ethnic nationalities (Uche 1989), has contributed to this, with the struggle for political power like a theatre of war among the various ethnic groups, particularly the dominant three – Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and the Yoruba. But this historical configuration has meant that the press has also become a tool of power, dangerously deployed by political gladiators in combat with one another. Subsequent chapters on specific regimes and news titles (Chapters Four - Seven) take up this idea of the press at the epicentre of the struggle for power and as a tool of power. But the analysis also explores how the protest tradition which held sway during colonialism did not wholly disappear. It continued as ‘idea’ and re-emerged in practice, in the form of guerrilla journalism, especially in the Abacha years.

However, in order to understand the particularity of the Nigerian press in a broader conceptual context, I draw on Hallin and Mancini's comparative study: *Comparing media systems: three models of media and politics* (2004). In classifying western media system, they propose three models viz; "The Mediterranean or Polarised Pluralist Model" where the media are dependent on the state, seen traditionally as organs of the parties and with a weak market base. The "Liberal Model", synonymous with US, British and Canadian media systems, has such characteristics as market-based, autonomy from state control and a degree of political partisanship. The third model "The North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model" is evident in European countries with historical, cultural and political similarities, with the press having characteristics similar to aspects of the other two models: a strong commercial market and a high level of journalistic professionalization together with what the authors refer to as 'political parallelism' (p. 26) including strong political partisanship.

In expanding the three models, they stress the importance of comparative analysis for thinking about a media system, in that it 'forces us to conceptualise more clearly and draws our attention to aspects of any media system, including our own, often taken for granted and difficult to detect' (2004, p. 2). They go on to usefully suggest four key dimensions in discussing the western media systems. The four key dimensions are: (1) the development of media markets; (2) political parallelism i.e. the links between the media and party politics; (3) the professionalism question; and (4) the regulatory system (p. 21).

The differentiation in the media markets in terms of circulation (low or high), readership, language and audience segmentation is said to be 'naturally accompanied by different roles played by the media, with deep implications for the development of the media as political institutions' (Hallin and Mancini 2004, p. 24). These media roles range from political advocacy to publicist role and entertainment. The authors view political parallelism as the extent to which the media 'structure paralleled that of the party system' (p. 27) and it is manifested in different ways. One of the indicators of the party-press alliance is manifested in the content of the news where distinct political orientation is reflected in the style of reporting. Another indicator is what the authors referred to as 'organisational connection' — the link between the media and political parties and such other organisations with links to political parties, such as the church, trade unions, cooperative societies etc. Other components of political parallelism include the partisanship of media audiences which they demonstrate by buying certain newspapers or

watching particular broadcast channels; as well as the active political life of journalists who work for political parties or are appointed into public offices (p. 28).

Hallin and Mancini also discuss the problematic issue of professionalism in journalism practice, alluding too to its global manifestations. Most practitioners do not have journalism degrees and entry into the profession is not regulated. Even in areas such as Italy where the 'Order of Journalists' is based on a mandatory examination, journalism still has 'a low level of professionalization' (p. 34). Thus, the degree to which a newspaper is professionalised whether by formal journalism training or by means of professional codes of practice may affect the role played by journalists in mediated politics. The final factor in the four components proposed by Hallin and Mancini is the regulatory system. Here, the authors confirm the important role of the state in shaping media system in any society (p. 41). The state role may be in form of laws or policies that may impede the functions of practitioners. These regulatory measures are often premised on national interest/s. They conclude that whether in areas where the market forces direct the media or in societies with heavier state control, the fact cannot be overemphasised that the state as a 'source of information and "primary definer" of news will always play an important role in influencing the agenda and framing of public issues' (p. 44).

Whilst their models focus on western media systems triggering criticisms about their usefulness in thinking about other media systems, the authors have since expanded their comparative study. *Comparing media systems beyond the Western world* (Hallin and Mancini 2011) builds on the earlier work, with perspectives from other world regions. But African media and Nigerian news media in particular, can be discussed in terms of the narrative and framework offered by Hallin and Mancini in both studies. For instance, Adria Hadland, in his contribution to the expanded study 'Africanising Three Models of Media and Politics: The South African experience' (2011) confirms the prevalence of the features of the three models, though pointing perhaps to deeper implications than those cited by Hallin and Mancini. Hadland suggests a high level of 'political parallelism with the tendency of the mass media to act as an instrument of clientelist networks and neo-patrimonial politics' (p. 104). In South Africa, as with many African countries, state intervention has been increasing since the end of Apartheid in the 90s and there is tendency by the state to poach senior media executives to work as government spokespeople. Hadland emphatically notes then that 'Africa's media landscape has strong features of political parallelism, with media products, ownership and audiences frequently reflecting ethnic, linguistic, racial or clientelist features' (2011, p. 116). Some of these issues,

in particular, professionalism in media practice have been highlighted by earlier media historians in the Nigerian context. Increase Coker (1960) points out that the idea of professional commitment comes last in the thinking of journalists of the colonial era. Journalism is thus seen as a means to achieving political interests of the proprietors (Golding and Elliot 1979). The situation remains the same in the contemporary journalism practice. Though there are institutions of higher learning training would-be journalists to the degree level; as well as codes of practice for the practitioners, notwithstanding, journalists regularly breach their own codes and this often results in arrests and prosecution at times.

Bearing the above in mind, I go on to outline the press's political role in the struggle for power before 1984 when the research period of the thesis begins, but try to do so through a consideration of the conceptualisations, reflections and assessments of the Nigerian press by scholars and some journalists. In particular I mark out two 'traditions' associated with the press and which have been in tension with each other throughout: the anti-colonial (protest/nationalist) press and the ethno-political press. Whilst there has tended to be agreement that the battle for independence from colonialists was won on the pages of newspapers, scholars have also pointed out that the press deviated from the pursuit of the common good once independence was established.

Anthony Enahoro, one of the early leading lights in Nigerian journalism lamented the negative effects of press partisanship in the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 pointing out how the press was actively involved (Okafor & Malizu 2013). Yet, there are other scholars and journalists who continue to pinpoint that the progress recorded by the Nigerian state can be attributed to the fighting spirit of the press whose journalists, in spite of constraints, refused to bow. Moreover, but for obstacles placed in the path of the press by successive regimes, it would have achieved more (Ogbonnah 1994, Akinfeleye 2003, Adesoji 2010).

Germane to these discussions is the fact that between 1940 and 1984, the Nigerian state was crisis ridden. In this context perhaps, too much emphasis has been given to the idea of the press as 'protest/liberal'. Less attention has been paid to the difficulties of achieving a national (ist) press and the ways that the press's ethno-political character, associated with the co-operative strategy between politics and journalism, made the achievement of a stable and developed Nigeria unrealisable. My emphasis, in order to shift the approach away from 'protest/liberal' is firstly to adopt the notion of the Nigerian press as 'ethno-political' and secondly, and relatedly, to take up a significant conceptualisation by Golding and Elliot (1979). They

specifically refer to the ‘incompleteness’ of the Nigerian press, characterising it in terms of the ‘dual allegiances of journalists to professional and political obligation’ (1979 p. 31). In many ways this understanding is similar to Hallin and Mancini’s later formulation - ‘political parallelism’ but the distinction between the two is the higher form of political affiliation by the Nigerian press as the Golding and Elliot’s study can reveal.

Central to the discussion about a nationalist press is the concept of nationalism. Ostini & Ostini rightly argue that ‘in any analysis of national systems, their media structures and institutions, as well as their relationship with political and economic structures, must be part of the picture because these relationships and structures are integral to the content, distribution, and reception of information in a society’ (2002, p. 55). How then is the notion of nationalism conceptualised in Africa more generally and Nigeria in particular? James Coleman in his study *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (1958) traces the emergence of nationalist movements to British colonialism. In colonial Nigeria, the people had to organise themselves into socio-political movements with the sole aim of securing self-rule from the imperial powers. Ultimately, these counter-hegemonic movements led to the granting of independence in 1960. Ukeje and Adebawo corroborate that the ‘pursuit of identities in their various and multiple forms’ (2008, p. 564) is at the epicentre of agitation for nationalisms the world over.

Accentuating the discussion on nationalism, Ukoha Ukiwo argues that one of the fallouts of colonialism and nationalist movements was a creation of two publics: the ‘primordial public’ and the ‘civic public’ – both in contention for the loyalty of Africans. The primordial public is comprised of ethnic groups at the vanguard of providing for the welfare needs of the natives, which were denied by the colonial state, while the civic public is the colonial and post-colonial state and all its apparatuses (Ukiwo 2005, p. 9). This contestation for the loyalty of the people by these two publics gave rise to ethnic politics or what Nyamnjoh (2005) referred to as ‘ethnicity and belonging’. Paradoxically, the idea of ethnic press is traceable to the nationalists who employed the power of the press in aid of their agitation against colonialism. Citing the philosophies of two frontline papers during the period of nationalism, Adesoji and Hahn rationalise how the *West African Pilot* established in 1937 and *Nigerian Tribune* founded in 1949, were mobilised in the 1950s. Whilst *West African Pilot* claimed it would promote “the cause of national unity” and would not “be used to foster extremes of regionalism, provincialism, parochialism and other forms of racial or tribal jingoism”, the *Nigerian Tribune* boasted it was set “for a policy of militant but constructive nationalism, fostered without

discrimination or partiality, the cohesion of every ethnical or linguistic group in the country, and sedulously promoted the federal unity of Nigeria” (2011, pp. 186-187). These affirmations by the two papers can be understood in terms of the colonial powers as a common enemy which only the unity of purpose could defeat.

Then, as colonialism eclipsed in 1960, Luke Uka Uche paints a picture of what became an ethno-political press, as the hitherto unity press that had fought the battle of independence dispersed into regional enclaves (Uche 1989). Ukoha Ukiwo further explains that, ethnicity then became a choice platform for acquisition of power and resources:

The Nigerian elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualised development as transferring resources from the civic public to the primordial public. The civic public is thus a contested terrain where representatives of the primordial public struggle for their share of the national cake. In this struggle, politics is amoral and the end justifies the means. The state is so treated because it is seen as alien, exploitative and oppressive (Ukiwo 2005, p. 9).

The intensity of the contestation was such that the primordial public became a real threat to the national order as the newspapers in the hands of the regional leaders became tools dangerously deployed to propagate their ideologies. The political sophistication of these privately-owned papers in the 60s led to government involvement in newspaper ownership in order to cushion the effects posed to its hegemony by the regional powers (Coker, 1968).

Elirea Bornman’s debate on ‘nation-building and citizenship’ (2013) is also illuminating alluding again to the fact that Africa’s quest for national integration has been problematic owing to its diverse ethnic base. As Bornman points out, since nation-building implies that ethnic allegiances are collapsed into single national identity (national integration), the media are under pressure from the political bureaucracy to articulate a unity agenda. Bornman argues further that a situation where ‘national unity takes precedence over the recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity, could in the end be detrimental to the harmonious co-existence of groups’ (p. 443). In suggesting a new role the media can play, Bornman renders the situation more complex when he writes:

On the one hand, they can become an important instrument for embracing diversity and promoting cultural awareness and understanding, but they can also have a divisive effect by being indifferent to difference. The result of such indifference is often the



marginalisation of groups, the estrangement and alienation of members of diverse cultures, and, in the end, divisive polarisation (p. 444).

I will return to the expanded discussions on nationalism and ethno-political character of the press (see pp. 41 - 47 below). But suffice it to state here that it was ethnic politics that gave rise to the ethno-political character of the press, which in turn made the idea of a nationalist press a forlorn hope. This aligns with Francis Nyamjoh's 'ethnicity and belonging' (2005) conceptualisation where he argues that the idea of thinking about Africa's media from a western liberal perspective is problematic. The upshot is that the media are incapable of playing a nationalist role or advancing a democratic process.

In the introductory chapter, I alluded to the idea of alternative media practice as exemplified by two weekly magazines *Tell* and *TheNews*. Here, alternative media is employed to mean those media activities that pose counter-hegemonic challenges to the social order. Chris Atton conceptualises alternative media as 'those media produced outside the forces of market economics and the state' (Atton 2004, p. 3). These categories of media include pressure groups, dissidents, breakaway political movements and even lobbyists, and they become a force to reckon with as topical issues of citizenship form the basis for their agitation. Inherent in their counter-hegemonic activities as Atton further points out, is 'sustaining a community of citizens engaged in democratic practice' and creating a borderless sphere (Atton 2004, p. 5).

Another term used in discussing this type of media practice is offered by John Downing who used the term 'radical media'. By radical media, Downing conceptualises it as 'media generally in small-scale and in many forms, that expresses an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives' (Downing 2001, p. v). The emergence of this form of media, Downing explains, is made possible in the 'face of blockages of public expression, coming from powerful components within the dynamic of capitalist economy and government' (p. v). Going by these descriptions, the 'alternative' or the 'radical' media oppose the mainstream media and their variants. They do not conform and in some ways expose aspects of 'political parallelism' in terms of the relation between state and the mainstream media.

The above formulations capture the phenomenon manifest in Nigeria. Tagged 'guerrilla journalism', 'underground' or the 'bush press' (Maringues 1996; Olukotun 2002; Oyediran & Agbaje 1999), the practice was embraced by few magazines. As Olukotun recounts, journalistic practice during the period was devoid of an identifiable office, personnel identity, distribution

van and open sale by vendors. Nosa Igiebor, editor of *Tell*, explains the phenomenon as being synonymous with the guerrilla war tactics employed by some Africa revolutionary movements to defeat some of the continent's worst dictators who conveniently commanded awesome war arsenals (Olukotun 2002). Bayo Onanuga, editor-in-chief of *TheNews*, foretold of what later became this practice. In his strategy paper at the inauguration of his magazine in 1993 'Inventing an editorial Compass for *TheNews*', Onanuga argues that the existing news journals 'are not probing enough. They sound too boring, too uncritical of government. No magazine in the world can be very successful if it does not at times wear the armour of opposition or the critic' (Onanuga 1993, *TheNews*, No 3). This framework for *TheNews* by Onanuga finds expression in Atton (2004) and Downing (2001) who both describes the 'alternative' or 'radical' media as offering a counter-discursive space as opposed to the mainstream media which is often weighed down by state and market forces.

### **The Anti-Colonial Press: Protest and Nationalism**

Debates about press liberalism and its association with the establishment of more democratic societies in the West have tended to centre on the period of modern mass communication since the development of print media. But it has been established that before the advent of colonialism, liberal values were evident in traditional settings, whether freedom of expression or of association. Writing broadly on this theme, Paul Ansha notes that in 'traditional African society, freedom of expression is recognized as a fundamental human right where consensus was given a high premium, and this was based on the free expression of opinion' (Ansha 1988, p. 5.). Claude Ake, a Nigerian political scientist also debunked insinuations that liberal values were alien to Nigerian people and that it was a misconception to see democracy as a Western creation alien to Africa. Political systems before colonialism, argues Ake, 'were infused with liberal values even more potent than those in the West. Particularly on issues such as corruption and repression, 'chiefs were answerable for their own actions' (Ake 1993, p. 72). Ayo Olukotun also documents that any liberal tradition of the press in Nigeria in the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew strength from the pre-colonial protest forms which employed mass popular culture such as music, theatre, oratory, poetry, sign communication, to criticise unpopular leaders (Olukotun 2002, pp 165- 172).

Thus nationalists who employed modern mass media to aid their anti-colonial agitation were drawing on a more embedded history of liberal principles and practice. This historical background is necessary to understand why nationalists appreciated the use of the press as a tool in their agitation to free Nigeria, and to explain further how it became a potent tool in political struggles after independence. According to Omu (1967), Uche (1989), Daramola (2006), newspapers that followed *Iwe Irohin* constantly challenged and scrutinised the activities of the colonial powers. The papers also educated the people about the evils of colonialism and about the freedom to govern themselves.

Uche recalled the first political newspaper, the *Lagos Times*. It was established in 1880 and started the first pitched press war between the Nigerian nationalists fighting for independence and the British colonial administrators, with editorials boldly challenging the establishment. According to Uche several other newspapers, emerging in the aftermath of the *Lagos Times*, also backed similar campaigns for change. Uche writes further:

The argument can be advanced that without privately-owned press by Nigerians, the Nigerian independence could have taken a longer period to arrive... They became the agenda-setting media by fanning the air of nationalism. They heralded the dawn of political articulation, rallying the general public and teaching it what it meant to be sovereign in one's own country (Uche 1989, pp. 93, 97).

Also, confirming this 'oppositional' journalistic practice, Adigun Agbaje narrates that several attempts by the colonial powers to checkmate the protest media tradition were resisted by journalists whom he said, 'consistently attack[s] the colonial regime, calling for indigenous participation in governance or subjecting its policies to vitriolic attacks' (Agbaje 1992, p. 43), a situation which drew 'harassment, prosecution and intimidation' (Omu 1996, p. 15) from the colonial powers.

As early as mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1862), Fred Omu (1968) documents that the ferocious attacks on the colonial regime led to the introduction of a paper tax by Governor Freeman to curb what the latter described as 'a dangerous instrument in the hands of semi-civilised Negroes' (p. 288). The colonial administration introduced other repressive and discriminatory policies but which were stoutly criticised by the press. For instance, when Lagos was separated from Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1886, a governor was vested with powers to administer Lagos, and key government departments were dominated by Europeans to the exclusion of indigenous people. Calling for

constitutional reforms, *Lagos Reporter*, *The Wasp* and *Lagos Weekly Record*, each in their separate editorials, discountenanced this idea of a government without the governed and called for a proper legislative body to promote the yearnings of Nigerians (Ogbondah 1994, p. 29). Later, incessant attacks on colonial policies and the need for stability drove the administration to try to whittle away the influence of the press: removing it from British Common Law under which it could enjoy protection, and subjecting it to oppressive laws (Oloyede 2004, p. 4). This marked the enactment of the first anti-press law – the *Newspaper Ordinance* No 10 of 1903 – used to prosecute the papers for sedition and libel (Omu 1968). If the law was intended to curb press hostility, it offered instead another avenue of attack against the colonial powers (Oloyede 2004, p. 3). Unable to curtail the press's war against its increasingly unpopular rule, the colonial regime gradually acceded to the dismantling of its activities, beginning first with the period of self-rule<sup>6</sup> or 'period of decolonisation' (Osoba 1996, p. 373) and leading eventually in October 1, 1960 to the granting of independence.

Scholars are in near agreement on how the press accelerated Nigeria's independence, but there were also what might be thought of as some problematic aspects of this 'wonderful' press. These were mentioned but downplayed, understandably given the struggle against colonial occupiers. They were, however, to rear their heads later and were issues the colonialists had observed. According to Golding and Elliot (1979), freedom fighters hid under the cloak of anti-colonial war but feathered their political and commercial interests with the aid of the newspapers they established. To these 'freedom fighters', 'journalism was a narrow avenue' to advance their 'political ambitions' and the 'flowering nationalism of these papers was consistently watered by self-interest' (p. 29). Citing Coker (1960) they point to the fact that these paper men were not trained journalists: 'The proprietors who fostered this party press were still professionals first, politicians second and journalists last. Ownership and control were in the hands not of trained journalists but of lawyers, doctors, chemists, businessmen and even surveyors and architects' (Golding and Elliot 1979, p. 30). Chick also recalled that, once it was clear that colonialists were moving towards granting political independence, attacks on the colonial regime were 'overshadowed by a struggle for succession [to power] in which politicians and newspaper men alike were deeply involved' (1971, p. 116).

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<sup>6</sup> This period between 1940 and 1960 was the period Nigerians were granted freedom to organise themselves into political parties and vie for elective posts, but the period was still under the British control until 1960 when the independence was granted.

As the scramble for power by the Nigerian people intensified, the press became a veritable tool for political propaganda along sectional lines. An English journalist who visited Nigeria in 1945 had sensed even then the impending political implosion among the indigenous people when he lamented that ‘a revolutionary native press ... quite seriously threatens the stability of this part of the Empire’ (Chick 1971, p. 116). This was truer by the late 1950s. Broadly then, as self-rule beckoned, many scholars agree that the press became even more involved in divisive activities. Adigun Agbaje aptly captures the situation when he notes that ‘the press became so enmeshed in the struggle for political power that it found it virtually an uphill task to rise above the personal, political and ethnic acrimonies of the period’ (Agbaje 1992, p.144). Whilst the press, lit up by the ‘glory’ of independence, might still merit the appellation ‘protest/nationalist’, I would argue that its glory was in fact fading even before formal decolonisation. Indeed, by the time independence was granted, any ‘protest’ or ‘nationalist’ press was watered down by pervasive ethno-political allegiances.

### **Rise of an ethno-political press**

As the preceding discussion reveals, the legacy of *Iwe Irohin* seemingly accentuated the pace of Nigeria’s political independence. However, with the process of decolonisation in the 1940s, there appeared a paradigm shift. While opinions diverge among scholars, a window into the political future of the role of the press was opened by the Governor General who, in an address to the Legislative Assembly in 1946, made a mockery of the ‘free’ press:

Our Press is free – free to abuse, to sabotage effort, to kill enthusiasm, to impute bad motives and dishonesty, to poison the springs of goodwill and foul the well of trust, to impregnate the body politic with envy, hatred and, malice – in short, free to do the Devil's work (Chick 1971, p. 115).

The sarcasm by the Governor-General may be dismissed as the ranting of a political figure whose administration is losing hegemony. Nevertheless, the crumbling of the solidarity of the hitherto united nationalists paved the way for personal, regional and political leanings; this was real enough. During this period of decolonisation leading to the 1959 elections ushering in independence, many newspapers were launched. These included, the *West African Pilot* of Nnamdi Azikiwe, mentioned earlier, and backed by his political party, National Council of Nigeria and Northern Cameroon (NCNC); in the North, *Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo* was established

in 1945 metamorphosing into *The Nigerian Citizen* in 1948 and in 1949, Obafemi Awolowo's *Nigerian Tribune*. While *The Nigerian Citizen* was linked to the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Awolowo's *Nigerian Tribune* was affiliated to his Action Group (AG) based in the Western region (Chick 1971, Omu 1978, 2000, Uche 1989, Okafor & Malizu 2013).

This is the history and configuration of the Nigerian press referred to by Golding and Elliot:

Nigerian journalism was thus created by anticolonial protest, baptised in the waters of nationalist propaganda, and matured in party politics. The separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete and the dual allegiances of journalists to professional and political goals have created conflicts whose resolution in daily practice underpins much of contemporary Nigerian journalism (Golding and Elliot, 1979, p.31).

What 'matured in party politics' was an ethno-political press, an 'incomplete separation of politics and journalism' and journalists with 'dual allegiances...to professional and political goals. Notwithstanding, scholars of liberal hue were optimistic about the contribution of the press during the turbulent era of pre and post-independence. Seston Humphrey (1960) suggested that even before Nigeria's independence "the press was independent...vigorously so. There is perhaps no press anywhere in the world so outspoken as that of this emerging nation" (Cited in Ogbondah 1994, p. 4). In his discussion of the theories of press control in post-independence, William Hachten described the 'Nigerian press of 1960 to 1965 as a unique phenomenon for black Africa: diverse, outspoken, competitive, and irreverent' (1971, p. 165).

Yet the governor general in 1946 and the concerned English journalist who visited in 1945 were to some degree right in their assessments of the press. By January 15, 1966, a political crisis gave rise to the first military coup, taking the lives of the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa; Northern Premier, Ahmadu Bello; the Finance Minister Okotie-Ebor; the Western Region Premier Ladoke Akintola and other notable politicians (Chick 1971, Akinyemi 1972, Uche 1989, Agbaje 1992, Oguibe 1998). Scholars are critical of the press suggesting that the role it played in the collapse of the First Republic was ignoble. Olayiwola lamented that 'leading political party newspapers were not only locked in vicious combat but also provided remarkable examples of over-zealous, irresponsible partisanship and recklessness' (Olayiwola 1991, p. 36). The use of obscene language and spread of fear among the populace were the fallout of political campaigns marked by bitterness, disagreement and no consensus,

particularly between the Azikiwe's *Eastern Outlook* and the NPC's *Nigerian Citizen* (Omu 1978, Uche 1989, Agbaje 1992, Oloyede 2004).

Nothing described the situation of the era more precisely than President Nnamdi Azikiwe's criticism of the editor of *Nigerian Citizen*. In a scathing letter in July 1964, he accused him of "beating the tom-tom of tribal hatred" and added ". . . it seems that I have failed to bring home to journalists like you the disastrous role you are playing to disintegrate this nation" (Chick 1971, p. 116). Paradoxically, this was exactly the sort of criticism heaped on Azikiwe and others by the colonial Governor General, who accused them of using their papers to spread fears and promote discontent among the people. Insisting that the press played a significant role in the collapse of the First Republic, veteran journalist, Anthony Enahoro comments that "whoever and whatever ruined Nigeria's first Republic, did so with the active collaboration of the greater section of the Nigerian press" (Okafor & Malizu 2013, p. 87). From the tone of Azikiwe's letter to the editor of *Nigerian Citizen*, his frustration over trying to hold the nation together, amidst active attempts by the press to destabilise it, is clear. Whilst Azikiwe's distress is understandable given his responsibilities, it appears that he forgot his own legacy: of using the press as a potent tool to power. As Golding and Elliot note Azikiwe was the quintessential *journalist-politician* to reach high public office (1979, p. 31, my emphasis).

The killing of notable state officials in the 1966 coup worsened an already complex situation. The coup was construed by the North as ethnically inspired since young Igbo officers, forming the bulk of the coup plotters, spared the life of the Eastern (Igbo) Premier, Michael Okpara, and another Igbo army commander, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi took over power. Ironsi's inability to bring the coup plotters to justice, further engendered the accusation that he was shielding his kinsmen. Hence a further counter-coup in July 1966 by Northern officers and the assassination of Ironsi (along with his host Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, the military governor of the Western region) while on an official visit to Ibadan. He was replaced as head of state by Lt.-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Northern army officer (Akinyemi 1972, Obasanjo 1987, Oluleye 1990, Oguibe 1998). But with the assassination of Ironsi another bloodbath in the North ensued, with more revenge killings of Igbos leading to a secession attempt in 1967 by an Igbo officer, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, and declaration of the Republic of Biafra. The ensuing civil war, ended in 1970 but only after an Igbo death toll of more than one million

lives. This was genocide, though a UN report (at the instigation of the British) ruled against such an interpretation <sup>7</sup> (Oguibe 1998, p. 95).

What role did the press played during the coups and counter-coups, the civil war and the death of so many Igbos? Chick recalled that tribal resentment between Hausas and Igbos, precipitating the drift into the 1967 civil war, was preceded by 'provocative journalism of an alarming kind' (1971, p. 116). Together with Azikiwe's scathing letter to the editor of *Nigerian Citizen* and Enahoro's lamentation about press partisanship, this suggests that the press was to some extent culpable. Uche (1989) further records that during the conflict the press became an instrument of war on both sides.

### **A press undermined?**

Unfortunately, Lord Cudlipp's famous expression "Publish and be Damned" is taken seriously by many African journalists to mean absolute freedom to publish anything. Self-criticism is a quality for which the people of my own country are well known. Other African countries do it in varying degrees. But all too often, it is carried too far by journalists in Africa to the point of self-destruction. A news item or an editorial concerning government that would merely raise eyebrows in London can incite inter-tribal riot or violent anti-government demonstration in an African country. It may bring down the government and where there is no organised opposition party or where it is not ready to be the alternative government, there will be anarchy (Jose 1975, pp. 259-260).

If there was any hope of an early resolution of a return to democracy after January, 1966, the bloody civil war (1967-1970) closed that hope. Instead, the military reign was consolidated. This was understandable. The human cost of the war as well as the heightened suspicion between ethnic groups, arguably made a military presence inevitable. However, there was no commitment either by the military or the press to bring the nation together and return the people to a participatory form of government. Having 'won' the civil war, General Gowon appeared

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<sup>7</sup> The UK *Guardian* in its editorial of 11 October 1968, 'If not "genocide", still bloody', rejected the report of international observers that there was no genocide, but accepted a report by two Canadian MPs and quoted them: 'If any foreign observer says there is no genocide in Biafra, he is either on the payroll of Britain or he is a bloody fool. If anyone wants to see genocide, he should come to Biafra'. See A.B. Akinyemi: 'The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War' *African Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 285 (Oct., 1972), pp. 408-426



to count on the continued support of the press in order for his government to quicken the recovery. Uche (1989); Oseni (1999); Uko (2004); Alimi (2011) point out that initially the relationship between the regime and the press was harmonious but in later years of his nine year rule, turned sour owing to the profligate expenditure of the military regime and its intolerance of criticism. There was, however, accusation (and counter-accusation) of corruption on both sides: the press attacked the regime's intensifying corrupt practices, demanding that the military hand over power to civilians, and the military reacted to what it thought was the hypocrisy of the press by introducing measures to curb the latter's criticism.

As far as the press is concerned, Ndaeyo Uko confirms that the allegation of corruption against it was true, but the regime's attempt to hide its own was a means to try to prevent the press from acting and being regarded as a competent referee (Uko 2004, p. 82). Writing during the period of Gowon's regime, Babatunde Jose, the Managing Director of *Daily Times* (quoted at the top of this section) went so far as to warn the press to be careful if further destruction was to be avoided (Jose 1975, p. 259).

Uko's acknowledgement of press corruption, but claim that it took second place to the larger corruption of the regime and to the requirement that the press be able to pursue 'its crusade' throws up two issues. In 1975 the Gowon regime collapsed in another military coup, with the press having played a 'pivotal role' (Olayiwola 1991, p. 36). It was not due to the press fighting for the public good – the Nigerian public and their democratic aspirations were, at one level, the least considered issue – but rather the upshot of a sustained campaign to bolster 'the personal interest of either the proprietor or the journalists themselves' (Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine 2003, p. 182).

The second related issue is that the actions of the press against the military back-fired, as Jose warned (1975): it paid dearly through harsh decrees, detention, closures and confiscation of publications and failed 'in stopping the excesses of the military' (Doyinsola Aboaba (later Abiola), former Managing Director of *Concord* Group of Newspapers cited in Uko 2004, p.73). This continued into the regime(s) of Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo<sup>8</sup> both of whom

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<sup>8</sup> The term Murtala/Obasanjo regime arose owing to the assassination of the head of state, General Mohammed in a bloody but failed coup of February 26, 1976. His deputy, General Obasanjo succeeded him, but did not alter the regime's programme of action put in place by the late Murtala, particularly the transition programme originally scheduled to terminate in October 1979. Obasanjo followed the transition to the letter, hence the joint term 'Murtala/Obasanjo regime'. This also led to Obasanjo becoming an ex-general who, as promised, handed over power to civilians.

did not hide their intolerance of the press, *ab initio*. The regime unleashed a volley of harsh policies and laws on the press with the sole aim of subordinating journalists to military rule. Barely a month in office, August 31, 1975, the regime compulsorily acquired a substantial and controlling sixty percent stake in the influential, widely circulated and profitable *Daily Times* and took over the *New Nigeria*. To further control the press, a decree, 'Public Officers Protection Against False Accusations' (No) 11, 1976 was introduced and backdated to 29 July, 1974 (Uko 2004). The latter meant that any publication which might have offended the decree in the previous year could also be sanctioned.

Even before this decree, in what Uko described as 'surgical precision of the regime's clampdown on dissent' (Uko 2004, p. 49), the government attacked the heart of the press, deliberately destabilising the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). Sirajo Sidi Ali, President of the Union was barely five months into his second term of tenure when in 1975 whilst on a Union assignment to a Non-Aligned Journalists Trades Union meeting in Cuba, he was removed *in absentia*, at what he described as an 'illegal convention', with the result that the Union fractured. Recounting this low moment of journalism a quarter of a century later, Sirajo bemoaned the state of the press: '[it] had lost the moral and professional credibility of moving the nation forward and the NUJ ha[s] never recovered since this *monumental reversal* in Nigeria' (Sirajo 1999, p. 19 my emphasis).

The government also blocked an attempt to enshrine specific constitutional guarantees for press freedom. The Constitutional Drafting Committee, set up by the military in 1976 to draft a new constitution for the planned incoming civil regime, did not make special protection for press freedom. The Committee reasoned that 'there are no grounds for giving any Nigerian citizen a lesser right to freedom of expression than any other person or citizen who happens to be a newspaper editor or reporter' (Agbaje 1990, p. 206). Given Obasanjo regime's crackdown on the press, it might puzzle observers how he was able to implement his transition and hand over to civilians. But then, the fact he was implementing the transition programme (fulfilling public's expectation), meant that the press didn't matter to him. Perhaps, with the transition programme on course, it could be advanced that the press simply tolerated him.

Thus the press which the newly elected democratic regime inherited in 1979 after thirteen years of military rule was bruised and sick: used and discredited by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime, factionalised into different political camps, legally curtailed and with a fractured NUJ.

### **The Playing out of Partisanship: Decline of National Interests**

Reminiscent of the period during the war of independence and decolonisation, in the Second Republic, further newspapers and magazines were established. But these were titles representing individuals and political pressure groups and aimed at promoting sectional rather than national political, social and economic preferences (Ogunade 1981; Uche 1989; Olayiwola 1991; Agbaje 1992; Oloyede 2004; Uko 2004). According to Uche, about eighteen newspapers were established between 1979 and 1983 (Uche 1989, p. 102). It might be thought that with the greater freedom of press enabled by the democratic regime, this flowering of titles would contribute to a mediated public sphere and strengthen democracy. Paradoxically, the impact was to hasten the collapse of the government and a return to military rule. According to commentators, the problematic aspect of this burgeoning growth was the intensified press partisanship (Olukotun 2002 p. 35; Agbaje 1992, pp. 186 – 198; Olayiwola 1991, p. 39; Uche 1989, pp. 101-120), and a descent into an anarchic journalism began almost immediately.

The election that ushered in the new civil regime was keenly contested by five political parties – Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP); the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); the Nigerian People's Party (NPP); the People's Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) – and marred by irregularities. The declaration was unsuccessfully contested in court by UPN's Obafemi Awolowo and GNPP's Wasiri Ibrahim, up to the Supreme Court (Agbaje 1990, p. 211; Uche 1989, p. 104; Onwumechili and Nwokeafor 2000, p.189; Uko 2004, p. 50). Following the swearing-in of Alhaji Sheu Shagari, on October 1, 1979, newspapers controlled by opposition parties, especially the UPN, immediately reported that his government was illegitimate and continued to do so even after the judicial pronouncement of the Supreme Court affirming the election.

Both Uche and Agbaje record how this partisanship played out. In his account, Agbaje (1988) explains how *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Sketch* (jointly owned by states controlled by Awolowo's UPN) refused to recognise the legitimacy of Shagari's government and instead battled against his regime. The embarrassment caused to the regime by the papers' bitter opposition was such that Awolowo intervened, asking his editors to accord Shagari respect. However, in response, the Managing Director of *Nigerian Tribune*, Tola Adeniyi, queried the statesmanship of Chief Awolowo and resigned over the latter's refusal to endorse the continuation of his column 'Till Death Do Us Part'. Awolowo believed the latter degraded the dignity and honour of the office of the president (p. 621). According to Uche, Chief MKO

Abiola, multimillionaire business mogul and prominent member of the ruling NPN (who incidentally hailed from the home state, Ogun, of the opposition leader Awolowo), founded *National Concord* on March 1, 1980 explicitly to promote the interests of the ruling party (Uche 1989, p. 103). *National Concord's* investigative activities into Awolowo were so damning that his socialist image was marred (Uche 1989). But the launch was also to aid Abiola's own presidential ambition in the 1983 general election (Uche 1989, Agbaje 1992).

In the event, Abiola's aim to contest the 1983 presidential election was dashed when the party endorsed Shagari for a second term, contrary to the party's zoning arrangement that allowed the other two tribes (Yoruba and Igbo) to contest the election. Abiola withdrew from the ruling party, switching camp to support Awolowo, his kinsman. *National Concord* followed suit and attacked Shagari's policies while praising those of Awolowo. Dele Giwa, editor of the *Sunday Concord*, who had also written articles in praise of Shagari, also joined this new political train. In a U-turn article titled: 'A Clarion call to Arms', Giwa wrote:

Having laid a bad foundation for his administration, aided and abetted by an unintelligent legislature, President Shagari began to drive the nation along a bumpy road. It has been a road strewn with corruption and unimaginable ineptitude that has led the whole country down the path until they were swallowed neck-deep in the poisoned ocean (Agbaje 1990, p. 215; 1992, p. 181).

This episode in particular and the intensified partisanship more generally, made evident that newspapers were driven by individual interests and party agendas, not by public concerns or the national interest.

### **Complicity with the Military?**

In his assessment of the situation, Uche concluded that the various positions taken by *National Concord*, on the one hand when it was supporting the ruling NPN and on the other after joining the opposition UPN, typified the chicanery of its editors. A critic summarised it thus:

The image of the UPN leader which the *Concord* sold to the reading public is best summarised in the following attitudinal words and phrases which the newspaper used to describe Awolowo in many of its editorials: 'aged and faded; truculent and irascible; naked; anarchist; tribalist; dictatorial; holier-than-thou; inconsistent; power monger;

illusionist; false image; and mischievous'. After its publisher had left the NPN, the image of Awolowo in the *Concord* changed to the following: 'farsighted'; dogged and principled fighter; democratic; consistent' (Uche 1989, p. 107).

An unhealthy rivalry and competition was played out on the pages of newspapers. Though some newspapers were ostensibly independent (Adesoji 2010) the accounts of Agbaje and Uche above suggest otherwise. As one author confirms 'the so-called independent newspapers were not so independent. They subjected their readers to all kinds of publicity about the politics, ideology and culture of their owners or of those who were close to them' (Olayiwola 1991, p. 39).

Scholars have argued that the combined effects of partisanship on the part of *National Concord*, *The Punch*, *Tribune* and other newspapers eventually paved the way for another military take-over of government in 1983. As an insider in the media told Agbaje, the press was also complicit in the coup that wrecked the democratic regime:

We were so much part of the coup to the extent that if the coup had failed, we probably would have been implicated... One week to the coup, we got the list of the principal actors. Twenty-four hours to the coup, Aboderin made some changes and told us to start working on stories on the assumption that (Major-General) Buhari would now emerge as the Head of State after the coup. We became so close to the coup planners that some of the data that we used to write anti-NPN editorials during this period were supplied by the coup planners (Agbaje 1990, p. 217).

Though scholars agree that the civilian regime mismanaged the nation's affairs and the elections were rigged by parties, a further disturbing aspect was that the media hastened and were often instruments in the military take-over, through their questionable reporting and conduct, their partisanship and rigging of election results. In the build-up to the election *National Concord*'s warehouse was burnt down by suspected sympathisers of the ruling party, with the loss of a huge volume of newsprint. News media were involved in releasing falsified results in favour of their respective proprietor's party. Aware of such practices in Ondo State, an angry mob burned down the *Nigerian Television Authority* (NTA) station for allegedly announcing fake results awarding victory to the candidate of the ruling NPN (Graf 1985; Uche 1989; Agbaje 1990, 1992; Olayiwola 1991; Onovo 1997).

Such actions by the news media seemed a far cry from the protest press of colonial times or the hopes for the press post-independence, but they make vivid the issues related to a predominantly ethno-political press in which the separation between politics and journalism/political parallelism is limited; and market orientation and lack of professionalism were made manifest.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter engages with some of the key ways scholars and commentators have discussed the Nigerian press from its early days under colonialism. Most important is the idea of a ‘protest’ press. During the war against colonial occupation the press was seen to wear the dress of an adversary and understood as paving the way for Nigeria’s independence in 1960. Without the press’s agitation, analysts argue, the freedom of Nigeria would have taken longer to achieve. In this way the press secured its place in history as a liberal press. This idea of press as protest, and adversarial, is also assumed to be necessary for the building of democracy. The idea resonates during the period which this thesis goes on to analyse.

Secondly, however, is a counter idea: that the press developed in Nigeria as an ethno-political press and that it is associated with the lack of separation of journalism and politics which (allegedly) characterises a western liberal press. The former is a self-interested press often intent on serving owners and political parties, with journalists becoming political players not umpires. This press is seen to undermine the processes of democracy and nation building and be integral to military power gaining the upper hand. Its ‘reward’ from the military, however, is to be disciplined and curbed, further impeding the possibility of serving civil society. Evidence for this idea is manifest in the analysis of the press that the thesis goes on to present. Nevertheless, in terms of how scholars and commentators have represented press practice, as we shall see, it is the more romantic view of press as protest that prevails, in part because of the emergence of a so-called guerrilla press.

What this chapter has also tried to do is offer a historical account of Nigerian developments up until 1983, and to make clear the historical parameters framing the press and press-state relations at the point the primary research for this thesis begins. In particular it has highlighted the idea of the press at the epicentre of power and a political tool to be used by all sides. The

next chapter opens up the methodology adopted to try to refine the arguments scholars have hitherto proposed.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

#### **Research Questions**

#### **In Relation to Existing Studies**

The Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

The Field Trip

Issues with Experiential Knowledge

Notes on newspaper titles and formats

Limitation of Study

#### **Summary**



## **Introduction**

‘Discovery consists in seeing what everyone else has seen, and thinking what no one else has thought’. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Hungarian Biochemist, 1937 Nobel Prize for Medicine.

The purpose of this study as explained in the introductory chapter is to revisit the period of military rule (1984 – 1999) with a view to unravelling what relationship existed between the Nigerian State and the Press in the battle to restore democratic rule. Germaine to this study is to contest the optimistic account that a liberal tradition of the press was in evidence and that perhaps, the press played a pivotal role in ending military dictatorship. This chapter therefore, outlines the research strategy adopted in order to explore this and related issues central to it.

## **Research Questions**

A research question provides the researcher with a clear path through which the phenomenon can be unravelled. As Zina O’Leary puts it, ‘without the articulation of a good question you are travelling blind’ (O’Leary 2009, p. 47). Thus, in order to appreciate the central issue of the role/s of the press in relation to the restoration of the democratic order in Nigeria, and to guide me through the research and writing process, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Throughout the periods of military rule, did the Nigerian Press uphold the ‘fourth estate’ function?
2. What role did the press play at moments of crisis and regime change?
3. Were there differences in the relationship between the press and each of the regimes under study and at different moments within each regime?
4. Were there differences in the behaviours of the newspaper titles in one or all of the regimes?

### **In relation to Existing Study**

As a key study upon which my study builds, Ayo Olukotun's 11-year study *State Repression, Crisis of Democratization and Media Resistance in Nigeria (1988 - 1998)* (2002), undoubtedly captures historical moments of tensions between the State and the Press. The depth of his study, particularly the full account of the extent of state repression of the press is a compendium to reckon with. However, there are other issues the author failed to properly scrutinize and which renders this highly intellectual study less pungent on the concept of State/Press relations. Though the author analysed newspaper contents, mainly editorials and news stories, a detailed attention to the linguistic features in the language of the press would probably have resulted more in robust findings. This is the major area where my study differs from his. Other critical formats which this thesis incorporated, such as photographs and cartoons, but which Olukotun's study did not reckon with, rob his findings of many hidden ideological practices of the press.

The application of critical discourse analysis, (CDA) which my study employed, significantly builds on Olukotun's study and reduced the prominent role assigned to the press, whose protest tradition the author insists was 'in evidence' during the period of his study (Olukotun 2002). Applying CDA approach would probably have led the author discarding or modifying Soyinka's 'magnificent and heroic' trophy. I must admit however, that the application of CDA on media research in Nigeria is rare. This thesis appears to be a major attempt that pays detailed attention to the ideological use of language in media research, and of the role of visual materials in political struggles.

Further, the study, by heavily concentrating on 'calendar of repression' (Olukotun 2002), not only made the press look more or less a victim, but also obliterates the underlying factors behind the crackdown on the press. It also waters the long term damage the press did to the democratic aspirations of the Nigerian people who bore the direct consequences of the former's constant alliance with the military in subverting the will of the people. For instance, the author quoted *The Guardian*, admitting the press "bent over backwards" (Olukotun 2002, p. 92) to accommodate the Babangida regime. Had the press not *bent* for the military, but stood to uphold the 'Fourth Estate' function, the latter would probably not have annulled a 'free and fair' election in the nation's history (The June 12, 1993, elections). Beyond quoting the sentence, a critical discourse analysis of the 'bent over backwards' admission, would have revealed its meanings and implications on the struggle for democratic order; and led the author

into holding the press culpable for the annulment instead of singling out the military. It is not in the tradition of a 'protest/liberal' press to defer to a military regime, seen as an aberration in terms of democratic trajectory. The non-application of CDA meant the author erroneously described this admission of culpability as 'biting and defiant' (Olukotun 2002, p. 93). Again, by not highlighting the fact that the press openly invited Abacha, despite his antecedents, the author failed to pinpoint the major defect of a supposed 'protesting press', which brought significant disruptions to democratic gains already achieved before the advent of Abacha.

Another gap in the study, which this thesis filled, relates to the differences in the periods of study. While this thesis covers the entire period of military rule between January 1, 1984 and May 29, 1999 when democracy was established (sixteen years), Olukotun's study period (1988 – 99) does not include the Buhari regime (1984 -85), part of the Babangida regime (1985 -87) or that of Abdusalami (1998-99). The significance of these missing periods is that, the study missed out on some salient issues in State/Press relations: such as Buhari's Decree 4 and its fall out; the assassination of Dele Giwa under the Babangida regime and the cloud surrounding the role/s of Giwa's colleagues in his high profile death. Yet, the crucial moments when Abacha suddenly died, the intrigues and power-play leading to Abiola's death, and perhaps the sealing of June 12 annulment and finally the fixing of the transition leading to the emergence of a retired General Olusegun Obasanjo and 'a low quality democracy' (Diamond 1999) — all would have been crucial to the making of an authoritative study on State/Press relations in Nigeria. However, I hasten to add that the gaps might be connected to the usual limitations and constraints that every researcher encounters. What the author set out to do could also be a factor in the gap noticed. Notwithstanding my observations, Olukotun's work provided me with an intellectual shoulder I leaned on to carry out this study. I would conclude that the study is powerfully arresting enough to stay permanently in the bookshelf of media research into the definitive years of democratic struggles in Nigeria.

### **The Critical Discourse Analysis Approach**

In contemporary media research, 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (CDA) is one of the many qualitative methods, to capture abstract formal structures of news reports and their subtle underlying meanings (Van Dijk 1988). According to Norman Fairclough, who developed the framework, the method offers communication researchers 'a framework and a means of

exploring the imbrications between language and social-institutional practices' (Fairclough 2013, p. V11). Rotimi Taiwo also argues that CDA is concerned with the ideological use of language both in speech and written forms, and therefore, 'analyses discourse to find the hidden meanings' (Taiwo 2007, p. 220).

