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The Effects of Militant Press on Nigeria's Democratic Evolution

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The Effects of Militant Press on Nigeria's
Democratic Evolution

by

Oluwaniran Malaolu

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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November 15, 2004

Keywords: media, education, diligence, integrity, activism

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memories of hundreds of nameless Nigerians including journalists who lost their lives in the struggle for the establishment of democracy and good governance in Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world, between 1993 and 1999. Amongst these Nigerians was *The News* magazine's reporter, Bagauda Kaltho, who was bombed to death by state security agents, for daring to report the truth.

Acknowledgements

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To all, I acknowledge a great debt of appreciation.

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The Effects of Militant Press on Nigeria's Democratic Evolution

Oluwaniran Malaolu

ABSTRACT

This is an in-depth study of the Nigerian press, the ubiquitous behemoth which called itself the "defender" of Nigeria's national independence and the last "hope" of the common man. It's a bold attempt to critically examine its antecedents, its evolution or development especially the historical, political, technological and socio-economic events that had impacted its growth, its world views and ideologies. It's a thorough assessment of the press' influence on Nigeria's socio-economic and political development, as well as the suitability of its tactics and posturing toward attaining its set goals of economic and political emancipation of Nigerians. Most importantly, this study is aimed at determining whether the Nigerian Press' militantly combative and adversarial posturing, cultivated since its emergence on Nigeria's political scene during the colonial era, is still relevant in view of the nation's current democratic experiment. And also whether there are better alternative strategies toward achieving good governance in Nigeria, which is its utmost desire.

Chapter One: Introduction

Salvadore Domingo, a Brazilian-born Belgian businessman with interests in petro-chemical industries, arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, two days ahead of his planned meetings with some members of the Lagos chambers of commerce and officials of the ministry of trade. Domingo ordered for newspapers and magazines the morning after his arrival. The hotel supplied six magazines and 10 newspapers.

All the publications without exception had a cover story on either the president or the state of the nation's political and economic well-being. From the front pages to the back pages, the coverage was not only negative but scary. The style of reporting was adversarial. The posturing was combative. To Domingo, the publications were indicative of two things: *political instability* and *insecurity*. He packed his bags and left the country without attending the planned business meetings.

There's no love lost between the government and the press in Nigeria. Government officials constantly blame the press for over-blowing the ills of the society beyond reasonable limits under the pretext of holding government accountable to the governed. They accuse media practitioners of frustrating efforts to attract foreign investments needed to turn the economy around and give better life to the ordinary people. The press is perceived as an enemy of the people, which consciously creates tension as a means of boosting sales. Ironically, media practitioners consider government officials as the real enemy

of the ordinary people. Their suspicion of government and its programs as well as the media's adversarial posturing are seen as indications of their patriotism. They equate consistent antagonism with holding the rulers accountable to the ruled. They perceive themselves as the real defenders of the nation's common heritage and blame government and its officials for policy failures as well as the nation's pervasive poverty in the midst of plenty.

The implacable lack of co-operation between the press and the government in Nigeria is rooted in the history of both institutions. Government in Nigeria did not evolve through the desire, consultation and consent of the people. It is a creation of the colonial rulers, who only transferred power after a bitter struggle to their "chosen" local lords. The press represented the opposite. It wasn't just in the forefront of the struggle for independence, it provided the platform upon which the battle for self-government was fought and won. Peter Golding and Philip Elliott¹ corroborated this view: "*Nigerian journalism was born of anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of nationalist propaganda and matured in party politics*".

Ordinarily, it's a fundamental function of the press to perform the traditional watchdog role of monitoring government and its activities. Consequently, journalism's obligations, according to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel,² is to tell the truth; be loyal to the citizens, maintain the discipline of verification of facts; practitioners must maintain independent stance from sources they cover and serve as an independent monitor of power. Others are: provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; make the significant interesting and relevant, keep news comprehensive and proportional and finally, its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

In other words, good journalism is to perform the tasks above in a responsible and detached manner. Therefore, to engage in political advocacy without respect for truth, verification of facts and independence of sources is no longer fulfilling the task of journalism, but an adventure in literary guerilla warfare. Militant journalism, therefore, can be defined as endless assaults on government without acknowledging the good things such governments have done. It can also be viewed as engaging in extra-journalistic activities propelled by hidden interests. These interests abound in Nigeria in different shades and colors. They have their roots in the colonial era.

Colonial Hang-Over

Indeed, the history of the Nigerian press pre-dates the country's independence from the British colonialists in 1960. Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world, had become a colony of the British adventurers in a most nebulous manner.

Europe's first contact with Africa began in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese established stopover ports along the coast of Africa for their ships traveling to Asia's spice market. But the British arrived in Nigeria in 1539. And for four hundred years, her missionaries, merchants, and soldiers interacted with Nigerians along the Atlantic coast.

In 1796, a Scottish sailor named Mungo Park had embarked on a voyage which led him to "discover" River Niger,³ one of the two major rivers that crisscross Nigeria. Following Mungo Park's adventure and purported discovery (a claim whose veracity is now being vehemently disclaimed by African intelligentsia and politicians), more groups of British missionaries found their way into Africa ostensibly to spread the Gospel. No sooner had the

Bible-wielding priests settled down amongst the "African heathens" than their trader kinsmen arrived and booming commerce (including inhuman trade in human beings) intensified on the shores of Africa. By the mid-18th century, the gospel workers and their trader compatriots had noticed the existence of huge deposits of natural resources needed to boost the economy at home. Hence, administrative control posts, which eventually metamorphosed into colonial governments, were created after much of Africa had been balkanized by European colonial powers. By the 1880s, the British had begun ruling Nigeria as a colony and subsequently forcefully divided the more than 200 ethnic groups into three distinct regions without considerations for traditional borders, past history and ethnic identity of the most diverse territory in Africa.

To maintain firm control on their "new" territories, the European powers formed the police force, the army, the state security agencies and other state's apparatus of coercion. Thus a colonial police force, with the orientation to brutalize rather than protect the local people, was firmly established. Neither the army nor the other forces was different in orientation. Altogether, they became an army of occupation, enforcing the will of the foreign minority on the helpless local majority.

The local residents were treated with disdain and condescension. They had no voice. They were denied a say in the way they were governed. European or colonial governors imposed taxes without consultation or consideration of the local citizens' ability to pay. They enacted harsh laws directed at the local people with impunity. They enacted even more punitive laws, further curtailing freedom, to counter people's earlier attempts to organize themselves into some kind of pressure groups.

The foreign rulers promulgated a law against wandering, for example. This obnoxious piece of legislation barred any native from walking the streets from 7 p.m. until dawn. The police force, seen as an army of occupation, enforced the law to the letter. But the more the brutality, the more aggressive and restive the people became. They rose in unison against the colonial rulers. The Nigerian press was created by those circumstances.

It was a militant press: bellicose in temperament, belligerent in posturing and adversarial in language and perception. Where the police force was supportive of the authority, the press pitched its tent with the people. It was resolute in its determination for political emancipation for the people. It was passionate in its demand for self-government. It was unrelenting in its battle against all vestiges of oppression, both local and foreign. It was, and still largely is, a fearless, vibrant and nationalistic press.

Pioneers' Influence

Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Nigeria's first president, testified to the heroic role of the Nigerian press in the nation's struggle for self-government when in one of his many public lectures, he said: "I can truthfully say that the pioneers of the Nigerian press had held their own in establishing a virile press at a time when in a colonial territory, freedom of expression was not respected as a right but as a privilege."⁴

Indeed, the adversarial posturing of the Nigerian press was informed by the brutality of the colonial rulers. The pioneers of the Nigerian press, a mixed bag of people from diverse races and nationalities, confronted this fact in various dimensions. For Rev. Henry Townsend, an English clergyman, who began publication of the first newspaper in Nigeria at Abeokuta⁵ in 1859,

balancing the yearnings of his teeming readers and the desires of the colonial government was a big challenge.

Torn between satisfying the two opposing interests, Townsend earned the reprimand of the colonial authorities on several occasions. He was once recalled to England for tutoring. He returned in March 1862. Apparently because of his popularity, prestige and influence amongst the *Egbas*,⁶ he was expected to persuade them to acquiesce to colonial policies particularly concerning the acquisition of some territories near Lagos. He was unable to achieve this task. Townsend admitted the dwindling influence of the white man in a letter to his colleague in England, Thomas Champness. Ironically, balancing demands between two diametrically opposed interests is still the biggest challenge for the Nigerian press. For Townsend, it was finding a median between colonial and local interests. For the Nigerian press today, the challenge is reconciling ethnic and national interests.⁷