CDA, a 'field of enquiry which employs procedures to identify ideological bias in texts' (Widdowson 1995, p. 157), is highlighted in this study because of its relative approach to Nigeria's media scholarship. Pennycook reinforces its importance suggesting that it goes beyond 'focusing on the relationship between language forms and a limited sense of context (immediate surroundings, speakers' intentions, background knowledge, or conversational rules)' towards addressing the 'ideological dimension of discourse' (Pennycook 1994, p. 121). Thus, paying closer attention to textual analysis will reveal hidden ideological meanings beyond the sentence.

Data used for this inquiry comprised of press and interview materials. Across the seven newspapers and two magazines used, a total of 1031 press items were analysed. These comprised of articles (news reports, editorials, letters to the editor and op ed contributions); cartoons and photographs. Items selected were linked to events of national significance in all the four regimes studied between 1984 and 1999 – a sixteen year period. The general pattern for all the regimes was to first establish the State/Press relations during the first month of each of the regime in office. Then the second analysis focuses on the State/Press relations during the crisis periods and parting of ways. This enabled me to establish whether there were marked shifts in relations during the two periods. Thus, the press materials were narrowed down to the two moments. These sixteen years of military rule, according to Larry Diamond represented years of 'definitive struggles, a period of collapse into praetorianism and a politics virtually bereft of rules and institutions' (Diamond et al 1997, p. 1).

Already marked out in previous studies, these events then enabled the narrowing down of newspaper archives research. For instance, the annulled presidential elections that nearly led to a civil and ethnic war under General Ibrahim Babangida was held on June 12, 1993 and annulled by a presidential fiat on June 23, 1993 (Kwarteng 1996, Olukotun 2002). The civil disobedience that followed the annulment lingered on until General Babangida was forced out and an Interim National Government (ING) formed on August, 26, 1993. The items were then derived from the time Babangida came to power on August 26, 1985 to the end of September, 1985 (first month in office), and June 1, 1993 to August 26, 1993 covering the periods before

the election, the election, the annulment and the crises that followed, leading to Babangida's exit. This method is replicated in each of the regime.

### **The newspaper titles**

In exploring the research questions, seven newspapers and two weekly magazines were analysed. These are: *The Guardian*, *National Concord*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Thisday* and *Champion*. The magazines: *Tell* and *TheNews*. The newspapers and magazines were selected based on knowledge of their historical antecedents (as seemingly healthy adversaries of the State) with 'a capacity for advocacy and adversarial haggling' against those they consider 'guilty of malfeasance' (Olukotun 2002, p. 22). Their scholarly assessment as 'independent' and 'fearless' (Oloyede 2004, Adesoji 2010, Alimi 2011) would be useful in establishing the degree to which the press was really 'magnificent and heroic'.

For instance, with the exception of *Thisday* and the two weekly magazines established in the early 90s and engaged in the alternative media practice, other titles were linked with partisanship between 1979 – 1983 leading to the collapse of that democratic regime and the enthronement of military rule in 1984. The *Nigerian Tribune*, the oldest of the selected titles to survive many political upheavals was established in 1949, and has been historically linked with the politics of its proprietor, the late Obafemi Awolowo, former premier of the western region in the 1950s and the opposition leader during the second republic between 1979 and 1983. *Thisday* from its inception has been variously linked with many military generals, suggesting it was financed by the military. A particular author echoes this narrative describing its publisher as 'maverick' (Daramola 2006). Though the two magazines *Tell* and *TheNews* were established in 1991 and 1993 respectively, their editors were no strangers to the political press of the second republic era. In fact, it was political disagreements with their respective publishers during the Babangida regime that led to the parting of ways and the founding of their own journals. Significantly, they were selected for symbolising the 'guerrilla journalism' that held sway particularly during the Abacha regime (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, Olukotun 2002). All the newspapers and the magazines share the same similarities – they were at one time or another proscribed and or their editors suffered one form of travail or another (arrest and detention, with or without trial; manhandling; confiscation of titles and instruments of

trade). This political background of the journals and their historical antecedents as papers likely to adopt 'fourth estate' model enabled me to narrow the sampling.

Whilst employing critical discourse analytical approach in relation to the content of these selected newspapers and magazines, I also engaged in interviews with eight editors and three former state officials during the years under study. Quality inherent in interview as a method cannot be downplayed. Daniel Hallin's groundbreaking study of the role of the America's news media in the Vietnam War 'The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam' (1989) attests to the importance of interview in a research of this nature. Beyond a wealth of news materials, Hallin interviewed many of the journalists who reported the war. As the study reveals, far from being a consistent adversary of government policy in Vietnam, Hallin shows, the media were closely tied to official perspectives throughout the war. Divisions in the government itself and contradictions in its public relations policies, the study revealed, caused every administration, at certain times, to lose its ability to "manage" the news effectively. The media only shifted toward a more critical view after public unhappiness and elite divisions over the war were well advanced (Hallin 1989).

Of the eight editors interviewed, five are still currently serving, namely: Sina Oladeinde, Yomi Efunuga (Features editor and Sunday editor of *Nigerian Tribune* respectively); Felix Abugu and Ehichioya Ezomon (Editor, *The Guardian on Saturday* and Deputy Editor *Sunday Guardian* respectively); and Bisiriyu Olaoye (Deputy Editor, *Daily Champion*). The three other editors are now retired but still maintain a role as columnists: Duro Onabule (former editor of *National Concord*); Mohammed Haruna (Former editor and later Managing Director of *New Nigerian* Newspapers and publisher, *Citizen Magazine*) and Moshood Fayemiwo (Former editor-in-chief/publisher of the defunct *Razor* magazine) now a Chicago-based author and publisher.

The three former officials interviewed were: General Oladipo Diya, formerly a military governor under the regime of General Muhammadu Buhari (1984/1985) and later Chief of General Staff (Deputy Head of State) under General Sani Abacha (1993 - 1997) before he was arrested for 'coup plot' against his boss. Interestingly, the two other officials interviewed also doubled as editors. They were appointed into governments while in practice. These are: Duro Onabule who served Babangida as Chief Press Secretary and Mohammed Haruna, former Chief Press Secretary to General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The experience and the views of the duo

on the subject of state/press relations, as former editors and later state officials, cannot be overemphasised, having been involved in the running of both institutions.

By analysing the contents of the selected newspapers and magazines, I was able to gather first-hand insight into what and how ideas and information were presented to the readers, focusing on language and visual matter. This enabled a closer exploration of the degree to which newspapers and magazines approached issues in the light of their alleged 'fourth estate' role.

The interviews with editors provided me with additional information, providing context, but also explaining the constraints shaping how a story came to be written in the way it was. Through interviews I was able to begin to open up the various relationships between press and state and their engagement with each other.

An editor in a news organisation is the head of the news room who not only assigns reporters and correspondents to beats, but who also ultimately determines what material merits publication and in which position. By his unique position, an editor is often a known figure to state officials, as well as to businesses, and can use his or her position in editing news materials in such a way to favour some interests rather than others. Thus he may determine the wording of a story and in fact 'doctor' a reporter's original story to suit specific purposes. Interacting with those editors, enabled me to understand how the newspaper title is led from the top with the editor often significant in shaping editorial content, selection and framing of stories at critical moments. However, an editor can never maintain total control over news gathering and reports.

Similarly, interviews held with the state officials revealed their perceptions of and engagements with journalists. More importantly, I was able to explore in a way that news content could not possibly open up, the reason/s behind the co-option of journalists into state affairs, their disagreements and the 'parting of ways' during periods of tensions, particularly under the three regimes of Buhari, Babangida and Abacha respectively.

However, it is also worthy of note that the period of research (1984 -1999) is a long while ago and that temporal distance undoubtedly pose challenges to what the interviewees might still remember. In addition, it is likely that subsequent events will have shaped the way in which they respond to questions about issues in the past. This challenge was an issue I engaged with while interpreting the interview materials.

In order to partly address the issues posed by the lapse of time, I had carried out my library study of newspapers first before proceeding to the interview stage. This method described as 'Retrospective Panel Design' (Rufai 2014) was employed. The design 'uses some recollection techniques and devices to enable respondents recollect and reconstruct the order and sequence of past experiences/activities' (Rufai 2014, p. 8). In this way, the news analyses provided me with a knowledge and familiarity with news stories and political issues in each of the periods of research. This then enabled me to draw-up appropriate questions and to be able to refresh the memories of the interviewees. I was able to take the interviewees back into the periods of the study, by references to specific newspaper coverage, quotes from speeches, mentioning individuals and specific events. This method enhanced their recollection and helped them in clarifying more clearly, past events, including statements they personally made in the past.

### **The Field Trip**

With the suggestion from my supervisor that there might be an archive of Nigerian newspapers at the British Library, I set out to the British Library in London, where I was registered as a researcher. Following this, I proceeded to Collingdale, North London where the Library's newspaper archive is situated. Unfortunately, the Library stopped collection of Nigerian newspapers in 1986 or thereabout, but I was fortunate to find both *The Guardian* and *National Concord* needed for my analysis of General Mohammadu Buhari regime.

The research at the Library was smooth and stress-free. This was made possible by the modernisation of the newspaper archive. Newspapers were archived in microfilm format. Once I obtained the details of the publications needed from the Library's web search, the staff then brought out the films containing the publications. The machine was easy to use and self-explanatory. Notes were taken from page to page and photocopies of necessary pages made. Two days were spent at the Library to complete the research.

Given the unavailability of other newspapers, it was inevitable that I carried out the library research in Nigeria. With my knowledge of the Nigerian system, I was able to choose the University of Ibadan (the first University in Nigeria) as my choice institution for the research. The University holds a newspaper archive dating back to the early nineteen century. Before leaving the UK, after approval was granted to proceed on the field trip, as many editors and former officials as possible were contacted via emails and phone calls, informing them of my



impending visit and the issues involved in the research. The response was encouraging. However, immigration issues delayed my trip as planned for late 2010. I eventually left for Nigeria in June 2011.

After registering at the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, I faced some problems. The papers were still in hard copies (unlike the microfilm format at the British Library) and they were piled on shelves across dusty stores. I had two options: to wait for the overwhelmed library staff to bring them out for me batch by batch, or to get to work myself, shifting the shelves. The first option was to be at the pace of the staff, so I decided to help myself. The first week was unpleasant as I suffered the effect of dust inhalation. That option was abandoned, while I waited for the library staff's assistance. The delays in the UK meant I arrived Nigeria during the torrential rain of that year which resulted in severe flooding. The University of Ibadan was badly affected, leading to my abandoning the university altogether.

I then travelled to the National Library in Lagos, but the flooding in Lagos was also severe, leading me to journey to the National Library in Abuja. Unfortunately they did not hold many of the publications. I settled for the *Nigerian Tribune* Library, in Ibadan later on, and I employed a research assistant to help shift through the shelves. In the midst of all this, I fell ill and had to seek intermission (from Sussex) while still in Nigeria. I returned to the UK in December 2011 after six months, as my visa did not permit me to stay outside the UK for more than that. However, during the six month period, I was able to interview very few editors and officials as many were no longer available owing to my delay in arriving Nigeria. As a consequence, I returned to Nigeria again in December 2012/ January 2013 to complete the field work.

Of the editors and officials interviewed, two were conducted by phone and email. The security situation in the North of Nigeria (Boko Haram terrorism) prevented me from travelling to Kaduna to meet the former chief press secretary to General Abdusalami Abubakar, Mr Mohammed Haruna. The interview was however conducted via phone on June 20, 2012, while I was in the UK. The former editor-in-chief/publisher of the opposition *Razor* Magazine (defunct), Dr. Moshood Fayemiwo, based in Chicago, US, asked for the interview questions to be sent to him via an email, which he later responded to.

Others were interviewed face to face and recorded. Notes were also taken. All the editors were interviewed in their open offices while General Oladipo Diya (Abacha's deputy) and Chief

Duro Onabule (Babangida's chief press secretary) were interviewed in their homes. They both have sections of their compounds used to receive visitors. The recordings were transcribed using the facilities at the University of Sussex's School of Media, Film and Music. As a prelude to the interviews, all the interviewees first sought to know what the topic of the subject was about. They were then availed with brief notes on the research topic and the specific issues of interest in each regime. Having been satisfied with the details of the inquiry, agreement was then reached and the dates for the interviews set<sup>9</sup>. The period of the interview also coincided with the heightened moment of politicking when issues being investigated became matters of public discourse. For instant, Generals Buhari and Babangida were in the news as presidential aspirants in the 2011 general elections. Buhari, who lost in the 2011 elections, is currently a presidential candidate in the February 2015 general elections. Their participation in the democratic process brought their pasts into public limelight. General Diya, Abacha's deputy has also granted interviews on issues surrounding his alleged coup plot in 1997 against his erstwhile boss, Abacha. Thus, the periods of the research (1984 – 1999), though a long time ago, became topical and as fresh as the periods they represented even in year 2014 when the thesis is written.

As the above reveals, the constraints along the line undoubtedly caused delays in progressing the thesis and perhaps in the quality of some of the data. However, I recognized from interactions with other PhD candidates that research field work, particularly when it involves travelling outside the University base, often means overcoming obstacles and constraints. In the end, I felt that the data I acquired was adequate.

### **Issues with Experiential Knowledge**

My familiarity with some of the news titles sampled both as an activist and a freelance writer in some of the years under study, provided me with useful insights into the activities of news staff (see Chapter One). Eight of the nine print establishments are located in Lagos while *Nigerian Tribune* is located in Ibadan, the Capital of Oyo State. I was born and raised in Ibadan while I had my university education as well as worked in Lagos for a decade. The University of Lagos where I graduated as a journalist is the first degree-awarding institution in mass

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<sup>9</sup> All the interviewees having been satisfied with the details and the nature of the inquiry, agreed to have their views and names published.

communication in Nigeria, and where a significant number of the leading newspaper and magazine editors were trained. I recall a module during my first year in 1996 'Writing for the Mass Media' (MAS 101), part of which was to write a publishable article in one of the dailies with a 10 points for those able to break through it. My piece '*June 12: How are the Heroes Fallen!*' was accepted and published by *The Punch* in January of that year. This background and some personal knowledge through the University of Lagos Mass Communication Alumni Association gave me access to the majority of the editors.

Lagos, the former capital of Nigeria, as well as the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria, was also the base for the colonialists. Its air and sea ports are said to have been the hubs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mabogunje 1964). On the other hand, Ibadan was the regional, and still remains the political capital of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria. Further *Nigerian Tribune* established in 1949 in Ibadan remains the longest newspaper to survive many political and economic crises in Nigeria. Indeed, no other newspaper of that period exists in Nigeria today. Ibadan was where the first television in Africa, *Western Nigerian Television* (WNTV) was established in 1959 (Uche 1989). It is these historical antecedents that earned the two cities the sobriquet 'Lagos/Ibadan axis' of the Nigerian press.

At this juncture, it is pertinent that I clarify my personal experience with the selected print media houses. Traditionally, a researcher has long been recognised as the 'instrument of research'; the researcher's pre-existing knowledge of the subject being investigated is deemed biased and should be separated from the study (Maxwell 1996, p. 27). However, notable scholars have differed with this notion. Mills (1959); Strauss (1987); Glesney and Peshkin (1992) all allude to the fact that a researcher's background knowledge is valuable to his study and should not be discarded. Mills in particular reasons that 'the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other' (Mills 1959, p. 195). Maxwell adds that to ask a researcher to discard his work from other aspect of his life is to rob him of 'a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks (Maxwell 1996, p. 28).

Alan Peshkin suggests that:

The subjectivity that originally I had taken as an affliction, something to bear because it could not be forgone, could, to the contrary, be taken as virtuous. My subjectivity is

the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher, from the selection of topics clear through to the emphases I make in my writing. Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalise on rather than to exorcise... (Glesney & Peshkin 1992, p. 104).

And Strauss, in what he terms *experiential data* (researchers' technical knowledge, research background and personal experience) echoes similar points, alluding to inherent potentials in a researcher's background knowledge. He expatiates:

This experiential data should not be ignored because of the usual canons governing research (which regard personal experience and data as likely to bias the research), for these canons lead to the squashing of valuable experiential data. We say, rather, mind your experience, there is potential gold there' (Strauss 1987, p. 11).

Consequently, my *experiential data* - knowledge of activities of news staff both inside of the newsroom and on beats before and during my university years; and my socio-political backgrounds – have been critically deployed to aid the quality of my inquiry. I also observed the useful suggestion by Reason (1988) to guide the use of my personal experience. He uses the term 'critical subjectivity' to advise researchers not to see 'experiential data' as a means of imposing their personal views on their research, but rather to critically appraise their pre-existing knowledge in aid of the current inquiry. Reason describes critical subjectivity as 'a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience, nor do we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and swept away along by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use is (*sic*) as part of the inquiry process' (Reason 1988, p. 12).

### **Notes on newspaper formats**

I selected six press formats to analyse, namely: editorials; news headlines (mainly front page); news stories; photographs; cartoons; and op-ed articles. The formats that I have chosen are not exhaustive of available newspaper items, even as I reason that the possibility of looking at all the newspaper items would be a tall ambition. As discussed in chapter one, the bad state of the economy during the research period was such that most readers could not afford to buy newspapers. Alternatively, the newsstand is besieged every morning as people gather to scan through headlines and in most cases tip the vendors to check on favourite pages, such as

editorial, cartoon or notable columns. This I personally practised on many occasions, and leading to a label 'free readers association of Nigeria' to mock those who harass vendors for free reading. Consequently, from this newsstand perspective arose my interest in the formats chosen for this study. It enabled me to narrow down on the aspect of newspapers to focus on.

The editorial format was chosen because it is the official position of a news title. The editorial is also seen as being more than a 'word factory' because unlike news items which require prompt publication, an editorial is often a reflection after a news item has been published, thus providing more time for the editorial board to verify facts and engage in further debate on a given issue. A typical editorial board in Nigeria also parades people from other fields such as academia, business, religious body.... Perhaps this composition ensures that those in charge of the news process, who are probably under political and commercial pressures, are not the same people determining the position of the organisation on a given issue. This, it is believed, offers a more balanced view from a wider perspective. An editorial is 'thus the judgement of the publication on a given event' (Agoro and Popoola 2005, pp. 26, 27; Hall 1978, p. 8).

Beyond editorial opinion, insights were also gained from other formats that often add weight to reported issues of the moment. For instance, a news headline on the front page confers importance and suggests editors consider it prominent in attracting the attention of readers. Newspapers and magazines in Nigeria are mostly bought from the newsstand and from hawking vendors, and a number of 'free readers' (see Chapter One) also converge at newsstand to glance at headlines. According to Van Dijk, headlines have ideological implications; they are 'a subjective definition of the situation, which influences the interpretation of the news report. Journalists may upgrade a less important topic by expressing it in the headline, thereby downgrading the importance of the main topic' (Van Dijk 1991, p. 51). Scholars such as Althaus et al. (2001); Andrew (2007); Leo'n (1997) have also questioned the credibility of headlines in relation to articles they represent, suggesting they manipulate readers (Ifantidou 2009, p. 700).

The use of a photograph to illustrate a story also adds weight and gives it more prominence. In most instances, a news item with a photographic illustration gives the readers a sense of a life story. Sidey & Fox opined that 'editors ... have to fight to hold as much as possible of their readers' time and attention, and among their best weapons are their cameras' (1956, p. 11). Zillmann et al adds that the motivation for the deployment of visual materials is linked to the 'presumption' of their 'desirable effects' in the printed matter (2001, p. 302).

A cartoon is an artistic representation of a given issue often in a caricature form. It often tells more than a written story can reveal and has been a major tool in communicating important views and emotions to the readers which cannot be said in words without censorship. At particular moments, cartoons have been a critical element in journalistic debate. In my research, cartoons have provided valuable insights and enhanced my analyses. Lamb (2004, 2007); Conners (2007); Eko (2007); Hammett (2010) all agree that political cartoons are used variously to criticise certain public figures, institutions and groups as well as to reinforce the political interests of others. Cartoons are also thought to be used during electioneering to manipulate the voters' opinion. In Nigeria in particular, Sani et al affirms the use of political cartoons to 'set [the] agenda by mainly encapsulating current and sensitive issues that people are much concerned about' (Sani et al 2012, p. 156)

Other formats considered are news stories as well as articles by columnists. Articles represent the opinions of members of the public, but they are selected and edited by the newspapers. These opinions usually provide alternative views to those expressed by journalists on specific issues.

The method of study I have adopted is to investigate in each case, the first 30 days in order to measure the press's reaction in terms of acceptability or contestation of legitimacy. I then went on to explore certain key moments in each of the regimes, rather than try to offer a necessarily superficial overview of the whole of each regime. These moments represent what Larry Diamond termed 'definitive periods' (Diamond et al 1997, p. 2) of democratic struggles which reversed or delayed Nigeria's developmental efforts towards democracy and when the press could potentially play a critical role. For instance, in chapter four the crisis of confidence between the press and Buhari's regime, and which became a public interest issue was the fallout of the enactment of Decree 4, which sought to control free speech. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 general elections — the most credible elections in the nation's history according to many commentators; and subsequent events (see Chapter Five); and the attempt by General Sani Abacha to transform from a military head of state to an elected president, without first resigning in 1998 (see Chapter Six), all shook the fabric of the Nigerian nation to the point of collapse. The death of MKO Abiola (presumed winner of June 12 elections) in detention (July 1998) under General Abubakar was another moment when anarchy loomed large on the already volatile situation in the country. Comparable coups and counter coups also impacted negatively on the integrity of the Babangida and Abacha regimes.

In each regime, I consider the military-press relations and how this relationship may or may not change during the different crises periods. The analysis reveals a complexity of relations between the state and the press.

Specifically, the focus under General Mohammadu Buhari (1984 - 1985), was the regime's Decree 4, 1984 - Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) which resulted in the jailing of two *Guardian* journalists for publishing details of diplomatic postings before their official release. The decree has been described as the most draconian of all anti-media laws in Nigeria since independence seriously impacting on the ability of the press to publish, let alone perform its 'watchdog' role (Uche 1989, Ogbondah 1994, Oloyede 2004, Alimi 2011).

The analysis examines on the one hand, the first month of the regime in office (January 1 - 31, 1984), after toppling the democratic regime of Alhaji Sheu Shagari on December 31, 1983. This is an attempt to analyse how the press reacted to the military takeover of the democratic government. I then examined the contents from February to July, 1984, covering the enactment of Decree 4, the arrests, detention, trial and subsequent jailing of the two staff of *The Guardian*. The two periods enabled me to establish the differences in the approach to news practice and the state of government/press relations before and after the crackdown on the press. *National Concord* and *The Guardian* were used for my analyses.

Under General Babangida regime (1985 - 1993), I focused on the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections presumed to be won by the business mogul, MKO Abiola and described by both local and international observers as the 'freest and fairest' in the history of Nigeria. I analysed the contents of two newspapers — *The Punch* and the *Nigerian Tribune*, first between August 27 and September 30, 1985, capturing the press's reactions to Babangida coup. On the June 12, crisis, the papers' practice was analysed between June 1, 1993 and September 30, 1993. This period covered the prelude to the election, the presidential election held on June 12, 1993 and the events leading to its annulment on June 23, 1993. It also covered the accompanied crisis leading to the eventual exit of General Babangida from power on August 26, 1993 and the handing over of power to an interim government headed by Ernest Shonekan.

In the regime of General Sanni Abacha (1993-1998) the focus of my analysis was the attempt by the General to transform from a military head of state to an elected president but without first resigning. But again, I first analysed the moment Abacha took over from the three-month old Interim Government put in place by Babangida between August 27 and November 17,

1993. This was to measure the reaction of the press to yet, another military coup. The analysis of the press during Abacha's attempt to transform into a civilian president covered a three-month period from April 1998 when all the five registered political parties were lobbied to adopt the General as their 'consensus presidential candidate' without any other candidate to contest the election scheduled for August, 1998. The analysis stretches into May 1998 covering the attendant crises on Abacha's ambition, through to his sudden death on June 8, 1998 (in suspicious circumstances) (Olukotun 2002). How the press handled his sole adoption as a presidential candidate, his mysterious death and subsequent events were examined in two newspapers: *Vanguard* and *Champion*.

Finally, under General Abdusalami Abubakar regime (1998 - 1999), my focus was on two key events: The death in detention, of MKO Abiola on July 7 while meeting American diplomats and the violent protest that followed. Also examined was the regime's transition programme, which culminated in the handing over of the reins of power to a democratically elected government. The analysis covered the entire regime from June 8, 1998 when General Abacha died to May 29, 1999. I explored whether the press was involved in the 'conspiracy theory' that MKO Abiola was murdered by the military and the foreign powers to 'balance the equation' following Abacha's death; necessary because it was June 12 and Abiola issues that led to the confrontation between the Abacha regime and the press and, almost, the collapse of the Nigerian State. Again, I explored whether the press welcomed the fresh military transition programme, considering the many failed transitions in the past. The electioneering, the election, the hand-over to a democratic government and the place of the press in that final moment of military exit from the political sphere were scrutinised. Four newspapers: *Thisday*, *Champion*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Vanguard* and two weekly magazines: *Tell* and *TheNews* were used for my analyses. Unlike in the three other regimes where two titles each were used, six publications were used for the analysis of this regime. As the last regime that ended military rule and handed over to an elected government, a robust evidence of press cooperation or absence of it with the regime is germane to the overall conclusions that I draw. It would also give a broad representation of the press practice direction during the last struggle to enthrone democracy.



### **Limitation of Study**

As is the case with most research endeavours, a researcher is confronted with many choices and challenges which necessarily constrain what is possible. The particular methods adopted offered a rich approach to the topic but there were also limitations. I focused on a limited range of formats partly geared to thinking about the reader at the newsstand the ‘free readers’ who scanned through the headlines or tip the vendors to check specific formats such as editorial, cartoon and articles of prominent columns for his daily information or entertainment needs (see Chapter One). Would more careful attention to a range of news items and features throughout a paper have shown the title in a different light for example? I limited the news titles in each chapter/period and didn’t use any one title all the way through the years of military regime. If I had changed these parameters i.e. using all the titles in each of the regime, the analysis and findings might have been different. Talking to participants may seem to prove gold; yet, the human factor, the issue of memory and what can be recalled of an earlier time also come into play. Whilst I tried to refresh their memories of the events in the specific periods with the help of archive materials, including quoting their past statements, the fact that they were ‘players’ with certain interests, past and current ideas and identities, inevitably meant that I heard ‘stories’: in effect, this wasn’t ‘nothing but the whole truth’. In the instance of this thesis, interviews with a wider set of witnesses — more editors/journalists and state officials might have opened up further issues about this ‘ethno-political’ culture and press relation to the state, and would probably offer me a plethora of views to analyse and juxtapose one against another. This might provide insights into current crises that still engulf Nigeria and the continuing role of the press in creating and transforming (or not) Nigeria into a ‘nation’.

Since the struggle for democracy during the periods was spearheaded by a number of pro-democracy and civil rights activists (academics, lawyers, unionists etc) who were neither state officials nor practicing journalists, their views perhaps could provide more insight about what they know transpired between officials and journalists at these critical moments. Again, since security operatives were involved in the arrest and detention of journalists, seizures of publications as well as closure of media houses, their knowledge of the intrigues between officials and journalists as well as who gave what order/s to them could be value-added as well. All these are limitations that cannot be overemphasised.

Moreover, this thesis focused on the press (newspaper and magazine) for its analysis, to the exclusion of the electronic media — Television and Radio. Since they were more accessible to

the people than the newspapers, radio in particular, how these two powerful media of communications reported events during the periods, what influence/impact they exerted on the struggle and whether there were similarities and or differences with the print media philosophy is also acknowledged as a limitation to this study.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined the processes involved in carrying out this research: the research questions; the methodological approach, in particular Critical Discourse Analysis; the design as well as the constraints encountered during the field work. The chapter also outlined the limitations of the study which subsequent research could take into consideration. Significantly however, the chapter highlights the application of critical discourse analysis approach as a major departure from the way in which media research has been carried out in Nigeria. This approach, together with other formats that have not been adequately captured before now in the Nigerian context (headlines, photographs and cartoons) will assist in establishing the degree of validity of Soyinka's claim about the 'magnificent and heroic' trophy. The hidden facts arising out of this approach as well as the significant contribution to the existing knowledge have been pulled out. In this regard, this study will contribute to the burgeoning literature on the military-press relations in Nigeria as well as put into perspective, the complexity of social struggles in the Nigerian socio-political and economic history. The content analysis and the interview materials hopefully casts light on the pressures exercised by arms of the state on the press and the complex of factors which gave rise to a press which unevenly took up its role of acting as a 'fourth estate'.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Enforcing Social Responsibility of the Press: Buhari, Decree 4 and the Press (1984 – 1985)**

Introduction

Supporting the Change of Government

Decree 4: The Gathering Storm

End of the Honeymoon

The Test Case: Buhari v press

Fourth Estate or Fifth Columnist? The Press Plays *Russian Roulette*

## Introduction

In a somewhat critical self-appraisal, William A. Thomas, former editor of the *New York Times*, piqued:

The one thing the Press covers more poorly today than anything else is the press itself. We don't tell our readers/viewers or listeners what we do or how we do it. We don't even admit our mistakes unless we are virtually forced to under threat of court action, advertiser, public opinion or public embarrassment. We do not attempt to explain our problems, our decisions, our news coverage and presentation, our fallibility, our procedures of monitoring governance and making them acceptable to the public. Yet, we try to put corrupt public officers on trial (Akinfeleye 2003, p. 27).

In chapter two, I discussed the flowering of press during the democratic regime of Shagari (1979 -1983) and the partisanship and recklessness that went along with it, leading eventually to the collapse of the regime and a return to military rule. The argument I have made is that the individual press titles promoted personalities and party preferences, at the cost of a national agenda which was in a state of precariousness. As a consequence, though the military was in partnership with the press during the period of planning and execution of the 1983 coup (Agbaje 1990), the former was also mindful of the latter's diabolical role in the crisis that rocked the ill-fated civilian regime. On assuming power, the regime's preoccupation was to restore national stability, economic recovery and stem corruption (Idiagbon 1984, Diya 2011). In doing this, notwithstanding the leading role played by the press in stabilising the Buhari regime, the latter did not shield the press, rather attempted to sanitise its partisanship and corruption. According to Oladipo Diya, a military governor at the time, this was to make the press 'straightforward, fearless and unambiguous' (Interview on October 10, 2011).

Historically, there were antecedents for draconian laws and extra-legal and administrative policies to control the press, dating back to colonial and post-colonial civilian and military regimes (Omu 1978, Ogbondah & Onyedike 1991, Agbaje 1992, Oloyede 2004), but less than two years into power, Buhari attempted to rid the press of its corrupt tendencies. In particular Decree 4 1984, 'Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation), which punished any journalist who violated its provisions, has been described as the 'most dreaded' and 'most repressive' of press laws in Nigeria (Ogbonda and Onyedike 1991, p. 61).

In exploring the relationship between the regime and the press, two newspapers, *National Concord* and *The Guardian* were analysed. As detailed in the methodology chapter, the periods of my analysis cover the first month of January, 1984 when the press heralded the regime and rallied the public behind it; and between February and July 1984 when the ‘honeymoon’ was said to be over (Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2011). This occurred with the arrest, prosecution and conviction of two staff of *The Guardian* for violating the provisions of Decree 4, when they published the ambassadorial list yet to be approved by the government. To aid my analysis, I propose four questions: did the press not only collaborate with the military to topple a democratic regime but also further legitimise it through its coverage? Was the press disingenuous in supporting Buhari’s corruption crusade, i.e. expecting that the press itself would be exempt? Similarly, in relation to Buhari, was he perhaps overconfident in trying to enforce press responsibility and foist a ‘developmental’<sup>10</sup> model on the press? If Decree 4 was a violation of press freedom was it also a necessary and inevitable reform of the press?

My analysis of the relationship of the two papers with the new military regime is geared to considering whether the new regime faced a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ in the contestation of hegemony between it and the press. To explore this, I first analysed the one month of press coverage of the regime’s activities (January 1st – January 31st, 1984). 106 items were examined in *The Guardian* while 98 items were reviewed in the *National Concord*, comprising editorials, front page news headlines, articles, photographs and cartoons.

### **Supporting the Change of Government**

In its January 2, 1984 edition (48 hours after the coup), and to indicate the importance of the event, *National Concord*’s editorial: ‘Verdict 83’ appeared on the front page taking up a third of the page and continuing on page two where it took up a further half page. It was very critical of the deposed democratic regime, and described the sacked government, its officials and supporters through the following less than flattering phrases:

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<sup>10</sup> The central theme of developmental model is that the press should partner the government in carrying out programs for improving economic and social change, particularly in societies beset with obstacles to development. For a country as diverse as Nigeria, the case for this model is more apt. The diversity of Nigeria, the self-seeking tendencies of the populace, and the history of ethnic, cultural and religious antagonism could easily split the country apart. The country continually has to promote coherence and unity to prevent anarchy. A factious press is counterproductive’. See Seng & Hunt ‘*The Press and Politics in Nigeria: A Case Study of Developmental Journalism*’. *Boston College Third World Law Journal*. Volume 6, Issue 2, 1986.

Dead government; rosy cheeked flatterers; sycophants; hustlers, ruffians, crass ineptitude of leadership; power hungry aides; vulnerable to flattery; a pathetic victim of casuistry; megalomaniacs; hoarders; profiteers; shylock middlemen; currency traffickers.... (*National Concord*, January 2 1984, pp. 1 & 2).

In contrast, *National Concord* advised the new regime to be dedicated to the cause of the common people, unequivocally assuring it of a 'large reservoir of public goodwill'. In a symbolic show of partnership, the editorial went further to set two 'urgent tasks' for the military regime to tackle: 'corruption and economy'. In its determination to ensure the military punished former officials, the editorial demanded the government 'track down' corrupt officials of the sacked regime, ensure they 'disgorge their loot' and be 'punished for their crimes' (*National Concord* January 2, 1984, p. 2).

Given the scathing phrases deployed to describe the ousted democratic regime, the paper leaves an arresting impression in the minds of its readers that, democracy was, after all, bad. Assuring the military, without obvious evidence, of 'a large reservoir of public goodwill' was to hand the military an unqualified and immediate legitimacy.

In a further twist that seemed to confer credibility on General Buhari's coup and discredit the 1983 general elections, *National Concord* likened the new military regime to a democratically elected government when it concluded assertively:

The new government would be right to feel that the verdict it delivered on Saturday (December 31, 1983 coup) is the verdict of the people, the authentic Verdict '83 (*National Concord*, January 2, 1984 p. 2).

The editorial was given further impetus by the rest of the front page which carried news on the coup. The major story in a large and bold headline was titled: 'ILL-GOTTEN MONEY WILL BE RECOVERED' with a rider, 'Says new regime'. Another small story: 'SMC members named' carried the names of appointed Supreme Military Council members. The final story at the right top corner is the *National Concord*'s usual 'Thinking Corner' short item which also tied in to the issue of the moment. It read:

*Time* magazine has voted US Ronald Reagan and the ailing Soviet Yuri Andropov men of the year. Reason: they are the only two people who possess the key to the peace and stability of the world. They are also the men, who if the fancy catches them, can blast

the world into pieces. *So, there is no place for our own man of peace and stability?* (*National Concord*, January 2, 1984, p. 1, my emphasis).

It would seem that the last statement is referring to the new military Head of State, General Buhari as Nigeria's own 'man of peace and stability' who should also be declared 'man of the year' along with Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov. With this declaration a few hours in power, and juxtaposing Buhari to the world's two most notable leaders, *National Concord* appeared to be powerfully convincing Nigerians that the replacement of the democratic regime with military rule was epochal, in fact democratic, and to be welcomed.

However, this antagonistic and negative perception of the deposed regime and the positivity attributed to the untested military regime both in the editorial and in all the front page headlines fly in the face of historical facts. Retrospectively at least, it seems scandalous reporting. How could a coup d'état be described by journalists as the 'verdict of the people'? How could a democratically elected regime validated by the Supreme Court be described in such vilified and visceral terms? Such a regime was a world apart from one that came to power through the force of arms.

More disturbing in relation to *National Concord's* position, from the historical standpoint, is the fact that the press partisanship was linked to the military takeover of the post-independence democratic regime (1960-1966) but, also precipitated a civil war (1967-1970) that claimed over one million deaths of Nigerians of Igbo extraction and engendered the polarisation of the nation along ethnic lines (see Chapter Two above). In the aftermath of this war Nigerians agitated against the military regimes for a return to civil rule, leading eventually in 1979, to the hand-over to a democratic government. Thus, in spite of the comparative recency of hostility towards military regimes, the paper set for itself the role of an advocate with the aim of achieving stability for the regime.

Advancing this advocacy, beneath the editorial on page two, is a cartoon showing party goers apparently celebrating the take-over, with a sign reading 'L'AGBO PARTY' (meaning 'at a party'). Foregrounded amidst the merrymaking is a man with a protruding pot belly, referred to in the caption: 'See what free food has done to Salisu — He never had his belly so full since austerity!'



Figure 1: Cartoon from *National Concord* January 2, 1984, page 2

In line with the editorial which describes the coup as the ‘people’s’ verdict’, the cartoon was an effective way for *National Concord* to ignite celebrations among the people. It reminded the populace about the shortage of food under the previous regime: the ‘pot-bellied’ Salisu a metaphor for food security in the new regime. Even though, the regime had only existed for forty-eight hours, that Salisu became so well-fed and a symbol of food security was either hyperbole or a symbolic promise for the future. As Taiwo Sanni et al posits that political cartoons can serve as a tool for manipulating public opinion (Sanni et al 2012, p. 1); in this case, *National Concord* is attempting to seduce Nigerians into accepting the new order as a better one.



In effect, the paper sets itself up as a willing agent of stability for the new government, and thus formed a pillar upon which the new regime could rely. *National Concord* had already mastered the art of shifting allegiance whenever it was deemed appropriate (Uche 1989). Its publisher – MKO Abiola – left the ruling NPN before the 1983 general elections to return to the opposition camp, but with the failure of the UPN to win the election, it was no surprise that the paper then worked to enthrone military rule, rather than be ruled by those its publisher had described as mediocres (Uche 1989). Its incisive first editorial on the first page backed by pro-military headlines all over the front page and a powerfully arresting cartoon – all designed to reinforce a positive image of the new military in which its readers could share. The paper provided red-carpet ascension into power for Buhari.

In *The Guardian*, the situation was not much different. The paper reflected its preference for the new regime by flooding its first edition of January 1, 1984, with news stories highly critical of the ousted democratic regime, but very supportive of the new one. Its reporters, who travelled round town on the coup day, wrote about the ‘excitements’ among the populace. A pertinent analysis of events written by reporter Bayo Onanuga was titled: ‘The futility of Nigeria’s elections’. While declaring the outcome of the 1983 elections as ‘a tragic defeat of the noble ideals of a people’s government’, the reporter, who later became one of the ‘radical’ editors (Olukotun 2002) opposing the military, pungently prophesied a long military reign. He wrote; ‘the traumatic experience of the elections made some Nigerians conclude that 1983 might be the end of representative democracy — at least for a while’ (*The Guardian*, January 1, 1984 p. 3). True to this prediction by Onanuga of a long reign, the press then went on to ‘entrust better governance’ to the military as the only ‘patriotic institution’ capable of restoring people’s confidence in governance (Interview with Felix Abugu, editor of *The Guardian on Saturday*, January, 16, 2013) – for the next sixteen years. This paper is often referred to as independent and identifies itself as the ‘flagship of the Nigerian press’ (Ogbondah 1994, Olukotun 2002)

The ‘entrust’ Abugu refers to was in response to a question on why the press had historically been supportive of the military in spite of the latter seen as an aberration from any democratic trajectory. He explained that since the political class failed to show responsibility, the military was then ‘entrusted’ with the responsibility of ‘flushing’ out ‘corrupt politicians’ and organising another transition to bring in fresh officials. This ‘entrust’ was visible in *The Guardian* in the first week after the coup. The paper ran editorials on a daily basis that were

highly suggestive of an alliance with the military. It adopted an advisory role spelling out policy directions and the type of personalities to be appointed into government. A particular editorial titled 'Must not be a mere change of guard' ran to four parts between Monday, January 2 and Friday, 6 1984. While commenting on the malaise of armed robbery (prevalent in the previous regime) in the third part, the paper asked the regime to start thinking of a more radical (indeed startling) means of dealing with this problem:

Those who advocate the return of public executions as deterrent may just have a point, provided that these executions are not seen as ends in themselves, but rather as part of a larger socio-economic programme to stem the problem (*The Guardian*, Thursday, January 5 1984, p. 6).

Could this be part of why *The Guardian* preferred the military – the inability of the last regime to execute armed robbers? Ordinarily, a military regime by its orientation would tend to be punitive in dealing with social problems. But whilst the prevalence of armed robbery was undeniable under the past regime, it was perplexing that *The Guardian* 'indisputably the best newspaper ever produced in Nigeria' (Omu 2000, p. 60) defended and legitimated 'public executions' of the perpetrators; especially since in the past such a punishment had been opposed by public opinion. Buhari actually implemented this policy with attendant condemnation from the civil populace. I personally recall going to a particular field (Polo Ground, Ibadan) where robbers were executed by soldiers. Spectators usually screamed at the sounds of gun shots. Interestingly, however, as the press and the regime later parted ways, the former then latched on to the unpopularity of this policy (among others) to rally the public against the latter!

But to return to the first days of the regime, the paper actively charged Buhari to get going:

General Buhari must get cracking. The ability to make an impact will depend on the discipline which he and his team are able to instil in our nation's consciousness. And he must begin now. The people will make the sacrifice needed to begin to see us through (*The Guardian*, Thursday January 5, 1984 p. 6).

Like the *National Concord*'s promise of a 'large reservoir of public goodwill' (p. 77 above), this editorial promised the regime that the people would make the necessary 'sacrifice'. It was a classic example of how the press, having installed Buhari, then strove to set the agenda for the regime. To *The Guardian*, it appeared that five days in power, Buhari was slow and

indecisive in his dealings with the public. 'Get cracking' is, therefore asking Buhari to show his military strength. Indeed, the fact that most suggestions to be firm and decisive in tackling the social malaise were coming from the press, arguably served as an impetus for Buhari to employ military codes of practice in dealing with the nation's problems. Ironically this included tackling corruption in the press. At this stage, however, *The Guardian* clearly did not envisage that such treatment would be applied across the board and without any preferential treatment for journalists and the press. It is pertinent to note here that the issue of a partisan press as a factor in the rationale for Buhari's 'rigid' rule and draconian measures has been largely ignored by scholars who too simply regarded Buhari as 'dreadful' (Ogbondah & Onyedike 1991).

Again, in what seemed like a celebration of the 'gun' over the 'ballot box', a cartoon humiliating and mocking ousted President Sheu Shagari and the members of the disbanded national parliament appeared on *The Guardian* of January 9, 1984. It showed a soldier with a barrel frog-matching a hand-cuffed Shagari out of the State House, parliamentarians out of the National Assembly and some senior civil servants out of the ministries. A member of the public stood at a distance, mocking the officials: 'At last'; 'That's it' and 'verily, no condition is permanent'.

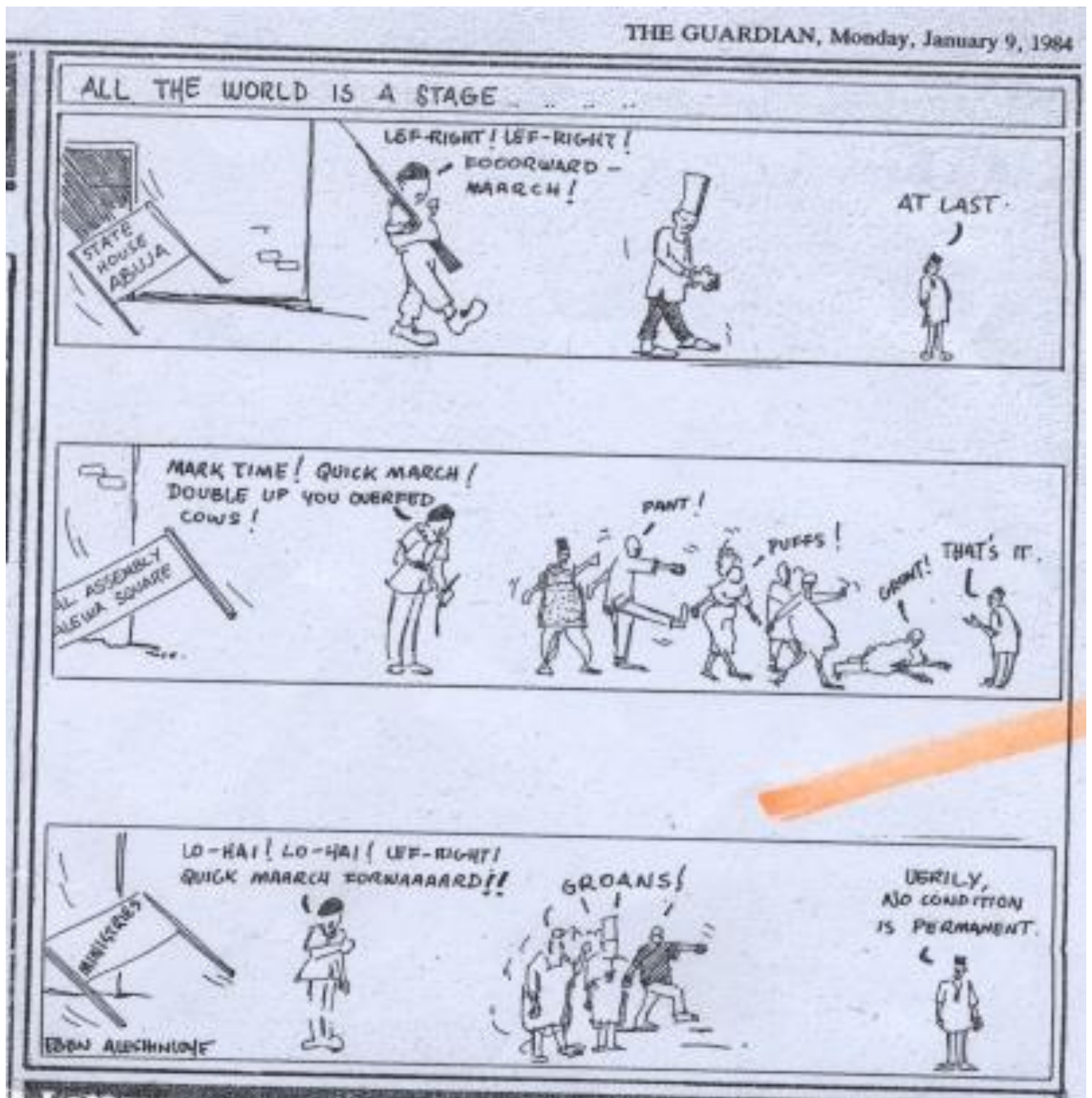


Figure 2: *The Guardian*, January 9, 1984, p. 6

In portraying the officials of the sacked regime as criminals, the cartoon legitimates the military action taken by the new regime, and arguably makes whatever happens to them acceptable to readers. (This communication parallels that in *National Concord*'s editorial of January 2 in which the officials were described in unflattering phrases. Further it echoes the front page story which called on the military to 'disgorge' the loot from the officials). By representing ex-president Shagari in handcuffs *The Guardian* cartoon also communicates directly to Buhari: the officials were guilty, they should be severely punished thus foreclosing any fair trial for

them. Again, Buhari latched on to these suggestions by the press, sentencing some politicians to as high as 200 years in prison after trials at special courts. This attempt by *The Guardian* and other media on the question of the Shagari regime without sound evidence or with allegations that were sometimes 'inane' (Jibo 2003, p. 222), is a common semiotic device adopted by cartoonists to communicate a viewpoint. Ray Morris remarks that 'caricaturists sometimes claim to substitute inner for outer appearance, revealing by exaggeration and distortion the "true" character of the person portrayed. In doing so, they implicitly claim access to inside knowledge and a position that the person skimming their cartoons in the daily paper lacks' (Morris 1993, p. 196). Thus, in this cartoon, but also in *The Guardian* more generally, democracy under Shagari was 'fraudulent' needing to be done away with, along with its characters. Given the opposition of *The Guardian* and other 'largely southern based' newspapers to the 1983 re-election of Shagari (having preferred Awolowo to win, see Chapter Two), it was a 'no win situation for Shagari' (Interview with Duro Onabule, October 7, 2011).

Historically, it has been a common feature for political cartoons to attack political leaders. In a pertinent feature story from a Nigerian daily, *National Mirror*, its head of Judiciary desk, Francis Famoroti, traces the use of cartoons as a tool of political struggles. He refers to a 1961 libel case involving the *West African Pilot* owned by president Nnamdi Azikiwe and three opposition leaders, Obafemi Awolowo, Ladoke Akintola and Rotimi Williams [cited as Hon Rotimi Williams & others v. *West African Pilot*, 1961] (1961) 1 All NLR 886). Ten cartoons ran between February 2 and April 7, 1959, depicting the leaders as 'unworthy characters'. Awarding £3,500.00 damages to each complainant, Justice Olujide Somolu of the High Court of Western Region declared:

It is culpable enough if these charges are levelled against any citizens, but it becomes very much reprehensible when they are laid at the door of highly placed public men without just cause and against men in the foremost places of their professions as is agreed even by the defence (*National Mirror*, Monday 24 March, 2014, p. 1).

Whilst *The Guardian* in 1984 was trailing a similar political path to discredit Shagari's democratic regime and portray the military as the messiah the country needed, its actions were without legal redress – at least at the time. This political affinity or alliance between press and certain governments has troubled the Nigerian press since the colonial days and continues to haunt what ought to be its umpire role in the nation's affairs. Golding and Elliot both note that 'the separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete and the dual allegiances of

journalists to professional and political goals have created conflicts whose resolution in daily practice underpins much of contemporary Nigerian journalism' (Golding and Elliot, 1979, p.31).

To continue with the January 1984 coverage, in a further series of editorials, cartoons and news both papers were unrelenting in their efforts to encourage the regime to take more drastic measures, notwithstanding the fact that the recommended measures could result in the use of extra-legal means and breach human rights of the citizens. For example, with the mass arrests that followed the coup, some senior figures in the sacked regime escaped abroad. The papers' line was to induce the new government to go after them. *National Concord's* half page editorial of January 14, 1984, on page two titled: 'Concern over escapees', lamented that their 'continued freedom hampers the task of retrieving the stolen funds' and asked the military to 'employ whatever means are necessary, and pay whatever price is possible, towards bringing the fugitives to book'. Another editorial on January 18, 1984, page two titled: 'The fugitives' advised the government to initiate legal and diplomatic processes with the foreign countries hosting them, with a view to extraditing them home for trial. Sensing that many countries might not be willing to hand over the officials to the Nigerian government, due to concerns over human rights, the editorial chillingly recommended that:

If all such measures prove ineffective towards achieving the desired goal, the government should feel no compunction in embarking on extra-legal and extra-diplomatic approaches towards ensuring that justice is done, and seen to have been done (*National Concord* January 18, 1984, p. 2).

These 'extreme' recommendations by the press symbolically highlight their rejection of the previous democratic regime and their alliance with the military.

Strikingly, and in what strongly suggested collaboration among the newspapers in their defence of the Buhari regime, both *The Guardian's* and *National Concord's* editorials attacking foreign media appeared on the same day, January, 17, 1984. Given the position of Nigeria as the most populous black nation in the world as well as being a 'strategic partner' of the western powers in terms of oil supplies to the global markets, as well as peace-keeper in Africa (Clifford 1984, Baregu and Landsberg 2003), it is not surprising that the coup and its aftermath attracted the attention of the international community, drawing stringent criticism from foreign media.

However, in turn, as they consolidated their advocacy role for the government, *The Guardian* and the *National Concord* criticised the foreign media positing their judgments on the coup as unnecessary interference. In a hard-hitting editorial, which took up a half page, *National Concord* picked holes in the Western media's negative reactions to the coup. Specifically, it accused *The Times*, London, of 'abysmal ignorance' about the terrible situation of Nigerians under the deposed regime. The *Time's* magazine story, which argued in support of democratic governance in Nigeria, was described by *National Concord* as an attempt to defend the sacked regime – a 'western ally'. The editorial declared:

Beyond their betrayal of crass ignorance and their hypocritical lamentations over a democratic paradise lost, the reactions of the Western media properly perceived actually mirrored the grief of their home countries over the demise of a government in which they saw a faithful ally (*National Concord* January 17, 1984 p. 2).

On its part, *The Guardian* railed against what it called 'alarmist editorials' of some western media, querying what the West meant by 'failure in Nigeria' and accused the Western press of ignoring the 'farcical exercise' that the 1983 elections typified. The paper also suggested that the West was supporting a 'democracy' in which a 'chunk of the nation's wealth looted by the former officials has been transferred to the safe havens of Western Europe and North America'. The editorial concluded bitterly:

We are left at the end with a patronising and mischievous western interpretation of 'democracy' as it has affected the Nigerian situation: a footloose license by a national ruling class to steal and export a country's wealth in active co-operation with ever-prosperous western companies (*The Guardian*, January 17, 1984, p. 6).

While the above editorials might have been aimed at preventing foreign interference in Buhari's regime, the United Kingdom's perceived interest in Nigeria's democracy and criticism of military rule, is pertinent given that the majority of the officials of the former regime escaped to London and attacks on the Buhari regime were mobilised from there. Among the escaped top officials in London were the Transport Minister, Umaru Dikko, the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Richard Akinjide, the ruling party's national chairman, Adisa Akinloye and several governors. The ease with which they all escaped to London despite a heavy security cordon at the Nigerian borders, suggested that British diplomatic cover was thrown around the escaped officials. Therefore it may well be that in advancing the idea of

unofficial state ally status, *The Guardian* and *National Concord* were gatekeeping for Buhari against external interference. But the key issue here for my argument, hinges on the propriety of the press in calling on a military regime to employ ‘extra-legal and extra-diplomatic’ means in dealing with foreign countries — a clear case of aggression outlawed by international conventions. Indeed, the regime later abided by the press suggestion by organising the kidnapping of one of the escapee ministers, Umaru Dikko on the street of London in a Nigerian-Israeli operation, crated him and attempted to smuggle him out of the country, but for the eagle eye British security personnel who foiled the plot at the Stansted Airport. This damaged diplomatic relations between the two countries for years.

In continuation of its self-imposed task to further legitimise military rule there were more provocative editorials particularly in *National Concord*. The editorial of January 21, 1984, which took up half the page, discussed the fundamental human rights of citizens under the military: ‘The military and fundamental rights’, the paper noted that while the military style of governance by way of decrees and edicts, with all the trappings of ‘dictatorial proclamations’, may appear detrimental to civil liberties, they may however be ‘justified if necessary’. Referring to the officials of the former regime, *National Concord* insisted that, having mismanaged the country, the officials had ‘forfeited their rights’ for any form of constitutional protection. Setting the stage for government to introduce whatever decree it deemed appropriate to run its administration, the paper pronounced:

We have no doubt whatsoever that sooner or later, issues will arise which would force the administration to resort to decrees. This is perfectly in order and it would never lack the support of Nigerians. No one would begrudge the administration such powers (*National Concord*, January 21, 1984, p. 2).

In its clever appraisal of the law courts under the previous democratic regime, the editorial which asks the military to give the judiciary a chance inspite its ‘imperfections’, also invoked the powers of the government to bypass the courts if necessary:

The judiciary, in spite of its imperfections and proven mistakes in the last government, must be given the benefit of the doubt. This of course, does not divest the government of powers to make special laws, if it deems fit to contend with some special offences (*National Concord* January 21, 1984 p. 2).



As the analysis below goes on to reveal, it would appear as if *National Concord* was in negotiation with the military on the use of decrees and special courts to push its policies forward. Having discredited the political class, the paper went further to undermine the judiciary which might properly interpret human rights laws if political detainees were found to be denied proper rights. Again, and perhaps naively, the paper did not realise that the military would not only enact decrees and establish special courts, but also apply them to all Nigerians, including journalists. It was thus, an irony that the press also became one of the victims.

In another feature, the paper disagreed with the agitation by civil society around when the regime intended to hand-over power to a democratically elected government. Its half page editorial of January 22, 1984: 'Future of Politics in Nigeria' affirmed the conventional wisdom that military governments are an 'aberration', but went ahead to make a special case for the Nigerian situation. It argued that the sort of 'misrule' experienced under the previous democratic regime made it the aberration not the current military regime, suggesting that military intervention might actually be 'proof of our political maturity and sophistication'. It concluded: 'to wish a hasty return to politics against the background of the distraught and disheveled state of the economy is to live under a fatalistic delirium' (*National Concord* January 22, 1984 p. 2).

While it is disturbing to make such unconventional and anti-democratic suggestions – denying in effect the right of the people by foreclosing a return to democratic rule – these views are consonant with Bayo Onanuga's reasoning that the December 31, 1983 coup might be the end of 'representative democracy' (*The Guardian*, January 1, 1984 p. 3). The adoption of this position – 'no to democracy' – by the press was perhaps inadvertently underplayed by scholars who simply listed as one of Buhari's sins, *his lack of clarity* on when the nation would be returned to democratic rule (Agbaje 1992).

From the foregoing discussions, it is evident that the first month of General Buhari in power saw a beehive of media activities aimed at rallying the populace behind the regime so that it could consolidate its grip on power. From the two hundred and four items sampled, the preponderance of evidence suggests that there was an overwhelming support for the Buhari regime by these two titles. But notwithstanding the solid foundation the press laid for Buhari, subsequent events proved that it would not be treated as a 'sacred cow', as it had confidently, albeit naively, assumed.

### Decree 4: The Gathering Storm

While Decree 4 was actually enacted on March 29, 1984, the momentum for its birth started a month earlier. In '60 minutes with Buhari', an interview conducted by three *National Concord* editors, Ray Ekpu, Dele Giwa and Yakubu Mohammed, part of which was published in the February 16, 1984 edition, Buhari, in unmistakable terms, spoke of his regime's intentions to curb the media excesses which he insisted threatened the nation's socio-political and economic progress. But I should add that even before the interview in February, Buhari's general disposition and utterances did not suggest he was going to treat the press differently from the rest of the nation. It could well be that the press saw this but decided to carry on in the hope of winning Buhari's heart.

The interview which took up almost the entire front page, and running into page eight was presented under a large banner 'PRESS FREEDOM? BUHARI: NO!' It quoted Buhari as saying: 'I am going to tamper with that [press freedom]. It's because I know Nigerians very well'. In the interview, Buhari dwelt extensively on a previous allegation against him while in charge of petroleum ministry in the Obasanjo regime - the 1979 'N2.8 billion missing money hoax'. He said:

If there was no judicial inquiry in 1979 when I was in the US War College, I would have been brought up and lynched because somebody just got up one day and said this money was missing. It would appear Nigerian intellectuals and those who know economics would never work out whether it is possible for that amount to be missing (*National Concord* February 16, 1984, p. 1).

From the above declarations, it was evident that Buhari was not in any mood to court the press, even though its coverage of him by *The Guardian* and *National Concord* in particular, the press more generally, had been generous. However, honest as Buhari may have sounded – not hiding his intentions – his hard-line posture, particularly his open declaration to 'tamper with press freedom', appeared hasty and undiplomatic to the press.

Viewed in the context of establishing legitimacy for his regime, his major preoccupation was how to win over the populace and stabilise to gain a hegemonic hold on power. Given the press's influential role in shaping the direction in which a society goes (Schramm 1964, p. 20, Bryant and Zillmann 2002, p. 121), it is surprising that Buhari did not see the press as the vehicle through which to articulate the regime's objectives. More surprisingly, as *The*

*Guardian* and *National Concord*'s news practices in the first month indicated, the press so readily offered the regime the platform it needed to establish stability, even as Buhari was planning to attack it.

Agbaje observes that legitimacy as a panacea to stability has to be worked out among the competing interests, and a compromise reached. He notes that:

Legitimacy is basically a measure of the extent of consent and acquiescence in governance and is, therefore, a first and basic step in the construction or contestation of hegemony: the extent to which the use of power is successfully rooted in consent or challenged by dissent is indicative of the first step toward the social construction of or challenge to popular consensus and, therefore, hegemony (Agbaje 1992, p. 14).

Given this line of thought by Agbaje, did General Buhari anticipate that once he declared open war on the press any incipient hegemony would be dissipated resulting in an immediate legitimacy crisis for his regime? Did his commitment on gaining leadership, to uphold national interest, rising above personal aggrandizement and political or ethnic group allegiance (Idiagbon 1984, Interview with Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2011), perhaps override this concern?<sup>11</sup> Could it be the case that the introduction of the Decree 'was intended to stave off adverse criticism of the government' (Ogbondah & Onyedike' 1991, p. 62) and thus in some way to protect hegemony?

Known as Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No 4, 1984<sup>12</sup>, and drafted on March 29, 1984, the Decree was regarded by many scholars, media practitioners and commentators as the most draconian of all media laws in Nigeria since independence in 1960 (Ogbondah and Onyedike 1991, Uko 2004). The Decree was also regarded as 'unique' in the sense that it provided the 'shortest route to discipline erring and indolent journalists' as well as serving as a form of 'spiritual purification' for the 'extinguished fire of purposeful journalism' (Onyebadi, *National Concord* July, 28 1984, p. 3).

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<sup>11</sup> Others disagree, however that this ever happened. Agbaje for instance argues that part of Buhari's sins was the lopsidedness in the appointments of officials which largely favoured his core Muslim North to the detriment of the Christian South (Agbaje 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Section 1, sub-section 1 in particular states that, any person who publishes in any form, whether written or otherwise, any message, rumour, report or statement, which is false in any material particular or which brings or is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government or the Government of a state or a public officer to ridicule or disrepute, shall be guilty of an offence under this Decree". See *Supplement to Official Gazette Extraordinary NO 18, Vol. 71, 4th April, 1984, Part A*).

The law was introduced to punish authors and journalists who made false statements and wrote reports exposing the Buhari administration or its officials to ridicule or contempt. Among other provisions, the Decree provided a two year jail term for offenders without the option of a fine, and in the case of a media corporation, the Decree provided for a fine of not less than N10,000.00. The law further empowered the Head of the Federal Military Government, when satisfied that a paper's continued circulation was detrimental to the State, to 'prohibit the circulation of that newspaper for a period of twelve months'. And in order to facilitate the trial of would-be offenders (in line with earlier suggestions by *National Concord* and *The Guardian*), a provision was made under the Law for the establishment of a 'Tribunal' whose members were to comprise of a 'serving or retired High Court Judge as its chairman and three members of the Armed Forces'. The most controversial aspect of the law was that the judgment of the Tribunal was not subject to any further appeal (Supplement to Official Gazette Extraordinary NO 18, Vol. 71, 4th April, 1984, Part A; Uche 1989; Ogbondah and Onyedike 1991).

At the same time, however, I argue, partly through analysis of news coverage, that Buhari's seeming 'nationalism' turned out to be more of a political suicide. He seemed to fail to consider the impact of his actions on the media. Indeed, this battle for Nigeria became the survival of the fittest: Buhari or the press.

### **End of the Honeymoon**

From the moment General Buhari issued his threats to curb the press's 'excesses', *The Guardian* and *National Concord* signalled a gradual shift from their initial pro-military stance to a more critical one. Once the decree was eventually passed and journalists were being arrested, the tone of coverage wholly changed gear. Further, subsequent editorials and news reports were antagonistic of the regime and this heightened the suspicion and tensions between the regime and the press. This shift typifies the culture of the press when its interest is at stake. If Buhari had limited his war against corruption and indiscipline to other Nigerians, the press would have cooperated. Mvendaga Jibo characterises this prevailing culture: 'in Nigeria, the media only complain when its corporate interests are at stake, or when an individual journalist is jailed and manhandled by the government' (Jibo 2003, p. 224).

*The Guardian* was first to react to General Buhari's 'surprising' declarations, but still in a more conciliatory tone. In its editorial of February 16, 1984 titled: 'Government and the press', the paper picked up on Buhari's reaction to the N2.8 billion alleged to have gone missing while he was in charge of the Petroleum ministry, wondering why he was still referring to it when a Government enquiry had 'repaired' the damage done to him. Pleading with Buhari to allow the press do its job, *The Guardian* claimed that 'what the Nigerian public needs now is greater openness in government' and not a 'further constriction of the people's right to know what is going on in the affairs of their nation'. Courting Buhari further, and to show it was ready to be responsible if spared the impending purge, the paper admitted some press irresponsibility:

This is not to say that the press has always been informed by the purest of motives nor governed by the highest of standards in purveying information. The press is, after all, a human institution and is bound to commit errors of judgment and inaccuracy in its reporting and commentary on events (*The Guardian*, February 16, 1984, p. 6).

Explicit as this editorial was in terms of admitting wrong doings (though in the abstract rather than citing specific instances), it raises, however, another issue in claiming that the press as 'a human institution' was bound to 'commit errors'. While urging Buhari to overlook its wrong doings, the press did not apply the same logic to Shagari, whose government could also be seen to have committed 'errors of judgement'. Rather than accepting the fallibility of human institutions and that democratic checks and balances would have 'corrected' Shagari's regime, the press leapt into bed with a military regime (thus, some might argue, losing its right to 'press freedom'). The admission of what could be termed a 'recklessness' in the editorial – 'the press is not always informed by the purest of motives nor governed by the highest of standards in purveying information' – appears to justify Buhari's attempt to address the issue. This is consonant with Oladipo Diya's remarks that Buhari wanted the press to be 'straightforward, fearless and unambiguous' (Diya 2011), a position variously echoed by Buhari's deputy, General Idiagbon: the regime was not against free speech but wanted the press to be purged of its sensationalism and outright fabrications (Idiagbon 1984). Many scholarly accounts have suggested that Buhari was 'concerned about the effects unrestricted press criticisms' posed to his regime (Ogbonnah & Onyedike 1991, p. 69) and for this reason 'curbed' the press. But in not emphasizing this possibility and admitting the press's own guilt this editorial perhaps tempers and complicates such a view.

*National Concord*'s editorial was more defiant in tone than *The Guardian*'s. Presented as a front page comment to underscore its importance, the editorial was headlined: 'A Campaign of Intimidation' (The style of the front page presentation was similar to the 'Verdict 83' editorial which greeted the regime on January 2, 1984). The paper lamented Buhari's threats to 'tamper with press freedom', and highlighted that the press was 'justifiably worried about the unearned anger that it had attracted from the authorities', warning that it would be 'overkill' to enact fresh laws. Reeling out the names of editors already in detention, the editorial asked rhetorically: 'Is it a crime to be a journalist? Is it a crime to be an editor?'

With reference to the journalistic *sine qua non* of the press as the 'fourth estate', the editorial insisted that it was a matter of right rather than of privilege for Nigerians to know how their affairs were being run. Declaring the press as a substitute for parliament in certain contexts, it claimed:

In a situation where the parliaments are dead, all forums are absent, the press is about the only forum on which they can hang their hopes, and any attempt to hamper the performance of that public function cannot be in the interest of the people, nor even of the government (*National Concord* March 2, 1984, p. 2).

However, a concerned reader of this editorial might put the press on the spot. Between January 2, 1984 when the paper dismissed the 1983 general election and declared Buhari's coup as the people's verdict and this editorial in March 2, 1984, it appears that the paper suffered a profound loss of memory or tried to shift the blame solely on Buhari. Having collaborated with the military to truncate a representative government, it is at best two-faced, a breathtaking hypocrisy that the paper then turns round to write about 'death of parliament and absence of forums'.

Between the time Buhari threatened to 'tamper with the press' and the time the decree was eventually enacted, the two editorials presented above demonstrate a marked shift from the uncritical and friendly disposition towards the regime in its early days to an arguably healthy adversary of the regime. In order to show their defiance of the impending crackdown, news reports by *The Guardian* and *National Concord* tended to whip-up sentiments *against* the government. Once journalists were arrested and detained, grave concerns were expressed by notable personalities and veteran journalists with such events regarded as a bad omen for the future of the country. However, the concern expressed was not entirely based on critical

analysis or evidence related to the situation, but simply to offer support for the abstract notion of 'press freedom'.

Buhari's attempt at reforming the press was not just to shield himself from scrutiny since he not only targeted private media practitioners but also the state-owned media both at the federal and state levels. *National Concord* carried a front page story under a bold headline: 'AXE FALLS ON 296 NEWSMEN', with a follow-up rider '176 others affected in Federal parastatals'. It reported that 267 staff were sacked, dismissed or retired from the *Nigerian Television Authority* (NTA), *Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria* (FRCN), *New Nigerian Newspapers* (NNN) and the *News Agency of Nigeria* (NAN), all state owned media outlets (*National Concord* May 19, 1984, p. 1).

The implication of the above is that if Buhari was out to gag the press against criticisms of his regime, as alleged by critics of Decree 4, he probably needed the publicly-funded media organisations. Rather than sack journalists, one would have expected him to brief them through these organs of the State. That he moved against journalists in the State-run media showed perhaps that he was putting national interest before any other consideration. It could thus be argued that this commitment challenges claims of Buhari's 'vengeance' against the press (Uko 2004).

A cartoon in *The Guardian* plays to the theme of Buhari against the press. Both Buhari and a journalist (the press) are seen exchanging views on the propriety or otherwise of the reform. While the journalist (self-indicts himself) claiming he 'fought' the Shagari regime to 'pave the way' for Buhari, an unimpressed Buhari insists that notwithstanding, he will go ahead with the reform (Decree 4) in order to prevent unrest that press partisanship can engineer (apparently referring to the killings and arson that trailed the 1983 elections) .

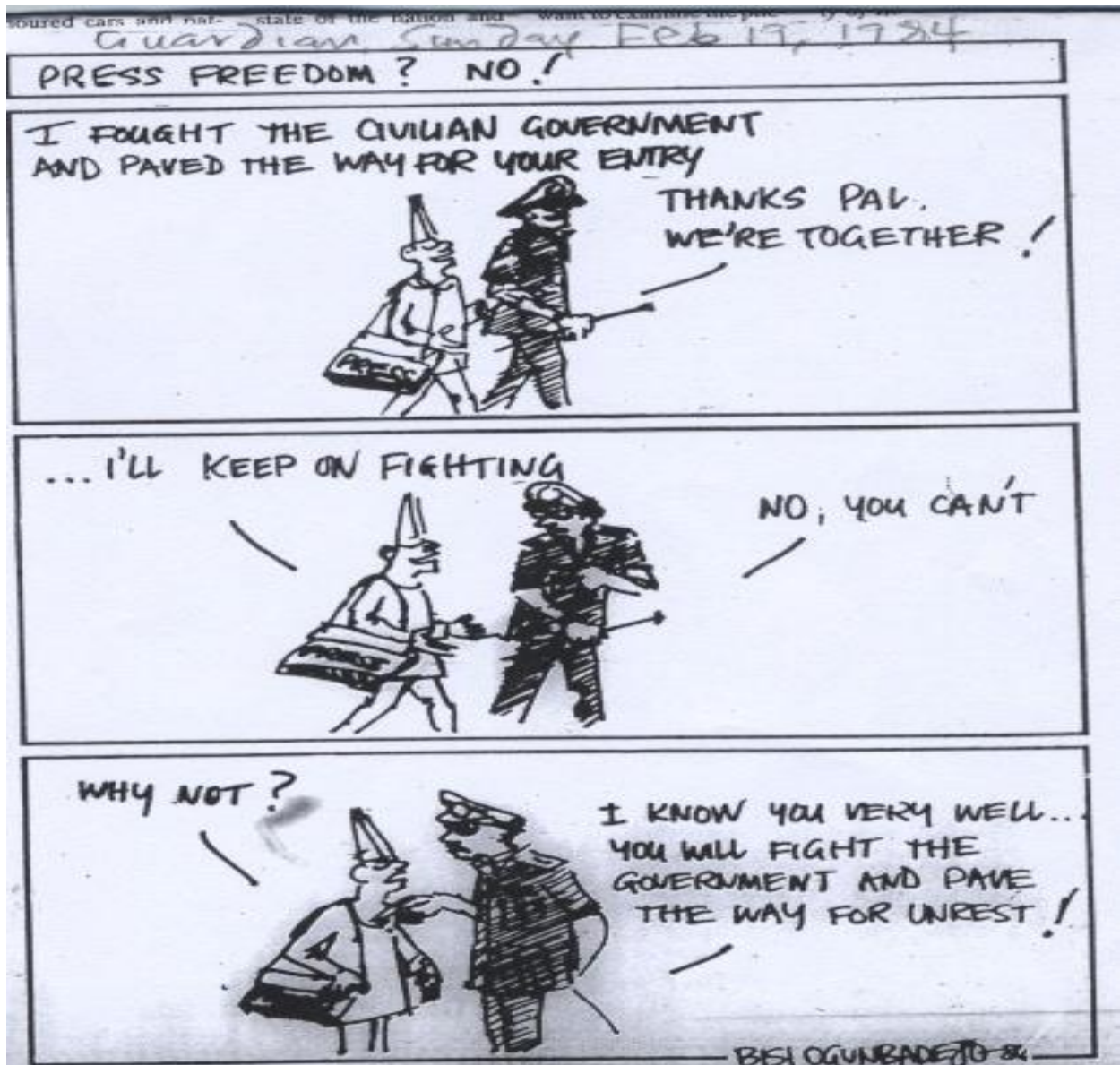


Figure 3: *The Guardian* February 19, 1984, p. 6

At one level, this cartoon reinforces *National Concord*'s editorial invoking the press as an 'alternative parliament' (see p. 93 above). At another, reflecting on the past, it offers evidence that the press worked against the democratic aspirations of the Nigerian people for its own interest. 'I Fought Shagari regime' i.e. the press wrecked the nation's democracy; to 'pave the way for Buhari'.

From March 1984, journalists were being arrested and detained for sundry offences, while operations of certain newspaper titles were suspended. An editorial in the *National Concord* of March 18, 1984: 'A sign of the times?' decried the suspension of the *Nigerian Statesman*, by the Imo State military government, on the grounds that the editorial statements of the



newspaper were ‘not in tune with the objectives of the military administration’. The editorial further claimed that although the paper was reopened eight days later, its managing director, the editor, features editor and Sunday editor were dismissed. In a tone that contradicted its earlier stance – justifying the regime’s use of military ‘fiat’ if it ‘deemed fit’, in order to get things done the editorial lamented:

We are not entirely appreciative of the fact that the military, given as they are to the culture of the barracks, do not particularly care for criticisms. But having made the decision to come out of the barracks, they must come to terms, and quickly too, with the fact that out here, it is a different ballgame altogether (*National Concord*, March 18, 1984, p. 2).

Another editorial of April 20, 1984: ‘Set the Journalists free’, listed journalists from a number of newspapers, such as *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Premier*, who were in detention and called for their immediate and unconditional release. This time, the paper appeared to capitulate insisting that the press was ready to cooperate with the government. It noted:

It is not as if we are craving any special indulgence for the press. Rather, we note this unhealthy development because we are convinced that the government needs the active co-operation of the press to achieve its just ends — not the type of acquiescence you obtain by the big stick (*National Concord* April 20, 1984 p. 2).

As the foregoing reveals, the press could be seen manoeuvring to repair its damaged reputation and desperate to get a reprieve from the military. Having spelt out the punitive measures the military could employ in dealing with the exigencies of the time, it appeared that the press realised it had boxed itself into a corner. *The Guardian* captured something of this in a self-appraising editorial, ‘Government and the press’, where it bemoaned the fate of the press while admitting recent errors of judgment:

Such errors are the sometimes flight of fancy reporting of events after the heady days of the coup. True, some media organisations over-reached themselves and allowed popular enthusiasms to affect the sobriety which should attend their news judgments (*The Guardian*, Tuesday February 21, 1984 p. 6).

Whilst the two editorials above were bolder attempts at halting the reforms, Buhari’s agenda to engender a culture of press responsibility stayed on course. But from the moment of his

proclamation that he would tamper with 'press freedom', the pattern of coverage of the regime's activities did change gear in the press. According to Oladipo Diya, this change in relationship may be owing to the fact that 'their expectations were not met by the government and then the dinner was over' (October 10, 2011). Press expectation that they would receive preferential treatment and somehow be placed above society, turned out to be a serious miscalculation.

### **The Test Case: Buhari v press**

When Buhari said he was going to tamper with the press, he did not mean he will just tamper unjustifiably, maybe the wrong ones. Like this issue about the list of the ambassadors which *The Guardian* published, but which the government had not released. I felt the whole situation could have been averted if the efforts were made to confirm from the government if the list was correct or publishable. If they say it's correct/publishable, go ahead. If they say it's not, you are not going to lose anything by deferring to the government. The question of press freedom is so elastic that you can manoeuvre comfortably without getting into trouble. If the list was not published on that day, *The Guardian* would still sell (Duro Onabule, former editor of *National Concord*, October 7, 2011).

In spite of intense media criticisms of Decree 4, the Government seemed determined to purge the media of its 'recklessness'. While many journalists were being arrested and detained, the arrest of two staff of *The Guardian* and their eventual arraignment became the first test case under Decree 4. This event was the rallying point for the showdown between the press and the regime. *The Guardian* journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor were arrested for their story reporting that the military government planned to shut down some 'Nigerian missions' and for being responsible for publishing the yet to be approved shortlist of foreign envoys (Ekpu 1984, p. 3). Tunde Thompson, *The Guardian*'s senior diplomatic correspondent, was arrested on April 11, 1984, Nduka Irabor, the Assistant News Editor, six days later. *The Guardian*'s story on its front page, April 18, 1984: 'NSO still keeps Thompson' and accompanied with a passport size photograph of Thompson, offered a rationale for his detention and was written to invoke readers' passion. The paper informed its readers that it believed the 'security agents wanted Thompson to divulge the source' of the diplomatic story,

a practice the paper claimed offended the 'code of journalism'. *National Concord* also published a story of the arrest on its front page, April 25, 1984: 'Guardian staff still being held'. Stories on the detention of the two men continued to appear on a daily basis, particularly on *The Guardian's* front page.

By continuing to place the story of the two men on the front page regularly accompanied by their photographs, both papers sought not only to draw public sympathy to the plight of the men but also to register the issue at stake. It became an emotionally wrought campaign. A front page story reaches more readers from both traditional newspaper readers and headline gazers (passersby and shoppers). In the particular story above, the 'still being held', without stating 'why being held' in the headline, connotes an illegal detention of innocent journalists. Those who follow the story on a daily basis are more likely to be 'subliminally' sympathetic to the men, wondering why they are 'still' being held and not set free, and forgetting perhaps the alleged offence and reason for their detention. Whilst those coming across the story for the first time are also likely to draw the conclusion that the men were victims of military repression. The headline 'hides' the offence for which they are being held.

Blake Andrew's 2004 study of the effect between the headlines and full stories on Canadian general elections has relevance here. He established that there was a knowledge gap between those who read the full stories and those who glanced at the headlines. He concluded: 'voters who scanned headlines were supplied with a different set of heuristic cues than those paying closer attention' (Andrew 2007, p. 24). Given headlines may be part of an 'emotion-inducing strategy, with hidden ideological meanings' (Taiwo 2007, p. 218), as is the case with this news story, it is likely that readers who glanced at *The Guardian* and *National Concord* headlines would sympathise with the newsmen and see the government as punitive. Those who read the whole story and have the facts may be less sympathetic or think of the men and the government differently.

The impact of photographs may be more powerful. Working with the headlines, the photographs of the men in this story, both confirm its authenticity, but also personalise and emotionalise the story, (especially when they are family photos as they were in later stories) rendering the journalists as fellow humans in detention. Iyengar (1991), Graber (1990) establish that visual images can influence public knowledge and also enhance viewers' recall of news stories hence, their 'ability to transcend textual limitations and convey emotions in addition to factual evidence' (Rogers et al 2007, p. 120).

In the face of public outcry and intense campaigning in the newspapers, the Government arraigned both journalists in Lagos on Monday, June 4, 1984 before Justice Olalere Ayinde's 'The Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Tribunal'. The trial lasted exactly one month with both men found guilty and jailed for one year. Throughout the trial, *The Guardian* and *National Concord*'s coverage followed a similar pattern: they adopted a critical stance in relation to the military government.

The first day of the trial appeared as a major story on the front page of both *The Guardian* and *National Concord* with photographs of scenes at the trial splashed across the page, in what was a personalisation and dramatisation of key players. Boldly headlined 'THE HISTORIC TRIAL BEGINS', the lead story was accompanied by three others, complemented with four photographs. One photograph showed the Tribunal Panel members, the second and the third featured the accused journalists alighting from the Black Maria that brought them from detention and the fourth photograph showed the journalists' lawyer emerging from his Range Rover jeep.

5 JUN 1984  
LAGOS, NIGERIA

# THE GUARDIAN

CONSCIENCE, NURTURED BY TRUTH

VOL. 2 NO. 353 LAGOS, TUESDAY, JUNE 5, 1984 20 KOBO

**Plateau NBA to defend politicians**

THE chairman of the Plateau State branch of the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) Mr. Clement Ikomi, said in his yesterday that NBA members would defend politicians charged before the zone's military tribunal.

The special military tribunal, Jos Zone, began sitting yesterday.

The NBA told members in the wake of publication of Decree No. 3 which created the tribunals to shun the proceedings, complaining about the constitution of the tribunals.

They wanted the judges to chair sittings instead of the advisory role allotted to them under the decree and wanted sittings to be conducted in public.

Mr. Ikomi said the Jos branch of NBA changed its mind and would appear before the tribunal on "humanitarian grounds."

He told the chairman of the Jos Zone, Brigadier Peter Ademokhai, to make charge against

Continued on Page 16

**Decree No. 4**



• The tribunal yesterday... Mr. Justice Ayinde reads his address. Other members of the tribunal are (from left) Squadron Leader Clifford Maigari (Air Force), Major Sanni Ahmed Fari (Army) and Lt-Commander Ekeng Ewa (Navy).

Photo: Gabriel Ikhalon

**3 ex-governors open defence on Thursday**

THREE former governors will open their defence on Thursday into charges of alleged anti-state offences being heard by the special military tribunal sitting in Enugu, Anambra State.

On trial are Jim Nwobodo (Anambra), Melford Okilo (Rivers) and Sam Mbakwe (Imo).

The trial, expected to have begun yesterday, is being carried out under Decree No. 3 (as amended by other decrees), which is aimed at the recovery of public property found to be in private hands.

The news that the trial could not go on yesterday was broken by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) correspondent, whose organisation is the only medium accredited to cover the proceedings.

Mr. Okilo appeared before the tribunal last

Continued on Page 16

## THE HISTORIC TRIAL BEGINS

THE Decree No. 4 tribunal sat yesterday... and rose on knotty question posed by Chief Rotimi Williams, defending.

Chief Williams (SAN) asked the tribunal: "If a true statement puts the Federal Government into disrepute, is it an offence?"

Mr. Justice Joshua Olalere Ayinde, tribunal chairman, replied: "I am not competent to answer that".

The Guardian's Tunde Thompson, senior diplomatic correspondent, and Ndika Irabor, assistant news editor, are accused of false publication under provisions of Decree No. 4.

By Richard Akinola and Abdul Oroh

Chief Williams posed his question when he called the tribunal's attention to the provisions of Section 1 (i) of the decree, which he said was defective.

He said the provision could be divided into two meanings.

ONE: "Any person who publishes in any form, whether written or otherwise any message, rumour, report or statement, being a message, rumour, statement or report which is false in any material particular OR

TWO: "Which brings or is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government or the government of a state or public officer to ridicule or disrepute..."

Chief Williams then asked whether the "OR", which links the two, should be construed "conjunctively". He added:

"If it creates only one offence, then each of the charges is defective in that it does not state that the publication is to bring the Federal or state government into ridicule or disrepute. The word 'OR', which links the (first two sentences), should be construed conjunctively."

"The accused have not been accused for having published statement with the intention of

Continued on Page 2



• Irabor alights from the black maria.



• Thompson coming out of the black maria.

Photos: Sunmi Smart-Cole

**CLUB BEER**

The taste more people are changing to. Join the club.





• Chief Williams arrives for the proceedings.

Photo: Monday Emoni

**Charges against The Guardian**

THE summons and charges of yesterday's trial were served on The Guardian on Saturday afternoon.

Guardian Newspapers Limited is joined as the third defendant.

They appeared on "Form 2 Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree 1984 summons to the accused" and read.

In the Tribunal for the trial of offences under

## A wife's parting gift to Thompson

MR. Thompson and

Figure 4: *The Guardian*, Tuesday June 5, 1984

It is clear that the stories but particularly the photographs were strategically positioned to attract the attention of not only the newspaper buyers but also the passersby or shoppers, following the precept that photographs tell stories far better than words and are effective in attracting readers (Zillmann et al 2001, p. 302). Two photographs show the journalists alighting from the prison trucks, an image likely to evoke public emotion and draw sympathy towards the accused, as well as stir up public anger against the government. Many readers with little or no knowledge of security operations, and seeing these men alighting from the truck, will immediately regard them as victims of injustice or repression: a Black Maria to most uneducated Nigerians signifies 'dramatic event' and the 'punitive hand of the state'. Similarly, publishing the photograph of

Tribunal members, to reveal their identities – an unusual event since photographs of a court in session were usually off limits – renders them the subject of public attention, if not potential attack, if they make the ‘wrong’ decision. Presumably this was a self-conscious tactic by *The Guardian* to intensify pressure on the Government.

The story in the *National Concord* also appeared on the front page, June 5, 1984 under another bold headline ‘NEWSMEN’S TRIAL STARTS WITH HITCHES’. The story reported two key issues: that the representative of *The Guardian* (as a corporate entity), charged alongside two of its staff, was absent; and that tight security within the premises of the court led to lawyers and journalists complaining of harassment. The paper reported that the first day of the trial ended without the plea of the accused being taken and that both were denied bail. The story, which took up two-thirds of the page, continuing on page eleven, was fleshed out with a photograph of family members of Tunde Thompson, *The Guardian*’s diplomatic correspondent. By publishing the photograph of the men’s family members, the paper raises the emotional plane to a new level: these are the extended victims whose breadwinner is being taken away by the State. Those who may not have been bothered by the plight of the newsmen before now are drawn into the anti-state sentiment, making it appear that many people, beyond the newsmen are being punished by the Buhari regime. Family photographs in the daily press may serve as a post-memory of the event long after. Giving insight into family photographs in newspapers, Linda Devereux notes that the images become ‘cultural artefacts, censored and mediated by dominant social discourses. They will echo popular tropes and reflect the historical, cultural and political influences of the time’ (Devereux 2010, p. 124). Thus, to the family, a material evidence to be kept as a reference for future purposes is made.





Figure 5: *National Concord*, Tuesday June 5, 1984, p. 1

The news story set out to suggest a lack of seriousness on the part of the prosecution and, possibly, to discredit the trial from the start. It is a common judicial practice that a case listed for hearing may for one reason or another be postponed, either at the behest of the parties to the case or the court. In this case, the absence or non-appearance of the representative of *The Guardian* stalled the full start of the trial, giving rise to the headline: 'Newsmen trial starts with hitches'. The story points to the prosecution who, not fully ready for the trial, failed to bring the defendants to court. In this way the headline sows the seed of doubt about the trial.

Likewise, it is a common practice in a high profile trial to provide extra security measures to control the unusual crowd and protect the court. *National Concord's* representation of this security measure as 'harassment' of lawyers and journalists is another means of undermining the trial. As already noted, typically, headlines are not mere summaries of news stories but construct ideological and emotionally loaded meanings geared towards achieving preconceived goals. As Rotimi Taiwo argues, 'headlines are an emotion-inducing strategy in the hands of the

editor used to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers' (Taiwo 2007, p. 218). In this way *National Concord* and other papers opposed to the trial of their colleagues, cast their headlines to discredit the trial and win readers to their side.

Following a month of legal fireworks, on Wednesday July 4, 1984, The Tribunal, found the two journalists guilty of false publication against the Federal Government. They were accordingly sentenced to one year imprisonment each, while their employer, The Guardian Press Limited was fined N50, 000.00. In what appeared as the Government wanting to deal a huge blow to the press in general and *The Guardian* in particular, the judgment coincided with *The Guardian's* first anniversary. Again, *The Guardian* played an emotional hand in its editorial: 'A guarded birthday'. The paper drew on a strong metaphor whilst adopting a diplomatic mode as it touched on the trial: 'neither the government nor the press can advance very far in a situation whereby the one perceives the other as cancer'. Promising to continuing serving the nation, the editorial then appealed to the public:

As we step into our second year, we intend to let the country enjoy the best of our resources and our good intentions. Nigeria is our country, we therefore have a stake, a stake equal to any other patriotic individual's or group's, in the ordering of her affairs. May Nigeria prosper like palm trees in the rain forest (*The Guardian*, July 4, 1984 p. 6)

Perhaps more than any other, this particular editorial was pitched at a high emotional level, invoking nationhood and the country's future verdant growth which was intended to embrace paper and people alike. 'Nigeria is our country' persuaded the readers that the paper had a stake in advancing Nigeria's interest, just as Buhari claimed to be doing, and the people themselves. So, Nigeria is not only Buhari's, it is all Nigerians. In addition the editorial makes a spiritual incursion, almost praying for the nation, 'may Nigeria prosper like palm trees in the rain forest'. Atoning for its sins or acting as pastor or imam in the court of public opinion, readers might be moved to rally round the apprehensive paper and its journalists, and become 'believers' before the day of judgment. In other words, by the time the verdict was delivered later that day, the paper hoped that most readers would have been touched by its 'patriotic prayer' for the nation. This campaign and others like it, formed part of the strategy to make Buhari look like a monster: the press as victim of his highhandedness.



The following day as expected, both papers did their best to ensure the event was registered in the consciousness of the reading public with catchy and sympathetic headlines. With the exception of a small advertisement on the front page of *The Guardian*, the rest of the page was devoted to the judgment. The lead story in bold type was headlined: 'Our birthday jail shocker!' with two photographs showing the jailed journalists in a show of defiance, laughing and waving as they climbed onto the prison truck. There was also a whole photo-page engendering more affect to the story of the moment. Two of the six photographs showcased the young families of the journalists. One featured Thompson's young son, with a caption: 'Courageous Thompson junior watches his daddy going away', the other, Thompson's wife with two of her younger children and some sympathisers.



Figure 6: *The Guardian* Thursday July 5, 1984, p. 1

THE GUARDIAN, Thursday, July 5, 1984 Page 5

## The celebrated trial ends ...

### Scenes on the judgment day



... men  
... driving  
... the  
... verdict

... ABOVE: Mr. Thompson and Mr. Irabor arrive for the ...

... RIGHT: Mr. Arcyoye, former editor of the Daily Times, now a ...

... BELOW: Mr. Jola, national secretary of the Nigeria Union of Journalists ...

... (U) Nijng interviewed ... women-after the ...

... Smart-Cole  
... Emeni  
... Okafor



• ABOVE: A scene inside the courtroom of the celebrated Decree 4 trial yesterday... (from left) Mr. Peter Ajayi, acting managing director, Sketch Press Ltd; Mr. Stanley Macebuh, executive editor of The Guardian; Mr. Alex Ibru, publisher of The Guardian Newspapers Limited and Mr. Felix Adenulike, editor-in-chief of The Tribune.



• ABOVE: Courageous Thompson junior... watches his daddy going away.



• Mrs. Julie Thompson and two of her children



Mr. Segun Osoba (left) president of Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria and managing director of Daily Times and Mr. Wole Awolowo, publisher of The Tribune outside the courtroom.

**Son sees dad going away for one year**

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Figure 7: *The Guardian* Thursday July 5, 1984, p. 5

Similar to *The Guardian*, *National Concord* reported the judgment on its front page with a bold headline: 'Decree 4: Thompson, Irabor in for 1 year' (July 5, 1984). This was followed by: '...NLC, NUJ reject verdict'. The news story reported that the Nigerian Labour Congress



(NLC) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) both rejected the court's verdict and described it as 'too harsh' and a 'disappointment'. Published alongside the two stories were two photographs, one showing the two men in the court with Tunde Thompson (standing), again defiantly laughing and waving to the crowd after the verdict. His colleague, Nduka Irabor seated and looking dejected, apparently confused or shocked by the outcome of the trial. The other shows Mrs. Thompson holding up her little daughter amidst a crowd of relatives, waving 'bye-bye'. Both stories occupy two-third of the front page, continuing on pages eight and sixteen and taking a further quarter of the page each. Bringing innocent children to the court and publishing their photographs drew public attention to the fact that the jailed journalists were leaving behind young families, accentuating further the Government's heavy-handedness.