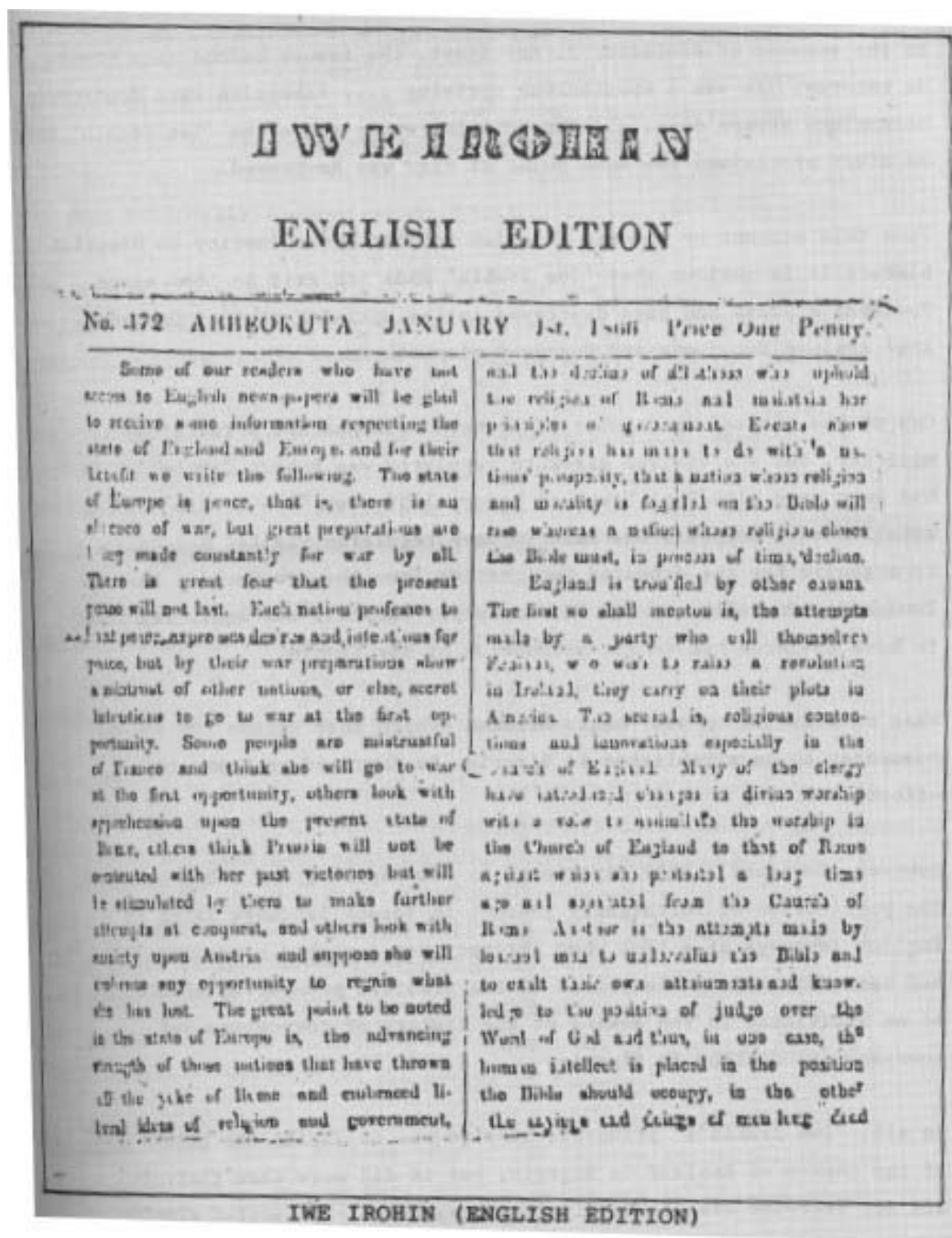
The story of Townsend represents a watershed in the history of Nigeria. It was the beginning of the development of modern mass media. Rev. Townsend arrived in Badagry⁸ December 17, 1842. He was a missionary of the Christian Missionary Society (Anglican Mission) on evangelical mission to Nigeria. His charge was to help provide spiritual succor for freed slaves from Sierra Leone. Then, the Slave Trade Abolition Bill introduced by William Wilberforce in 1789 coupled with the efforts of the duo of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey against slavery were beginning to have some fundamental effects. Many religious denominations had not only begun to denounce slavery as inhuman but also adopt anti-slavery concepts as doctrine.