# national concord

TRUTH IS CONSTANT

VOL. 5 • NO. 1361 • THURSDAY, JULY 5, 1984 • SHAWYAL 6, 1404 A.H. • 20 KOBOS

## THINKING CORNER

In journalism, bad news makes a good copy. The foreign press has made a virtue of this dictum to the extent that it does not see any good in any developments in Third World countries. Omeruah's concern about foreign press is therefore understandable. But he should bear in mind that the best public relations for any government are its own actions.

### DECREE 4:

+ P  
- G

Advises the  
GROUPE ADJUDICATOIRE  
and KANHEED  
WILLIAMS



Messrs Thompson (standing) waving to colleagues yesterday and Irabor. Pictures: FEMI AKINTOBI

# THOMPSON, IRABOR IN FOR 1 YEAR

**F**OR almost one hour yesterday, two newspaper executives pleaded passionately with the Public Officers Tribunal trying two senior journalists and their employer for mitigation of sentence.

But at the end of it all, the two journalists, Messrs Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor were sentenced to one year imprisonment each, after being found guilty of false publication against the Federal Government.

The Guardian Press Limited was also fined ₦100,000 and ordered to enter into an undertaking of ₦100,000 before leaving the court premises pending the time the money would be made available.

... But NLC, NUJ reject verdict

**B**OTH the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) have rejected the guilty verdict given to Irabor, the Public Officers Tribunal against them yesterday.

The NLC President, Alhaji Abubakar Aliyu, said the verdict was 'too harsh' and 'disappointing'. He said the one year sentence was 'too harsh' and 'disappointing'.

The NUJ President, Mr. Omeruah, said the verdict was 'too harsh' and 'disappointing'. He said the one year sentence was 'too harsh' and 'disappointing'.

Mrs. Thompson (left), her daughter (being carried) as well as relatives wave bye-bye after the sentence yesterday.

Continued on page 8

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Figure 8: *National Concord*, Thursday July 5, 1984, p. 1

The conviction of the two journalists undoubtedly marked a new era in government-press relations at this time. On the part of the military regime, a strong message was sent to the press that it would not condone further 'irresponsible journalism' (Mohammed, *National Concord*, May 22, 1984, p. 3). For the journalists, it was a time of regret that the regime did not live up to their hopes but also a wake-up call to what lay ahead.

## Conclusion

### Fourth Estate or Fifth Columnist? The Press Plays *Russian Roulette*

Contrary to the liberal notion (to which many journalists are quick to lay claim) that the press as the 'fourth estate' holds the government accountable to the governed, the excessive and somewhat cheerleader journalism exhibited by *National Concord* and *The Guardian* at the collapse of the democratic regime of Alhaji Sheu Shagari renders this notion irreparably damaged at this moment of Nigerian history. Like the proverbial game of Russian roulette – a dangerous game of chance – the press's negation of democratic values in favour of a military ethos, in the risky hope, that it would become an (unelected) branch of Government became its major undoing.

Admittedly, the 1979 N2.8 Billion hoax was still fresh in the memory of Buhari at the time he became Head of State, and may have inspired his determination to check the press's penchant for political scoops to bring down officials. But far from being on a vengeful mission (Uko 2004, p. 90), it is instructive to note that the involvement of the press in the planning and the execution of the coup that ended the democratic regime of Alhaji Sheu Shagari (Agbaje 1990, p. 217) meant for some, including Buhari, that the press exposed itself as an institution that could not be trusted. If the press was part of the coup that ended the former regime, then it followed that the same press could also work with other interests to end Buhari's regime, if it saw fit.

The other important issue raised by General Buhari's relatively early hostility towards the press relates to hegemony. As Gramsci points out:

Undoubtedly, the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromised equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading

group should make sacrifices of an economic/corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must also be necessarily be based on the decisive nucleus of economic activity ( Gramsci 2006 p. 86).

Buhari did not bother to develop or lay any foundation for his government's legitimacy. Perhaps, he did not believe in hegemony and hoped to survive as a Government by repressive force rather than ideological force (Althusser 1971). However, it is pertinent to note here that previous military regimes did try to uphold Gramsci's cooperative strategy as a means of sustaining hegemonic rule by collaborating with the press. That the press made manifest such collaboration which Buhari rejected is puzzling. The early support from the press could have been an opportunity for the regime to achieve some legitimacy. Instead Buhari destroyed the civil political class with influence and impact on institutions at home and abroad, with obvious implications for the regime; he also instilled fear in the minds of ordinary people with his corrective War Against Indiscipline (WAI); and finally he irrevocably antagonised a press which had supported him. Having lost the chance of hegemonic rule, it was then only a matter of time before Buhari lost the ability to hold onto power.

Conceptually, this chapter raises two issues bothering on professionalism and lack of separation of politics from journalism. As discussed by various scholars, the fact that most journalists lack basic knowledge of the roles expected of them gave rise to a situation where the press assumed the role of 'adviser' to the military regime, reeling out policies and programmes for the military. This manifested in the share volume of editorials, new stories, photographs and cartoons which both the *National Concord* and *The Guardian* deployed in their alliance with Buhari immediately the democratic regime of Shagari was toppled. A truly 'fourth estate' press does not collapse its own estate with the other estates, but works independently of the other estates as much as possible. This is not the case as the facts in this chapter can reveal, and it suggests a lack of professional ethos as a bane (Coker 1960, Golding and Elliot 1979, Hallin and Mancini 2004). The other important issue is that the press sees itself as a stakeholder in the political process — the sort of stake holding that merge journalism with politics, rather than journalism being a midwife of politics. This high level of 'political parallelism' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) between journalists and politicians means the press could not rise above partisanship, and thus incapable of behaving professionally. As Golding and Elliot (1979) espoused, the nationalists who engaged the colonial powers for the battle of independence were also press barons who

successfully mobilised their papers to tackle the colonialists. This historical foundation of press and politics or ‘double allegiances’ (Golding and Elliot) continued to hunt and harm the political role of the press in post-independent years and still being carried forward to the contemporary journalism practice.

Contrary to scholarly assessment that Buhari ran a ‘dreaded’ regime and ‘abused’ human rights (Ogbondah and Onyedike 1991; Mohammed 2003; Uko 2004; Soyinka 2007), my argument in this chapter is somewhat different. I argue that the press, as represented by *The Guardian* and *National Concord* welcomed the coup. They criticised the ousted democratic regime for its many failures, believing that the Buhari regime would arrest the problematic economic and political situation in the country. Indeed the papers took it upon themselves to rally the populace behind the military regime, saving the regime itself from having to convince the nation about the legitimacy of subverting democracy. In short, the preponderance of evidence linking the press with the coup and their work of legitimacy on behalf of Buhari, were such that any public dissent against the coup and military rule was subdued. As I further established, Buhari’s ‘reform’ of the press went beyond the private media to include the publicly funded media where hundreds of staff were laid off in so-called ‘reorganization exercises’ (*National Concord*, May 19, 1984, p. 1). This is perhaps compelling evidence that he was not attempting to silence the independent press alone.

Notwithstanding the fact that the press suggested many of the draconian policies Buhari implemented, the fact that he applied his policies across board and did not treat the press as a sacred cow led to what I have argued was a hypocritical war mounted against the regime. Indeed, the press succeeded in misinforming the public claiming that Buhari was out to suppress the public’s right to know. Unfortunately for Buhari, ‘misinformation’ won public support. Though his regime fell, it was not as a result of Decree 4’s corrective provisions, but rather by another coup supported by an increasingly manipulative and politically corrupt press, as I explore in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Democracy Delayed! The Press and Cosy Conspiracy in Babangida Years (1985 - 1993)**

Introduction

A Timely Intervention

Riding Through the Storm, Negotiating Friendship

The run-up to June 12

June 12: Election Day

The Gathering Storm: The Annulment of the Election

Conclusion

## Introduction

Up till now it has been thought that the growth of the Christian myths during the Roman Empire was possible only because printing was not yet invented. Precisely the contrary. The daily press and the telegraph, which in a moment spread inventions over the whole earth, fabricate more myths ... in one day than could have formerly been done in a century.

Karl Max, 1871 (cited in Stanley Cohen & Jock Young (1973) *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*)

General Ibrahim Babangida as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) in the Buhari regime was, by 1983, already an established political personality in uniform. Though he remained apolitical and held only military posts before he toppled Buhari, Babangida's name had been registered in the consciousness of the nation as a prominent figure in previous military take-overs. It was his bravery that led to the foiling of the 1976 bloody coup against General Murtala Mohammed's regime — a feat that earned him the image of a gallant and patriotic officer (Mohammed 2003, p. 69).

Babangida's eight year regime, (August 27th, 1985 – August 26th, 1993) the longest of the four regimes studied, presents a case study of a 'shared understanding' between the press and the regime about the need for a liberal press. This agreed liberalism, by which I mean, an amicable working arrangement to get around tensions but allowing the press to do its job, offered a way out of the Buhari regime's perceived hostility which had undoubtedly created an atmosphere of fear after the jailing of the two staff of *The Guardian*. In this subsequent 'cosy' arrangement, Babangida was to restore the dignity of a bruised press in exchange for press cooperation. While for a period Babangida kept his side of the bargain by fully restoring the honour of the press and promoting it as 'fourth estate of the realm' (to the latter's delight), the press also kept its side of the bargain, by supporting and even becoming an extension of the regime, with some of its notable members becoming active participants in state affairs.

However, starting in September, 1985, when the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) debate got underway<sup>13</sup> there were a series of allegations against the regime. For instance, it was

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<sup>13</sup> The IMF debate centered on revamping the dilapidated infrastructures in the country, particularly university education, and whether the Government should accept the IMF's monetary package. The public rejected the loan owing to the age long suspicion that the IMF and other Bretton Wood monetary policies impoverish poor nations.



accused by a section of civil society, of offering monetary inducements, government appointments and choice Government plots of land to opposition figures, media executives and notable rights activists, with a view to silencing them and leading to what was termed a ‘settlement syndrome’ (Uko 2004, p. 104; Mohammed 2003, pp. 69 & 70; Olagunju et al 1999, p. 248). There were also many failed attempts at transitioning to civilian rule — the banning and unbanning of political parties and certain politicians, with the most controversial being the aborted June 12, 1993 Presidential election which nearly led to a civil war (Kwarteng 1996, pp. 185, 187, Diamond et al 1997, Uko 2004, p. 103). Specifically in this chapter, I investigate the annulment of this election which put strains on the ‘shared arrangement’ between the regime and the press.

In order to do this, I draw on two popular dailies, the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* in addition to interviews with some editors and relevant State officials at the time. The period of my analysis covers the first thirty days of the regime, in order to gauge the mood of the press after the collapse of the Buhari regime. I then discuss the ensuing ‘cat and mouse’ game between government and press over the eight years. Finally I focus on the significant period of June 12 election; this was not only the first free and fair election in the history of Nigeria (Oloyede 2004, p. 71, Alimi 2011, p. 62), but also one in which Nigerians bridged the north/south and religious divides. However, its annulment by the military became a defining moment for Nigeria as a nation, with the crisis that followed leading to a forced exit of Babangida from power and an intervening 3-month interim government (discussed in the next chapter). This period thus offers an opportunity to study the Nigerian press in a crisis situation when the ‘liberal agreement’ broke down and the deafening voice of the Nigerian people took centre stage.

This chapter is arranged in three parts. I first analyse key moments in the newspaper coverage of the opening thirty days of the regime. After the collapse of the Buhari regime, and apparent relief post-Decree 4, both papers demonstrated an acceptance of Babangida while demonising the ousted Buhari. I also explore how the press may have been involved in the coup that toppled Buhari, and probably struck a deal with Babangida on how the regime and the press could work together. This is evident in Babangida’s coup broadcast in which he cited ‘human rights’ violations, particularly Decree 4, as a key reason for his coup. He demonstrated this further with the ‘immediate repeal’ of the decree and the ‘unconditional release’ of jailed journalists. *The Punch* also confirmed this ‘deal’ in its editorial on the ‘Death of Decree 4’, four days after

the coup, when it ‘welcomed the change of guard’ and the ‘new attempt at forging a cooperative link’. This line of prior knowledge of the coup was strengthened by a *Nigerian Tribune* editor, who described Babangida’s emergence as ‘timely and a relief’ (Interview with Sina Oladeinde, Features editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, October 18, 2011).

Next, I discuss the ‘negotiated friendship’ between the regime and the press, which enabled the former to emerge unscathed from many stormy issues. This is the period from late 1985 when the regime witnessed a public backlash – a result of economic policies aimed at revamping the economy, but which impacted negatively on standards of living – and a series of transition initiatives and accompanied crises until late 1992 when the transition to civil rule was, for the second time, postponed.

In November, 1985, the refusal of the public to allow the Government to take further loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), led to a ‘home grown’ (Olagunju et al 1999) economic package — the Structural Adjustments Programme (SAP). This policy, which proposed belt-tightening measures, resulted in the rise of food prices and other essential commodities and snowballed into riots. This development, coming barely three months into the life of the regime, put the press, which was in a ‘cooperative agreement’ with the Government, in an awkward situation the upshot of which was that it did not fulfil its much touted ‘fourth estate’ role.

In 1989, there was another litmus test to the working relationship of the Government and the press. This time, Dele Giwa, editor of a Lagos weekly magazine, *Newswatch* was killed by a parcel bomb marked ‘from the office of C-in-C (Commander-in-chief)’ (Oloyede 2004). According to many interpretations, the editor may have been killed for his investigative activities. Notwithstanding the potential implications of this also being a murder of press freedom, the reaction of the press against the murder was at best wimpish, with accusation of a possible conspiracy within the press. Ndaeyo Uko, a former editor, now an academic in Australia suggests that many leads were ‘overlooked’ by the Nigerian and international press. He concludes that, Giwa’s unresolved death reveals the ‘effect of the intimate relationship between the press and a silky military government on the treatment of key national issues’ (Uko 2004, pp. 104 - 107).

In the final section, I focus on the period June 7 to August 26 1993, in particular the Presidential election (12 June) and the heightened political activities created by a pro-military group, the

Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) (Kwarteng 1996, p. 187), the days before the election, followed by the annulment of the result (23 June) and subsequent crises, plunging the nation into violence which took on an ethnic dimension. As the political climate deteriorated, surprisingly perhaps, the press was still unable to break its eight-year long allegiance with the regime. The Nigerian people, however, simply bypassed the press and stoutly resisted military dictatorship by demanding a restoration of the electoral decision. This resistance, in the form of general strikes, forced sit-at-home (by ordering commercial activities to shut) and outright violent demonstrations, started soon after the annulment was announced and developed into an unmanageable situation for the military. By this time, forced by the popular uprisings, the press eventually, but again reluctantly, joined the struggle until August 26, 1993 when Babangida stepped down.

During this short period, the generous coverage of the activities of civil society organisations rattled the military leading to a renewed crackdown on the press. There followed more anti-press measures, both legal and extra-legal than witnessed under the vilified Buhari regime. Journalists were arrested and detained without trial, media houses proscribed, copies of thousands of offending publications confiscated or bought off (from distributors before reaching the newsstand) and decrees enacted.

However, notwithstanding this belated attempt by the press to break away from the regime, overall, Babangida appeared to have gained enormous power over it, in ways which might be described as hegemonic (see pp. 23, 90 & 107). The regime successfully built alliances among various forces including the press, earning legitimacy and achieving stability over its eight year rule. While it may be an exaggeration to say that the news practices of a 'fourth estate' were non-existent under the Babangida regime, its 'management' of any press criticism until the very end of its rule was striking. It might also be argued that while this working relationship between the regime and the press may have benefitted both parties, the latter's abdication of press responsibility cost the Nigerian people: it took a longer period to establish democracy and there was unnecessary death and destruction. In short what played out during the regime can be likened to what Van Dijk referred to as a 'strategy of journalistic distancing' (Van Dijk 1991, p. 152) that allows journalists to play safe while preserving a vested interest.

In order to explore and explain this 'cosy' relationship between press and regime, I turn next to analysis of the *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Punch* in the first 30 days of Babangida regime.

### **A Timely Intervention**

When Babangida came in, it was a relief. If you recall the policies of Babangida, there was no way the press would not have gravitated towards him. As a student of Machiavelli, Babangida understands how to manipulate power, and the press. He understands power. To get power, you have to get the people who wield that power. Once you are able to bring those who wield the power under your influence, then you are the absolute controller of power. So he understands fully that if there was going to be problems at all, it will come from the media, so why not hand pick some people from the media? (Sina Oladeinde, Associate Editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, October, 18, 2011).

In the *Nigerian Tribune*, 125 items were analysed while 140 items were sampled in *The Punch*. The analysis of the two newspapers provides insights into the early relationship between the new military regime and the press.

Given the jailing of ‘The Guardian Two’, it was not surprising, as Oladeinde claims (above) that the press welcomed Babangida’s rescue intervention as a ‘kind of relief ... a soothing balm’ to Buhari’s ‘inglorious Decree 4’ (Oladeinde, October 18, 2011).

In effect, a pact was established between General Babangida and the press. After ousting Buhari, in his broadcast to the nation Babangida cited human rights violations as one of the key reasons for staging the coup. Published in *The Punch* (August 28, 1985 pp. 1 & 7) titled: ‘Why we struck’, it is highlighted on page one with the full broadcast given generous coverage on page seven. Specifically, Babangida suggests that Decree 4 has ‘generated a lot of controversy’ and cautiously assures the press:

As we do not intend to lead the country where individuals are under the fear of expressing themselves, the Public Officers — Protection Against False Accusation Decree 4 of 1984 is hereby repealed with immediate effect. Those who have been in detention under this decree are hereby unconditionally released. The responsibility of the media to disseminate information shall be exercised without undue hindrance. In that process those responsible are expected to be forthright and to have the nation’s interest as the primary consideration (*The Punch*, August 28, 1985, p. 7).

At the bottom right of the same page was a short news story on the issue titled ‘Obnoxious DN4 Abrogated’ containing no new information but presumably intended to flaunt and showcase that the main reason behind the take-over of power was, precisely, the press. The

victory is there for all to see: the ‘unconditional release’ of jailed and detained journalists as well as the ‘immediate repeal’ of Decree 4. In this way, the press boasts about, and boosts, its own power: it had effected the change in governance.

Interestingly, while Babangida rescued the press from the jaw of Decree 4, he nonetheless still acknowledged its recklessness, not mincing his words in sounding a warning in his broadcast. The granting of ‘undue hindrance’ came with the expectation of the press being ‘forthright’ and acting in the ‘nation’s interest’. Here, I want to engage with these three phrases and the issues underlying them – ‘undue hindrance’, ‘forthrightness’ and ‘national interest’. The threat here was clearly that if the press was not ‘forthright’ and jeopardised ‘the national interest’, intervention by the military government, and in whatever manner, would become justified (‘due hindrance’). Intriguingly, implicit in Babangida’s conditions is exactly the same issue Decree 4 sought to solve. Was Babangida (like Buhari) also being honest from the outset by not promising his rescued friends an unfettered press freedom? So what, if anything, had changed?

Throughout the 30-day period both newspapers were awash with news reports justifying the intervention of Babangida by referring repeatedly to the Buhari regime as ‘arrogant’ and ‘insensitive’ while welcoming Babangida’s positive proclamations. Interestingly, there were also instances where the press criticised the previously toppled democratic regime of Shagari; perhaps indicating to Babangida that the press was not in a hurry for another democratic government. This is consonant with the position of both *The Guardian* and *National Concord*, rejecting a hasty return to civilian governance (see Chapter Four).

Thus in its editorial of 28th August, 1985 (the day following the coup) titled ‘Cautious Optimism’; *The Punch* lamented the nation’s woes since independence (in the first three of a thirteen-paragraph editorial) and described the coup as a ‘mere change in leadership structure, not a fundamental structural shift’. The editorial appeared on the front page in a designed rectangle and in bold capitals, attracting attention, stressing its importance and continuing on page four. Challenging Babangida, it urged him to convince Nigerians that he could lift the nation out of its woes. The remaining ten paragraphs were devoted to spelling out policies which the paper felt the regime should adopt. Reinforcing its hard-line stance on democratic government, one paragraph insisted that Babangida arrest and prosecute the key actors in the deposed democratic regime, particularly ex-president Sheu Shagari and his vice-president, Alex Ekwueme:

We call for the immediate trial of the key political actors (Sheu Shagari, Alex Ekwueme etc.) of the Second Republic. Our experience with the Shagari regime and the Buhari's military junta had shown that one was a logical extension of the other, and by simple inference, deduced from 20 months of silence on these key political actors, we would never expect a fair justice under a decadent rule of law (*The Punch*, August 28, 1985, pages 1 & 4).

Given the bitter experience of the press under the regime of Buhari, it might be expected that if the press wanted any form of revenge, it would be against the regime of Buhari not the democratic regime of Shagari when newspapers 'flowered' (Uche 1989). Yet twenty months after Shagari was ousted, *The Punch* still wanted his regime to be sanctioned. The contradictions were understandable. The paper may have realised the futility of asking Babangida to punish Buhari, his former boss, since military tradition forbids querying a superior officer, at least in the Nigerian context. Criticising the Shagari regime suggests some semblance of a liberal tradition of holding public officials to account, providing a respectable cover, whilst the paper simultaneously supports the new military regime.

However, a more significant imperative for calling for Shagari's head probably lies in the fact that *The Punch* was one of the opposition papers rejecting the result of the 1983 general elections: its preferred candidate, Obafemi Awolowo, lost to incumbent Shagari. Indeed, as Adigun Agbaje noted, *The Punch* was deeply involved in the planning of the coup that toppled Shagari, to the extent that editors knew that Buhari was going to be head of the new government (Agbaje, 1990). I assume, therefore, that the editorial, calling for Shagari's head is a continuation of the 'double allegiances to political and professional goals' (Golding and Elliot 1979) that had become a permanent feature of the press since post-independence. Inferentially, the editorial's call on Babangida to revisit and punish political actors of the Second Republic acts as signal to Babangida not to be in a hurry to transit to democracy. This 'no to democracy' stance, was also reminiscent of *National Concord's* opposition to a 'quick' return to democracy, and *The Guardian's* wish for a 'long military rein' at the inception of Buhari's regime (see Chapter Four).

Also on the front page is a story of the coup: 'Buhari's govt falls after 605 days', with a full length photograph of Buhari and Babangida, taken at an occasion before the coup. Both are in their military uniforms, discussing issues as they walk, Buhari, with his hands folded behind his back, lowers his head, as he talks with his army chief Babangida, now the new head of state.

The latter's arms swing freely, he strides confidently, head turning in the direction of Buhari. Buhari's image is that of a subdued and dejected superior while Babangida appears dominant and queries his overthrown boss. Though Buhari is taller than Babangida, the latter's confident features in the photograph more than compensate for his diminutive stature. Put succinctly, *The Punch* appears mocking the 'rigid and uncompromising' Buhari.



Figure 9: *The Punch*, Wednesday August 28, 1985, p. 1

The impact of news photography and other visual aids in news stories cannot be overemphasized. Matthew Shulman contends that 'print editors know that readers are drawn to photos and artwork before the printed word'. Shulman further notes that editors will go after 'well-composed photographs if they illustrate the assertions in a news analysis, or portray the human condition described in a feature article' (Shulman 1994, p. 25). It is thus not surprising that *The Punch* finds the photograph in Fig 9 perfectly fitting to illustrate the story of the fall of the 'arrogant' Buhari and the 'victorious' Babangida in whom the press is pleased.

Not surprisingly, an editorial attacking the ‘unpopular and draconian’ Decree 4 soon appeared. Titled ‘The Death of Decree 4’ (Saturday August 31, 1985, p.4), the paper declared the decree (albeit short-sightedly as it turned out) ‘dead and buried along with the characters that came up with it’<sup>14</sup>. It lamented the arrogance of the Buhari regime for squandering the ‘fruitful romance’ offered his regime by the press. In a subtle revelation that the press may have been part of the plot, to oust Buhari from power, the editorial states that Babangida was right for not ‘allowing the decree to survive a day longer once it was obvious that the change of guard at the national level was a fait accompli’. Confirming its alliance with the regime, the editorial assured Babangida:

*The Punch* welcomes the repeal by President Ibrahim Babangida. Indeed, we are more inclined to welcome the new attempt at forging a cooperative and nationally beneficial link with the press because the new government has gone all out to assure the nation of its respect for the wisdom and supremacy of the people even within a non-democratic setting as a military regime.

In this editorial the choice of language arguably suggests that the press was not a bystander in the coup, but that there may have been some bargaining prior to the event. This is what I earlier termed ‘agreed liberalism’ between the regime and the press. The editorial declares firstly: ‘it was obvious that the change of guard was a fait accompli’ and secondly points to ‘forging a cooperative and nationally beneficial link’. The question arising is who was aware of the ‘obvious’ change of guard as ‘a fait accompli’? Could *The Punch* be referring to the fall out of Decree 4 as a sign that Buhari regime would inevitably fall? (i.e. a fait accompli). It might therefore be deduced that during the campaign against Buhari, the press struck an accord with Babangida, on how they could work together in a ‘beneficial manner’. This was obvious immediately Babangida seized power when he cited in his broadcast: ‘human rights violations’ of the Buhari regime particularly Decree 4 as key reasons behind his coup (see pp. 115, 116 above).

Alongside this editorial was a cartoon showing Babangida holding what looks like the gazette of Decree 4 while a journalist (judging by the caption) excitedly sets it ablaze with a lighter. The caption, referring to a bewildered Buhari reads, ‘With all pleasure. We have self-

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<sup>14</sup> Rather than ‘dead and buried’, Decree 4 resurfaced later in different ways in the course of Babangida regime.



censorship'. The cartoon is straight to the point — mocking Buhari and telling him his 'draconian' Decree 4 is gone.



Figure 10: *The Punch*, Wednesday August 31, 1985 p. 4

As already noted (see Chapter Three above), the role of cartoons in political struggles cannot be downplayed. Eko (2007) and Hammett (2010) stress their particular importance in power struggles, as effective tools both in dissenting against unpopular regimes and in stabilising and reinforcing hegemonic powers. They are 'powerful spaces in which negotiations of power and resistance are expressed' (Hammett 2010, p. 4). Here, *The Punch* cartoon setting ablaze Decree 4, demonises the Buhari regime, while simultaneously promoting Babangida's 'civility' that allows freedom of expression (self-censorship). In chapter four, I established the leading role the press played in the collapse of the democratic regime of Shagari and the work of legitimisation done to stabilise Buhari regime. In figure 10, the press follows a similar pattern: mocking the deposed Buhari and celebrating the untested Babangida.

Such cartoons have helped give credibility to the ‘liberal’ stance of the Nigerian press, without analysing their implications on the democratic struggles. For instance, Ayo Olukotun, reviewing five years of Babangida’s regime (1988-1999), argues that the press, building on the protest tradition of the colonial period, ‘carried the struggle against the military class to a new pitch’ (Olukotun 2002, p. 1). I will return to this issue later. Suffice to state here, that we might question this view.

Throughout the first 30 days were public relations type news reports in *The Punch* purporting that Nigerians accepted Babangida’s coup, with ‘endorsements’ from notable professional bodies and associations, as well as individuals. A sample of such stories includes: ‘Mass support for Babangida’ (Thursday August 29, 1985, front page); ‘ASUU supports change of Govt’ (ASUU is the influential Academic Staff Union of Universities) and ‘NUJ hails death of DN4’ (Nigerian Union of Journalists applauding the repeal of Decree 4) (Thursday August, 29, 1985); ‘A long day indeed for the President’ (a photo splash showing Babangida’s many events of the day such as swearing-in of officials and meeting with diplomats) (Saturday August 31, 1985); and ‘Babangida born under the sign of wisdom’ (Monday, September 2, 1985). There was also an article by a notable media figure and columnist, Tola Adeniyi in his column ‘Tola Adeniyi’s Third Coming’, titled ‘The collapse of arrogance’. He dissected the 20-month old regime of Buhari and declared that the regime’s collapse was owing to its arrogance and insensitivity (*The Punch*, Tuesday September 3, 1985, p. 7). Further critical stories included revelations by freed detainees, editorials lamenting the harsh conditions under the regime, as well as articles and letters to the editor. In many ways in his first month in office, Babangida received a golden hello from *The Punch*.

The *Nigerian Tribune* also offered editorials and news reports about violation of detainees’ basic rights under Buhari, as well as stories boosting Babangida’s popularity. The first editorial after the coup was on Sunday September 1, 1985, on the front page for more effect, and continuing on page 3. Titled in bold ‘Buhari’s torture chambers’ and framed to stand out, it lamented the ‘gross abuse of human rights and desecration of the human person by the fascist and tyrannical regime of Buhari’. The editorial was accompanied on the front page by supporting news stories: ‘Students rule NSO “den”’ reports on the activities of detained student activists in the facility of National Security Organisation (NSO), a state secret service holding alleged offenders and in contrast, ‘Detainees: Prison gates open’, reports that prison gates were flung open and detainees were released following an order by Babangida in his coup broadcast.

In these ways the ousted Buhari regime is exposed and Babangida's take-over of power justified.

A further interesting cartoon appeared on page three of Tuesday September 3, 1985 edition of *Nigerian Tribune* (Fig 11). A woman in a designer top with the inscription 'press' and a handbag marked 'Accord', was seen covering herself with an umbrella. Accompanying her is Babangida who throws his arm across the woman's shoulder. Both seem excited and are laughing. On their left hand side, to the right of the cartoon, drenched in the rain, is Buhari with his mouth wide open and a finger placed between his upper and lower teeth, suggesting bewilderment. He looks in the direction of the woman and Babangida, apparently querying the 'Accord' in the caption beneath: 'Beautiful bride again?'

The 'lovely couple' highlights the new 'romantic' alliance between the press and the Babangida regime. In the downpour (difficult times), the woman chooses to share her umbrella with Babangida, leaving Buhari to endure the elements (and his fate) alone. Given Buhari had previously enjoyed a relationship with a woman (the press) this rejection implies that he is being punished for his past demeanours. By openly sheltering the new man (cosying up) to Babangida, the cartoon represents the press as mocking the 'arrogant and insensitive' Buhari (see p. 123 below). Looking at the cartoon in another way, it might be seen as a criticism of the press on par with a woman being mocked if she jumps from one man to another in traditional Nigerian society. The caption 'Beautiful bride again?' appears to doubt whether the press (woman) will in the long run establish a long term relationship. It is a warning to Babangida that the 'Accord' may not after all be a genuine one and that the press will jump to another regime (man) if things go awry.



Figure 11: *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday September 3, 1985 p. 3

This idea of a ‘marriage of convenience’ and shifting of allegiances on the part of the press was aptly captured by various media and state personnel I interviewed. Specifically on the crisis of confidence between the military and the press during the period, Chief of General Staff under the Abacha regime and a former military governor under Buhari commented:

It is an irony of event because I have never seen any military regime that was not heralded/supported by the press at the beginning, but along the line, the ovation was over. May be the expectation of the press starts falling short of what they had in mind, and then the dinner is over (General Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2011).

General Diya's view was echoed by Mohammed Haruna, former Managing Director of *New Nigerian* Newspapers and erstwhile chief press secretary to ex head of state, General Abdusalami Abubakar. When I asked him about this behaviour of the press, he submitted: 'There is nothing complex about it... it is contradictions that we see everyday. In the press, what we do is to say one thing and do another thing... we pontificate, we moralise, but we do something else' (Interview on June 20, 2012).

In many ways this analysis of the first thirty days of Babangida reveals a similar pattern to the same period of the Buhari regime — campaigns in support of military rule and a demonisation of democratic governance, a perspective consonant with Francis Nyamjah's view that 'media that genuinely advance democratisation in Africa are rare' (Nyamjah 2005, p. 272).

However, there is some difference in how the press welcomed the Babangida regime: it was devoid of the flamboyance associated with the Buhari regime. The reason was, perhaps, the upshot of the sanctions and 'discipline' imposed on the press by Decree 4. The press's fear and anxiety under Buhari arguably moderated its behaviour so that the response to the Babangida coup was more reflective than reactive — fear of the impact of 'professional misconduct' still haunting it.

### **Riding Through the Storm, Negotiating Friendship**

In line with Babangida's promise to run an 'open' administration, a number of national issues emerged early in his regime that tested his relationship with the press. The first was a decision by the regime to take further loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to revamp the ailing economy in September, 1985. Babangida had thrown the debate open by setting up a Presidential Committee on IMF Loan Debate to allow Nigerians the opportunity to be part of the decision making process. Tunji Olagunju quotes Babangida as saying: "it is important that the choices inherent in the IMF conditions be fully explained to our people" (Olagunju et al 1993, p. 82). This decision, according to Ndaeyo Uko, a former journalist with *The Guardian* was 'a brilliant stunt that captured the essence of the press — openness and debate'; it was Babangida's way of keeping his side of the bargain with the press (Uko 2004, p. 95).

Though opinions diverged on the Loan Debate, the overall report of the Committee did not favour the IMF loan. Scoring another PR goal, Babangida deferred to this opinion and rejected the IMF loan as the "only part of honour" (Olagunju et al 1993, p. 83). It was significant,

however, that during the debate, the press's disposition was neutral. Given the public hostility to the IMF issue, it might be expected that the press would lead the debate, but conscious of its obligations under the 'agreed terms' not to antagonise the regime, the press's involvement then was ineffectual. Further, even after Babangida opted for a home grown economic solution under the Structural Adjustments Programme (SAP) (which led to cuts in public services, later snowballing into riots), the attitude of the press toward Babangida was still lenient.

There were other pressing issues that led to the arrest and detention of journalists and proscription of media houses up until 1992, in what can be described as a 'cat and mouse game'<sup>15</sup> game between state and press. Yet the relationship with the regime remained cordial. One significant issue referred to above (p. 113) was the assassination of Dele Giwa, editor of the popular weekly magazine *Newswatch* in 1986. According to various accounts, Giwa was close to elites in power, business and diplomatic circles (Uko 2004, Oloyede 2004). He received a parcel bomb marked 'from the office of the President' which exploded and killed him. It is suggested that Giwa might have been killed by the Babangida regime for a series of investigative activities embarrassing to the latter. More disturbing perhaps was another lead pointing to conspiracy within the press and involving Giwa's own colleagues (Uko 2004, Oloyede 2004). To date, Giwa's death remains unresolved but at the time there was no concerted effort, either by the Babangida regime and the police or the press, to resolve the crime, pointing to a possible state-media conspiracy.

The suspicion of an 'enemy within' over Giwa's murder was further strengthened when *Newswatch* awarded Babangida 'Man of the Year' in 1989, and in 1990 the latter appointed *Newswatch* director, Alex Akinyele as Minister of Information. Yet in spite of these signs of camaraderie, the editor succeeding Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu denied his team had a 'chummy chummy' (Ekpu 1992, p. 27) relationship with the regime. Further, Ekpu added: 'All of us were worried about what happened [in relation to Giwa's death], particularly because the details were not clear and still aren't clear' (p. 27). Nevertheless these events do encourage the idea that the relation between military regime and the press was deeply problematic.

As in the *Newswatch* case, several other editors who were either arrested or whose media houses were closed down became beneficiaries of Babangida's 'generosity' (Uko 2004, pp. 99

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<sup>15</sup> By cat and mouse, I mean a situation where the regime and the press pretend there was no love lost between the two. A contrived game of constant pursuit, captures and escapes. Whereas, while the public may sympathise with press and blame the regime for stifling free speech, both actually engaged in symbiotic relationship in which one assists the other resulting in mutual benefits.

– 106), including, interestingly, Nduka Irabor, one of ‘The Guardian Two’ jailed by Buhari regime. He was appointed as the chief press secretary to Babangida’s Vice President, Augustus Aikhomu. Babangida also succeeded in wooing critics, like Professor Wole Soyinka, appointed as Head of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC). This co-option has been criticised as a ‘show of avuncular geniality — a form of positive censorship aimed at silencing people through amity’ (Uko 2004, p. 98). It is not surprising therefore that despite the fact that by 1993, Babangida had surpassed Buhari’s records in terms of the number of journalists arrested, detained and media houses closed there was little or no resistance from the press. Even when some of those co-opted realised they were being used, they felt paralysed to speak out. As Wole Efunuga, Editor of *Sunday Tribune* retrospectively highlights:

When some of our colleagues took up the appointments, they thought they were doing it in the interest of the masses, but soon discovered what they had in mind was not in tandem with the military’s. Wole Soyinka was appointed to head the Federal Road Safety Commission to project its image, but discovered he could not cope with the situation. Likewise, late social critic, Dr Tai Solarin was appointed to work for the People’s Bank of Nigeria, but discovered when he got there that what he had in mind was not in agreement with what those who appointed him had in mind. Some people who were appointed would have been given a rough idea of what they were going to do, but as soon as they got there, they discovered the situation was different from the initial briefing. So, some of our colleagues who went there later regretted it. Some did not get the clearer picture of what they were appointed to do, and later regretted it (Interview on October 18, 2011).

One might argue though that Efunuga’s comments, like Ekpu’s denial of a ‘chummy chummy’ relationship and Uko’s charge of ‘positive censorship’ by Babangida, demonstrate a degree of disingenuousness, given the evidence from earlier historical moments. Babangida’s offering of carrots to the press was hardly a new game. With the exception of Buhari, previous military regimes had been in the habit of first wooing the press at inception for legitimacy and acceptability only to pounce on the press once stability was established (Agbaje 1993). Similarly, Efunuga’s reasoning that his colleagues were not in the know of Babangida’s ‘game plan’, and therefore could not be held to account, is undermined by the fact that there is no proof that those ‘lured’ into government, particularly media executives, resigned their positions after becoming aware of the ‘game plan’.

In the end it was events around the June 1993 elections and a frustrated and unhappy electorate who disrupted and transformed this 'game'.

### **The run-up to June 12**

Any newspaper that values its freedom and believes sincerely in the liberty of the citizens of this country must wield the cudgel heavily, fearlessly and relentlessly against the oppressor and the budding dictators in our midst.

Obafemi Awolowo (1981) 'The Press in the Service of the State'

By late 1991, the regime's phased-elections had produced Local Government and State elected officials as well as Members of the Federal House of Representatives and the Senators from the two Government-sponsored political parties – Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). The presidential election was scheduled at the end of the transition timetable (Olagunju et al 1993, pp. 172 – 173). This meant that a form of diarchy was in place from January, 1992 when the elected officials took office<sup>16</sup>. However, following the failure of the political parties to keep faith with the Transition timetable, and the ensuing crisis (see Chapter One) the transition, originally scheduled to terminate on January 2, 1993 was extended to August 27, 1993. Further, in order to convince his critics accusing him of a hidden agenda, Babangida set up a Transitional Council to handle the remaining phase of the transition, while he remained in the background. The team was headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, a former boss of the United African Company (UAC) and a holder of the Order of British Empire, (OBE) whom Babangida believed would be regarded as a respected public figure (Olagunju et al 1993, pp. 244 -247; Lewis 1994, p. 325; Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, p. 152).

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) introduced a new voting system after October 1992, termed 'Option A4' — an electoral system where candidates emerged through a series of party primaries from ward to national levels (Lewis 1994, p. 325) – with a nation-wide Revised Transition to Civil Rule Committee set up to implement this process and elect the executives of the two political parties. The plan was that if the method was successful, it would be used to

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<sup>16</sup> Diarchy is a form of double governments — a system in which two systems can be practiced. Here, I refer to military/civilian arrangements under Babangida.



elect the presidential candidates for the two parties and, subsequently, the president itself. This was an attempt by Babangida to make the process transparent and produce a credibly elected president. As discussed in chapter one, I was in fact appointed to one such Committee in my Local Government and a witness to this process which gained widespread support. The stage was then set for the presidential primaries and the election on June 12, 1993. By February, 1993, the Committee had concluded its national assignment and handed over the next stage to party executives (Olagunju et al, 1993, pp. 220 -224, Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, pp. 154 - 155).

During these periods of fine-tuning the transition between November, 1992 and March 1993 and in spite of the ongoing tensions between the regime and the press, the latter continued to give full coverage to the transition activities. With the emergence of MKO Abiola and Bashir Tofa as the flag bearers of SDP and NRC at the Jos and Port Harcourt party conventions (March 27 to 29, 1993), analysis of both *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* from June 1, 1993 shows a steady rise in political reporting, as well as advertisements placed by both candidates and their parties.



Figure 12: *The Punch*, Thursday June 10, 1993, p. 1.

*The Punch*'s lead story headlined in bold type: '3 days to go: NEC, party leaders meet on Security' (Figure 12) occupies considerable space suggesting its importance and is illustrated with the photograph of the Electoral Commission's Chairman, Professor Humphrey Nwosu. *The Punch* engaged readers, first by reminding them that the all-important June 12 Presidential election was 3 days away. Since this date was already well known, this was a call by *The Punch* for the electorate to prepare themselves for their civic responsibility. Importantly, the headline mentions two strong partners in the election: the electoral commission 'NEC' and the 'party leaders' (whose cooperation would be needed for the success of the election) 'meeting' on another important issue in the election — 'security'. Thus reassuring the public that the major figures connected with the election were acting to ensure its success.

The photograph of the electoral chief with his head slightly edging forward, his right arm raised and pointing (as if to stress a point) and an expressive face, all add meaning to the headline.

He appears to be presiding over the meeting and in a serious mood to conduct the business. Arguably the attributes of the headline and the photograph work together to capture the mood of the public in relation to the elections. *The Punch* is promoting the transition by engaging its readers in what Cohen and Young called ‘comparative recency’, by presenting the election story as a ‘dramatic performance’ in which the subject matter of the election unfolds, through the actions of central characters. In this manner, the readers become ‘spectators encouraged to participate vicariously in the performance through projecting themselves into the situation or identifying with the major characters’ (Cohen and Young 1973, p. 165).

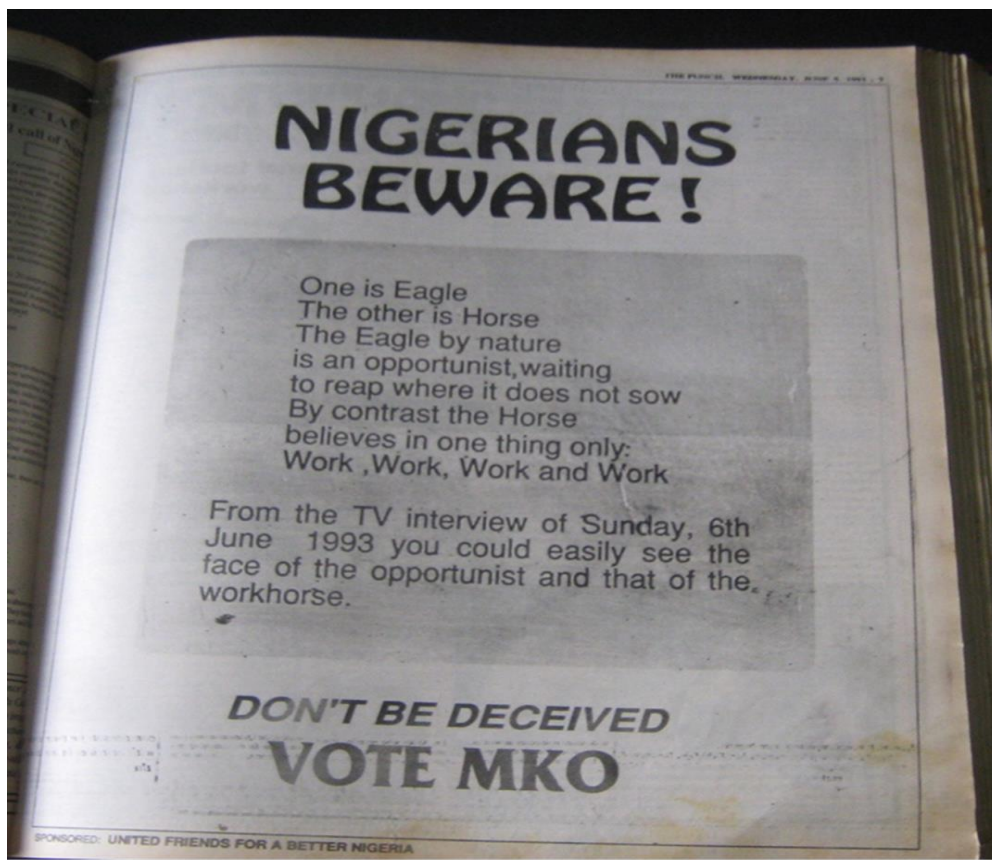


Figure 13: *The Punch*, Wednesday June 9, 1993 p. 9

In contrast, Fig. 13 is a political advertisement placed by the SDP, ‘leftist party’ whose flag bearer is MKO Abiola. The ‘eagle’ mentioned in the advert is the logo and symbol of the rival NRC a ‘rightist party’ (Olagunju et al 1993, p. 217) and is used to represent the party’s presidential candidate, Bashir Tofa, while the ‘horse’, the logo of SDP is used as a metaphor for MKO Abiola. Thus, by comparing the smaller eagle to the larger and more powerful horse the advert insinuates that NRC’s Tofa will be unable to meet the daunting task of turning Nigeria around, while SDP’s Abiola will engage in the hard work needed to lift Nigeria out of

its socio-economic crisis. The TV interview referred to is the Presidential Debate in which press accounts suggest Abiola ‘floored’ Tofa. The declaratory: ‘Nigerians Beware!’ (In bold capitals) hyperbolically warns Nigerians not to vote for a less capable candidate — Tofa. The similarly declarative strapline: Don’t be deceived. Vote MKO (in bold capitals) again reinforces the idea that the electorate should not vote for the eagle but for MKO, the man with the horse power, who is also the subject of the advert.

In the week leading to June 12, 1993 presidential election, a dangerous twist that later put the eight-year transition in jeopardy, surfaced. In its Tuesday June 8, 1993 edition, *The Punch* reported on the front page that two dangers might threaten the election. The lead story was that staff of the state-owned oil corporation, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), had commenced a nationwide strike that might halt fuel supply (see Figure 14 below). The headline in bold lower case was titled ‘6 days to polls: Fuel crisis returns’. The paper reasoned that the strike could disrupt the election, just four days away<sup>17</sup>. The other story, under the headline ‘...court ruling may stall election’, reported that the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) had approached an Abuja High Court to ‘halt the election’ and ‘compel Babangida to extend his tenure till 1997’. The two stories were complemented with a photograph of General Babangida. Overall this front page creates a sense of unease about the upcoming election.