Townsend's motivation was to advance this anti-slavery doctrine. He worked with Sierra Leonian freed slaves and natives of Badagry spreading the gospel amongst them in conjunction with Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist missionary on similar assignment. Townsend later moved northward to Abeokuta ostensibly on the invitation of the *Alake of Egbaland*.⁹ In 1854, he established a small printing press, which he used in the publication of religious pamphlets and other Christian/educational instructional materials.

On December 3, 1859, the missionary published the historic *"Iwe-Irohin Fun Awon Egba ati Yoruba"*¹⁰. Rev. Henry Townsend's newspaper, the first ever to be published in an African language, was produced under very laborious circumstances. *"Iwe-Irohin"* became a bi-lingual newspaper in January 1866, when its English edition was introduced, ostensibly to encourage the patronage of the literate Egba political class. The newspaper's production quality was rudimentary. Its layout was dull and crowded. It was lacking in aesthetic, without color or pictures. Its columns were filled with texts of uniform types. But that was the best available then. The eight-page newspaper compensated with its vibrancy what it lacked in aesthetics.¹¹

It provided a strong platform for vitriolic attacks on slavery via forceful but logical editorial opinions. *"Iwe-Irohin"* was a crusader against the slave trade, a derider, however, subtly of the fetish.¹² The newspaper's mission against slavery, according to Nnamdi Azikwe, was successful.¹³ Its columns regularly featured wide ranges of news and incisive commentaries on topical social, political, economic and religious issues, especially those concerning Abeokuta and its environs. It also devoted space advertisements and public

announcements. While the Yoruba edition was sold for 30 cowries,¹⁴ its English edition carried the cover price of one penny.



• Fig. 1: A bromide copy of the English edition of "Iwe-Irohin," published by Rev. Henry Townsend

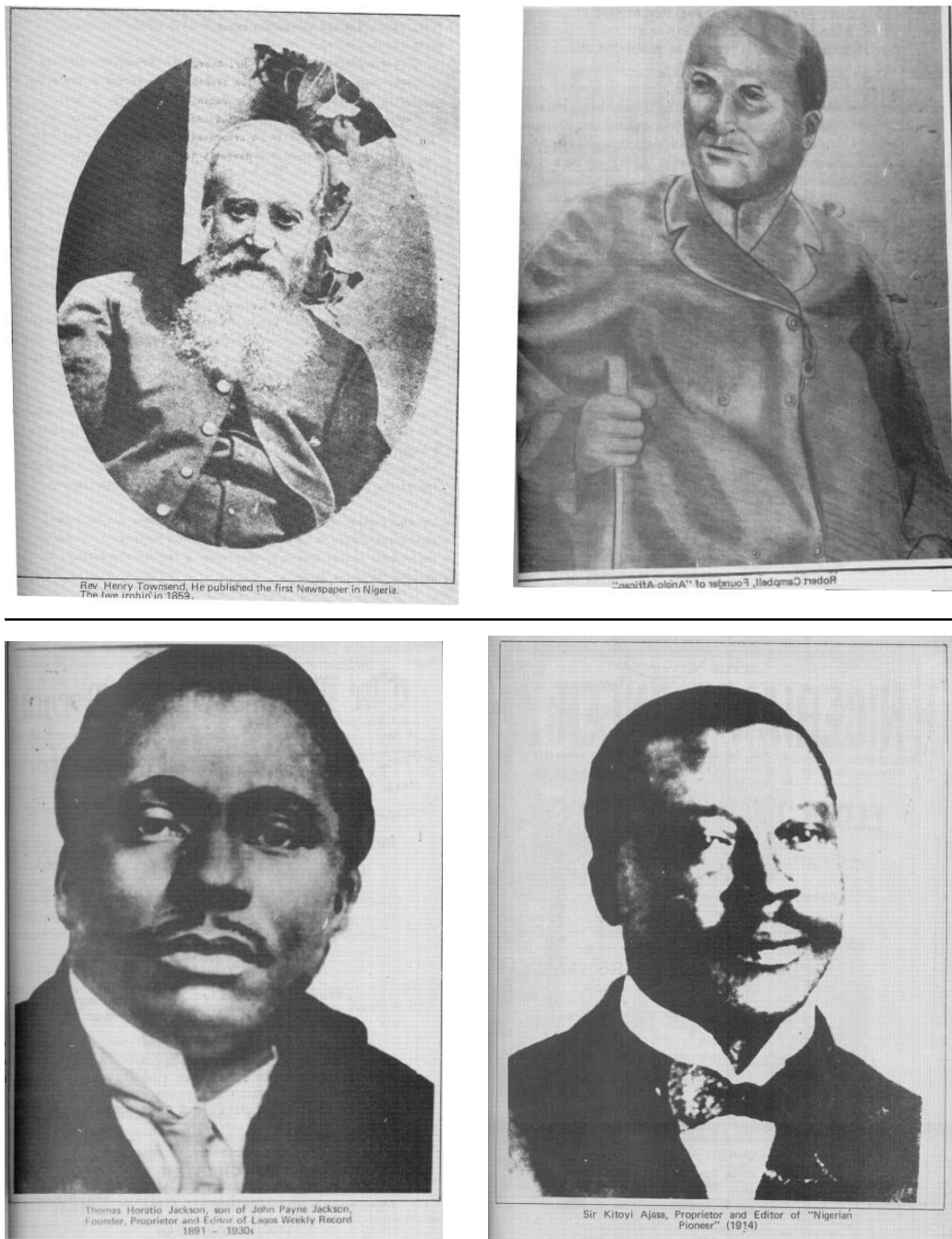
Townsend, the reverend gentleman proprietor, publisher, writer, journalist and editor of "*Iwe-Irohin*," commanded tremendous influence in Abeokuta. He was respected and recognized wherever he went. He was the hero of the Egba-Dahomey war of 1851.¹⁵ One of the close associates of Townsend was "Professor" Robert Campbell. He regularly visited Abeokuta from his base in Lagos and was said to have assisted Townsend in the laborious production of the newspaper.