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<sup>17</sup> Given the date of the edition of the newspaper, June 8, 1993 and the date of the election, June 12, 1993, it was 4 days to the election and not the 6 days reported by the headline. The current editor noted the error and regretted it was a miscalculation.





Figure 14: *The Punch*, Tuesday June 8, 1993

I focus particularly on the photograph of Babangida to consider *The Punch*'s management of this unease and its support for the Babangida regime. In the photograph, Babangida dresses in a white traditional robe with a white head dress to match. He is seated gazing to the left with his left arm raised, fist clenched and touching his chin. There is something out of place about this photograph. Using a photograph where the leader dresses in a civil white robe (in traditional Nigeria, white colour symbolises purity), shows a worried frown (or maybe it's an expression of disapproval), the paper leads the readers into a realm where he is seen as a man of peace looking as bewildered as any other concerned Nigerian at the new developments: the NNPC strike and the ABN court case. The 'why all these confusions' or 'I am innocent of these developments' suggested by the photograph, disabuses the populace of any suspicions they might harbour that he is not sincere about the transition. Given the anxiety provoked by the headlines and stories, the positive attributes of Babangida's photograph alleviate or soften the

sense of disruption and potential chaos the news invokes. The civil dress equates Babangida with the civil populace and renders him 'innocent' and maybe apart from the confused situation, whilst a photograph showing him in his official military uniform, looking tough and authoritative might have aroused anger, warning readers that current developments were incited by the military and that Babangida might not want to leave the stage (as indeed it emerged later). A wider shielding of the regime by the press over the longer period of Babangida's regime was reinforced by Tunji Belo, a former editor of the *National Concord* who suggested:

Of Nigeria's past heads of state, Babangida remains the most astute in courting the friendship of top journalists and media practitioners. This could be part of his method at seeking legitimacy or popular acclaim like the human rights bogey. Whatever it was, it worked as many of these journalists soon became gatekeepers against attack on governments from critics (Olukotun 2002, p. 79).

*Nigerian Tribune* also reported the threats to the election on its front page, Wednesday June 10, 1993. There were three stories: two were slightly different from *The Punch*'s reports while the third was similar. The lead headline in bold capitals was titled '72 hours to June 12: FG cries sabotage' with a rider in bold lower case: 'orders NNPC to provide fuel for election'. The first part of the story reported the Transitional Council alleging sabotage by the striking oil workers, describing the latter as 'ill-timed and illegal' and with a directive to the management of the NNPC to take 'immediate and appropriate steps to handle the situation'. Unlike the provocative report in *The Punch*, warning of 'worst fuel crisis', *Nigerian Tribune*'s report was reassuring, quoting an official promising that the strike would not affect election preparations, as 'funds' had been advanced to electoral officers to stock 'petrol, engine oil, gear oil, and brake fluids'. Since there was to be a restriction of movement on Election Day, except for electoral and security officials, the story may have served to calm the nerves of a public wondering how the former would transport the necessary materials to and from the polling stations. The second, also a more upbeat story, was headlined in bold lower case, 'NNPC workers to call off strike' and reported that the striking workers were directed to 'resume work'. The third report, 'Court may stop election' was consonant with *The Punch*'s story, speculating on the judge's threat to grant the prayers of the ABN 'unless parties to the case show cause why it should not be granted'.

Overall, these stories on the two from pages might present a confusing situation to readers: a declaration of a strike and the threat from the court to halt the election. But the positive attributes of Babangida's photograph and 'the strike to be called off' (*Nigerian Tribune*), and equivalent aspects in *The Punch*, soften the tension. Both papers, in slightly different ways, actually highlight the dangers, but cleverly subdue the anger that might erupt with other more 'positive' reports. This suggests an awareness on the part of the papers but the upshot is that the regime is shielded by the press, for the umpteenth time.

Nevertheless, on June 10, the Abuja High Court made a wholly unexpected move: it stopped the election. *The Punch* on its front page Friday June 11, 1993, under a large banner: 'Ikpeme's court stops election' reported that Justice Bassey Ikpeme of an Abuja High Court granted the prayers of the ABN. He declared:

It would be wrong of me with my hands chained to encourage the National Electoral Commission to carry on an act of illegality in the name of presidential elections which had been tampered with by politicians. Given the evidence before me, it is the greatest shame that has happened to Nigeria and the entire political process and something must be done for NEC to sit up.

On the question of jurisdiction, particularly Decree 13 of 1993, which bars courts from entertaining suits relating to the election, the report quoted the judge as citing another Decree, No. 27, 1989, which states that 'it shall be the duty of all arms of government to ensure that democratic processes are not tampered with' (*The Punch* Friday June 11, 1993, p. 1).

The *Nigerian Tribune* also carried reports of the court's ruling under the headline in bold capitals: 'Court stops election'. Above this lead story, seemingly to alert the readers that the court might have trampled on the law, is a small quote from the section of the decree that bars courts from adjudicating on any matter pertaining to the election: 'what the decree says'. Another story: 'Who is Justice Ikpeme?' reported that the judge had been on the bench for only two months, perhaps suggesting he was inexperienced for the job assigned to him. Clearly, the two reports put the court on the spot, but went short of overt criticism. It was more a question of putting the facts out and asking the readers to 'judge' for themselves – which could be regarded as an abdication of the press's responsibility to offer a critical assessment of the situation in the public interest.

From the strike of oil workers to the court action, it is difficult to establish the motives behind this turn of events. But given the transition had been postponed three times (Olagunju et al 1993, Ihonbere 1996) with widespread accusation that Babangida was sitting tight, retrospectively it is feasible to suggest that the regime was behind the emerging sabotage. Was Nzeribe's association (ABN) acting as a conduit for Babangida, to derail the transition so that Babangida could stay in power? Was the strike by the NNPC a ploy to cause problems for the election? And if so, on whose behalf? Was the court intimidated into making the order? Given Babangida's preparations to insulate the election from challenges, it is difficult to point an accusing finger. For instance, one of the transition Decrees already signed into law was Decree 13<sup>18</sup>, 1993 which ousted the jurisdiction of the law courts from engaging with any matter relating to the election (Sesay and Ukeje 1997, pp. 32 – 33). Bearing this in mind, the papers did not allude to any threat to the election at this point, perhaps still 'trusting' that Babangida was sincere (Interview with Felix Abugu, editor of *The Guardian on Saturday*, Tuesday January 16, 2013). Apart from quoting the judge, neither paper offered any analysis either condemning or supporting the ABN's move, nor was suggesting the regime behind it. They preferred to let the readers decide for themselves. This might suggest they were aware of what might have been going on behind the scenes but did not want to ruffle any feathers, given their hitherto 'cosy friendship' with the regime.

Nevertheless, with the election stopped less than twenty four hours before polling on June 12, it was to be expected that political tension would rise. Were the judge's hands truly 'chained' by the evidence of electoral corruption during the presidential primaries, as made available to the court by the ABN? Was ABN acting alone or in concert with the Babangida regime? Certainly, electoral corruption had been evident at earlier moments, as demonstrated by my own experience of politicians offering me cash to declare certain candidates when they were not the successful ones (see Chapter One above). The presidential primaries of both parties held in March, 1993, were also marred with heavy use of cash to 'buy' delegates. Historically too, Nigerian elections have always been fraught with crisis (Uche 1989, Lewis 1994). So the judge may well have been confronted with evidence of corruption. In a retrospective analysis of these events and corroborating my experience, the newly introduced 'Option A4' balloting system was switched to 'Auction A4' at the conventions, leading many politicians to call for

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<sup>18</sup> Section 19, sub-section 1 of the Basic Constitutional and Transition Decree 13, 1993, gave the Electoral Commission (NEC) the exclusive right on matters relating to the conduct of the election. This was why NEC flouted the court order in the first place and went ahead to conduct the election.



the cancellation of the primaries (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999). Thus since the primaries, a range of problematic aspects were not scrutinised or revealed by the press, only for the time bomb to be detonated at the eleventh hour by Babangida using the ABN as cover.

### **June 12: Election Day**

Notwithstanding the June 11 court order to stop the election taking place, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) insisted on holding it, citing Decree 13 which insulates the commission from court interference. *The Punch* on its front page story of Saturday June 12, 1993, under the headline: ‘Despite Ikpeme: Nigerians vote today’, reported that the Chairman of the electoral commission, Professor Humphrey Nwosu had told a press conference the previous night:

By the virtue of section 19 (1) of Decree No 13 of 1993, the said order of the Honourable Court shall have no effect on the day or time of the holding of the presidential election coming up tomorrow. The election will therefore go as scheduled (*The Punch*, Saturday June 12, 1993 p. 1).

‘Despite Ikpeme: Nigerians vote today’ projects a ‘defiant regime’ holding its own as the executive branch of Government, not under the apron string of the judiciary, thus, fulfilling its obligation to the public. An appointee of the president reporting directly to the president, the chairman might be seen by the public as demonstrating courage to press ahead. This firm hand again contributes to subduing public anger. However at the same time, the negative predicate ‘despite Ikpeme’, reminds the public of a court order, but fails to alert readers that going ahead with the election ‘despite’ the order could create more problems. Given this was also not addressed in the news story, the public were provided with no means of understanding the significance of going ahead with the election. This was arguably an abdication of press responsibility<sup>19</sup>. *The Punch* was again shielding the regime from public anger. To make the point more clearly, a headline such as: ‘Danger! NEC to hold election despite court order’ or ‘NEC violates court order, to hold election’ might have helped trigger a debate influencing the electoral body to stop the election, lodge an Appeal with subsequent court intervention. Belatedly the NEC did act in this way but the military stalled the process.

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<sup>19</sup> This was shortly evident (June 16) when another court nullified the election on the basis that the election was held in defiance of a subsisting court order, and therefore was illegal (see below).

In a variety of ways then, the press covered up for the regime with half-truths and sometimes outright concealment of the real situation. The use of the passive voice or of nominalization, as Van Dijk observes, is the way through which the newspapers ‘conceal responsibility’. ‘Playing down an event by referring to the event in a lower (less prominent) embedded clause or conversely by putting it in first position when the event needs extra prominence, is a syntactic style of implicitness or indirectness’ (Van Dijk 1991, p. 188 ). As Roger Fowler also suggests, since ‘people are not in general trained to see through the veils of media representation’ (Fowler 1991, p. 12), it means readers are unsure of what position to take.

According to Oyediran and Agbaje, the election was held amidst a ‘peaceful atmosphere’ (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, p.157), and by June 15, 1993 results from sixteen States and the Federal Capital, Abuja, were released, showing MKO of SDP had won in thirteen States and the Federal Capital, with Tofa of NRC winning in three States (*The Punch* Tuesday 15 June, 1993 p. 1). However, the following day another mine was thrown onto the path of the transition programme: a second court injunction suspended further announcement of the results. The front page of *The Punch*’s edition that day (Wednesday 16, 1993) was full of election reports. But my focus is on two prominent news stories. The first, ‘Another Abuja Court stops NEC...from announcing results’ and ‘NEC studies order’ (i.e. the electoral commission weighs its options). A similar story was also carried by the *Nigerian Tribune*: ‘Court stops election results’. Both papers reported that an Abuja High Court presided over by the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital City, Justice M.D. Saleh, granted an *ex-parte* motion brought by ABN to halt further announcement of the election pending the full hearing of the initial case instituted to stop the election.

This decision by the electoral commission, which earlier disobeyed a court, established for the first time that trouble was indeed brewing. In its Thursday June 17, 1993 edition on the front page, under a big banner, *The Punch* reported: ‘Presidential Polls, NEC suspends election’. As earlier, aside quoting the Court order and the decision of the NEC to ‘study’ the order and suspend further announcement of the election, the paper did not reveal any connection between the regime and the ABN; and there was no indication that the paper asked the NEC boss why he was now deferring to the court. No critical editorial or cartoon appeared either. This lull was perhaps further continuation of the press’s ‘abiding faith’ under the ‘terms’ of its cooperation with the regime.

Yet, confirmation that the press was aware of events behind the scenes was manifest in a compelling front page news story also in Thursday June 17, 1993 edition headlined: ‘Nwosu offered to resign?’ Quoting a foreign news agency, AFP (*Agency France Press*) it reported that the electoral commission boss had offered to resign, but Babangida refused his resignation. The paper further disclosed that efforts by its reporter the previous day to reach the professor or any of the Commission’s staff to confirm the story failed. By hiding behind a foreign news agency to break this news, the paper again did not take direct responsibility for reporting what was increasingly becoming public knowledge: the regime was behind the plots. By quoting a foreign news agency on the tension between Babangida and the NEC boss, the paper indirectly informs its readers of the link between the regime and the electoral crisis, but without incurring the anger of the regime. This mode is what Van Dijk referred to as a ‘strategy of journalistic distancing’ (Van Dijk 1991, p. 152) allowing journalists to make a point but preserve vested interests.

Still, in spite of this ‘distancing’, some observers, including Bayo Oloyede, believed the press was still performing its liberal role. He suggests that the situation could have been worse ‘but for the traditional resoluteness, great courage and defiance of a large section of the press, particularly the private news media and their journalists who insisted that the truth must be published’ (Oloyede 2004, p. 153). However, this frame of ‘courage and defiance’ seems misplaced given the cautious coverage by the private titles *The Punch* and the *Nigerian Tribune* where ‘resoluteness’ is absent. For Ayo Olukotun it was *The Guardian* and *National Concord* at the frontline of private media opposing the regime, though he shows how during this crisis *The Guardian* admits in an editorial headed ‘In bad faith’ that the press ‘bent backwards to accommodate the Babangida regime’ (Olukotun 2002, p. 89) which orchestrated the crisis. Enjoying a beneficial relationship with the regime during this period, they were unable to break ranks. The result was a failure to critically appraise the political situation in the public interest.

### **The Gathering Storm: The Annulment of the Election**

From this moment on, tension flared as civil society organisations rose to challenge the establishment. Meanwhile, the electoral commission was still trying to get the High Court orders withdrawn through the Court of Appeal so that the election results could be released. However, in a move that seemed to pre-empt the Court of Appeal’s intervention, the regime

announced the annulment of the presidential elections and all matters pertaining to it. Bizarrely, the release announcing the annulment – ‘on a plain paper, unsigned and without a title’ (*The Punch*, Thursday June 24, 1993) – was distributed to State House Correspondents by the Chief Press Secretary to the Vice President Augustus Aikhomu, Mr. Nduka Irabor, *The Guardian* staff member previously jailed by the Buhari. The release clearly put an end to the transition programme by suspending all court proceedings as well as repealing the Decree in which the transition processes were anchored. Ironically, the election which united Nigerians on June 12, 1993 had, by June 23, 1993 when it was annulled, become the source of divisions amongst Nigerians (Kwarteng 1996, pp. 190, 194).

As people poured onto the streets, in spite of troops deployment, the press responded to the pressure and from June 15 and through July and August, critical stories against the annulment emerged. These stories expressed the angry reactions of notable rights activists and pro-democracy campaigners, as well as critical reactions from the international community. Front page headlines included: ‘Voters oppose fresh polls’ (*Sunday Tribune*, July 4, 1993, p. 1); ‘IBB disgraces the Army, Danjuma’ (a former chief of Army staff berating Babangida for the annulment) (*Sunday Tribune*, July 4, 1993, p. 1); ‘Soyinka backs sanctions’ (Wole Soyinka backing the proposed sanctions by certain countries) (Friday August 6, 1993, p. 1) and ‘MKO meets US VP’ (Abiola meeting US vice president during his global tour) (Wednesday August 11, 1993, p. 1). There were similar headlines in *The Punch*: ‘Soyinka, Solarin spit fire’ (Soyinka and another notable figure heaping pressure on the military) (*Sunday Punch* June 20, 1993, p. 1); ‘Britain restates calls for release of polls result’ (Tuesday June 22, p. 1); ‘EC may impose sanctions on Nigeria<sup>20</sup>’ (Saturday June 26, p. 1) and ‘US recalls her citizens from Nigeria’ (Monday June 28, p. 1). In this context of critical press coverage and mass demonstrations, the military lashed out arresting and detaining campaigners and journalists, proscribing media houses (illegally, without court warrants). In turn these measures led to ‘guerrilla’, ‘suicide’ or ‘underground’ journalism and media ‘terrorism’ — a journalistic moment when proscribed media began operating underground and printing outside their premises in order to remain in circulation and keep the heat on the military dictatorship (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, p. 119, Olukotun 2002, p. 132).

According to Olukotun, this underground phenomenon was made possible by the civil populace, who had pressured the press to break its allegiance with the regime, and who

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<sup>20</sup> EC, the European Commission, preceded the EU, European Union

provided logistic support to the hiding journalists (Olukotun 2002). Interestingly, disenchanted members of the security apparatuses sympathetic to the popular cause also shielded the underground press and passed on information of impending operations to journalists (Adebanwi 2011). In the midst of violent demonstrations, the regime made further efforts, ostensibly to placate the situation, by announcing a new presidential election (without Abiola and Tofa) and a promise to step down from power on August 27, 1993. However, campaigners rejected all proposals and demanded a revalidation of the annulled election results. During this period, the press's coverage was more critical and an alliance formed between civil society and the press, but it did not wholly adopt an oppositional voice, an indication perhaps, that the press was still cautious in dealing with the regime. This tempering of criticism is evident even in cartoons.

In one example from *The Punch* (Fig 15), the man refuses his dinner, telling the wife his 'hunger strike continues until Professor Nwosu announces the winner of the June 12 election'. In the *Nigerian Tribune* (Fig 16), a father and child exchange views on the concept of power transfer in the developed and the developing nations. The conversation goes thus:

FATHER – IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, THERE'S A PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER

SON - HMMN! DADDY THAT'S **DEMOCRACY**

FATHER – BUT IN AFRICA, IT'S USUALLY A TUG OF WAR

SON – OOH-OO! DADDY THAT IS DEMOCRAZY

Both cartoons suggest a problematic situation: the 'hunger strike' in *The Punch*, the linguistic turn of 'democracy' into 'democracy' (demonstration of craziness)<sup>21</sup> in the *Nigerian Tribune*. But both, arguably, underplay a serious matter of national importance, manifest in the struggle on the streets, by displacing into the domestic sphere and reducing to a quotidian exchange. Perhaps such an approach would have greater appeal, including to women, than a more overtly

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<sup>21</sup> Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a Nigerian-world renowned Afro-beat musician cum critic, coined the words 'demonstration of craziness' (**democracy or dem all crazy**) to criticise the manipulation of democratic process globally. This particular track is in his 1987 album 'Teacher don't teach me nonsense'. See also Tejumola Olaniyan's (2004) *Arrest the Music: Fela and his Rebel Art and politics*. Indiana University Press

political format. In contrast to the earlier cartoons *supporting* and legitimising Babangida in power, these seemed devised to temper criticism, to barely ruffle the regime's feathers, and thus provoke no sanctions

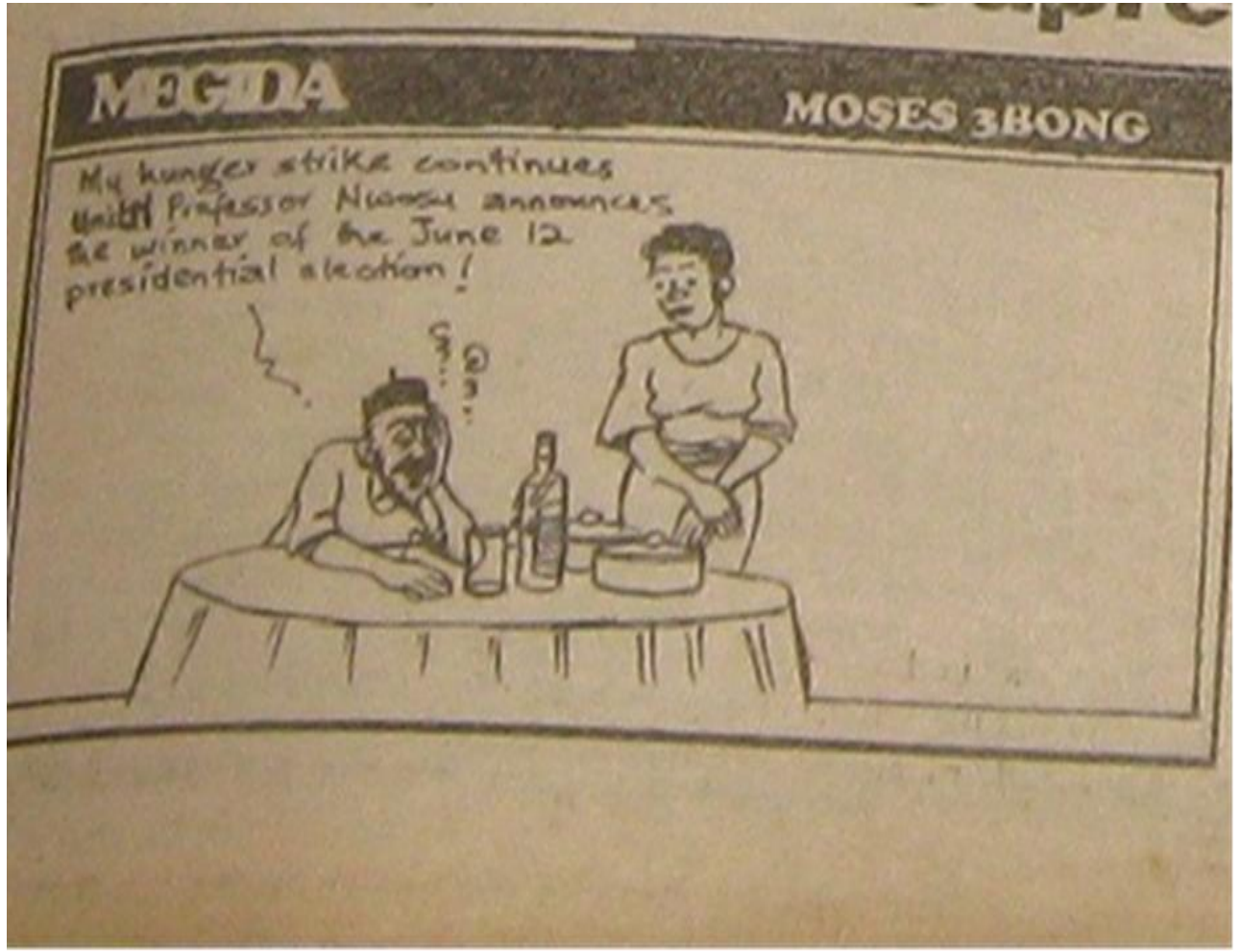


Figure 15: *The Punch*, Tuesday June, 22 1993 p. 1



Figure 16: *Nigerian Tribune*, Friday July 2, 1993 p. 9

Likewise, editorials on the issue of the moment were scant, and when they appeared, they were non-committal, even apologetic in relation to the regime, displacing criticism onto other parties. *Nigerian Tribune*'s editorial (Saturday June 19, 1993 p. 3), titled 'Judicial Anarchy' occupied approximately half a page. As the caption suggests, it wholly places blame for the electoral crisis on the judiciary, accusing it of 'incoherence and contradiction'. In the paper's view, the various High Court injunctions 'erode the authority of judiciary, drag it into disrepute with the potential to lead to public anarchy and mass lawlessness'. Not surprisingly, given what had become enduring support, the seven-paragraph editorial did not mention either the Babangida military regime or the association at the centre of the 'judicial anarchy', the ABN, as possibly responsible for the crisis. The electoral body, NEC was mentioned once while the judiciary and Courts were mentioned seventeen times. Negative phrases were deployed to describe the judiciary/courts, but the NEC was not attacked and Babangida and ABN were out of the picture. By this method of 'journalistic distancing' (Van Dijk 1991), removing Babangida and the ABN from the political impasse, *Nigerian Tribune* tries to transfer public anger from the regime to the courts and judiciary. In fact the so-called 'judicial anarchy' of the editorial, constituted little or no problem to the transition, since a single pronouncement of the

higher Court of Appeal could override any high court decisions. It is thus, curious that the *Nigerian Tribune* shielded the regime from any agency in the crisis but since this editorial appeared on June 19, it might be suggested that the paper was creating a soft landing for Babangida before the announcement of the annulment on June 23 – let the judiciary rather than Babangida take the blame. Perhaps the paper was in some form of agreement with the regime on how to prepare the minds of the public for the impending coup against their electoral wishes.

Notwithstanding this position adopted by *Nigerian Tribune*, it is interesting that some scholars have proposed that the press at that time was leading the people. Writing on the crisis occasioned by the annulment of June 12, election result, Ayo Olukotun insists the ‘independent media defied censorship and repression, and continued to harp on the restoration of civil will’ (Olukotun 2002, p. 90). Sina Alimi in his study on the role of *Nigerian Tribune* during the period, also argues that in spite of MKO Abiola using his *National Concord* to pull down Obafemi Awolowo (*Nigerian Tribune* publisher) in the 1980s, *Nigerian Tribune* did not see the annulment as an opportunity to pay Abiola back, rather ‘protected and sustained’ the ‘gains’ of the election, as well as ‘launch open criticism’ of the Babangida regime (Alimi 2011, p. 62). Alimi’s position sits oddly with the analysis above which reveals how the paper shielded Babangida.

It seemed as if the press was not in a hurry to ditch ‘a friend in need’. Rather, any critical reporting of the escalation of violence was triggered by popular revolt by the people. In the end it was public support and public demonstrations that forced the press, or at least gave it a strength it had hitherto not had, to abandon the regime, at least in part, and once again defend liberal claims.

As late as 30 June, *The Punch* is still engaging with Babangida. In the second part of a two-part editorial, in the form of a front page ‘commentary’, also taking up the whole of page two to stress its importance, the paper comments: ‘IBB’s place in history (2), asking Babangida to respect the wishes of the people. One paragraphs reads ‘one thing we *beg* of General Babangida, though: he should leave for us what he met us with — one country, strong, united, peaceful. We *plead with him, in the name of Allah, in the names of Maryam and Halimat* (wife and daughter), in the name of anything he holds dear, not to leave us a Yugoslavia’ (my emphasis). The paper concludes:



Time will surely heal the wounds of the Nigerian people, and when the present ominous cloud clears, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida will be accorded his rightful place in history. Babangida holds the aces. What use he makes of them will determine his place in history.

As in the cartoons above (Figures 15 and 16), Babangida was not directly held responsible for the crisis, but treated like a statesman standing by, potentially able to act responsibly, as crisis engulfs his community. 'Time will surely heal the wounds of the Nigerian people' and 'when the present ominous cloud clears', are phrases which avoid linking Babangida or ABN to causing the 'wounds' of the people or the 'ominous cloud'. By not explicitly holding Babangida and ABN responsible, the paper left the mass of uncritical readers to guess or search further causes. In this way, by constructing sentences in the passive voice (Van Dijk 1991) *The Punch* perfectly conceals both Babangida and the ABN as agents responsible for the political crisis.

Further, unlike the expletives poured on Buhari, when Babangida took over eight years earlier ('arrogant', 'insensitive', 'fascist'), language in *The Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* during this crisis period was very different. To some of the press, the annulling of the result of an election adjudged the 'freest and fairest' in history (Kwarteng 1996, Ihonvbere 1996, Oyediran and Agbaje 1999) was still not a decisive enough event to totally break the cord tying them to Babangida. However perhaps it would have taken some strength and independence for a newspaper to fight the currents. After all, the arrests and proscriptions of media houses by the regime, demonstrated that even though their coverage was never explicitly critical of the regime, Babangida was still unhappy with the coverage.

With violent demonstrations continuing and ethnic clashes in Lagos, between Hausa and Yoruba in particular, and others fleeing, it was increasingly impossible for Babangida to hold the nation together. Yet he continued to unleash further conditions on the press for their reporting on the crises. On Monday August 16, 1993, the regime signed into law a new decree which required all newspapers to register afresh. The *Newspaper Decree* No 43 of 1993 also established the Newspaper Registration Board<sup>22</sup>. Under its provisions, newspapers and magazines were expected to re-register with this board. Failure to comply meant a conviction

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<sup>22</sup> A replica of the colonial regime's *Newspapers Act* of 1917, Decree 43, 1993, mandated all newspapers published and circulated in Nigeria to register annually with the Board via a written application. The Board is vested with the powers to register or refuse a given application.

and fine, to the tune of Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira (N250, 000.00) or a seven year jail term, or both (Oloyede 2004, pp. 69-71).

If Babangida thought the Decree would reduce the coverage of the crisis or temporarily cripple the press, the opposite was the case as the anger and defiance of the protestors on the street rose. Indeed, the situation was becoming a no-win for Babangida, not as a result of media pressure but as a result of intense violence, international pressures and descent into ethnic war. Although, Babangida remained fully in charge, there was sign of division among the military chiefs – some officers favoured a revalidation of June, 12 election results, others objected – but no sign of a military coup. Babangida no doubt commanded the loyalty of the majority of his fellow senior and middle rank officers through patronage, and so many people had benefited from Babangida's eight year rule that a coup would have been a suicidal move (Kwarteng 1996; Ezeani 2005; Omotosho 2006).

Nevertheless, with no clear way forward, Babangida appeared to accept that the game was up. He addressed a special joint session of the Parliament on August 17, 1993 where he declared his intention to 'step aside' on August 26, and relinquish power to an interim national government. He also denied the speculations that he wanted to hang on to power. *Nigerian Tribune* quoted him:

Following lengthy deliberations with my service chiefs, I offered, as my own personal sacrifice, to voluntarily step aside as the President. Our stewardship would always be available for posterity having been convinced that the present regime had scored first to have ran (sic) the most documented administration in this country (*Nigerian Tribune*, Wednesday August 18, 1993 p 1).

'Stepping aside', on August 26, 1993, he relinquished power to a Interim National Government (ING) headed by the Head of his Transitional Council, Chief Ernest Shonekan<sup>23</sup> (who midwived the failed transition). Babangida retired, and along with him all service chiefs, with the exception of General Sanni Abacha, his long-time military colleague and coup veteran, appointed as Secretary of Defence in the new Interim Government, which in some ways can be seen as an extension of the Babangida regime,.

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<sup>23</sup> Incidentally Shonekan is MKO Abiola's kinsman — both are from the *Egba* division of Abeokuta, the capital of the Yoruba state of Ogun. Presumably, this was in an apparent move to divide Abiola's homestead and weaken the agitation for the revalidation of the result of the annulled June 12, election.

## Conclusion

I would argue that in the context of debates about a ‘liberal’ press, the Babangida regime offered a new vista in the relation between media and government. Unlike under Buhari, Babangida faced many difficult issues of national importance: the parcel bomb killing Dele Giwa which was linked to the regime; the IMF/SAP debate; and the many adjustments to the transition timetable. All these events should have been critical moments when the press acted and commented independently of government. But the bond between the two was so strong that their relationship became inseparable and their voices merged.

The Babangida coup which toppled Buhari rode on the crest of a press war against Buhari. In my analysis of the first thirty days of Babangida, I establish a strong link between the latter and the press. The link enabled a working arrangement between the two sides, which I have referred to as an *agreed liberalism*. This was evident in the way the press reported the regime in news reports, editorials, cartoons and other sections. Practically Babangida also demonstrated the alliance by releasing detained journalists and reopening closed media houses; he also ensured that an ‘inclusive’ government included the press. Thus, for the first time in the history of Nigeria, a government was run with the active participation of media personnel. As a consequence arguably, there could be no fourth estate of the realm.

With the annulment of the result of the first ever peaceful and fair election (June 12, 1993), it might have been expected that the press would break its seven year old alliance with Babangida. But it could not, even as it tried to criticise the regime. Ndaeyo Uko confirms as much, suggesting that in the face of all Babangida’s failings, the press ‘lowered its voice’ (Uko 2004). In explanation of this ‘lowering’ of the press’s voice, it has been claimed that the press was vulnerable to military tactics in Babangida years, but this appears less credible when juxtaposed with the fact that the press wittingly rejected Buhari and enthroned the Babangida regime.

Did Babangida study the culture of the press to know how to deal with it or simply offer ‘carrots’ with the aim of buying up the press? Ndaeyo Uko offers such an insight proposing that he had studied the causes of frictions between the press and various regimes so that he knew how to handle the press (Uko 2004). *Nigerian Tribune*’s editor claiming that Babangida was a ‘student of Machiavelli who understood that for him to have absolute power, he needed to court the press (Interview, October 18, 2011), poses a related view. Whatever the reasons offered for the umbilical tie of press and government, it is clear that ‘lack of separation of

journalism from politics' (Golding and Elliot 1979) or 'political parallelism' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) was responsible for the cooperative strategy adopted by both the regime and the press. I aver that the understanding of the Nigerian press during this period depends on seeing itself as a part of the state and not a distant estate keeping watch over the affairs of the state. This is contrary to the optimism expressed by some scholars about the press's touted advocacy role and outspokenness.

Therefore, argument can be advanced at this point, that the Nigerian press collaborated with Babangida for its own interests. The collusion with Babangida regime was at the cost of democracy for the Nigerian people. It also led the people into the darkest era as the press sacked the interim government Babangida put in place in favour of yet another military strongman, General Sani Abacha, as the next analysis will reveal.

## **Chapter Six**

### **News as Myth: Politics of Succession in Abacha Years (1993 – 1998)**

Introduction

Interim Government: The Press opted for the military

Press Invitation to Abacha: A Turning Point

A Familiar Story: The Press Withdrawals Support for Abacha

Abacha: The President in Waiting

Abacha: The Cul-de-sac

Conclusion

## Introduction

If Abacha succeeded in emasculating the press, it was not because he was too powerful or dictatorial but because the press had deliberately weakened itself. It had left the people confounded. The public was no longer sure whose cause the press was fighting or, indeed, what the press stood for: truth or falsehood, integrity or duplicity, democracy or dictatorship. With a morally bereft and selfish press to contend with, the Abacha regime won an easy victory.

*Romancing the Gun: The Press as a Promoter of Military Rule* (Ndaeyo Uko (2004)

In spite of the many dramatic and violent scenes that characterised Babangida's last days in office, for many people the subsequent Interim Government was a relief: Babangida did not revalidate the June 12 elections results, but nonetheless on August 26, 1993 he handed the reins to a civilian Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan. As a successful entrepreneur and former boss of United Africa Company (UAC) it was anticipated that his handling of the crisis would differ from that of a military man. With the exit of Babangida, it might have been expected that the press would then align itself with a civilian polity, reappraising democratic struggle. Instead, however, it contributed to the precariousness of the Interim Government, leading to another full blown military rule.

No sooner was the Interim Government formed on August 27, 1993 than Lagos and other cities were embroiled in violent demonstrations trying to force the Interim Government out of power, and calling for the installation of Abiola presumed to have won the annulled June 12 election. While grappling with street demonstrations, on November 10, 1993, a Lagos High Court Justice Dolapo Akinsanya declared the ING 'illegal' and ordered machineries be put in place for instituting a democratic regime (Olukoshi 2002, p. 234, Aiyede 2010, p. 177, Ogbeidi 2010, p. 50). At the same time the press grew more 'combative, militant, aggressive and antagonised' (Malaolu 2004, p. 77) towards Shonekan as a Babangida 'lackey' (Felix Abugu, January 16, 2013) and what they saw as the 'lame-duck' (Alimi 2011, p. 62, Olukoshi 2002, p. 234) government. In response Shonekan attempted to bring the situation under control by releasing some detained journalists, announcing the establishment of a commission of inquiry to probe the June 12 crisis, and indicating his intention to appeal the judgement declaring it illegal. However, these potential ways forward were stoutly rejected by the press (*Daily Champion*, Tuesday November 16 1993).

With battle raging on the streets, and the Interim Government under intense press criticism, on November 17, 1993 General Sani Abacha, defence secretary and veteran coup plotter (he was part of the two previous coups – 1983 and 1985 – as well as responsible for aborting the bloody 1990 coup against Babangida) ‘forced Shonekan to resign and announced himself the Head of State’ (Mahmud 1993, pp. 88, 89) thus instituting the most ‘brutal and sadistic’ regime (Olukotun 2010, p. 168) since independence in 1960.

Opinions diverge on why Babangida let Abacha stay on with the Interim Government. Some believed he was left to protect military interest and stabilise the regime, given the precarious situation at the time, while others opined that the motive was that he should take the reins (Interview with Ehichioya Ezomon, Deputy Editor of *Sunday Guardian*, January 16, 2013) as master of the game and having played ‘John the Baptist’<sup>24</sup> in previous coups. Or as Ndaeyo Uko quoting Babangida described him as the ‘Khalifa’ (the prince in waiting) (Uko 2004, p. 112).

But whatever the reasons, it is clear, as I go on to explore, that Abacha's easy ride to power was, again, the making of the press. Had the press learned lessons from the previous two regimes of Buhari and Babangida and embraced ‘fourth Estate’ journalism, it was possible that Abacha's efforts to ‘take his turn’ might have been aborted. But so intensive was the press chorus for Abacha to come and clear up the mess that he didn't need troops and weapons to seize power (Uko 2004). Again, Abacha did more than his callers expected: in his maiden broadcast on Thursday, November 18, 1993, Abacha dismantled all the democratic structures already in place. Specifically, he ‘dissolved the Interim National Government; sacked the National Assembly and state governors and assemblies; dissolved local governments, the electoral commission and the two political parties; banned political meetings/gatherings and established a Provisional Ruling Council’ (*Daily Champion*, Friday 19 November, 1993 pp. 1 and 3). With these announcements the nation returned to full blown military rule.

Yet in his broadcast, Abacha also cynically (and contradictorily given his other announcements) appealed to what Uko later refers to as the ‘naïve’ press (Uko 2004, p. 117) by promising to respect human rights and uphold press freedom. He released detained journalists and de-proscribed media houses closed by the Babangida regime. For this, Abacha

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<sup>24</sup> John the Baptist is one of the Biblical Twelve Disciples of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, who announced the coming of Jesus Christ. Abacha similarly announced the take-over of powers in two previous coups of Buhari and Babangida, and perhaps, he felt it was time for him to be in the driving seat, rather than somebody else.

received press support, but as in previous regimes, the press's 'good' relationship with Abacha was short-lived, the 'honeymoon over' (Interview with General Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2011). It was followed by the harshest treatment in Nigeria's history, climaxing March 1995 with the trial and imprisonment of journalists, for coup plotting (Jibo 2003, p. 229, Kraxberger 2004, p. 416).

Thus six months into his regime when Abacha had clearly delineated his authoritarianism the press changed its tune. Felix Abugu, editor of *Guardian on Saturday*, claims that the press invited Abacha to sack Shonekan's Interim Government, on the basis of the 'agreement, though not written' that he would revalidate the June 12 elections result and hand over to Abiola, once the Interim Government was dissolved. Abugu lamented that regrettably the 'trust the press has in the military to do the right thing was betrayed' when Abacha reneged his promise to hand over to Abiola (Interview on January 16, 2013). This 'betrayal' then led to the press attacking the regime. As General Oladipo Diya, Abacha's deputy, reflected: the press supported the regime initially, but 'along the line the dinner was over, may be because press expectations from the regime fell short of what they had in mind' (Interview on October 10, 2011). On the eve of the first anniversary of the annulment of June 12 elections (June 11, 1994), Abiola, who had declared himself president at Epetedo play-ground, Lagos (Ogbondah 2000, p. 233) was arrested and placed in detention.

In the course of Abacha regime, political and financial corruption became endemic; there were assassinations of known opposition figures, including journalists and Abiola's activist wife Kudirat killed on the street of Lagos by agents<sup>25</sup> of the regime (for her outspokenness over June 12 and Abiola's detention (Lewis 1999, Olukotun 2002, p. 122, Adebaniwi 2012, p. 247). There were also two coups (1995 and 1997), alleged by the opposition to be arranged, aimed at reining-in those standing in the way of Abacha (Alimi 2011, Uko 2004, Malaolu 2004, Olukotun 2002, Ogbondah 2000).

With this background in mind I analyse the news practices of *Vanguard* and *Champion* as discussed earlier in methodology chapter. I first dissect the Interim Government Babangida

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<sup>25</sup> Subsequent trials lasting a decade at a Lagos High Court in 2011, found some agents of the regime guilty of the assassination of Kudirat Abiola, including Abacha's chief security officer, Major Hamza Mustapha. The suspects were finally discharged and acquitted by the Court of Appeal in August 2013, while the Lagos State Government has appealed to the Supreme Court.



hurriedly put in place in August 1993, particularly the 17 days preceding the Abacha take-over of power (November 1 – 17, 1993 in order to properly understand the genesis of the Abacha regime. I then pay attention to Abacha's actions in returning the country to a full military rule, investigating what he considered to be 'home grown' Nigerian democracy and his attempt to transform himself into a civilian president (though without first resigning from the military). His adoption as the sole presidential candidate by the 'five fingers of a leprous hand'<sup>26</sup> (Lewis 1999) was also examined; and in particular how the press feasted on the moment<sup>27</sup> unwittingly promoting the presidential ambition of the man it claimed to be fighting against. Further, the chapter explores how from 1994 Abacha and the press parted ways with the latter demanding a return to civil rule. Finally I engage with the sudden, but suspicious death of Abacha on June 8, 1998, thus ending a five-year long 'catastrophe'.

In the last part of the chapter, the focus is on Abacha's succession agenda. Between April and June 1998, he had succeeded in taming press opposition such that his plans to succeed himself almost became a *fait accompli*. With notable opposition figures, including some editors, either on death row or serving long jail terms for coup plots (Olukotun 2002, 2010); Nigerian society was gripped with a fear of Abacha

### **Interim Government: The Press opted for the military**

The imposition of Shonekan by Babangida was insulting and contemptuous, and that robbed Shonekan of press support. The stance we [the press] took on Shonekan was because, it was a sad reminder of the insincerity of Babangida regime that we didn't want to have anything to do with anymore.

Interview with Felix Abugu, editor of *Guardian on Saturday*, January 16, 2013.

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<sup>26</sup> The late Nigerian Attorney-General and Minister of Justice and a notable opposition figure during Abacha's regime, Chief Bola Ige, mocked the five parties that declared Abacha their sole candidate, dismissing them as 'five fingers of a leprous hand' - a nomenclature that went viral in the media.

<sup>27</sup> As the five parties endorsed Abacha, there was a media frenzy as the press jostled to sell space to the regime's agents who wanted to congratulate Abacha and promote his presidential ambition.

As already indicated, Ernest Shonekan inherited a political and social crisis from Babangida. Yet the regime delicately sought to undo the annulled election by setting up a commission of inquiry and was diplomatic in trying not to humiliate or stir up anger in the military, whose top brass were said to be opposed to an Abiola presidency (Omoruyi 1999). Yet Shonekan's constructive steps were rebuffed by the press.

As reported in the *Daily Champion*, in his broadcast to the nation General Abacha in fact attested to Shonekan's courage in taking up the leadership of the Interim Government at:

A most trying time in the history of Nigeria when there were lots of uncertainties politically, economically and socially. However, driven by a belief in himself, his countrymen and love of his country, he accepted to face the challenges of our time and showed great courage to take on the daunting task' (*Daily Champion* Friday November 19, 1993, p. 3).

Indeed, Abacha's tributes to Shonekan could not have been more apt, in that it was an achievement that a civilian without a military background who had spent decades in the corporate world would shoulder such a precarious post in a difficult situation where he was surrounded by over-ambitious military politicians. Surprisingly, in spite of this courageous move, the press vigorously undermined Shonekan, alleging he was a military stooge (Alimi 2011, Abugu 2013). As I discuss below, rather than a 'sad reminder of the Babangida regime', as Abugu alleges in my opening quotation of this section, the press's opposition to Shonekan regime, was in fact, in carrying out a press/military organised coup that would see Abacha become the new head of state. This press/military agenda, denying Nigerians civilian rule, was a replica of Buhari's 1983 coup against the civilian regime of Shagari. Adigun Agbaje confirms that this was carried out with the connivance of the press, such that top editors were already aware Buhari would lead the new government before it happened (Agbaje 1990, p. 217).

Initially, from the moment Shonekan was sworn-in, on August 26, 1993, the press did not recognise him as a legitimate leader. Shina Alimi, a historian at Obafemi Awolowo University, (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria, acknowledges that the Interim Government upheld human rights, but noted that the press considered it a 'lame duck institution' (Alimi 2011, p. 62) or 'a bad Babangida joke' (Uko 2004, p. 113) imposed on the Nigerian people. As such, the regime was not accorded any credibility. For instance, the Interim Government announcement of the removal of fuel subsidies early November, 1993, incited negative reporting and increased press

attacks on the regime, notwithstanding sound economic reasons advanced by the regime for the removal of subsidies. While not totally denying the press's link with the Abacha coup, Abugu (cited at top of this section) insists that the press's opposition to Shonekan was echoing others' views that the military was better placed to solve the crisis it created: 'The leadership of the people believed the military was better in terms of *organisation and integrity* to help us cleanse the Augean stable and bring us back democracy' (my emphasis) (Interview on January 16, 2013)<sup>28</sup>.

Analysis of some specific headlines makes the antagonistic approach by the press clearer. But I first suggest some more generic qualities of headlines. Daniel Dor in his analysis of the role of headlines contends that 'functional definition positions the headline as a textual negotiator between the story and its readers' (2003, p. 696). But more than being a negotiator, headlines from another perspective, should be seen as 'autonomous texts rather than faithful representation of the story they introduce and that unless one reads the actual news report, a distorted or incomplete account of the story is received' (Ifantidou 2009, 702). Taiwo further notes that headlines 'have hidden ideological meanings reflecting the views of those whose interest is being served and those whose interest is being undermined' (Taiwo 2007, p. 218). Similarly, Van Dijk's highlights that newspaper headlines 'not only globally define or summarise an event, they also signal (their) social or political opinions of the event' (Van Dijk 1991, p. 53). In this light, I refer to some pertinent stories and headlines.

Supporting anti-ING interests, the *Vanguard* edition Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1993 carried on its entire front page, stories that mounted pressure on the regime. The major headline in a very large font was on the threat of a general strike issued by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) to the Government: 'NLC gives ING 72-hr ultimatum'. Under the story was a similarly large photograph showing a bonfire made by protestors who barricaded the major Ikorodu Road in Lagos. Here, even before the ultimatum expires, *Vanguard* amplifies the strike threat implied in the headline with the photograph showing protestors making bonfires and barricading the road, and thus letting the Government realise that the people already oppose it. As a participant myself then, I can recall that reading such headlines and stories of our street activities (which

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<sup>28</sup> By the 'leadership of the people', Abugu was referring to a coalition of civil society groups (pro-democracy and human rights groups) at the time, but including the National Union of Journalists (NUJ); The Guild of Editors and Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN). As my earlier discussion has established (see Chapter Five above), some notable members of the press and other civil right groups, served and collaborated with the Babangida regime. Whether this 'leadership' was a true representative of the people and was working towards the revalidation of June 12, mandate was a most question.

were not in short supply) only spurred us on and increased street protests. Another headline: 'Protests spread over fuel price hike' gave accounts of the protests spreading into other states beyond Lagos. Such threatening language – 'ultimatum' and sign of escalation – the 'spread' of protests implies that we the protestors were on top of the situation and a sign that the government was unpopular.