Following Townsend's footsteps, Campbell in 1863 established the "Anglo-African" newspaper, which was Nigeria's second newspaper, in Lagos. Townsend was also assisted in his journalistic pursuits by Dr. A. A. Harrison, a medical doctor attached to the Anglican Mission in Abeokuta. Harrison briefly edited "*Iwe-Irohin*." Townsend's objective for publishing the newspaper was to stimulate the intelligence of the people, get them to read and, most importantly, build a strong religious foundation based on the Anglican doctrine not only among the Sierra Leone immigrants who came to Nigeria after the end of the slave trade but also among the natives.

In his January 1860 declaration, Townsend wrote: "*I have set on foot a Yoruba language newspaper. My first number is out. I am writing the second. My object is to get the people to read, i.e. to beget the habit of seeking information by reading. It is difficult.*"¹⁶

Whatever was Townsend's objective, the newspaper was quite popular amongst the Egbas and their fellow Yoruba people. It became a source of veritable information on the Colonial Government's programs as well as a calendar of social and religious activities. Throughout its existence, "*Iwe-Irohin*", Nigeria's first newspaper became the rallying point of a new crop of

society's intelligentsia, who employed its pages to canvass or propagate their viewpoints.



- Fig.2: Shows four of the pioneers of journalism in Nigeria. Rev. Henry Townsend (above, left) Robert Campbell (above, right) Thomas H. Jackson (left) and Sir Kitoyi Ajasa (right).

Chapter Two: The History of the Nigerian Press

Indeed, balancing his acts between the roles of a missionary in an alliance with the colonial authorities against his interest in Egba politics and issues was really a difficult task for Rev. Townsend. The two interests were divergent. While the colonial authorities demanded that he use his popularity amongst the Egbas to influence their acceptance of colonial policies, the Egbas expected him to moderate the harsh policies of his fellow Europeans in authority.

Though Townsend used his newspaper to promote Egbas' point of views at times, he was perceived to be an "agent" of the colonial authorities. For example, his newspaper supported the colonial position during the Egba-Ibadan¹⁷ war of 1862 and the protest war of 1867 when Egba soldiers under the joint-command of Akodu, *the Seriki of the Egbas* and Chief Solanke, *the Jaguna of Igbein*¹⁸ rose against the colonial authorities over British policy on the annexation of Lagos, which affected Abeokuta's claim on some towns and villages near Lagos. *Iwe-Irohin's* involvement in these issues angered the Egbas who responded by burning down the newspaper's premises during a riot October 13, 1867.