More specifically, on the same front page, was a story suggesting that the ING was arrogant and insensitive to the crises of the moment. The story is titled: 'ING forges ahead despite obstacles – Shonekan'. The headline was taken from Shonekan's state-of-the-nation address to the joint session of the National Assembly. I reproduce below the particular quote relating to the headline and as published by the paper, which gives insight to the tenor of his address.

Despite all legal and political obstacles being put in our way, we are determined to succeed within our mandate for the sake of Nigeria; for the sake of democracy and for the sake of our children to whom we should bequeath a united, strong and viable nation (*Vanguard*, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1993 p. 1).

The quote is a positive statement of reassurance to Nigerians that the Government will succeed in its efforts to find solutions to the crises notwithstanding the many challenges. And the fact that the ING actually took constructive steps, such as the commission of inquiry on the annulled June 12 elections results, attests to such an interpretation.

However, since the press saw the regime as 'lame duck' (Alimi 2011), or 'a joke' (Uko 2004) and it was pushing for the military, in the manner Dor (2003) and Ifantidou (2009) suggest above, *Vanguard* presented the speech in a manner that suggested the ING was 'defiant and insensitive' to the crises. The headline 'ING forges ahead' could be read as signalling to protestors that the Government was not deferring to their legitimate demands, was not letting anything get in its way; in this way it increased the tempo of violence. Whereas the tone of the speech actually reassured the people that the Government was attending to the obstacles to peace and affirmed the regime's resolve to overcome the challenges: 'we are determined to succeed'. Since a headline is first and foremost a means to attract readers (in part a 'textual negotiator between the story and its readers' (Dor 2003), the majority of whom may not buy the newspapers – as we call it in Nigeria 'free readers association' – many readers were likely to hold on to in this way, rather than pay close attention to the actual statement made by Shonekan.

In other circumstances, it might have been possible for *Vanguard* to have carried headlines making the same points but less provocatively, e.g. 'Despite obstacles, ING optimistic of peaceful resolution' or 'Political Crises: We will overcome our obstacles - Shonekan'. Though as Fowler notes, the use of language by newspapers 'does not have to be particularly melodramatic or ominously metaphoric' (Fowler 1991, p. 165), i.e. to be hyperbolic, but *Vanguard's* choice of words in its headlines, as Van Dijk (1991) points out, clearly manifested the paper's political stance on the Shonekan regime. All the stories align with the headlines: they reinforce what can be interpreted as provocative phrases in the headlines.

In another instance, shortly after the ruling of a Lagos High Court had declared the ING as illegal (in a suit instituted by MKO Abiola) the Government filed an appeal at the Appeal Court in Lagos. Both papers reported the story on Tuesday November 16, 1993.

On the court case, *Daily Champion's* headline reads: 'ING goes to appeal court'. The headline was displayed in red font over a white background making it strikingly different from the usual headlines so that it stood out as an issue of national importance. In *Vanguard*, the headline read:

ING

Appeals

Court ruling

The headline was tiny, squeezed and hidden; it was written in white ink over a black background, arranged in a deck, as above and swallowed up by a large banner on the Government-Labour negotiation: 'Govt-NLC talks deadlocked.... and strike continues'. A large photograph of a highway, showing an almost empty road with commuters walking to their destinations (and thus evoking the impact of the strike), was placed under the headline. In this way, readers' interests have been guided towards the stand-off meeting with labour. The very important judicial issue of the appeal court case was downplayed. In arguably sensationalising events, *Vanguard* engaged in an 'engineering of content and manipulation of public space' (Owens-Ibie cited in Popoola 2011, p. 108) to suit its agenda i.e. the military agenda. The public is then led to see Shonekan as a leader not to be trusted.

In contrast, the *Daily Champion's* headline: 'NLC govt meeting adjourned – Labour's CWC meets today', used less combative language: 'adjourned' rather than 'deadlocked'. As with the headline on the court issue, this one was displayed conspicuously in red ink over a white

background. It added a rider reporting that Labour's Central Working Committee (CWC) would be gathering after the meeting with the Government, suggesting that the negotiations were productive and on-going. *Vanguard's* rider, 'and strike continues', gives an impression that the Government is unyielding and the situation a battle between two equally unyielding parties.

Another story on the strike which appeared on the front page of both papers on the same date further reveals the disposition of the *Vanguard* towards the regime. 'Labour strike paralyses business nationwide'. Thus it is the labour strike which is actively 'paralysing' the latter, invoking a dramatic and widespread 'nationwide' impact – a complete standstill or immobility. Compare this with the *Daily Champion's* headline: 'Strike Stalls Business'. Here the agency of labour is not highlighted and the phrase 'stalls' suggests the strike is slowing down business or that there is a temporary lull in business activity, which can be restarted. It is clear that *Vanguard* attempted to raise the emotional level of people's response thus piling up more pressure on the Government. Without the ascription 'nationwide', for example, the event seems less serious.

There were cartoons, mostly in *Vanguard* that also amplified the emotional level of the conflict between the public and the government, as one appearing in *Vanguard*



Figure 17: *Vanguard*, Sunday November 14th, 1993, p. 6

The cartoon shows an angry citizen, the 'common man', confronting Shonekan about the removal of fuel subsidies summed up in the phrase 'Fuel Hijack', accompanied by a caption in pidgin English: 'Oga! This cloud, hun...katakata go burst o'. The cartoon implies that the people on the street i.e. the 'common man' reject the ING. It also invokes violence: the 'common man' can be seen to yell and threaten Shonekan 'katakata go burst o'. *Katakata* is Nigerian slang that stands for 'wreaking havoc'<sup>29</sup>. University students who formed the bulk of the protestors were also caught up in 'katakata'. They often displayed unruly behaviour toward senior academics who cautioned against protests outside the university environment and clashing with the security (see Chapter One above). Vice chancellors, Deans of students and other officials in charge of student affairs were often abused and pelted with stones and urine

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, violent protests that characterised the latter days of Babangida regime spilled into the Interim Government with ferocity. The *katakata* slang used by the paper in the cartoon is one of the ways in which newspapers plainly incited violence. The period was marked with attacks on public buildings, state officials and security operatives, leading to the deaths of protesting youth, as security operatives quelled the violence, at times with live bullets.

in plastic bags, while in some cases official cars were damaged. The cartoon indicates perhaps how newspapers legitimated a culture of disobedience towards authorities during this period. However, unlike the passivity that characterised the better part of the Babangida years, The cartoon represents the ideological position of *Vanguard* – a rejection of ‘lame-duck’ Shonekan, and beneath this rejection, a desire for the military, as it turns out later.

The above examples, especially from the *Vanguard*, typified the way in which most newspapers were opposed to Shonekan’s regime. With the latter represented as a threat to the unsuspecting public, the case for the return of the military was reinforced and amplified; and on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1993 a ‘forced resignation’ was imposed on Shonekan (Akinrinade 2006), paving the way for Abacha. It was arguably *Vanguard* and other papers (as Uko’s quote in the opening of next section indicates) that set and framed the agenda for the return of the military, whilst the restraint on the part of *Champion* was an exception. As Dennis McQuail notes, by ‘using certain words or phrases, making certain contextual references, choosing certain pictures or film, giving examples as typical, referring to certain sources and so on’ (McQuail 2005, 379), the media moves from ‘agenda setting – *what* the audience should think about’, i.e. (the focus on Shonekan), into ‘agenda framing – *how* they should think about it’ (how Shonekan should be portrayed) (Nwabueze et al 2011, p. 29).

### **Press Invitation to Abacha: A Turning Point**

The press invitation to Abacha came from the most interesting of avenues. *Guardian*, the most highly respected national newspaper, in an editorial in October 1993 called on the military to intervene ‘as the only national institution that can act as the honest broker in the process of reconciliation’. Abiola’s *Concord* group of newspapers also called on Abacha as the most senior officer to stop sitting on the fence and intervene.

Ndaeyo Uko (2004) *Romancing the Gun: The Press as a Promoter of Military Rule*

Abacha’s eventual ascension to the seat of power, on the invitation of the press (as *The Guardian*, *Concord* and the *Vanguard*’s rejection of Shonekan reveal), casts a shadow on the Nigerian Press’s liberal claim and raises critical questions about the press. Abacha had been an active participant in the nation’s military politics for a decade (1984-1993) and a key player in the past two successful coups. This background would ordinarily have marked him out as an ambitious soldier and an interesting figure to the press. But it is strange that a ‘liberal’ press



should count on a man who in 1983 had announced and led the subversion against Shagari's democratic regime.

Beyond Abacha's background, there were speculations between June and August, 1993, following the crisis that attended the annulment of June 12 election results, that some top brass of the army did not want Abiola as commander-in-chief. Retrospectively Ndaeyo Uko also confirmed that Abacha was generally regarded in the military as the 'Khalifa' (the prince in waiting) (Uko 2004, p. 112). Newspaper reports at the time also quoted Babangida as claiming that his 'hands were tied', a view validated by Professor Omo Omoruyi, Director General of the Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) – a think-tank for the Babangida regime – in his book, *The tale of June 12: The betrayal of the democratic rights of Nigerians* (1993). He cites Babangida explaining why he annulled the election:

Sani [meaning General Sani Abacha] is opposed to a return to civilian rule. Sani cannot stand the idea of Chief Abiola, a Yoruba, becoming his Commander-in-Chief at all; Sani seems to have the ears of the Northern Leaders that no southerner, especially from the Southwest, should become the President of this country. Sani seems to rally the Northern Elders to confront me on the matter. Where do I go from here? They do not trust me. Without Sani, I will not be alive today; without the North, I would not have become an officer in the Nigerian Army and now the President of Nigeria.....

I don't want to appear ungrateful to Sani; he may not be bright upstairs but he knows how to overthrow governments and overpower coup plotters. He saw to my coming to office in 1985 and to my protection in the many coups I faced in the past, especially the Orkar coup of 1990 where he saved me and my family including my infant daughter.

Sani, you know, risked his life to get me into office in 1983 and 1985; if he says that he does not want Chief Abiola, I will not force Chief Abiola on him....' (Omoruyi 1999, p. 165).

Given many senior members of the press served in the Babangida regime, elements of the press may well have been aware of scheming within the military, of Abacha's importance to Babangida and thus that it was unlikely Abiola would become leader.

Decree No 61, 1993<sup>30</sup> (Interim Government (Basic Constitutional Provisions) Decree) which Babangida enacted to legitimise the ING also had some suspicious provisions that ordinarily would have interested a 'liberal press'. While the Decree recognised Shonekan as the head of state, it did not make him the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, whilst Abacha was recognised as the 'Defence Secretary' and the 'Senior Minister'. Strangely too, the Decree provided that in the event of 'resignation or other untoward event', the 'senior minister' shall succeed the head of the ING (Fawehinmi 1993, Ogbeidi 2010). It seems clear that in making these legal provisions, Babangida had marked Abacha down for the top job, presumably to reward him for his decade of loyalty.

Given these anti-democratic tendencies, one might have expected the press to be vigilant and a pillar of support for the ING rather than its adversary, and at least concerned about warding off further military intervention. But it seems as if the press knew about Babangida's game plan to allow Abacha to take up the helm. During my interview with Ehichioya Ezomon, deputy editor of the *Sunday Guardian*, he defended the press, denying that it invited Abacha rather indicating that it was a 'design by the military clique to pass power round — that was why Babangida left Abacha behind' (Interview on January 16, 2013). The fact that Abacha later appointed Alex Ibru, publisher of *The Guardian* as the minister in charge of Internal Affairs, coupled with Uko's quote at the top of this section, all raise suspicion that Abacha's ascendancy was not only known to the press *ab initio* but, possibly, was also facilitated by the press when it seemed he was dragging his feet, before eventually sacking Shonekan in late 1993.

From November 17<sup>th</sup>, when Abacha took over the reins of Government, to the end of December 1993, there appeared a relative calm in the press (not surprisingly if the above is true, i.e. Abacha was long awaited by the press). Immediately Abacha assumed power the stormy anti-ING headlines characterising newspapers gave way to a celebration of the 'new order'. Notwithstanding the ending of democratic structures by Abacha, the newspaper pages were adorned with photographs of Abacha and other military officers, as well as photographs of new civilian appointees, pumping hands and beaming. This new affirmative order, in part created by the press, reduced tension, particularly as regards the general strikes ordered by the labour movement. On November 21, 1993 the Labour movement ended its strike after meeting with military chiefs. *Vanguard* reported Labour's agreement in its edition of November 22, 1993 under a large banner 'Fuel price now N3.25 as NLC ends strike'. Labour, which had held

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<sup>30</sup> See Gani Fawehinmi: 'June 12 crisis: The illegality of Shonekan's government' (1993).

Shonekan to ransom, suddenly soft-pedalled realising they were handicapped in pushing their demands any further with the military. They accepted precisely the same concession that days earlier they had rejected from the ING.

As part of his strategy to win hearts and minds, Abacha embarked on regular consultations with various segments of the society and the diplomatic community. Both *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* reported events with the generous use of front page and other photographs, a journalistic mode giving further legitimation to Abacha.

News photos, as scholars suggest, do more than attract readers. Sidey & Fox (1956) opined that editors will do all they can to hold their readers time and attention and their best weapons are their cameras. Gibson (1991) in another study advised that: '(1) Photographs can tell some kinds of stories far better than words; and (2) photographs can be used as strong lures to attract readers to text matter'. Given these powers, Fox (1993), Garrison (1992) and Zillmann et al (2001) were surprised to discover that little consideration is being accorded the use of news photos in text books on print journalism.

*Vanguard's* photographs were in colour and appear to celebrate and present Abacha as a popular leader. Most photographs were cropped to show a full length Abacha either beaming or shaking hands with his guests, often wearing white traditional robes — a symbol of peace and purity in the Nigerian context. However, in the *Daily Champion*, most photographs were either in black and white and not obviously cropped, devoid of pomp, presenting Abacha mostly as a military man. While *Vanguard* homes in and celebrates Abacha, making him attractive to the public, the *Daily Champion* maintains some distance, reminding the populace that Abacha is a military man and perhaps, a notable figure in the crises plaguing the country — a representation that might caution some citizens from seeing Abacha as the 'new order' portrayed by *Vanguard*. By presenting Abacha mostly in military uniform, *Daily Champion* also raises the possibility of yet another military odyssey in politics.



Figure 18: *Vanguard* Monday November 22, 1993, p.1



Figure 19: *Daily Champion*, Wednesday December 8, 1993, p. 1

Captions on the two photographs also reveal how the two papers differently present Abacha in his official capacity. *Vanguard* refers to his two full titles, 'Head of State and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces' accompanying the photograph of the official residence, the 'Defence House' in Lagos, where he received the Japanese Ambassador. *Daily Champion* opts for the simple title 'Head of State' with Lagos represented as the place where Abacha received the President of the Benin Republic. While these representations might be seen as inconsequential, they help contribute to particular ideological positions. The title 'Commander-in-chief' is rarely used in the Nigerian press unless during a military event or in a real war situation when the President or the Head of State must be seen to be in control of the troops. The use of the title by *Vanguard* can be seen to align with the paper's wider labelling process which constructs Abacha as a 'new order'. Together with the detail of his official residence,

this appears to convey two things: power and honour for the new strong man. In contrast, the photograph in the *Daily Champion* presents Abacha as the familiar general in the corridors of power for the past decade, rather than a 'new order'. This is also consonant with the paper's opposition to a re-emergence of the military in politics and manifest in its non-antagonistic reporting of events under Shonekan.

The *Daily Champion* placed itself on the side of the people. To engage in over-promotion of Abacha at the time, would have suggested the political situation was 'normal', a concern expressed by the paper a few days after Abacha's claim to power. In its edition of November 20, 1993, *Daily Champion* carried a series of reports on its front page pointing to the paper's position. One of three headlines is: 'Abacha's tenure uncertain', beneath which is a large photograph of Abacha and other military officers. Tallying with this headline, the photograph shows Abacha and other military chiefs looking sideward with some degree of discomposure, as some of them shield their faces with dark sun glasses. With Abiola in detention, June 12 issue stalemated, and democratic structures dissolved with Abacha's seizure of power, this photograph reinforces the uncertainty that the military faced. Other headlines are: 'Democracy at crossroads - a news analysis' and 'New order creates worry'. All the reports variously describe the situation as 'a turning point'; 'a crossroads'; 'worrying' and 'uncertain'. And these evaluations are anchored by the tone of the headline — 'Abacha's tenure uncertain'.





Figure 20: *Daily Champion*, Saturday 20 November, 1993 p. 1

*Daily Champion* had already exhibited its considered approach, as Abacha took over the reign of power. Politicians and favour-seekers regrouping to align with the new military regime, bought media space in order to place congratulatory messages. The scale of the sycophantic celebration of Abacha in the press became so embarrassing that the regime had to issue a statement, ordering an end to it. In this context, *Daily Champion* published a critical editorial, 'Abacha and Sycophants' (Monday 6, December, 1993 p. 4). It decried the 'obscene avalanche of goodwill messages in the media — newspapers especially', commending Abacha who had 'been close to the seat of power for a decade, maybe even longer' for stopping the 'praise-singers' from their 'unwarranted flattery and dubious' messages. The paper lamented that it was difficult to stop those with vast resources who choose to promote their personal agendas in an 'ever thriving advertising business'. In deploying a particular vocabulary to describe the messages of support for Abacha, 'obscene', 'praise-singers', 'unwarranted flattery', 'dubious', the editorial spares no effort in condemning the whole Abacha phenomenon as a charade, and in the process perhaps also casts aspersions on Abacha himself.

More widely, it is perhaps curious that the newspapers continued to accept the 'flattery and dubious' messages which ultimately promoted a military culture. But such messages not only dovetailed with the press agenda at the time: a preference for what they saw as an 'effectual' Abacha rather than a 'lame duck' Shonekan. But also, as Shina Oladeinde, Associate Editor of *Nigerian Tribune* outlined, 'economic considerations' significantly contributed to the press having to 'gravitate' to the military state (Interview on October 18, 2011). Reinforcing the economic dynamic, Moshood Fayemiwo, publisher of the defunct *Razor* magazine and detained under Abacha, points out that the 'press is a business venture which needs to post profits and or losses'; and 'no newspaper can and has made it without advertisements'. However, Fayemiwo, having obtained a doctorate and now a Chicago-based author, was quick to point out the corruption of the press at the time. Concurring with the *Daily Champion*, he suggested that there were 'also journalists who harboured bourgeois tendencies too and were unprincipled because they profited from the status quo' (Interview on March 14, 2013). Indeed Oladipo Diya, a Lieutenant General and Abacha's second-in-command commenting more generally using the dictum, 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune'. He reasons that the press cannot 'be free' in a situation where the Nigerian state owns press titles (during Buhari era) and reaches out to the press (in subsequent regimes). He further alluded to this culture as a global phenomenon even in established democracies, citing the example of the Nigerian experience since 1999 when politicians establish media outlets to further their interests. In this instance, Diya opines, the freedom is compromised (Interview on October 10, 2011).

On the whole then, notwithstanding *Daily Champion's* greater ambivalence, the press heralded Abacha's ascendancy to the seat of power and helped consolidate it such that by the end of November, 1993 when Abacha released the names of cabinet ministers, military rule was again entrenched. A high number of notable politicians, including, surprisingly, Abiola's running mate in the annulled June 12 election, Alhaji Baba Gana Kingibe, and from the Yoruba tribe (Abiola's kinsmen), accepted to serve under Abacha. The publisher of *The Guardian*, Alex Ibru also accepted ministerial appointment in charge of internal affairs, one sign that the press offered Abacha a licence to expand his political base. Nevertheless, by the turn of New Year 1994, Abacha was beginning to articulate his personal political agenda and from that time on, the 'honeymoon' between the regime and the Press 'was over' (Interview with Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2011).



In discussing this stage, the press's war against Abacha and his ferocious response, Golding and Elliot's views that the press's 'double allegiances to political and professional goals' (1979) are pertinent, continuing to impact negatively on the press's quest to act as a 'fourth estate'.

### **A Familiar Story: The Press Withdrawals Support for Abacha**

Following the inauguration of cabinet ministers, including many of Abiola's supporters, such as Baba Gana Kingibe, his vice presidential candidate, there were speculations in the press that Abiola, whom Abacha had met earlier, had agreed on the formation of the new Government and advised on names and further, that Abacha would hand-over to Abiola. This rumour was validated by Fayemiwo: 'Abacha told Abiola he was going to hand over to him, but Abacha was not a man of honour' (Interview, March 14, 2013). This speculation, which led to accusations by activists that Abiola had sold the people's mandate to the military, prompted him to issue a public statement detailing his meeting with Abacha. The 'advertorial', with the title 'The State of the Nation: My stand on June 12' was published in all newspapers. Denying the accusations, Abiola stated that he was invited by Abacha for his views on the way forward. After meeting with Abacha at 11 pm on November 18, 1993, Abiola met his supporters to discuss Abacha's proposed cabinet of 'big names'. This meeting urged Abiola to hold firmly to the June 12 mandate, but could not agree on whether his supporters should join the Government, only that each individual should decide his or her own relationship with the Government (*Vanguard*, Sunday December 19, 1993, p. 12).

Further, the public notice, personally signed by Abiola, stated that he conveyed the decision of his supporters to Abacha on November 22, 1993, particularly holding firm to the mandate of June 12. As reported by *Vanguard*, Abiola concluded with a strong statement:

It is clear that the present dispensation imposed one month ago will not lead us out of the economic morass. It lacks legitimacy and credibility and being undemocratic, it does not have the necessary ingredients for good governance. The only way forward for Nigeria is the return to where and when June 12 was derailed. Any other solution is begging the question (*Vanguard*, Sunday December 19, 1993, p. 12).

In response to Abiola's 'clarifications' it is probably safe to assume that his supporters in civil society (if not those in government), and a section of the press, were shocked that Abacha had not only dismantled the entire democratic structure but was also consolidating his power. With this realisation (albeit a late one) of another full blown military regime, the press now gained a fresh impetus to move against Abacha. Abiola's firm rejection of the military and the description of the Abacha regime as lacking 'legitimacy, credibility and undemocratic' was a less than subtle declaration of war against Abacha. It was thus only a matter of *when* the war would break out, not *if* it would break out, and of when Abacha would act against Abiola.

It is intriguing that Abacha who was openly invited by the press to take over from Shonekan, few weeks earlier, was now loathed as 'dangerous and undemocratic'. This change of course by the press can be linked to Abacha reneging on what had been 'agreed', ie seizing power from Shonekan in order to hand over to Abiola. Why the press initially trusted Abacha, a coup veteran rather than Shonekan, has remained puzzling. Twenty years on, Felix Abugu, editor of *Guardian on Saturday*, justified the press's stance: the military is a 'patriotic institution which by orientation and training, is better organised and less corrupt, to flush out the corrupt politicians and then do a transition that will bring a new set of politicians that are devoid of the practice of the old'. Buttressing his points, he cited South Korea and Brazil – whose foundations for prosperity, he insisted, were laid by their militaries – as good examples of a military capable of building a nation. 'The press didn't do anything wrong trusting the military' but he lamented that the Nigerian military 'betrayed that trust we have in them as a patriotic institution' (Interview on January 16, 2013). But his account does not really explain why the press would trust the military yet again, given Abacha had been part of the 'betrayals' of the past. He continued:

Again, it was the trust the press had in the military *as an institution of integrity* that could rise to the challenge of saving Nigeria from the June 12 crises, which necessitated the call on Abacha. There were interactions people had with the leadership of the military. Contacts were made and there were permutations. People didn't just wake up and invite the military. We weighed the options to see which one was better for us — was it to allow Shonekan, who was like a lackey, just there like a filing general left behind, or based on the contacts/interactions the leadership of the Nigerian people had with the military leadership, and our readings/permutations of the political climate? Then we say OK! If this is what you think you could do, to remove Shonekan and install

Abiola, why don't you come in? So, the press didn't just invite Abacha. It was an agreement, even though it was not written. The people involved [mentions notable names] were not fools because a lot of them staked their lives, were detained and killed. So the press was just echoing those interactions/contacts and telling the people: Yes! This is the best way for us to go that this man we believe will come in and do the right thing (Interview on January 16, 2013, my emphasis).

Whatever their principled intentions, however, these revelations together with Abiola's press release point to the press handing Abacha power on a plate.

In the aftermath of Abiola's December, 1993 statement, Abacha appeared to take notice of the impending political attacks on him. According to press accounts, the game changed dramatically when Abiola declared himself president-elect at a crowded rally at Epetedo Playing Ground, Lagos, on June 11, 1994 (Folarin 2013, p. 15). He was subsequently arrested and charged for treason. With this turn of events, *Vanguard's* news practice changed direction from its initial pro-Abacha to a view also adopted by other papers which was sympathetic to Abiola and June 12. As bitter criticisms surfaced in the press, Abacha began fighting back, beginning with the seizure of offending titles, arrest and detention of editors and journalists.

The intensity of the clampdown on the press forced some publications, notably magazines – *Tell* and *TheNews* in particular, and a new publication, *Razor* – to go underground and publish in defiance of the official ban placed on them. According to Oyediran and Agbaje, and, Olukotun, this marked the beginning of 'guerrilla journalism', whereby editors and journalists without identifiable offices were able to meet undercover in different locations and at different times to decide on stories for publications, thus confounding the security operatives who were hounding them (see Chapter Two above) (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999, Olukotun 2002). By February 1996, the situation took a frightening turn when Alex Ibru, *The Guardian* publisher and Abacha's former minister was shot by gunmen believed to be agents of the regime. The assassination attempt was linked to Ibru's inability to curtail the criticisms of the Government by his newspaper (Abugu January 16, 2013). In 1997, there was another 'staged' coup largely involving senior military officers – including Abacha's second-in-command and then Chief of General Staff, Oladipo Diya. After this event, Abacha was regarded as a threat to national security (Olukotun 2002, Uko 2004, Fayemiwo 2012).

However, one particular set of events in 1997 before the second coup attempt became an avenue for Abacha to openly acknowledge the war between his regime and the press. At the Guild of Editors' Conference held in Sokoto in January 1997, Abacha castigated the press, describing it as 'purveyors of rumours, agents of disintegration, invaders of private closet and unrepentant alarmists' (Olukotun 2002, p. 108). During the fourth anniversary of his regime and after the second coup attempt in 1997, Abacha further condemned the press's war against his government:

The Nigerian media has become an unpatriotic institution which tended to misinterpret the notion of free speech and freedom of the press to mean a license of defiance to defame individuals and governments, indeed to destabilise society (Olukotun 2002, p.108).

It was clearer that Abacha meant business in his revenge against the 'idiocy and hypocrisy' of the press (Uko 2004, p. 121). These words testify to the tense situation between 1994 when Abacha's succession bid to become a civilian president began to 1998 when he suddenly died.

### **Abacha: The President in Waiting**

'He will contest as a General if he accepts to vie for the presidency'

Wada Nas, Special Adviser to Abacha (Quoted in *Daily Champion*, Tuesday April 14, 1998, p. 1).

By April 1998, Abacha was closer to becoming a civilian president. With his transition programme already in place, speculations started surfacing in the newspapers that Abacha was scheming to take up the succession himself. *Daily Champion* quoted Abacha's Special Adviser; Alhaji Wada Nas as telling *CNN's 'Question and Answer'* that Abacha would not resign from the army before contesting the presidency. From that moment, the political situation assumed another dimension — that of dramatic political manoeuvrings, later culminating in Abacha's sole presidential candidacy.

With rallies held across the nation by Abacha's political allies to drum up support for his succession bid, pro-democracy activists also stepped-up their opposition rallies, sometimes leading to bloody clashes. I personally witnessed the biggest and the bloodiest of such rallies

organised by a political warlord, the late Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, in my city of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. The rally, held with the blessing of Abacha and supported by the police, took place on Wednesday April 15, 1998, at Lekan Salami Stadium and, leading to the deaths of some pro-democracy activists who were attacking the rally, while during the bloody conflicts the 'strongman' escaped through a car belonging to a Lagos based private Television, *Africa Independent Television* (AIT)<sup>31</sup>.

After these rallies, the stage was then set for the registered political parties to begin the process of adopting Abacha. On Thursday April 16, 1998, the United Nigeria Centre Party (UNCP) became the first party to adopt him, though he was not a registered member of the party. The party chairman, Mohammed Said told the Congress that, UNCP decided to adopt Abacha based 'on his good works for the country and the sustenance of peace'. He also stated that after wide consultations, the party was able to establish that the majority of Nigerians wanted Abacha to 'continue in office as a civilian president' (*Daily Champion* Friday April 17, 1998 pp. 1 & 2; *Vanguard*, Friday April 17, 1998, pp. 1 & 2). Abacha's good works, alluded to by the party's chairman, could well have referred to his 'generous' handing out of cash to have his way on any issue. It was generally believed that the pro-government registered parties were being funded by the regime, a situation that spurred activists. But with the UNCP taking the lead, other parties followed suit. Thus from April 16, 1998 when the UNCP endorsed Abacha and through to April 20, 1998, the other four parties – Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Congress of National Consensus (CNC), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and Grassroots Democratic Party (GDM) – all adopted Abacha as their sole candidate for the August 1, 1998 presidential elections, at their separate conventions.

During this week of interesting political scenes, what was the position of the press? How did the press report the endorsements? What/whose agenda dominated the media? In the preceding discussion, I established that *Vanguard*, having battled with the ING and heralded Abacha, later switched to Abiola and June 12 side. Through May and June 1998, Abacha and his ambitions, as well as the activities of his political foot soldiers, received generous mention in both *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion*. *Vanguard's* reporting of the Abacha phenomenon, both in news stories and cartoons, tended to enhance his image and ambition, even while seeming

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<sup>31</sup> The television station subsequently explained it was not on the side of any of the opposing groups, but that its staff rescued the man on humanitarian grounds when he took shelter with journalists covering the rally after he was chased by the mob.

to be on the side of Abiola and June 12. Editorials which appeared to be critical of Abacha's ambition were indirect. As for *Daily Champion*, the pattern of reporting did not change from the period of ING to Abacha's early days. In most cases, news reports on Abacha's ambition, while not necessarily negative, suggested problems. This is in spite of the fact that its publisher was fully participating in Abacha's transition process as a member of one of the five parties. Olaoye Bisiriyu, deputy editor of *Daily Champion* attested to the fact that his publisher 'did not dabble into what we do... he didn't get involved to the best of my knowledge' (Interview on January 15, 2013). For instance, after the endorsement of Abacha by the four parties, the remaining party GDM became the subject of discussion, as to whether the party would join the endorsement train. Thus when the party held its convention on Sunday April 19, 1993, it caught the attention of the nation. However, because of disturbances at the convention and the inconclusiveness of the proceedings by the publication deadlines, *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* both reported the convention as if it had concluded. On Tuesday April 21, 1993, the papers carried the story on their respective front pages. The *Daily Champion* headline read: 'Presidency: How GDM endorsed Abacha' with a rider, 'Gani goes to court'. *Vanguard* reported it wholly from this latter angle: 'Gani in court to stop Abacha'.

From the *Daily Champion*'s headline, the awaited result was clearly made known to readers — Abacha was the party's choice in the coming election. The rider, counterpointing the headline 'Gani goes to court' referred to a legal challenge mounted against Abacha by Gani Fawehinmi, Nigeria's most credible and unrepentant rights crusader at the time. He was a newsmaker in the mould of Wole Soyinka and indeed, a thorn in the skin of Abacha's regime. Going to court after the fifth party endorsed Abacha would be newsworthy for the public.

The stance taken by *Daily Champion* tallied with its anti-military ideology since Shonekan's interim government. The headline offers a critical thread through its mobilisation of 'How' and the power verb 'endorsed' which are picked up in the news story. The latter gives an account of the manipulations, leading to Abacha's adoption. The first paragraph makes interesting reading:

Intense lobbying and horse-trading among more than 3, 000 delegates characterised the national convention of the Grassroots Democratic Movement, (GDM) held at Maiduguri Sunday where the Head of State General Sani Abacha was adopted as its presidential candidate (*Daily Champion*, April 21, 1998, p. 1).

Qualifying the process of ‘how’ Abacha was ‘endorsed’ (as signalled in the headline), ‘intense lobbying and horse-trading’ connotatively suggest a sense of a manipulative process i.e. an adoption fraught with bribery, corruption and intimidation of unyielding delegates. The newspaper put into play the possibility of an illegitimate process to Abacha’s endorsement, discrediting the convention and not in any simple way accepting it. In this way, we might argue that *Daily Champion* played the role expected of a liberal press.

In contrast *Vanguard*’s headline totally obscured the process of ‘endorsement’ of Abacha by the GDM and a crucial news item of interest to the public was missing. But perhaps the Gani court angle allowed the paper to make a critique by proxy – maybe a safer line to adopt. The news story also distances the paper from the processes of the convention and Abacha’s endorsement. Running from the front page through page two and four, its opening (three of sixteen) paragraphs, repeats the headline that ‘Gani Fawehinmi headed for the court to stop Abacha from contesting the forthcoming election’, and that this was ‘one of the reactions that trailed Abacha’s adoption by the five parties’. Besides quoting a civil society group, ‘NADECO’ which was not ‘surprised by the adoption of Abacha by the parties’, the rest of the story deals with the affidavit (legal claims) of Fawehinmi. However an interesting angle to the *Vanguard*’s position on his candidacy surfaced in the previous day’s edition of the paper, in a pungent cartoon.



Figure 21: *Vanguard*, April 20, 1998, p. 6

In the upper left corner is an announcement of the three candidates for the party's primary. With the rain falling at the party convention, Abacha is seen to arrive, stepping onto the carpet (marked Nigeria) and represented as the winner. He is beneath an umbrella marked 'presidency', which shields him from the torrential rain. The other two candidates are seen trailing behind and, without umbrellas, drenched in the rain. The caption 'First come first served' appears to suggest that Abacha as the winner has been served the presidential ticket, because he happens to be there first with the aid of State protection (the umbrella as a metaphor).

At the time this cartoon was published, the party's convention was inconclusive and both papers had reported that a fracas had broken out between pro and anti-Abacha party delegates leading to the deployment of riot police, highlighting that it was not an easy ride for those routing for Abacha. It is thus curious that before the convention was even concluded, *Vanguard* boosted the Abacha camp by presenting him as the GDM's preferred candidate. Whether delegates who saw the cartoon at the convention ground were swayed into voting for Abacha or whether it helped break the ranks of anti-Abacha delegates is a matter of conjecture. Several similar cartoons promoting the five parties and Abacha's candidacy appeared regularly in the paper.



A further cartoon also appeared on Wednesday April 22, 1993 edition of *Daily Champion* which appears to ridicule the bloody Ibadan rally organised the week before (April 15, 1998,) In the background pro and anti-Abacha demonstrators clash while victims lie on the floor and the Ibadan politician who spearheaded the rally is saying: 'Ah! It was a very successful rally. You can see for yourself. Obviously, the violent scene presented contradicts the 'very successful rally' claim by this Abacha politician — pro- Abacha campaigners in Figure 22 below can be seen on the floor beaten /injured by the surging anti-Abacha protestors. The cartoon mocks the stage-managed attempts to foist Abacha on the Nigerian people, taking issue with the idea that the Abacha camp was 'winning'. This is in contrast to *Vanguard's* cartoon that portrays Abacha as sailing smoothly towards the presidency.

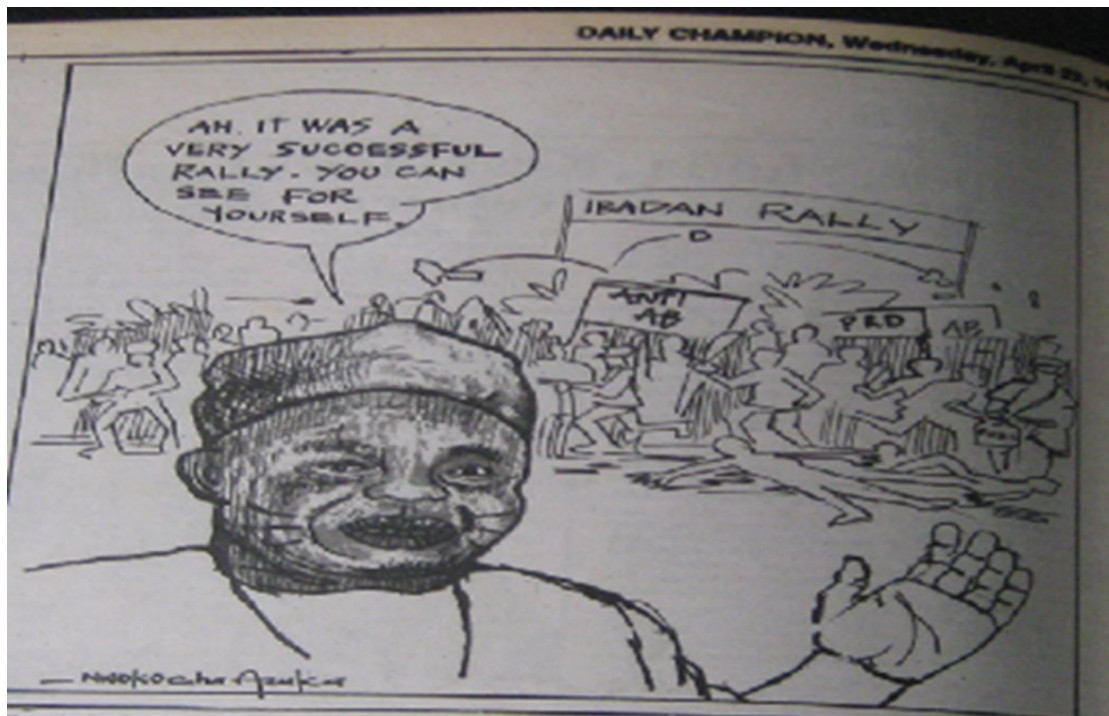


Figure 22: *Daily Champion*, Wednesday April 22, 1998

Scholarly works have established the pre-eminence of political cartoons as powerful tools in political struggles. Lamb (2004), Connors (2007), Eko (2007), Hammett (2010) all agree that political cartoons are used variously to criticise certain public figures as well as to reinforce the political interests of others. Cartoons are also thought to be used during electioneering to manipulate the voters' opinion. In Nigeria in particular, Sani et al affirms the use of political cartoons to 'set [the] agenda by mainly encapsulating current and sensitive issues that people are much concerned about' (Sani et al 2012, p. 156). As the foregoing discussion reveals, the

short-lived regime of Shonekan and later, the vilified regime of Abacha, were of immediate concerns to the Nigerian people. Both *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* thus, deployed their cartoons to set their different agendas.

Typical of the shifting of political position and the sectarianism that characterises most Nigerian newspapers, *Vanguard* in particular deployed its cartoons to serve different political figures. Under Shonekan it used the cartoon in figure 17 to discredit the leader when he removed the fuel subsidy. During the thick of Abacha's succession project, as we have just seen, *Vanguard's* cartoon Figure 21 manipulates members of the GDM to endorse Abacha. Whilst there are optimistic account that political cartoons echo popular will and provide spaces for resistance (Mbembe 2001; Eko 2007; Obadare 2009), other scholars differ with this optimism, contesting that indeed, rather than resisting the powerful, they actually reinforce and promote their preferences (Fontein 2009, Hammett 2010).

If the newspapers reveal political allegiances through cartoons, though not always directly, in editorials such allegiances are more direct. Throughout the periods of Abacha's succession bid between April and June 1998, *Vanguard* ran a series of editorials marking out its political position. John Windhauser describes a newspaper editorial as the 'opinion column that reflects a paper's views on an issue or event and appears daily in approximately the same place on the editorial page or section' (Windhauser, 1973 p. 563); while John Oakes opines that a newspaper editorial page is 'the heart and soul — the one area where the personality and, more important, the philosophy of the newspaper can most properly be expressed' (Oakes, 1968, p. 2). In his perspective on the role of the editorial in the Third World, Cornelius Pratt suggests that newspaper contents focus on the 'needs and interests of the urban elite and more particularly those of the government', and thus, he avers further that, the editorial page is the 'logical place for the press's criticisms of government and for its opinions on national issues', while at the same time, it 'provides a forum for the discussion of development issues' (Pratt 1990, p. 18). An editorial on Monday April 27, 1998: 'Essence of democracy', which ran on the front page and continued on page sixteen, read more like a written paper for a workshop chronicling military incursion into government since 1966, but not criticising the political manipulations going on at the time. In all its sermonising about the 'essence of democracy', the paper made no mention that Abacha and the five political parties endorsing him, might have violated that essence. Yet in its final paragraph the editorial lamented that Nigeria 'deserved a better deal —

genuine and not half-baked or manipulated democracy’ but leaves the readers to figure out the manipulator, thus shielding Abacha – the beneficiary – whom the paper supports.

A second editorial appearing after Abacha’s candidacy had been endorsed by all the five parties is similarly reticent but again indirectly reveals approval of Abacha’s candidacy (Monday May 25, 1998, p. 6). ‘This Transition’, a twelve-paragraph editorial, discussing and complaining about the transition, is devoid of critical phrases and makes no mention of Abacha on whose behalf the transition was being manipulated. As in this paragraph:

There has been quite a debate on the nature of the presidency and the modality of its emergency. Two months or so to the decision, the picture is not clear as to the contestants. Rather, what we have had has been acrimonies as to the nature of the selection of the presidential candidate.

The word ‘debate’ suggests a public discussion in which different voices and groups can be heard. By implication Abacha’s candidacy is neither illegal nor undemocratic: the candidacy is debatable, and if the debate eventually favours Abacha, so be it. Notwithstanding the financial inducement of the parties and the coercion of others; the deadly Ibadan riots; the violence that trailed the GDM convention; the two ‘phantom coups’ and the closure of many media houses — all to smooth Abacha’s path – the paper (deviously?) seeks to legitimise a contentious and undemocratic transition by framing it as a consensus arrived at through proper debate.

The editorial not only leaves Abacha out of the picture, so too the political parties and other figures promoting the succession process. No person (and thus no agency) is mentioned. In this way, the public is left wondering whether there are any culprit/s, or if no one is to blame for events and to consider the process a ‘natural’ or inevitable one. By using the phrase ‘the nature of the presidency’ (above) rather than ‘the nature of Abacha candidacy’, the paper shields Abacha from public anger. As Haliday explains:

Language is closely related to the demands that we make of it, the functions it has to serve. The particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal needs that language is required to serve (cited in Fowler 1991, p. 32).

Thus, the system of language employed achieves a particular ideological end, leaving the reader unclear as to who is directly responsible for the political crisis. To have referred to Abacha

would mean readers could instantly blame him, whereas, ‘presidency’, leaves the issue of ‘who’ in the realm of conjecture. *Vanguard* also writes that ‘two months or so to the decision, the picture is not clear as to the contestants’ (my emphasis), yet even according to *Vanguard*’s own news reports, the process of selection of presidential candidates was completed at the time of this editorial: all parties had ‘endorsed’ Abacha as the sole candidate. So what ‘picture’ is *Vanguard* suggesting not ‘clear’? To whom? Who is *Vanguard* referring to as ‘contestants’ when the only contestant was Abacha? This would seem to be an attempt to douse the growing flames of tension surrounding Abacha’s candidacy. Viewed from this angle, one can conclude as (Oakes 1968; Windhauser 1973 and Pratt 1990, see p. 177) note, that *Vanguard*’s editorials signify its preference for Abacha and for him to become a civilian president without first resigning from the military.

Tom Koch refers to such accounts above by *Vanguard* as the ‘institutionalised narrative form’ of journalism. These arise from contact with officials, reducing the ‘power of a journalist from a critical and independent stance’ to ‘moderators for, publicists to and legitimaters of the official world’ (Koch 1990, pp. 175 & 181). Koch goes on to explain that a majority of stories that appear in the principal newspapers are based on the statements and quotes of government officials passed to journalists during photo sessions, media opportunities, press conferences or press releases. In the Nigerian context, such narrative forms also emerge from bribe taking and favour seeking from officials. Mvendaga Jibo gives more insight on this institutionalised narrative form, pungently noting that the Nigerian press often puts itself in a compromised position:

In Nigeria, the editors rather than ask the right questions, often join the list of applicants for plum jobs from a military regime. In this move, the last thing on their mind was the fate of democracy. The media only complain when its own corporate interests are at stake or when an individual journalist is jailed or manhandled by the government (Jibo 2003, p. 224).

There were several other formats aimed at boosting Abacha ratings. Of particular interest were the numerous interviews granted to Abacha campaigners for promotional purposes and which portrayed him as the ‘messiah’: ‘Only Abacha Can Achieve Stability’ (*Vanguard* May 16, 1998 p. 12). The interviewee in this case, a former minister of aviation under the Babangida regime and senator-elect under Abacha, argues in support of ‘a locally nurtured democracy’ that only Abacha ‘at this point in time can achieve. ‘Arthur Eze makes case for Abacha’ (*Vanguard*

Wednesday May 20, 1998, p. 1 & 2). Here the Abacha campaigner, addressing a pro-Abacha rally in Enugu, south-east Nigeria, threatened that the 'life of every Nigerian will be on the line should General Sani Abacha fail to become Nigeria's next civilian president'. In 'It's too late for Abacha to say no' (*Vanguard* Sunday May 24, 1998 page 3), another senator-elect claims that since no other contestants 'have the guts to come out and say they want it, why do we want to punish the person who says he wants to continue?'.

Further, there were news reports which in fact 'promoted' Abacha. In 'Useni sells Abacha's adoption to royal fathers' (*Vanguard* Thursday 28 May, 1998 pp. 1 & 2), the paper quoted an army general and minister for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, addressing the royal fathers' meeting: 'the Head of State acknowledges the profound sense of appreciation which informed the persistent clarion call from all and sundry to once again place his services at the nation's disposal'. Another report: 'Time not ripe for Abacha to quit' (*Vanguard* Monday June 1, 1998, page 3), quoted a professor and member of the Transition Implementation Committee, at a book launch, also backing Abacha as a good leader: 'General Sani Abacha knows that military rule is not the best for the country, but given the situation in which we find ourselves, a good leader does not abandon the ship midstream. He must find a solution to the plaguing problem before he can make his exit'. In an opinion article, 'A vote for Abacha Presidency' (*Vanguard* Wednesday May 13, 1998, p. 7), the author justified Abacha's candidacy – 'morally and legally', there was nothing wrong in Abacha contesting as a military head of state – whilst at the same time lampooning the opposition who 'selfishly' think they are 'gods of democracy'.

With this litany of PR-styled news stories, cartoons, photographs and editorials, *Vanguard* journalistic practice was reduced to what Koch, referring to the American press, describes as 'news as myth' (Koch 1990). As Koch notes, to adopt another tack and criticise the candidacy, *Vanguard*, like the American press, would have had its 'access to the powerful decreased' (Koch 1990, p. 181). Though Taiwo observes that 'no news report is ideologically neutral, transparent or innocent' (Taiwo 2007, p. 221), the scale and weight of *Vanguard's* partisan support for Abacha at a time of heightened military violence against the civil populace, was striking. But as Pratt notes, discussing sub-Sahara African media culture more generally, one of the 'salient variables in Nigeria's media behaviour is the co-opting of influential journalists into the Government as a system of softening the press criticism' (Pratt 1990, p. 37). The upshot of this practice, as General Oladipo Diya well describes, is that the press cannot be free in a

situation where ‘he who pays the piper *also dictates the tune*’ (Interview on October 10, 2011 my emphasis).

In the *Daily Champion*, its position was conveyed in news reports, articles and cartoons. Most of these implicitly if not explicitly discredit the Abacha campaign. I first explore a story picking up on the fuel scarcity and the strike by bus owners in Lagos which suggests that the situation under Abacha is precarious (Thursday May 14, 1998, p 2). I focus on the headline, ‘Fuel crisis cripples commercial activities, Council of State meet’, and the significance of the first paragraph<sup>32</sup>:

Protracted fuel scarcity has reduced to the lowest ebb, commercial activities across the country, with the situation compounded in Lagos Tuesday by the continued strike by owners of mass commuter buses as the state police command threatened to sack any senior officer found colluding with unions.

In this headline and paragraph, six terms invoke crisis and problems which are likely to increase public anger against the Government: ‘crisis’, ‘cripples’, ‘protracted’ ‘reduced’ ‘lowest ebb’ and ‘compounded’. Since readers – buyers and ‘free readers’ alike – first notice and read the headline and opening paragraph of a news report, *Daily Champion* effectively amplified the emotional impact on the reading public at a time when the Abacha candidacy was being foisted on the electorate. The phrasing ‘protracted fuel scarcity has reduced to the lowest ebb, commercial activities across the country, with the situation compounded in Lagos’, raised the stakes: the problem has not only spread nationwide, but to Lagos in particular, i.e. the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria is worst hit. The reading public is left with the fear of the unknown as their increased anger is guided towards the government and, perhaps Abacha — the man who could not fix the nation’s woes, but yet is bent on imposing himself on the people. The issue here is about the disposition of *Daily Champion* towards military rule, a situation where one might expect the use of less ‘extreme’ language. For instance, during a comparable situation under Shonekan, the paper protected the civilian regime with the use of phrases less likely to incite and more geared to reassurance, as when it reported that the labour strike ‘stalls’ business. Here, under the military regime, the phrase is ‘Fuel strike *cripples*’. The choice of

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<sup>32</sup> Other paragraphs report on how Police tackle touts taking the law into their own hands and it finishes by reporting that the Council of State met to discuss the fuel crisis

language used to refer to the Abacha regime is, in Fowler's words, 'hostile reporting' (Fowler 1991, p. 144). It underscores the paper's ideological position: its opposition to military rule.

Other news items that deflate and implicitly critique the Abacha project in *Daily Champion* include an article: 'Dangling Politicians' (Friday April 17 1998, p. 5) lampooning Nigerian politicians for reducing politics from a 'serious business' to a 'game or dance'. The author describes the politicians' conduct under Abacha as 'selfish, inconsistent, unprincipled and devoid of national interest'. 'GDM in rowdy convention; Braithwaite quits' (Monday April 20, 1998 p. 1) gives an account of the manipulation and violence trailing the endorsement of Abacha by GDM. 'Activists abort pro-govt rally' (Thursday May 7, 1998 p. 1); 'Don't run — Ekwueme, Ciroma, Others tell Abacha' (Sunday May 10, 1998), report pressures being mounted on Abacha by notable elder statesmen, and 'Presidency: NECON unawares of Abacha's adoption' (Wednesday May 20, 1998 p. 1), reports that the electoral commission feigns ignorance of the adoption of Abacha by the five parties.

### **Abacha: The Cul de sac**

As Abacha's succession campaign intensified and gained an upper hand, so also did civil society exercise pressure on him, through various means — legal suits, violent protests and international pressures. In particular, the latter was so significant that, US, UK and France became centres of co-ordinated opposition against Abacha's ambition. Newspapers reported that Soyinka in particular, addressed the French Parliament on the Nigerian situation in May, 1998, the second time in six months (See *Daily Champion*, Wednesday April 8, 1998 p. 1, *Vanguard*, Wednesday May 13, 1998 p. 1). This international opposition only led to Abacha becoming more violent and desperate.

However, as dire as the situation was, the independent voice of the press appeared to have been drowned by Abacha's vengeful crackdown. Both in *Vanguard* and in *Daily Champion*, there was no sign of a real press war against Abacha. Although *Daily Champion* remained consistent in its opposition to military rule, mildly highlighting democratic deficiencies in the transition processes, *Vanguard* could be said to be still aiding Abacha's self-succession bid. From the news media point of view, the situation was perhaps understandable. At the time, several editors, journalists and prominent citizens were either on death row or serving long jail terms. A journalist from the *TheNews*, Bagauda Kaltho disappeared without trace, with accusation pointed at the regime (Olukotun 2010, p. 156). Fear of Abacha and for reasons of 'safety and

economics', the press adopted a strategy of 'self-censorship and caution' in dealing with the leader (Sina Oladeinde, Features editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, October 18, 2011). The implication of this (self) imposed decorum on the press indicated for the first time in Nigeria's history that Abacha had inflicted a psychological fear on the press, such that Abacha's election to civilian head of state in the August 1, 1998 presidential elections was a straightforward matter.

Nevertheless, as the nation resigned itself to its fate, on June 8, 1998 news filtered onto the street that Abacha had died. I recalled attending a lecture on the day when a lecturer in my department peeped into the class and said 'Abacha yamutu' (Hausa meaning 'Abacha is dead'). The class ended in chaos as students pushed and shoved to join the confusion that already enveloped the university community. The lecturer, with whom I was friendly, was at the time the editorial board chairman of *Diet* newspaper whose editor, Niran Malaolu, was in jail for coup plotting. I later joined the lecturer in his car to observe the celebration on the streets before proceeding to the *Diet*'s office. The situation in the newsroom was not much different from the wild jubilation encountered on the streets. The self-imposed calamity which had brought journalists and people alike to their knees had unexpectedly disappeared. The nation was still in a celebratory mood when Soyinka, upon his return to Nigeria from exile, made his emotional declaration:

The press and let me seize this very opportunity to stress this, the press has been magnificent, really magnificent, heroic and one of these days, when there's more pleasure, we are going to erect a statue. I am going to see personally to this, that a statue for heroism of the press is erected at a prominent place in this country; we must never ever forget (*The Guardian*, Saturday October 17, 1998, p. 5).

At the time there was no doubt, that Abacha's 'curious, strange and unexpected death' (Akinrinade 2006, pp. 290 & 293) in the midst of the conflicts around his succession bid seemed to be a victory, not just for the traumatised press, but for the entire nation gripped by fear. But notwithstanding Soyinka's accolades, the death of Abacha was hardly a result of a 'press war'. Though officially the result of a 'heart attack' (Akinrinade 2006, p. 290), most Nigerians believed his death was due to a conspiracy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The most credible of the many reasons was, and still is, a conspiracy within the military (Fayemiwo 2013). The military at the time was polarised along an ethnic divide. Many army generals, mainly of the Yoruba origin including Abacha's second-in-command, Oladipo Diya, were on death row for coup plotting. It was thought that if the convicted officers were killed, the military might implode and the nation would be engulfed in a civil war; hence the mysterious death of Abacha and his hurried burial without an autopsy.



The analysis of *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion* also throws up a finding which contradicts the popular position at the time, i.e. that particular newspapers such as *Daily Champion* were pro-state (Olukotun 2002, Daramola 2006). The latter paper had an image of a 'promoter' of military rule, apparently because of its non-antagonistic culture and because it was not one of the papers proscribed by the military. However, as the analysis above suggests, particularly during Shonekan's regime, and after Abacha became the head of state, *Daily Champion's* news stories in fact supported the course of democracy whilst not seemingly antagonising the Abacha regime — news headlines, photographs, cartoons and editorials were devoid of flattery or flowery phrases, while at the same time, readers were made aware that Abacha regime was not just a 'new order', but one marked by 'uncertainties', 'worries' and a 'turning point' in the nation's march towards democracy. As Ifedayo Daramola points out, this not 'too radical' and not 'too moderate' policy of *Daily Champion*, was responsible for the accusation of being a pro-state medium, but in actual fact, the paper's 'editorial and presentation of stories are moderate and superb' (Daramola 2006, p. 103). One might say that the paper offered a 'balanced journalism' when many other titles did not.

On the other hand, *Vanguard*, one of the newspapers that was generally accorded respect, and which I personally read at any given opportunity, was not the 'pro-democracy' paper that it was thought to be and which view I also held. Perhaps our position could be because we belonged to the mass of 'uncritical readers' unable to 'discount the bias' of the newspapers' (Fowler 1991). The paper not only antagonised and rejected the ING — a civilian regime — but also promoted Abacha (who for the previous decade had also suppressed democracy) as an alternative and better option to the ING. As the analysis above demonstrates, photographs and headlines between November 17 and December 31, 1993 were not in favour of democracy but showcased a military culture. Retrospectively it is strange that papers like *Vanguard* were seen to have been 'counter-hegemonic and agitating' voices (Olukotun 2002, pp. 120, 127).

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to critically engage with a liberal proposition which suggests that the press is seen as serving a *parliament of the people* (Olukotun 2002, 2010; Oloyede 2004) under authoritarian regimes. In the instance of the Abacha regime, I have tried to provide evidence linking the press, on the one hand to the collapse of the realisation of a people-oriented, democratic government and on the other, to an entrenchment of military hegemony. This latter at its peak created an atmosphere of fear and trepidation such that the people became

helpless in realising their democratic aspirations. I then foregrounded that, news practice in the Abacha era was mythical: their 'adversarial and lively outspokenness' (Olukotun, 2002, 2010) notwithstanding, Abacha had his way and but for his death would have become a civilian president.

All the editors I interviewed, with the vision of hindsight perhaps, agreed that the 'military is an aberration' in terms of the possibility of a democratic trajectory. However, even during Abacha's regime, *Daily Champion* did exhibit a form of journalism one might expect of a 'liberal' press, given the circumstances of the period. It appeared to lead the popular will. If *Daily Champion* could produce such journalism, why not other titles? I have highlighted how between November 1st and 17th, 1993, the news pages from *Vanguard*, in particular, showed a consistent attack on the Government, while the *Daily Champion* was less antagonistic in its reporting of the political crisis. *Daily Champion's* use of cartoons in particular fulfils the duty of a 'liberal press'. In this way and others, the paper resisted the military hegemony being foisted on the Nigerian people by the likes of *Vanguard*. But on the whole, news items in the *Vanguard* called for an end to the interim arrangement. Most headlines during the period were excessive and arguably misleading, while threats of violence against the government by pro-democracy activists were given generous mention.

Given the provisions of the decree that established Shonekan regime, it was obvious that Abacha was actually waiting in the wings to take over power. It was thus a blessing for him that his ascension to power was facilitated by the press, saving him the use of troops and weapons. Still, the pulls from Abugu's revelation make an interesting reading of the situation. If the press 'did nothing wrong' by 'trusting' and inviting the military, and was right to 'hammer' Abacha when he betrayed them, was Abacha then right to crackdown in return? Contrary to Ayo Olukotun's position that 'a tradition of lively outspokenness is in evidence' during the Abacha era (Olukotun 2010, p. 162), I argue that that the press was at the heart of very murky politics which turned out to be self-defeating.

The fact cannot be overemphasised that Abacha largely succeeded in emasculating the press, and was close to 'defeating' it when he suddenly died. That he died and the press was still 'standing', though wobbly, represents some kind of victory (Uko 2004, p. 123). Chronicling the military era from 1984, Lanre Arogundade, Chairman of the Lagos State chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) agreed that Abacha had indeed succeeded in cowing the press:

When we had the regime of Buhari and Decree 4, we said we could not have it worse. Then we had the regime of Babangida and newspapers were shut down and we said it would not be worse than this. But certainly, things were worse off under Abacha. If we have to look at the Military regimes from 1983 up to date, that period was the darkest as far as the relationship between the press and the government goes (Olukotun 2002, p. 109).

Whatever way the regime is perceived, it is perhaps too simplistic to describe Abacha as a 'monster' as various studies have opined (Alimi 2011, Uko 2004, Olukotun 2002) without looking at the underlying factors. Abacha's antecedents in the preceding decade as a member of Buhari and Babangida regimes ought to have marked him out as a threat to democracy rather than its candidate. That the press 'trusted' (Abugu 2013) Abacha to restore democracy is indeed perplexing. While the argument that the harsh economic realities of the time partly forced the press to 'gravitate' (Oladeinde 2011) to the military sounds convincing, but even if this economic angle is countenanced, such a stance is still an anathema to the principles of a 'liberal press' as Fourth Estate.

The press's fraternity with the military, or its 'double allegiance' to its own role and 'inclination' to military ethos (Golding and Elliot 1979), or better still, the extent of degree of 'political parallelism' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) was its major undoing: once that was in place their opposition to the military was ineffective and the fate that befell them inevitable. The 'hammering' (Abugu 2013) of Abacha after the 'dinner was over' (Diya 2011) was a face-saving exercise that failed to repair the damage done to the democratic aspirations of the Nigerian people. As in James Curran's description of the American press as a 'shining city on the hill' but which when inside, 'become[s] less luminous' (Curran 2011), the Nigerian press during this period also lost any 'shine' it might earlier have had.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Willingness to disengage: The Abdusalami Abubakar Transition (1998 – 1999)**

Introduction

Hands of Fellowship

Having its way: The Military Triumphs

The Press Support the Transition

Obasanjo: The Press Rallies Round him

The Press Accepts Defeat

## Introduction

When Abacha died, Abubakar came-in, appealing to everybody, releasing prisoners, flying the olive branch – saying, we will go very soon and we say (the press) let's give him the benefit of the doubt. Let's do away with the crises. Maybe, a Daniel has come to judgement. That was the attitude of the press. No! We didn't know that he had his own plan. Perhaps, Abiola could not have died naturally. He was killed. He could have been poisoned.

(Interview with Felix Abugu, Editor of *Guardian on Saturday*, Tuesday January 15, 2013).

As we saw in the previous chapter, notwithstanding the pockets of resistance by a few magazines adopting guerrilla journalism, Abacha appeared to have subdued the fighting spirit of the Nigerian press. Whilst Felix Abugu, editor of *The Guardian on Saturday* insisted that the press kept 'hammering' the military, he nonetheless agreed that the death of Abacha on June 8, 1998 brought 'happiness and jubilation' to everybody (Interview on January 16, 2013). But so 'happy' (or perhaps war weary) was the press after the death of Abacha that they had no objection to Abubakar's 'hands of fellowship'.

Playing the old military card of courting the press while fresh in power, Abubarka's 'olive branch' (Abugu, January 16, 2013) included the release of jailed editors, reopening the proscribed titles and an appeal to those underground and in exile to embrace the new government. As the 'celebration' of Abacha's death and Abubakar's 'new order' enveloped the newsrooms, the press appeared to have forgotten Abiola, (still in jail<sup>34</sup>) and the June 12 struggle (the thorny issues that brought it to war with the Abacha regime). As Ndaeyo Uko rightly noted, at the peak of battle between Abacha and the press, the latter was, more or less, fighting a survival battle. A survival battle in the sense that the media space was dominated with lamentations about freedom for jailed journalists and proscribed media houses, overriding the core issue of June 12 and leading to a distorted public sphere (Uko 2004 pp 122, 123). However, the moment Abacha died and Abubakar 'freed' the press, the latter went into a period of recuperation. Yet paradoxically this moment of recovery also offered the military the chance to finally defeat the press's touted 'protest tradition'.

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<sup>34</sup> Although Abubakar released other prisoners from jail, for whatever reason, Abiola was kept behind bars.

In what was, and is generally still, seen by Nigerians as a conspiracy between the military and the Western powers to nail the coffin of Abiola and June 12 on the head (Olorode 2006; Olumide and Akachi 2012, pp. 83, 84); between the time Abacha died on June 8 and July 7, 1998, Abubakar received an unusual stream of diplomats. The first was the special envoy of the European Union and British Foreign Office Minister, Tony Lloyd who after meeting with the Head of State addressed a press conference, telling them 'June 12 was dead' and that it was time for Nigeria to conduct another election (*Sunday Champion*, June 28, 1998, p. 1). The diplomatic shuttle culminated on Tuesday July 7, 1998 with the visit of Thomas Pickering (US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs) and Susan Rice (Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs). After meeting with Abubakar, they then met with Abiola. In the course of this latter meeting, Abiola collapsed after drinking tea served by one of the diplomats. Efforts were made to revive him on the spot before he was transferred to the State House Clinic, where he was pronounced dead. Though the official report claimed that he died of heart failure, the very cloudy circumstances surrounding his death led to civil society organisations claiming that he was murdered in a high-wire conspiracy, the latter fuelled by the strangeness of visiting US diplomats serving tea to a political prisoner (Kabila 1998, p. 2; Olorode 2006; Olumide and Akachi 2012, pp. 83, 84; Abugu 2013). By extension, and significantly, this event also marked the death of the June 12 struggle and a permanent sealing of the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections: the military had 'won'. Not surprisingly, riots broke out and the nation was plunged into another period of violence.

Abugu's sombre explanation in my opening quotation summarised (in hindsight) the psychological state of the press at the death of Abacha: the relief from Abacha's vengeful attack but which seemed to throw the press into a state of inertia. As if a 'Daniel' ha[d] come to judgement'<sup>35</sup>, Abubakar eliminated the stalemate but Abiola, June 12 and the 'liberal' press were all 'punished', the military gained another edge in winning the next 'war'. In this chapter, I analyse Abubakar's one year regime which culminated in the handing over of power to a civilian government on May 29, 1999. Specifically, I discuss the state of the press after the death of Abacha; the emergence of Abubakar and his 'olive branch' to the press; the state visits by foreign dignitaries and the death of Abiola; and, finally, the transition to democratic rule.

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<sup>35</sup> Someone who makes a wise judgment about something that has previously proven difficult to resolve. It alludes to the biblical character Daniel, who was attributed with having fine powers of judgment. See Daniel 5:14 (King James Version)

Engaging with this period, as discussed earlier (see Chapter Three), I analyse three national dailies, *Thisday*, *Vanguard*, *Tribune* and two weekly magazines *Tell* and *TheNews*. The chapter draws on a wider range of publications than in previous chapters. Firstly, this regime was at the centre of an ‘extraordinary confluence’ (Robinson 1998, p. 136) – the deaths in June/July 1998 of both Abacha and Abiola in cloudy circumstances. Secondly, the regime ended the sixteen years of protracted struggle between the press and the military, handing over to a democratically-elected government on May 29, 1999. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to offer a broader analysis of press behaviour and news practice, but continuing the emphasis on headlines, news reports and photographs, supported again by interviews with editors and state officials. How the press reacted to this ‘extraordinary confluence’ of events (Robinson 1998) and the transition that ushered in a civilian regime, are the focus.

The chapter is arranged in two parts. In the first, I discuss and critically appraise the emergence of Abubakar as head of state and the ‘psychological’ state of the press. Then I focus on Abubakar’s re-igniting the democratic process which had been struggled over for 15 years, since 1984. In the second part, attention shifted to Abubakar’s transition process after the dust over Abiola’s death had settled. Though the two weeklies were cautious about changing their stance – continuing their more questioning journalism – the regime’s ‘olive branch’, as well as the end to Abiola and the June 12 crises, made it impossible for them and the wider press to engage with the regime’s transition as critically as might have been expected, leading to ‘a low quality democracy’ (Diamond et al 1999, p. 2). For reasons to be discussed below the quiescence of the press eventually gave rise to the election of the military’s preferred candidate, Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired general and former military head of state. He was released from jail, shortly after the death of Abacha, pardoned, and in December, 1998 became presidential candidate of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). The press was, again, emasculated, playing no part in this decision.

### **‘Hands of Fellowship’**

For many Nigerians, the sudden death of Abacha on June 8, 1998, was suspicious and mysterious (Olorode 2006; Alimi 2011 p. 64; Olumide and Akachi 2012, pp. 83, 84; Abugu 2013). The suspicion was not misplaced: Abacha had made many enemies. In addition to his crackdown on the opposition and the press, he also turned against his own constituency – the military – with the aim of getting rid of any powerful figures he considered might stand in his

way. At the time of Abacha's death, Olusegun Obasanjo commanded a considerable respect among serving and retired generals, but was in custody, whilst his deputy (when in power 1976-1979) General Sheu Musa Yar 'Adua died in detention in December, 1997 in suspicious circumstances over his criticism of Abacha regime. Further, Abacha's deputy, General Oladipo Diya, as well as a host of notable serving military generals was also awaiting executions, having been found guilty of a coup plot (Olorode 2006, Lewis 1999). Abacha also deposed the foremost Sultan of Sokoto and Spiritual Head of Muslims in Nigeria, Alhaji Mohammadu Dasuki. In effect, Abacha could be said to have held public office but held the public in contempt. Peter M. Lewis emphatically notes that 'years of predatory rule...created a formidable set of difficulties [but] abuse of executive power reached a nadir under General Abacha' (Lewis 1999, p. 151).

Whatever caused the death of Abacha seemed immaterial to most Nigerians who thronged the streets and expressed jubilation, including in the newsrooms to celebrate the end of an 'abysmal era' in Nigeria's political history (Ogbondah 2000, p. 231). General Abubakar, the Chief of Defence Staff, was sworn in as the head of state on June, 9, 1998 (Nwankwo 1999). In relation to this moment, Abugu argues that as a first step Abubakar consolidated the peaceful atmosphere that pervaded the nation after Abacha's demise by releasing various individuals either jailed for certain phantom offences or in detention without trial (Interview on January 16, 2013). Characteristic of previous military tactics, Abubakar also earnestly began discussions with the opposition, including the press. Defending the press's alliance with the Abubakar regime, Abugu insisted that it was natural for the press to embrace Abubakar's 'olive branch' because it was an authority the press could 'interface with' (Interview on January 16 2013).

Given the pro-military background of *Thisday's* publisher, the public relations-led journalism of *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune's* gravitation to the military, it was not surprising that these three papers gave generous coverage to the Abubakar regime with his name featuring prominently in news headlines, though less often in *Nigerian Tribune*. In addition, from the time Abubakar was sworn in, to July 7, 1998 when MKO Abiola died, the coverage was positive, giving him a voice through direct quotes and a plentiful supply of photographs.

Headlines too were significant in how Abubakar was framed. According to Van Dijk, headlines have ideological implications; they are 'a subjective definition of the situation, which influences the interpretation of the news report' (Van Dijk 1991, p. 51). Scholars such as



Althaus et al. (2001), Andrew (2007), Leo'n (1997) have also questioned the credibility of headlines in relation to articles they represent, suggesting they 'manipulate' readers. These ideas seem to be in play in the news headlines I am considering here. Most of those referring to the new regime were robustly edited in order to popularise the head of state and boost his reputation. They were boldly displayed, mostly on the front page, and in some cases with more than one headline. In *Thisday* particularly Abubakar is the active subject and where he is not, his name still features in the headline:

***Thisday.***

*Abubakar Sacks Nas, Oyelese, Unaogu (Thisday, Wednesday July 1, 1998 p 1)*<sup>36</sup>

*Abubakar to visit Mandela (Thisday, Tuesday August 18, 1998, p 1)*

*'Stay clear of Sycophants', Abubakar Warns the military (Thisday, Tuesday August 18, 1998, p. 1)*

*Abubakar Rules out Ethnic-based Parties (Thisday, Thursday August 28, 1998, p. 1)*

*Gwarzo is Being Probed, Says Abubakar (Thisday, Tuesday September 8, 1998, p. 1)*

*Abubakar Orders Withdrawal of Charges Against Exiles (Thisday, Tuesday September 8, 1998, p. 1)*

*Abubakar Unfolds Foreign Policy Trust (Thisday, Thursday (Tuesday October 13, 1998, p. 1)*

*Abubakar to meet Heads of Foreign Missions (Thisday Thursday October 8, 1998)*

***Vanguard.***

*'My pact with Nigerians', General Abdusalami Abubakar (Vanguard, Wednesday June 10, 1998, p. 1)*

*Gowon seeks support for Abubakar<sup>37</sup> (Vanguard, Wednesday June 10, 1998, p. 1).*

*Abubakar, others offer prayers for Abacha (Vanguard Friday June 12, 1998, p. 1)*

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<sup>36</sup> All emphases in the headlines are mine.

<sup>37</sup> Gowon was the Military head of state between 1966 and 1975

Make Nigeria proud, *Abubakar tells Eagles*<sup>38</sup> (*Vanguard*, Friday June 12, 1998, p. 1)

Transition: *Abubakar seeks parties' input* (*Vanguard* Monday, 15 July, 1998, p. 1)

Agbakoba pledges support for Abubakar<sup>39</sup> (*Vanguard* Wednesday June 12, 1998, p. 3).

'I will rid Nigeria of human rights abuses', says Abubakar (*Vanguard* Tuesday, June 23, 1998, p. 1.)

*Abubakar warns over coups* (*Vanguard* Thursday August 27, 1998, p. 1)

### ***Nigerian Tribune***

Handover date sacrosanct – Abubakar' (*Nigerian Tribune* Wednesday August 19, 1998, p. 2)

'Abacha regime under probe', says Abubakar (*Nigerian Tribune* Tuesday September 8, 1998, p. 1)

*Abubakar tells world to lift sanctions* (*Nigerian Tribune* Friday September 25, 1998, p. 1)

Abacha planned to sack me – Abubakar (*Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday December 1, 1998, p. 10)

At a time of political despair, the ideological implication of these headlines is simply to portray the head of state as being up and running – a man of the people, working hard to clear the system of Abacha's messes, communicating to the Nigerian people and to the world.

The cognitive impact on readers of consistently featuring Abubakar in the headlines can be profound. As Van Dijk notes, since most readers have no more contact with the newspapers than the headlines, it is likely to be seen as the 'model of the situation by the readers.... headline information is used to stimulate the relevant knowledge the reader needs to comprehend the news report' (Van Dijk 1991, p. 50). Given the 'free readers association of Nigeria' converging at the newsstands to gaze at headlines and form their opinions (see Chapter One), Van Dijk's

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<sup>38</sup> Eagles is the National football team.

<sup>39</sup> Agbakoba was a leading anti-military opposition figure under Babangida and Abacha, and formerly the president of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO).

assessment is pertinent. With the persistent use of Abubakar's name, the reader is likely to form a particular knowledge and understanding of the political situation with Abubakar perhaps representing their yearnings for the formation of a people's government. The active verbs such as 'orders', 'probes' 'restates', 'sacks', 'rules out', 'warns' suggest an active head of state reshaping the system, eliminating what a scholar referred to as Abacha's 'anything goes' (Olorode 2006) style.

These headlines also shift attention away from the evils associated with military regimes (in a situation where Nigerians would in fact have preferred Abiola and were critical of Abacha's replacement being yet another military man). Through frequent use of Abubakar's name, the papers created him as a 'normal guy' not associated with a problematic past but trying to help the country find its feet. Further, this repetition helped plant Abubakar's name in the consciousness of the readers, perhaps endearing him to them, but importantly, given the prominence of headlines as an 'emotion-inducing strategy' geared to shaping the views of readers on national issues (Taiwo 2007, p. 218), this also helped to erase any suspicions about him.

However, unlike the three dailies, *Tell* and *TheNews* remained sceptical of the military, notwithstanding the fact that the magazines benefited from Abubakar's 'hands of fellowship' — their jailed editors were granted freedom, while those working underground came into the open. As radical magazines, the advent of Abubakar therefore did not represent any significant change. A *Tell* editor detained during Abacha regime, Onome Osifo-Whisky, confirmed that while the magazine did not specifically confront the Abubakar regime, they did not fully embrace it either. Had Abubakar prolonged his stay in power, Osifo-Whisky said they 'would have gone back to the trenches to pick up guerrilla journalism. We left our underground paraphernalia intact for most of 1999' (Olukotun and Seteolu 2001, p. 31).

The magazine front cover and inside headlines are inflected differently, suggesting the magazines' ambivalent and sometime critical position and Abubakar's more fragile hold on power:

### *Tell*

'Death of a Tyrant'. Challenges ahead<sup>40</sup> (*Tell* June 22, 1998, cover page).

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<sup>40</sup> The story chronicled Abacha's five year 'brutal dictatorship' and his sudden death. It tells of the challenges

‘Abubakar’s Dilemma’. How to resolve June 12. His problems with the military<sup>41</sup> (*Tell* June 29, 1998, cover page).

‘Nigeria After Abiola’. Fire, Fury, Farewell<sup>42</sup> (*Tell* July 27, 1998, cover page).

‘Under the Carpet’<sup>43</sup> (*Tell* August 3, 1998, cover page).

‘A Spanner in the works’<sup>44</sup> (*Tell* August 17, 1998, cover page).

‘Abubakar is Deceiving Himself’ - Gani Fawehinmi<sup>45</sup> (*Tell*, August 3, 1998, p. 22).

‘We are fed up’: Nigerians Angry with Abubakar<sup>46</sup> (*Tell* January 4, 1999, cover page).

‘Crisis in Aso Rock... Over Service Chiefs’<sup>47</sup> (*Tell*, April 26, 1999, cover page).

‘Looting Incorporated: How Abubakar And His Generals Plunder Nigeria’<sup>48</sup> (*Tell* May 17, 1999, cover page).

‘Abiola’s Death: The Great Conspiracy’<sup>49</sup> (*Tell*, June 21, 1999, cover page).

In the foregoing headlines, the language highlights ‘challenges’, ‘Abubakar’s dilemma’, ‘A spanner in the works’ and ‘crisis’. Abubakar is the object of others’ emotions – ‘Nigerians angry with Abubakar’, and is criticised – ‘How Abubakar and his generals plunder Nigeria’, ‘Abubakar is deceiving himself’. Headlines without an obvious agent inevitably imply something amiss and a probable association with Abubakar: ‘Under the carpet’ [who is pushing

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ahead of the new military leadership, such as Abiola and June 12 issue.

<sup>41</sup> The story’s opening remarks read: ‘General Abdusalami Abubakar, the new head of the military junta, is faced with the option of moving Nigeria forward by resolving the June 12 issue, once and for all, or sweeping it under the carpet like his predecessors, and thereby plunging the country into further political crisis’ (p. 12).

<sup>42</sup> The edition captured the violence that trailed the death of Abiola in custody as well as the outpouring of emotion by Nigerians, and blamed the military for his death.

<sup>43</sup> The story appraised the new regime after the death of Abiola, concluding that Abubakar’s ‘junta is clearly lacking in both the will and the way to confront what has come to be known as the fundamental issues affecting the Nigerian state’ (p. 12).

<sup>44</sup> This story highlights the various demands by interests groups, on the transition programme announced by the government, and insinuated that the transition was under threat.

<sup>45</sup> An interview granted by the human rights lawyer and anti-military campaigner, who lashed out at the military.

<sup>46</sup> The edition heaps pressures on the military, publishing the angry reactions of some Nigerians interviewed.

<sup>47</sup> The story reveals the uneasy calm in the seat of power over the attempt by the military to retain the service chiefs ahead of the inauguration of the new democratic government.

<sup>48</sup> This story, two weeks before the handing over to the new government, uncovers the various shady deals by the outgoing military government, particularly the distribution of oil exploration blocks to military generals and their civilian acolytes

<sup>49</sup> The edition revisits Abiola’s death and concluded that he was a victim of high wire politics. Abiola’s personal physician, Dr. Ore Falomo was interviewed in the edition, where he alluded to the ‘controversial tea’ given to his client by the American diplomats.

what under the carpet?'] 'Nigeria After Abiola'. Fire, Fury, Farewell' [who has created the 'Fire, fury...?']. As Osifo Whisky admits, they neither confronted nor embraced Abubakar (p. 194). Here, they play safe by seeming to offer support for Abubakar if only to 'do away with the crisis' (Abugu 2013) whilst also covertly querying the regime.

### *TheNews*

'Bamaiyi & Co must go'. The Umar interview<sup>50</sup> (*TheNews*, April 26, 1999).

'The Soyinka Interview: Abubakar's junta dubious'<sup>51</sup> (*TheNews*, May 3, 1999, cover page).

'Akhigbe's last minute deals'. Generals grab oil wells'<sup>52</sup> (*TheNews*, May 10, 1999, cover page).

'Abubakar corrupt' – Dr Junaid<sup>53</sup> (*TheNews*, May 17, 1999).

As in *Tell*, *TheNews* headlines also question the regime's corrupt practices and highlight challenges: 'Generals grab oil wells', 'Bamaiyi & Co must go' and 'Abubakar junta dubious'. However, unlike *Tell* which offers support by hiding the 'agent', *TheNews* offers open criticism with an obvious 'agent' in the headlines: 'Abubakar junta dubious' – attributed to Soyinka, and 'Abubakar corrupt' – attributed to Junaid. In this instance, *TheNews* appears to insist on showing its opposition to the military by not offering covert support for the regime.

Van Dijk (1991), Chiluwa (2007), Taiwo (2007) all point out that the choice of words in newspaper headlines plays an important role, in that they not only define the situation but serve the interests of some and undermine those of others. Unlike *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune*'s portrayals of Abubakar through headlines, *Tell* and *TheNews* signal their political

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<sup>50</sup> An interview granted by a retired radical army colonel, who fell out with Abacha over Abiola and June 12, and was retired by the former. He demands the retirement of the army chief, General Bamaiyi and other service chiefs before the new government is sworn in, warning: 'The last time a service chief was left behind, he brutalised us all. Now they want to have three behind to finish us up'. The colonel was referring to Abacha left behind by Babangida, but who later removed the interim government of Shonekan.

<sup>51</sup> An interview granted by Wole Soyinka where he condemns the regime, particularly the scheming to leave the service chief in power.

<sup>52</sup> The edition reports on the corrupt practices of the military, highlighting in particular, shady deals involving the chief of general staff, Admiral Mike Akhigbe. It lamented the 'oil and sundry deals even to the consternation of the president-elect and international observers of Nigeria' (p. 16).

<sup>53</sup> An interview granted by a radical element and a former government appointee, who threatens: 'I have evidence of his corruption. If he likes, he can sue me. I have all my facts' (p. 17).

position: they do not glorify Abubakar or celebrate a new era but represent him as yet another military ruler who is not to be trusted and against which to take a stand. This political and ideological stand point is likely to frame readers' perception of the Abubakar regime as a continuation of the past. Given the mood of the people at the time on military rule, *Tell* and *TheNews* keyed in to the popular wish of the people.

Clearly, each of the five publications marked out its ideological position through judicious use of headlines. While *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune* (more or less) supported the role of pro-military, *Tell* and *TheNews* embraced a more critical stance. The headlines were well crafted to define the political situation as they saw it and by extension, tried to lead their readers to follow a political line. The different viewpoints/approaches to framing news in this period suggest perhaps that there was an ongoing debate. The magazines were keeping the liberal press alive even if mainstream titles were not.

### **Having its way: The Military Triumphs**

The death of Moshood Kasimawo Olawale Abiola marked a turning point in the yearning of Nigerians for democratic governance. In particular, it was a humiliating defeat to the touted 'lively outspokenness' (Olukotun 2010) or 'robustness' (Ibelema 2002, p. 163) of the press at the time. Abubakar would have had knowledge of the troubled alliance of military-press relations under Babangida and Abacha and wanted to avoid their mistakes. He therefore moved rather swiftly, putting paid to the possibility of such a problematic relationship re-occurring. Extending the 'olive branch' to the press – to give a sense of a return to 'normal' business – Abubakar thereby weakened the press's moral basis to ensure government accountability. He also undermined journalists by what Britain refers to as 'breaking the political ice' (Britain 1998) – removing Abiola and the June 12 debacle from the political agenda. After Abiola's death, he further leveraged a blow to the press, announcing an exit strategy tallying with the expectation of a populace who no longer wanted to support military rule <sup>54</sup>.

Thus the way appeared clear for Abubakar to implement the final phase of his agenda — the transition to an elected government. On July 20, 1998, two weeks after Abiola's death,

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<sup>54</sup> In this process of democratisation, however, he further closed any further avenue to courting the press. Osifo Whisky confirms that had Abubakar elongated his tenure, they would have returned to guerrilla reporting (p. 194).

Abubakar announced his transition programme, with May 29, 1999 fixed as the date of his departure from power. Albeit, Abubakar was said to be an apolitical soldier, he was aware that the Nigerian people, vehemently opposed Babangida and Abacha and were no longer in the mood to accept military rule. He was poised to return the country to democracy (Robinson 1998, p. 136, Obi 2000, p. 78). Yet germane to Abubakar's plan was ensuring that the military retained power, an intention manifest in several ways. Having released former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, along with others, he granted Obasanjo a presidential pardon while others, including journalists and military generals, were left with criminal records hanging over them. The presidential pardon meant that Obasanjo's criminal past was officially erased, thus allowing him to hold public office again. Interestingly, Babangida also paid a visit to Obasanjo a week before Abiola's death, telling the press 'Nigeria needs Obasanjo' (*Vanguard* Sunday June 28, 1998, p.1). Further Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary General, visited Obasanjo in his Ota Farm to 'intimate him of the desire of the imperial powers' (Olorode 2006) to have him returned to the seat of power. 'Imperial powers' is a reference to the UK government, thus also suggesting Obasanjo was being positioned to become president.

Several papers took up this story publishing photographs, but *Thisday* showcased the visit. *Nigerian Tribune* also published a photograph and story of the visit (*Nigerian Tribune*, July 3, 1998, p. 3).



Figure 23: *Thisday*, July 6, 1998, p. 22





Figure 24: *Nigerian Tribune*, Friday July 3, 1998, p. 3

*ThisDay* included eight photographs in colour, unambiguously linking the ‘imperial powers’ to Obasanjo and Abubakar (Fig. 23). They offer a particular narrative of events. Given priority at the top of the page were two photographs of Emeka Anyaoku’s visit to Abubakar, below, photographs of his visit to Obasanjo<sup>55</sup>. In the first of two top photographs, Anyaoku and Abubakar are seen laughing (albeit nervously) with their arms stretched out and placed on the desk (a feature consistent with unease), Anyaoku’s head tilted in the direction of Abubakar invoking a challenge or questioning mode (the features in the photograph do not tally with a relaxed atmosphere - no banter scenario). In the second photograph Abubakar is alone grinning nervously, his hands clenched and placed on the table, suggesting that the head of state is anxious about the implications of the message just delivered by Anyaoku: should he act, or not, to end the possibility of a resolution of June 12 with Abiola and allow Obasanjo to take charge? The photos suggest Abubakar is struggling with the situation he faced at that time.

<sup>55</sup> Two days earlier Tony Blair, June 24, 1998 phoned Abubakar, telling him Tony Lloyd would be visiting. Similar arrangements for the US diplomats were also made from Washington, but neither Whitehall nor Washington were forthcoming on Abiola’s political future in their rapport with Abubakar and Obasanjo, thus strongly suggesting the narrative of Abacha/Abiola was a ‘fix’. See Britain (1998, p.1) ‘Nigeria: Abubakar Meets Abiola’. *Africa Confidential*.

The remaining six photographs are a world apart from the previous meeting between Anyaoku and Abubakar. They indicate a rather pleasant atmosphere signified by hand-slapping and back-slapping: Obasanjo seems happy about the message Anyaoku is delivering (that he should take on the presidency). Press accounts suggest that when Obasanjo was informed of the need for him to shoulder the responsibility of holding the nation together, he insisted that with Abiola and June 12 still unresolved, it would be difficult for him to play any role<sup>56</sup>. It was reported that he was assured that there would be a solution to the crisis. A pertinent front page story in *Vanguard* on June 28, 1998: 'IBB visits Obasanjo, says Nigeria needs him' confirmed this narrative, reporting Babangida visited Obasanjo after his release from jail. Abiola died the following week. The photographic representation of Anyaoku's visit, after meeting Abubakar, implies this arrangement will be followed through. This explains why *Thisday* plays up the emerging political drama generously devoting its most expensive colour photo page to the news. The photographic narrative also implies that the press knew of the arrangement.

Retrospectively the latter's foreknowledge of the political game is evident at a pertinent event that took place earlier on May 12, 1998, a month before Abacha's death. A seminar with the theme 'Patriotism and Professionalism in Defence Reporting: Nigeria as a Case Study' was organised by the Association of Defence Correspondents (ADC), held at the Air Force Officers' Mess in Ikoyi Lagos, and attended by top military brass as well as top editors. Interestingly, the special guest of honour was the Chief of Defence Staff, General Abubakar, who became the head of state a month later. In his opening presentation, captured in an editorial published a week later by *Vanguard*, Abubakar proclaimed:

The sword in the days of old was mightier than the press. As the time went by, the press evolved a greater status than the sword, but today in our contemporary society, *the pen*

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<sup>56</sup> There had been an age long rivalry between Obasanjo and Abiola prior to the June 12 crisis. Both were kinsmen and former classmates from the Egba Tribe of Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State, South West Nigeria. While Obasanjo was one of the nation's military 'big boys' enjoying the limelight from the 1960s, Abiola became friendly with these military 'big boys' on account of his company's business as a military contractor. Shortly after Abiola met the then minister of Communications in Gowon's regime, General Murtala Mohammed in 1975 on behalf of International Telephone Telegraph (ITT) handling military communications, the latter became Head of State (after the coup that toppled Gowon) and Obasanjo became his deputy. With Abiola having his friend Murtala as Head of State and Obasanjo his kinsman as the deputy, the rivalry grew. Obasanjo was said to be uncomfortable with Abiola, his former classmate, not only rubbing shoulders with the military high command, but sharing the limelight alongside him. Thus, it was not a coincidence that after Babangida annulled June 12, Obasanjo did not offer support but instead campaigned against Abiola whom at a gathering in Zimbabwe in 1993 he dismissed for not being 'the messiah Nigeria was looking for'. Though he became Nigeria's president in 1999 after Abiola's suspicious death in State custody, Obasanjo refused to acknowledge the latter's election victory and sacrifices, and throughout his eight year tenure declined calls to immortalise Abiola. See Adebajo Adekeye's 'The Nigerian Emperor's New Clothes'. *Africa Review of Books* Volume 9, No 1, pp. 4 – 6.

*and the sword are partners in progress* (*Vanguard*, Tuesday May 19, 1998 p. 6 my emphasis).

*Vanguard* relished the positive outcome of the seminar. Under the heading ‘Military vs. Press: A new spirit?’ the editorial described Abubakar’s pronouncements as ‘mighty’, asserting that ‘both sides share a common stake in nation building’. ‘Freedom for all jailed and detained journalists today will be well in accordance with the emerging new spirit’ (*Vanguard*, Tuesday May 19, 1998 p. 6).

The allusion to the ‘emerging new spirit’ is interesting, given there was no sign at the time that Abacha was soft-peddalling in his war on the press. Retrospectively at least, it is clear that Abubakar was not representing Abacha at the event and the confidence exuded in the editorial can be interpreted as a sign that *Vanguard* was sure of its assertion. Indeed, it became a reality a month later. The inaction of the press in the following month of June/July 1998 when Abacha and Abiola died, and its seeming acceptance of Abubakar’s ‘hand of fellowship’ is itself suspicious, at least viewed from the statements coming out of the May 12 seminar. Once in power and in the spirit of ‘partnering for progress’, Abubakar kept his side of the bargain with the unconditional release of jailed and detained journalists. It would seem that, in turn, the press would play the game ‘fairly’. For the press to have reneged and attempted any form of opposition, would have meant the ‘honeymoon’, as in previous periods, would be ‘over’ (General Oladipo Diya, October 10, 2012). The cost yet again was democracy - Abiola, June 12 and the ‘liberal press’ – whilst the retention of power in the hands of the military was also assured.

In August, a news item in *Nigerian Tribune* also reinforced the idea that Abiola may have been killed. In a banner headline, ‘CIA killed MKO?’ (Tuesday August 25, 1998, p. 3) the paper linked Abiola’s death to the American CIA. Convincing its readers further of this possibility, the paper reproduced its 1983 story ‘CIA plans to kill Awo, MKO’ (see Figure 25 below). It alleged a CIA plot to eliminate Obafemi Awolowo (opposition leader at the time) and MKO Abiola who had fallen out with the ruling party, NPN and aligned himself with Awolowo. As a socialist the latter was not the choice of the western powers and Abiola’s association with him rattled their calculations. The story also revealed that the CIA was involved in the political crisis leading to Buhari’s 1983 coup. Coincidentally, and adding fuel to the fire perhaps, the American Ambassador to Nigeria at the time of the 1983 plot, Thomas Pickering, was again

the Under Secretary of State in 1998, accompanying Susan Rice at the meeting when Abiola collapsed after the fatal cup of tea.



Figure 25: *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday August 25, 1998, p. 1

Reflecting back on this period, Abugu suggests that the press was helpless to save the situation. Nonetheless he implicitly confirmed that there had been a ‘political fix’; he complained bitterly: ‘we didn’t want Obasanjo, but then we still had to support Abubakar’s transition, haphazard as it was’, because of his ‘olive branch’ and the need to ‘do away with the crisis’ (Interview on January 16, 2013).

### The Press Support the Transition

With over sixty protestors killed by security forces in the aftermath of Abiola’s death (Lewis 1999), the transition took off with the registration of political parties and the constitution of the electoral commission. Even before publicly declaring his presidential ambition, Obasanjo, whose businesses according to press account, were said to be in ruins after his detention, gave a large donation of One Hundred and Thirty Million Naira (N130 M – US \$1M) to the leading party, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) (*Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday December 1, 1998,

p.1). The donation may have come from the party backers alleged to be rich retired military Generals and civilians with close links to the Government (Olorode 2006).

Throughout the period of electioneering, from local government, through governorship, parliamentary and presidential elections, all five publications, but particularly the three dailies performed the role of informing the electorate about candidates as well as providing details on the activities of the electoral commission. The three newspapers were more generous in their coverage of the transition, carrying more front page reports on the head of state. They also carried more stories on the activities of the leading party PDP and its presidential candidate, Obasanjo. According to Olukotun, this was in line with an economic logic: his party was rich and spent more on advertising and patronage than others (Olukotun 2000, p. 32).

For instance, *Nigerian Tribune* carried a front page report on Wednesday August 25, 1998, informing its readers of the planned release of the transition guidelines by the electoral commission. The story was headlined 'INEC releases guidelines today'. *Thisday* carried a bold headline on its front page edition of Tuesday September 22, 1998: 'Transition: INEC May Extend Verification Exercise – Akpata'. The story pertained to the on-going verification of claims by political parties and the desire of the electoral body to give more rooms to the parties to comply with the rules. Given the scepticism evident during past transitions, the paper quoted the electoral chairman, Justice Akpata, assuring the public that he 'did not foresee the possibility of extending the on-going transition programme beyond the May, 29, 1999 set for it to terminate' (*Thisday*, September 22, 1998 p.1). This direct quote from the electoral commission's chairman on the front page showed the importance attached to the Abubakar transition, reassuring the public that the extension of the verification exercise would have no implication for the hand over date. This story was followed up the next day with another bold headline on the front page, confirming the speculation: 'INEC Extends Verification Exercise to October 12' (*Thisday* September 23, 1998, p. 1). *Vanguard* featured the same story on its front page edition of September 23, 1998: 'Verification: INEC extends deadline'. With the headlines robustly edited to popularise the activities of the electoral commission, all three papers guide the public towards supporting the transition process.

Following Abiola's death, part of Abubakar's consultation process involved diplomatic visits to countries in order to restore Nigeria to the comity of nations. In their continuing support of his regime, all three papers prominently featured these foreign visits with front page stories and photographs. *Nigerian Tribune* headlined his visit to South Africa: 'Mandela lauds transition'

(*Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday August 25, 1998, p. 1), reporting that Nelson Mandela was impressed by the transition being put in place by Abubakar to restore Nigeria to democracy. A photograph on page three showed Abubakar being welcomed to Pretoria by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and the Foreign Minister. The following day, another photograph was published showing a joint press conference held by Abubakar and Mandela.



Figure 26: *Nigerian Tribune*, Wednesday 26, August, 1998, p. 3

On the second leg of his foreign trip, *Vanguard* similarly informed readers of Abubakar's visit to the United States in a front page story: 'Clinton, Abubakar parley next week' (*Vanguard* Friday September 11, 1998, p.1), whilst *Thisday* offered another story on a foreign trip, titled 'Abubakar Begins UK, US France Visit' (*Thisday* September 22, 1998, p. 1). The headline was boxed and with a black-inked background to stand out. *Vanguard* followed with yet another similar story under the headline 'Abubakar, Tony Blair hold talks on EU sanctions' (September 23, 1998, p. 1).



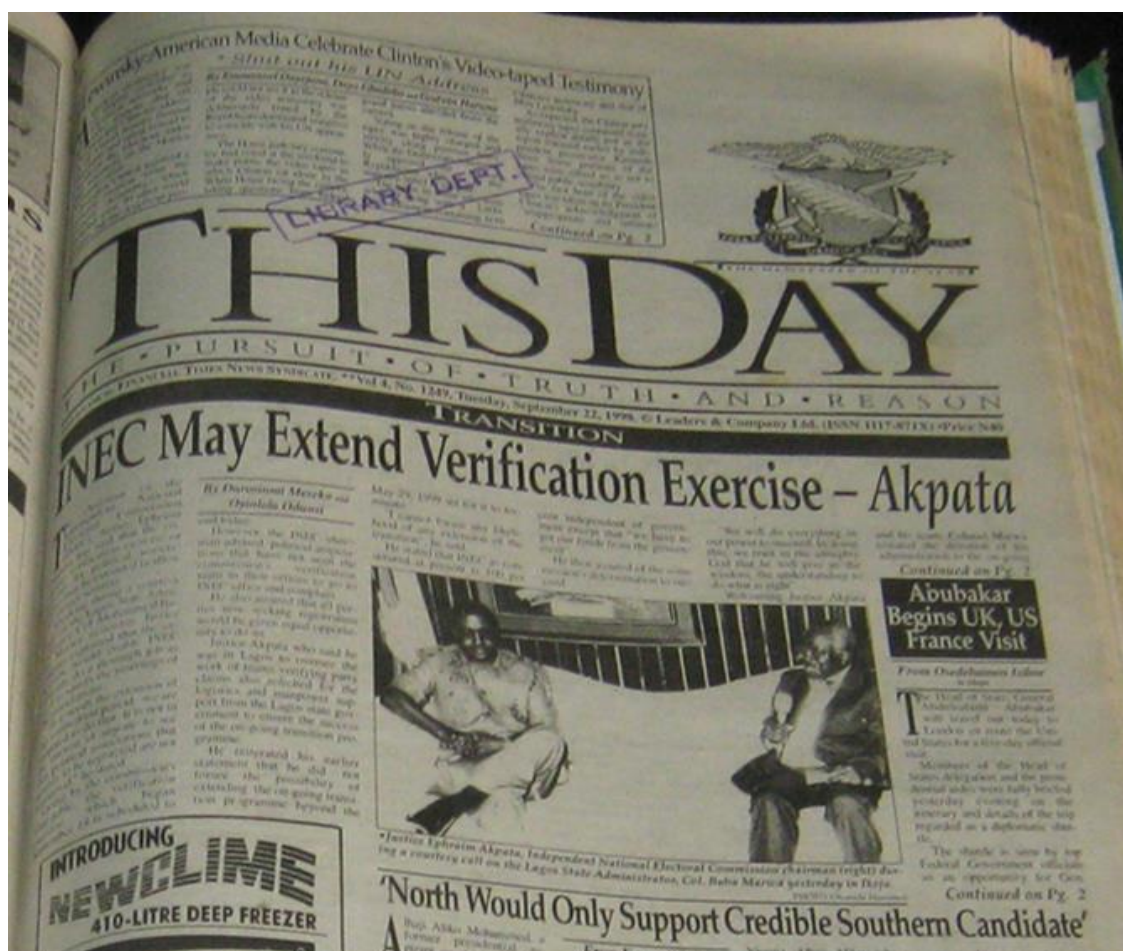


Figure 27: *Thisday* September 22, 1998, p. 1.

A follow-up photographic story on the same visit also appeared on the front page of *Thisday* on Thursday September 28, 1998. It shows the General shaking hands with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the door step of Number 10, Downing Street. Abubakar appears relaxed and smiling as he and Tony Blair pose for the camera. Their demeanour suggests confidence, satisfaction progress being made – overall a fruitful meeting. The paper reproduced the photograph in another edition three months later on December 27, 1998 with a sub-head title: ‘Perspective’ (see Fig. 28), the caption describing the visit as ‘evidence of what changed in ‘98’. Again by re-publishing the photograph of the visit to the ‘imperial powers’, *Thisday* reassured readers that the ‘extraordinary confluence’ of June/July 1998 was over. It is perhaps also another indication of the press having knowledge of the ‘political fix’.



Figure 28: *Thisday*, Sunday December 27, 1998, back cover)

The foreign visits by Abubakar were symbolic in the sense that Nigeria's relationship with these countries had been severely strained for over five years since the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections with many sanctions imposed on Nigeria<sup>57</sup>. Such a story on the front page of

<sup>57</sup> Though these countries imposed sanctions on the Abacha regime, owing to pressures by civil society organisations, they had covert dealings with the military. For instance, Soyinka told newsmen in Lagos, 1995 that the United Kingdom in particular was aiding the Abacha regime with continued supplies of military hardware at a time of gross rights violations. This was after Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth following the hanging of the Niger Delta environmentalist, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others. The British High Commissioner replied that the supplies were 'outstanding'.



each of the three papers, complemented with photographs, sent a message of stability to Nigerians that the country was back on the world stage. The photographs were direct evidence of their head of state's successful foreign trips to the world's notable seats of power: Abubakar gaining credibility through his association with foreign leaders, suggesting that he was working hard to restore Nigeria's image – and its democracy. In effect, the press's packaging of Abubakar in this way could be seen to be striving to partly erase from people's memory, the tragedy of the two months (June/July 1998) earlier – the deaths of Abiola and Abacha but more particularly of over sixty protestors killed following Abiola's death. There was no probe into these deaths, and the press did not lobby for an inquiry. As Hall points out, in the modern newspaper, while text is essential, photographs add colour to a text. "Pictures are more imperative than writing; they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it" (Cited in Cohen and Young 1973, p. 226). The three papers thus tell their readers: 'This is the direct evidence, our man was there'.

For *Tell* and *TheNews*, as expected of weekly magazines, space was limited. Although the magazines appeared to put Abubakar on his toes, with stories about Abiola and June 12 persisting, as well as consistent allegations of corruption, they also adopted a moderate tone and did not attack the transition programme. As a matter of civic responsibility and perhaps to put pressure on the regime not to renege on the transition, throughout the entire transition period, *Tell* in particular, offered a weekly countdown to the hand-over date. Olukotun and Seteolu describe this feature as a 'kind of advocacy advertising for the transition programme' (2001). One of the contributions from *TheNews* was a light-hearted cover story featuring all the presidential candidates, complemented by individual photographs and their campaign rhetoric, thereby giving readers a glimpse of those angling for their votes. Here, *TheNews* leads the electorate to consider the full range of candidates. In these ways – and there were several other such features and stories – these titles made manifest their support for the Government's activities, particularly in relation to the transition programme. This stance contributed to ensuring that Abubakar's plan sailed through without hindrance.

But while the three dailies emphasised the promotion of Abubakar as personality, the two magazines were more restrained. They did not highlight Abubakar, at least in a PR sense. His regime was consistently referred to as a 'junta'. The ideological differences between the dailies and the weeklies had to do with their backgrounds and orientation. Indeed, until the end of Abubakar's transition, editors of the two magazines at the centre of guerrilla practice all

through the Abacha years strove to restore their reputation, seriously dented by their earlier collaboration with the military during Buhari and Babangida years.

### **Obasanjo: The Press rallies round him**

After Obasanjo (unsurprisingly) won the vote at the February 27, 1999 general elections, the opposition candidate, Olu Falae, filed a case challenging the victory only to abandon it midway. ‘Programmed’ to succeed by the military, Obasanjo’s victory was a *fait accompli*, such that it would have been a herculean task for any opposition candidate to upturn the result. Whilst the press did give coverage to Falae’s case, largely, it seemed pleased with the Obasanjo victory. Shortly after the electoral commission declared Obasanjo the winner, the paraphernalia of office of the president was extended to him. He also began a presidential pre-inauguration world tour, ignoring the fact that his victory was the subject of judicial scrutiny. Ordinarily, while the Election Tribunal determines the authentic winner, nothing should be done to jeopardise or influence any pending case. But in this case there was no indication of any press criticism of this anomaly; rather, his presidential conduct was elevated by the press, in part through their take up of the fulsome endorsements of his foreign trips

Barely two weeks after Obasanjo was declared winner, and as the opposition challenge was still being debated, British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook arrived in Nigeria on a visit to see Obasanjo. *Nigerian Tribune* in a front page story ‘Obasanjo’s election credible – UK, Anyaoku’ reported that the visiting diplomat declared the election ‘generally free and fair’. The report also captured a statement issued by the Commonwealth Secretary General, Emeka Anyaoku to the effect that the election was a ‘credible exercise in spite of the reported irregularities’. A photograph of Robin Cook’s visit to Obasanjo on the same front page complemented the story (*Nigerian Tribune*, Thursday March 11, 1999, p. 1, see fig. 29). A further press account also reported that the US sent Reverend Jesse Jackson, envoy to Africa on democracy and Mr Andrew Young to parley with Obasanjo and Falae while other diplomats in Nigeria rushed to congratulate Obasanjo. In all these attempts which, in effect, undermined attempts to seek judicial action, the press did not query why Robin Cook and Anyaoku in particular, or the American officials were ignoring opposition concerns: the press went along with the notion that the election was generally peaceful and Nigeria should move forward under Obasanjo.



Figure 29: *Nigerian Tribune*, Thursday March 11, 1999

*Thisday* and *Vanguard* also carried reports of Obasanjo's visits abroad captured in pictures and elaborated on. *Thisday* carried two: 'Obasanjo Meets Clinton Today, Hopeful of Nigeria's Future' (*Thisday* Tuesday March 30, 1999, p. 1) stating that Obasanjo was a guest at a reception by the African-American Institute in New York. The second report: 'Obasanjo to Overhaul NNPC, CBN' captured Obasanjo's meeting with the World Bank in Washington DC, promising the Bank transparency in his yet-to-be formed Government and to reform key state institutions, such as the State oil company, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and the Central Bank of Nigeria (*Thisday*, Monday April 5, 1999, p. 1). Beneath this report is a story on the electoral court case challenging Obasanjo's victory: 'Court Rules on Falae Vs Obasanjo Today' about the expected judgement. However, prominence is given to Obasanjo world tour over the determination of the electoral dispute, with the headline about his meeting with the World Bank in a larger font size, across the entire six columns, with two sub-headlines underneath it. The effect is to highlight Obasanjo's victory as a *fait accompli*. The fourth additional complement to the story was on top of the main headline, highlighted by a blue background: 'At parley with the World Bank...' In this way, *Thisday* places a higher premium

on the Obasanjo phenomenon as it guides the attention of its readers away from the *inconsequential* court verdict expected on this day: court or no court, Obasanjo is the president.



Figure 30: *ThisDay*, Monday April 5, 1999

As in the case of Anyaoku's visit to Abubakar and Obasanjo, *ThisDay* also showcased Obasanjo's foreign tour with a generous full colour page containing nine photographs, including his visit to Pope John Paul 2 at the Vatican, Tony Blair at Downing Street, Clinton at the White House, as well as visits to the Jamaican and Italian Presidents. The significance of the photos is anchored by a statement at the top of the publication: 'President-elect, General Olusegun Obasanjo recently returned from *a very successful and fruitful* global tour that took him and his entourage to several countries including Europe, North and South America' (*ThisDay* Sunday April 25, 1999, p. 12, my emphasis). This PR-style packaging of Obasanjo continues the paper's pro-military agenda which began with its reporting in June/July 1998 when both Abacha and Abiola died.

*Vanguard* also featured the world tour in a full page but with eight black and white photos similar to those in *ThisDay*: 'Obasanjo's World Tour in Pictures' (*Vanguard* Monday April 12, 1999, p. 3) and some days later this was followed up with another photo page: 'Credit Suisse

Fetes Obasanjo in New York’, containing five photographs of the event hosted by the global financial services company (*Vanguard* Sunday 18, March 1999, p. 8).

In relation to the two weekly magazines, the situation did not differ much from their earlier ambivalent attitude to Abubakar. However, there were instances suggesting *Tell* was also ‘gate-keeping’ for Obasanjo. Two cover stories suffice. The first: ‘The Army will deal with Obasanjo’ featured an interview with Omo Omoruyi, professor of political Science and head of Babangida regime’s think tank – Centre for Democratic Studies – who parted ways with the military after the annulment of June 12 elections. He warned: ‘the same people who jailed him [Obasanjo] are still in the military’ (*Tell*, April 6, 1999). The second: ‘Nigeria’s Last Chance... Challenges before the President’ (*Tell*, May 31, 1999), appearing two days after Obasanjo’s inauguration on May 29, 1999, whipped up sentiment by pointing to those in the system who might sabotage Obasanjo’s Government. Such reports arguably legitimated action or put pressure on Obasanjo to act against the unidentified threats to his Government; which indeed he did by retiring a number of generals after his inauguration.

## **Conclusion**

### **The Press Accepts Defeat**

In this chapter, I have argued that by the time General Abdusalami Abubakar regime assumed power, following the death of Abacha, the press was already undermined, such that it could not resist Abubakar’s ‘olive branch’ (Abugu 2013). Capitalising on the ‘psychological’ state of the press, Abubakar then went on to further undermine the press with what the thesis proposes was a ‘political fix’ – death of Abiola and the permanent sealing of the June 12 crisis. Decisively, Abubakar ensured the press was bowed by handing over to an anointed candidate Olusegun Obasanjo.

The chapter also throws up the possibility that, as with the past regimes, the press may have been compromised in order to do away with the raging crisis. I discussed the May, 1998 seminar organised by Defence Correspondents’ Association, with Abubakar in attendance, as the possible avenue where the dramatic events of the following months of June/July 1998 were sealed – the clear out of Abacha and Abiola.

For instance, I argue that given the stream of diplomats who visited after Abacha died, in particular the weighty statement of Tony Lloyd to the effect that 'June 12 was dead' (*Sunday Champion*, June 28, 1998, p. 1), the press ought to have sensed the looming danger over Abiola. But as Abugu revealed, the mood in the press then was to give Abubakar 'a chance' and 'do away with the crises'. All this suggest that Tony Lloyd may be addressing a briefed press.

Having settled permanently, the June 12 and Abiola, Abubakar announced his transition. All the titles, particularly the newspapers, supported the transition and went further to construct Abubakar as a new man. *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune* deployed their headlines to plant Abubakar in the minds of readers. His diplomatic visits abroad were also showcased in photos. However, *Tell* and *TheNews*, while not antagonistic, did offer some kind of 'protest' culture. His transition programme which was not scrutinised by the press, but rather supported eventually led to a 'low democracy' (Diamond et al 1999). However, the failure of the press at this critical time to preserve the 'June 12' struggle (death of Abiola in custody), can be linked to journalists' penchant for romanticising with the military and other political gladiators i.e. 'inclination to politics' (Golden and Elliot 1979) or 'political parallelism' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) or 'instrument of clientelist networks and neo-patrimonial politics' (Hadland 2011). The upshot of this political enmeshment is that, the press could not properly scrutinise General Abubakar's 'hands of fellowship' (Abugu 2013) hence, its inability to safeguard the democratic rights of Nigerians.

With this Abubakar scenario, which ended the sixteen year-long military rule, and which to an extent subordinated the press to its final whims, the chapter concludes that whatever remains of the credibility of the press was damaged, and that Soyinka's 'magnificent and heroic' trophy could not stand. Rather, the press was part of the Abubakar arrangement that ensured that the electoral will of the people (June 12) was permanently eroded. The press was also instrumental to the implementation of a transition programme in which the choice of the people did not count.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

#### **Neither Magnificent nor Heroic: Nigeria's Complicit Press (1984 – 1999)**

In this thesis I have explored and questioned the performance of the Nigerian press in relation to the state during its long period of military rule. In 1998 after Abacha's death, Wole Soyinka made his renowned declaration:

The press and let me seize this very opportunity to stress this, the press has been magnificent, really magnificent, heroic and one of these days, when there's more pleasure, we are going to erect a statue. I am going to see personally to this, that a statue for heroism of the press is erected at a prominent place in this country; we must never ever forget (*The Guardian*, Saturday October 17, 1998, p. 5).

In some ways this statement, which was uttered in spite of a sixteen year long military reign, sparked this study. Was the press really 'magnificent and heroic'? I wanted to question and explore Soyinka's statement (see Chapter One above). My interest partly arose from what became a confusing array of changing experiences: son of a first and second republic politician; an activist involved in anti-military activities; a state official involved in the implementation of transition programmes and, a student of journalism. I found myself shifting my views, particularly my initial enthusiasm that the press was championing the course of democracy. Soyinka's image and authority in Nigerian society (Gibbs 1983) and the view that he was the 'press's man Friday' (Olaoye Bisiriyu, deputy editor, *Daily Champion*, 2013), made exploring his statement pertinent if challenging. Such a view had also been taken up and developed by other scholars. Ayo Olukotun in his study of state-press relations under the military, argues that the 'the vibrant media played an influential role' and 'patriotically rose' against the military (Olukotun 2002, p. 1). Olukotun further averred that given this role, the press will be 'central to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria' (Olukotun 2002, p. 233).

In exploring Soyinka's statement and Olukotun's assertions, chapter two considers the earlier conceptualisations and accounts of the Nigerian press by scholars and journalists, from the stage set by the first newspaper *Iwe Irohin* in 1859 up to the period this study began in 1984. These are marked by two traditions of the press synonymous with particular journalism practice and in tension with each other. The first is the view of the press as anti-colonial (protest or nationalist). This definition is earned in the long run up to and glory of independence and carries over into the press's own understanding of itself, and in a public perception that recalls the postcolonial struggles (see Chapter Two above). This view is furthered by the near agreement by media historians that the protest nature of the press in tackling colonialism accelerated the granting of political independence. However it is pertinent that liberalists such as Ogbondah (1994), Olukotun (2002) and Adesoji (2010) carried forward this view of the press as a protest press throughout the military regimes until 1979 when a democratic regime was in place.

The other tradition, the ethno-political press, suggests a different view pulling against the notion of a national 'protest' culture. These scholars suggest that practitioners of the early period hid behind anti-colonial struggles to perpetuate their other interests (Chick 1971, Golding and Elliot 1979, Uche 1989, Agbaje 1992), leading to the associated conception formulated by Golding and Elliot (1979) that:

The separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete and the dual allegiances of journalists to professional and political goals have created conflicts whose resolution in daily practice underpins much of contemporary Nigerian journalism' (1979, p. 31).

Specifically, Golding and Elliot opined that in Nigeria's colonial press, 'journalism was a narrow avenue' for politicians to advance their 'political ambitions' and the 'flowering nationalism of these papers was consistently watered by self-interest' (p. 29). This phenomenon is also alluded to by Increased Coker (1960) who argued that journalism came last in the fight against colonialists: "the proprietors who fostered this party press were still professionals first, politicians second and journalists last" (cited in Golding and Elliot p. 30). Chick (1971) added that this culture was also in practice during the period of self-rule, when colonial war was replaced by a battle for power between different ethnic groups, using their newspapers as war tools. Golding and Elliot (1979) cited *West African Pilot's* publisher, Nnamdi Azikiwe who



became Nigeria's independence president in 1960 as one example of newspaper men who became political leaders.

The idea of an ethno-political press and that the 'separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete' (Golding and Elliott 1979) in Nigeria, provided a theoretical means in the thesis to begin to counter the more prevailing view of a 'protest' press which Soyinka's statement endorses.

Methodologically, choosing titles, seen as independent or liberal and perhaps politically 'aggressive' (Ogbondah 1994, Olukotun 2002, Adesoji 2010), for analysis was in order to see if indeed their practices could be described as 'magnificent and heroic'. As outlined in chapter three, the thesis also focused on the initial weeks of each new (military) regime and moments of crisis when newspapers' practices might be expected to be in the 'national interest' and/or adopt a 'protest' style of reporting. These periods posed serious challenges to Nigeria's stability. In addition, the specific formats chosen for analysis – headlines, front page news, editorials, photographs and cartoons in particular – were intended to enable a discussion of how Nigeria's newsstand readers might have understood politics and political positions from reading the press, and of what I would refer to as a 'visual politics'. In contrast to some accounts, attention to this material by adopting critical discourse analysis, which has not been largely adopted in studies of the Nigerian press, provides a richer and more contradictory account than is possible through a wider overview of press titles. Interviews with those involved as editors and or state officials offers yet further complication to open up or challenge the notion of a heroic press. Together these combined approaches allowed the development of a nuanced and complex account of news reporting between 1984 and 1999.

As the analyses in chapters 4 to 7 demonstrate initial moments of collaboration and alliance between press and new regime, followed by 'crisis', antagonism and a shifting of position on both sides – the end of the honeymoon (Diya 2011) – was repeated across the regimes.

For instance, *National Concord* and *The Guardian* deployed their editorials to herald Buhari's coup and attack the deposed regime. *National Concord's* editorial forty eight hours after the coup, 'Verdict 83' used 'foul' phrases to describe the officials of the Shagari regime, describing Buhari's coup as the 'authentic verdict '83' not the re-election of Shagari earlier that year. They set a political agenda for the regime acting as a 'think-tank', suggesting policies the regime should adopt. *The Guardian* also railed against the 'alarmist editorials' of the Western media

which denounced Buhari for aborting the democratic government and accused the West of supporting electoral malpractice and supporting former officials who looted the nation's wealth (see Chapter Four above).

The pattern of alliance was also in evidence during Babangida, Abacha and Abdusalami regimes. *The Punch* used a full length front page photograph of Babangida and Buhari on August 28, 1985 (the day following Babangida's coup) to welcome Babangida. The features in the photograph shows a 'subdued' Buhari and a 'victorious' Babangida, mocking Buhari whom the paper in an editorial described as 'arrogant' (see Chapter Five above). Their photographic stories perhaps more vividly demonstrate their support than the printed word. *Vanguard's* photographs (see Chapter Six above) presented Abacha in a white flowing robe (a symbol of purity) while receiving the Japanese Ambassador. He is depicted as the 'new man' in Nigeria for readers. *Thisday* (see Chapter Seven above), celebrated the Abubakar regime by publishing colourful photographs once the dust over Abiola's death had settled.

A striking photograph linking 'imperial powers' and the Nigerian military to the dramatic events of June/July 1998 (Abacha and Abiola's deaths) showed a full length photograph of Tony Blair and Abubakar (dressed in flowing white robe) at the doorstep on No 10 Downing Street, both beaming; *Thisday* captioned this particular photograph as 'evidence of what changed in '98' (p. 207). However, in this visual war, analysis suggests that *Champion* exhibited restraint, in line with the mood of the people, and maintaining a distance from other papers. Abacha was presented in photographs in his army uniform, thus reminding the people of a 'familiar general' as opposed to the 'new man' presented by *Vanguard*. Its use of cartoons also mocked Abacha's campaigners, whilst in many other formats; the paper fulfilled the duty of a liberal press.

On the disagreements between the State and the press, which led to a falling out at different moments, self-interest was at the heart of the 'cat and mouse' game – cosying up/falling out. As evidenced in the collaboration between the regimes and the press initially, the press wanted to hold on to its own understanding as a 'protest' institution able to attack the officials as it deemed fit whilst still a 'shareholder' in the government. This contradiction did not sit well with the military, offering carrots (appointments, advertisement etc) to the press in exchange for cooperation and legitimacy – a negotiation which might be thought about in Gramscian

terms, thus, as Diya pointed out, the State that courted the press ('pay the piper') expected to direct the affairs of the press ('dictate the tune'). With this scenario 'double allegiances to professional and political goals' (Golding and Elliot 1979) or 'political parallelism' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) the press did re-enact the protest culture at different times, sometimes inciting violence against the State and its officials, as symbolically represented in the cartoon in *Vanguard* (see Chapter Six above) where a supposed 'common man' threatens Shonekan (head of the interim government) with violence: 'Hun, Oga, katakata go burst o'. Such moments were, except under Abubakar, usually followed by repressive legislations and other extra-legal measures like detention of journalists and closure of media houses, with any democracy project the loser.

Across the chapters, the thesis establishes some of the causes of the tensions. Buhari enjoyed 'a red carpet' welcome from the press and the press supported, even advised before the event, the tough actions he should take on corruption and indiscipline. *The Guardian* asked him to 'get cracking' while *National Concord* assured him of public support. But then, the moment Buhari spread his war against indiscipline to the press, trying to enforce press responsibility the latter felt it should be exempt from the rules imposed on the rest of the society i.e. should not offer 'sacrifices' which it initially agreed were needed to move Nigeria forward. When 'The Guardian Two' were arrested for publishing 'embarrassing' diplomatic stories, the press felt it was an attack on it. But as Duro Onabule, *National Concord* editor at the time reasoned, the story touched on the 'sensitive' diplomatic issue; *The Guardian* would have lost nothing by waiting for the 'official' release. Again, at one and the same time this was a partisan press – cosying up to Buhari, but one that also wanted to be independent. The fall out of the 'protest' at this period following the jailing of the journalists was attacks by the press which Buhari could not control. Buhari lost, the press went on to leap into bed with another military man.

Adopting a discourse analysis approach, demonstrated that the language deployed by the newspapers promoted a military agenda. This meticulous promotion of a military ethos and, systematic shielding and or distancing of the military from public anger through carefully edited headlines arguably enabled the sustenance of military rule for sixteen years in spite of persistent resistance to it by the people. As detailed in chapters six and seven, there was a litany of headlines, editorials and PR-ized stories in *Vanguard*, *Thisday* and *Nigerian Tribune* that promoted Abacha's transformation and the Abubakar emergency respectively. *Champion*, *Tell*

and *TheNews* remained cautious and offered a semblance of ‘protest journalism’. For instance, at the peak of the endorsement of Abacha by the parties, when the remaining party had still to endorse him, a fracas was reported at the convention ground. *Champion* headlines clearly informed the readers of the final ‘endorsement’ by the last party ‘Presidency: How GDM endorsed Abacha’, with a rider, ‘Gani goes to court’. In the story proper, the paper highlighted the high wire manoeuvrings by Abacha loyalists leading to his ‘endorsement’, thus exposing the corruption at the heart of the process and discrediting the whole Abacha phenomenon. *Vanguard* instead opted for an inconsequential headline that hid the details of the contentious convention: ‘Gani in court to stop Abacha’. (You will recall that Gani, who went to court to stop Abacha, was a leading rights lawyer who had been detained by the military). Not that taking Abacha to court was wrong, but then, court rulings did not matter to Abacha at the time. Giving prominence to a story that would not worry Abacha over the one that could encourage people’s vigilance about what was going on (as in *Champion* case) was *Vanguard*’s way of promoting Abacha. In the story proper, *Vanguard* concealed the ‘endorsement’ process, thus, making it look as if everything was smooth sailing, backing Abacha with a powerful cartoon that encouraged delegates to queue behind him (see Chapter Six above).

The emergence of Abubakar (following the death of Abacha), and his ‘olive branch’ which enabled him to undermine the press further, with Abiola’s death, did not give much room for any ‘protest’ attempt. Headlines, from *Thisday*, *Vanguard* and *Nigerian Tribune*, mostly on front pages, and at times multiple promoted the leader. Abubakar’s name was prominent and was the ‘active subject’. At a time of political uncertainty, the impact of these headlines on the readers was to plant Abubakar in the minds of the sceptical readers as a new man moving away from Abacha’s past. With Abiola’s death in particular and over ‘60 protestors’ (Lewis 1999) killed after his death, the press ensured Abubakar climbed out of the chaos quickly (see Chapter Seven above).

*Tell* and *TheNews*, whose editors were part of the ‘protest’ culture at the time Abacha’s crisis reached its peak, were cautious in reporting Abubakar. Though in their cover stories, they exposed the ills of his government and referred to him constantly as a ‘junta’; they were subtle and not as adversarial as under Abacha. The situation was understandable, with Abiola and June 12 cleared off the political space, they had little left to fight for. They were humbled and could not offer scrutiny of his transition, leading to the emergence of a military candidate,

Obasanjo. Olukotun's 'calendar of repression' referred to the military crackdown on the press, but accounts presented as the press's 'sacrifices' for its stance against the military and for the enthronement of democracy, scratch the surface of a significant moment in Nigerian journalism. Whenever it was dissatisfied with the prevailing situation the press leapt into bed with the military thus undermining the democratic aspirations of the people.

Interviews with some of the *dramatis personae* also challenge assertions in previous studies. For instance, Olukotun (2002), Adesoji (2010) both listed newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune* as some of the independent and radical papers that were at the forefront of democratic struggles with the military. Evidence from the newspapers themselves and from interviews conducted, question this view. Across the chapters, I cited Oladipo Diya, a former military governor under the Buhari regime (1984-85) and Abacha's deputy (1993-1997), while discussing the vexed issue of press freedom, argues that the press cannot be free in a situation where the State and the press collaborate (Diya 2011). This angle was strengthened by the comments from Moshood Fayemiwo (2012, 2013), publisher of defunct *Razor Magazine* detained under the Abacha regime. On why the military was able to perpetuate itself in power for sixteen years in the face of press 'resistance' to it, he revealed a grim picture citing Babangida regime in particular which bought into frontline newspapers through proxies so that the press faced a moral dilemma in fighting Babangida.

Overall the interviews offer background context but they also help dismantle accounts of a 'magnificent and heroic' press. Rather the press was in alignment with the regimes and was subtle in its criticisms. In this way the interviews contribute in a similar way to those Hallin conducted in his groundbreaking study of the role of the America's news media in the Vietnam War (1989) where he attests to the quality inherent in interview as a method of study. In his case the journalists voiced a powerful critique of the conventional argument about the media reporting on Vietnam: far from being a consistent adversary of government policy in Vietnam, Hallin shows, the media were closely tied to official perspectives.

What this thesis indicates is that titles hitherto celebrated as 'independent, fearless and outspoken' (Ogbondah 1994, Olukotun 2002, Adesoji 2010, Alimi 2011), should now, in retrospect be thought of differently: more 'ethno-political' than 'protest' and showing evidence of Golding and Elliot's 'lack of separation from politics'. They represented more the aspirations of individual gladiators than any public endeavour.

In the chequered history of Nigeria, from the period of colonialism; through post-independent civilian and military regimes, up to the moment of the press as 'magnificent and heroic', there are many historical accounts pointing to the laudable roles the press played. Taken at face value, particularly the 'glory' of independence, these roles can appear truly laudable if it was during this era of struggle against colonialism, and for Nigeria's political independence that the press secured its appellation of a 'protest/nationalist' press (Omu 1978, Ogbondah 1994, Olukotun 2002). In hindsight, given the plethora of crises that impeded Nigeria's development goals, the press's role can now be seen as more problematic.

As postulated by many scholars in the concepts discussed in the review chapter, the press's alliance with political gladiators or perhaps the political role it is expected to play often makes it an herculean task for journalists to remain neutral and be objective: Golding and Elliot's 'dual allegiances to professional and political obligations' (1979); Hallin and Mancini's 'political parallelism' (2004), and serving as 'instrument of clientelist networks and neo-patrimonial politics' (Hadland 2011). The Nigerian press, which from its inception has been characterised with affiliations to political parties and personalities became a player in the process and not an estate afar. For instance, the cosy relationship between Babangida and the press not only enable Babangida to stay put in power for eight years, but also to escape sanctions over many scandals that rocked his regime, e.g. Giwa's assassination and the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections results. It was also the result of the press's political alliance that emboldened the Abubakar regime to end the June 12 deadlock with the murder of MKO Abiola in state custody. The result as this thesis shows is that, the press failed to make any meaningful impact that could assist the populace to realise their democratic aspirations.

The market concept (Coker 1960; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Curran 2005) is another compelling framework that impeded the democratic role of the press generally. As a business desirous of making profit, newspapers first and foremost owe themselves an allegiance of survival. In this case, proprietors and journalists alike tend to place the economic logic over and above the public interest. The Nigerian press as Coker (1960) argues was pioneered by Lagos business elites who wanted to have a share of the advertising market from the Europeans. This economic foundation continues to characterise the Nigerian press, with attendant implications on the matters of general interest. In Nigeria, advertising revenue from the government such as supplements has always been a source of income for the newspaper press.

The fear of losing out and on other form of economic benefits from the State means the press 'gravitated' to the State. Thus, General Diya's reference to 'paying the piper and dictating the tune' couldn't have been more apt. Under this circumstance, the press often becomes the underdog. Yet, the issues of 'ethnicity and belonging' (Nyamjoh 2005); 'audience allegiance' (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and 'citizenship and nation-building' (Bornman 2013) are factors that cannot be downplayed even if the press attempt to play its role fairly. In Nigeria, where over 250 ethnic nationalities (Uche 1989) compete for recognition and political control, the idea of any form of 'balancing act' by the press remains a dream. This ethnic rivalry, as the thesis reveals, led to the annulment of the 'freest' election in Nigeria, as the military generals of Northern extraction were against the emergence of MKO Abiola, a Yoruba from the south-west. The rivalry was also at stake when General Diya and other senior military Yoruba officers were arrested for the 1997 coup, thought to be an avenue by Abacha to get rid of those seen as threats to his ambition to become a civilian president without first resigning.

In this thesis, I have amassed credible evidence to counter claims of a prevailing 'liberal' tradition during this 'definitive period' (Diamond 1997). It could also be advanced that Soyinka's claims about the press as 'magnificent and heroic' did not help journalists to reflect critically on their role during the period of the last military rule (1998/1999), but rather engendered complacency. This 'frame' continued to impact negatively on the role the press played in the post military years as Agbaje and Adebani (2004) have confirmed. Moreover, since 1999, Nigeria's democracy has wobbled like a troubled canoe in the sea with the press consistently mentioned as central to the gloomy situation. Political violence, election rigging, massive corruption, including in relation to the press have continued to be rife (Agbaje and Adebani 2004). All these have proved wrong Olukotun's hope that the press post-1999 would be central to the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy' (Olukotun 2002). I conclude, sadly, that Soyinka's acclaims, whether intentional or not, covered-up a most atrocious period of journalism in Nigeria's history and were undeserving.

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**Newspapers and Magazines**

*The Guardian*

*National Concord,*

*The Punch,*

*Vanguard,*

*Nigerian Tribune,*

*Thisday*

*Champion*

*Tell*

*TheNews*

## Appendix 1.

List of major newspapers and magazines in Nigeria between 1960 and 1999, their owners and affiliations

NEWSPAPER/MAGAZINE	YEAR ESTABLISHED	OWNERSHIP	CLASSIFICATION
Complete Sports	December 1995	Private	Independent/Sport/Commercial
Daily Times	June, 1925	Public/Private	Independent/Commercial
Daily Champion	1 October, 1988	Private	Independent/Political/Commercial
The Guardian	27 February, 1983	Private	Independent/Political/Commercial
National Concord	1980	Private	Independent/Political/Commercial
New Nigerian	1 January, 1966	Public	Public/ Political/ Commercial
Nigerian Tribune	November, 1949	Private	Independent/Political/Commercial
Newswatch	28 January 1985	Private /Problematic	Independent/Political/Commercial
TEMPO (Underground - Defunct)	1993	Private/Problematic	Independent/Radical/Commercial
The Punch	1971	Private/Problematic	Independent/Political/Commercial
ThisDay	January 22, 1995	Private/Problematic	Independent/Political/Commercial
TheNews (underground)	8, February, 1993	Private/Problematic	Independent/Radical/Commercial



Tell (underground)	April 8, 1991	Private/Problematic	Independent/Radical/Commercial
Vanguard	June 3rd, 1984	Private	Independent/Political/Commercial
P.M. News	August, 1994	Private/Problematic	Independent/Radical

### **Additional Notes on ownership and affiliations**

In general terms, it is difficult to establish the true ownership structure of major Nigerian newspaper press, as well as the degree of their independence. As the above shows, those whose names appear as owners and are known publicly as the owners, also have other co-owners who are unknown to the public. The implication of this problematic structure is that, most newspapers and magazines have been linked to several public officials, particularly during the military era. Where the names of shareholders are listed, many of them are fronts for former military officers and past/current civilian officials. With this arrangement, we might be looking at the ownership structure from three angles:

1. Newspapers/magazines (marked private) owned by notable politicians such as *The Nation*, *Daily Independent*, *Champion Sun* and *Nigerian Tribune* (owned by former state governors); notable politicians and ex office holders.
2. Newspapers/magazines (marked private/problematic) owned by publicly known private individuals, and other shareholders fronting for retired military and past/current civilian officials; e.g. *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Thisday*.
3. Newspapers/magazines owned by known editors/media professionals but with secretive/mysterious shareholders; e.g. *Tell*, *TheNews*, *TEMPO* and *P.M. News*.
4. Newspapers (marked public) owned by governments (Federal and States) e.g. *Daily Times*, *Daily Sketch*, *New Nigerian*, *Daily Trust*....

Ethically and or legally, equity is thought to be two-way or to borrow the legal axiom 'he who asks for equity must do equity'. For the press to be able to perform the 'fourth estate' function i.e. (fights corruption and offers, if a fairly free and equitable 'public sphere'), it must come clean and be seen to be transparent and accountable. This lack of transparency may have been

responsible for accusation and counter-accusation of bribery and corruption between state officials and press corps.

## Appendix 2

### Notable Dates and Personalities in history from Independence

**October 1, 1960**, granted independence by Great Britain with a democratically elected government installed. The government was headed by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, with Nnamdi Azikiwe as the Governor-General of the Federation. Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo and Michael Okpara were premiers of the Northern, Western and Eastern regions respectively. Samuel Ladoke Akintola later replaced Obafemi Awolowo as the Premier, after Awolowo was convicted of sedition charges. Akintola was Awolowo's deputy party leader.

**October 1, 1963**, Nigeria became a Federal Republic after the Declaration of Independence was signed with Governor-General becoming the President. A Mid-west region was also carved out of the existing Western region, with Dennis Osadebey as the administrator.

**January 15, 1966**, the First military coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogu killed the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa; Northern and Western Premiers, Ahmadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola respectively; Finance Minister Okotie Ebor and others. The coupists were predominantly of the Eastern region, and General Aguiyi Ironsi, an easterner, became the head of state - giving the coup an ethnic colouration.

**July 29, 1966**, a counter-coup by Northern officers killed the head of state Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi and his host, the military governor of the western region, Lt. Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi while on official visit to Ibadan, the capital of the Western region. Lt-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a northerner, became the head of state.

**May 30, 1967**, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, military governor of eastern region declared Biafra's Independence following the killings of easterners in the north. A civil war broke out and lasted till January 15, 1970 when Biafra surrendered.

**July 29, 1975**, General Murtala Mohammed staged a bloodless coup and toppled Gowon to become head of state.

**February 13, 1976**, Colonel Buka Dimka staged a bloody but botched coup that killed the head of state, General Mohammed. General Olusegun Obasanjo, his deputy became the head of state.

**October 1, 1979**, General Obasanjo handed over to a democratically elected president Sheu Shagari. Second Republic began

**December 31, 1983**, General Mohammadu Buhari sacked the civilian regime of Sheu Shagari to herald another military odyssey in politics.

**March 29, 1984**, Buhari regime's Decree No 4, 1984 Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) was enacted. The decree became the thorny issue between the regime, the press and the wider public.

**July 4, 1984**, two journalists from The Guardian, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor were found guilty of false publication against the Federal Government under Decree 4, and sentenced to one year imprisonment.

**August 27, 1985**, General Ibrahim Babangida, chief of Army Staff in Buhari regime toppled his boss in a palace coup to become Nigeria's first military ruler to address himself as the president. Others before him designated the title of 'Head of State'.

**December 17, 1985**, Babangida regime arrested several military officers including Major-General Mamman Vatsa, Federal Capital Territory Minister, for plotting to overthrow his regime.

**March 5, 1986**, General Mamman Vatsa and others were executed after being found guilty of a coup plot.

**October 19, 1986**, Dele Giwa, editor and co-founder of *Newswatch* magazine assassinated via a parcel bomb.

**April 22, 1990**, Major Gideon Orkar led a bloody coup attempt against the Babangida regime. The coup was foiled by loyal troops but Babangida lost his ADC, Colonel U. K. Bello.

**July 27, 1990**, Major Gideon Orkar and 41 others were executed after being found guilty of the April 22 bloody coup. Another set of 27 officers were executed in September, 1990 over the same coup after a retrial.

**January 2, 1993**, Babangida appointed a Transitional Council headed by Ernest Shonekan to midwife his transition programme after public accusation he was sitting tight.

**March 27, 1993**, MKO Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tafa emerged presidential candidates of the two parties Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) at Jos and Port Harcourt convention grounds respectively.

**June 10, 1993**, a group Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) filed a law suit to stop the June 12 presidential election and sought an extension of Babangida regime. Same day, Justice Bassey Ikpeme of an Abuja High Court granted the group's request, barring the electoral commission from holding the election.

**June 11, 1993**, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) announced it will disobey the court order and hold the elections, citing legal protection from court interference on electoral matters.

**June 12, 1993**, presidential elections held nationwide.

**June 13, 1993**, NEC released some results from 14 of the 30 states showing MKO Abiola leading with 4.2 million votes with Bashir Tofa trailing with 2.3 million votes.

**June 15, 1993**, the Chief Judge of the Abuja High Court granted another injunction sought by the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) to stop the announcement of the remaining election results.

**June 17, 1993**, two High Courts in Lagos and Benin cities, ordered the Electoral Commission to release the remaining election results.

**June 23, 1993**, Babangida announced the annulment of the June 12 elections results.

**August 17, 1993**, Babangida addressed the Parliament announcing his intention to 'step aside' on August 27, 1993, his 8th year in power.

**August 26, 1993**, Babangida handed over to an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan.

**November 10, 1993**, Justice Dolapo Akinsanya of a Lagos High Court in a suit filed by MKO Abiola declared the Interim Government illegal.

**November 17, 1993**, Abacha toppled the Interim Government to become the new military head of state.

**June 11, 1994**, Abiola declared himself the president at a rally in Lagos.

**June 23, 1994**, Abiola was arrested for treason

**February, 1995**, Abacha regime announced the foiling of a coup plot. Several military personnel and civilians, including Olusegun Obasanjo were arrested.

**July, 1995**, Obasanjo sentenced to 25 years imprisonment after a Military Tribunal found him guilty, but later reduced to 15 years.

**November 10, 1995**, Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues hanged by Abacha regime after a trial found them guilty of treason.

**December 13, 1997**, Lt-Gen Oladipo Diya, Abacha's deputy escaped a bomb blast as he was about boarding his official plane at Abuja airport.

**December 20, 1997**, another coup was uncovered by Abacha regime. His deputy, General Oladipo Diya and several other senior officers were subsequently arrested, tried and sentenced to death on April 28, 1998.

**April 16 – 20, 1998**, Abacha was adopted as the sole presidential candidate by the five registered political parties for the coming general elections.

**June 8, 1998**, Abacha's death announced.

**June 9, 1998**, Chief of Defence Staff, General Abdusalami Abubakar, succeeded Abacha as the new head of state and subsequently released Obasanjo and others in detention. MKO Abiola remained in detention.

**July 7, 1998**, MKO Abiola died in the presence of American diplomats, Thomas Pickering and Susan Rice after a cup of tea.

**February 27, 1999**, Obasanjo won presidential election.

**May 29, 1999**, Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated as the new democratic president.