"It was a spontaneous uprising..., libraries were destroyed, harmoniums broken down, and the printing works where the "*Iwe-Irohin*" had so often proclaimed the Egba point of view was destroyed."¹⁹ The riot and

subsequent expulsion of the missionaries and their Christian converts from Abeokuta finally ended Townsend's journalistic sojourn.

The Birth of the Critical Press

The expansion policy of the British colony in Lagos under Governor Glover was the beginning of a love-hate relationship between the British authorities and their independent Egba neighbors, who were then practicing self-government. The primary issues of conflicts were (i) Glover's insistence on establishing a trade route to Ibadan by passing Abeokuta; and (ii) his refusal to relinquish some villages and towns near Lagos to the Egbas.²⁰

The inability to find amicable resolution to these issues heightened tension between the two sides. The acrimony eventually led into a war in which the Egbas were defeated at Ikorodu²¹ in 1865 by the superior British fire-power.²² The strained relationship worsened thereafter, leading to the eventual expulsion of the missionaries and their converts.

However, Governor Glover warmly received the expelled people in Lagos and the Egba refugees were resettled in *Ago-Egba* on the Lagos mainland. No sooner had the refugees settled in Lagos than a new political culture emerged there. The Egba refugees who were accustomed to reading newspapers and using it for the propagation of their viewpoints began the publication of newspapers and the agitation for self-government took a new dimension.

In the forefront of this crusade was John Payne Jackson, a Liberian-born, popular pan-African thinker, who in concert with his son, Thomas Horatio Jackson, gave Nigerian journalism its combative traditions.²³ John Payne Jackson published his "*Lagos Weekly Record*" in 1890.

Before the advent of John Payne Jackson's "*Lagos Weekly Record*," Andrew Thomas published Nigeria's third newspaper (after Townsend's "*Iwe-Irohin*" in 1859 and Campbell's "*Anglo-African*" in 1863).²⁴ Thomas's "*Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser*" was first published November 10, 1880. It was published fortnightly and existed for only three years. "*Lagos Observer*," by J. Bagan Benjamin was the fourth Nigerian newspaper.²⁵ The paper hit the newsstands February 15, 1882. It was also a fortnightly publication. Owen Emeric Macaulay's "*Lagos Eagle and Critic*" was the fifth Nigerian newspaper. A monthly publication, "*Lagos Eagle*," was first published March 31, 1883 but survived only five years.²⁶ Others were the "*Nigerian Chronicle*," published and edited by Kumolu Johnson. It was first published November 20, 1908.²⁷ G.A. Williams's "*Lagos Standard*," began publication in 1908.²⁸ Lagos lawyer, Sir Akitoye Ajasa started his "*Nigerian Pioneer*" in 1914.²⁹

What is considered the second phase of the development of the Nigerian press began with the emergence of privately owned, better-packaged and well-produced modern newspapers between 1920 and 1937. Ernest Sese Ikoli, considered one of Nigeria's best editors, began publishing his weekly newspaper, the "*African Messenger*," on March 10, 1921. Ikoli later sold his publication to the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company and joined the *Daily Times*, the forerunner of Nigeria's modern newspapers, at its inception in 1926 as its first editor.³⁰

Earlier, in 1923, the "*Spectator*" and the "*Nigerian Advocate*" hit the newsstands.³¹ Herbert Macaulay, easily recognized as the father of Nigerian nationalism, founded his newspaper, the "*Lagos Daily News*" in 1925.³² The "*Daily Service*" followed in 1933 while the "*Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*," edited by

Malam Abubakar Imam was published in 1939.³³ The "Nigerian Citizen" was published about the same time.

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<p>ING S.</p> <p>will and read</p> <p>tion 100, vass p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE NIGERIAN FAITH MISSION</p> <p>Ureggi via Zangere is offering free boarding & local privileges to twenty or thirty boys or girls unable to otherwise attend school.</p> <p>Standards I to IV, School Protestant but non-Sectarian. Communications to: MANAGER.</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">WEST AFRICAN PILOT</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">"Show The Light And The People Will Find The Way."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WANTED URGENTLY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">One Certificated Teacher Higher or Lower Class (any Male or Female).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Apply to: THE ACTING MANAGER ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL OKIKORO.</p>
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LAGOS, SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 1943

Forces Completely Surround 33 Naz

**Over-
hock**



SIR NEVILLE HENDERSON
British Ambassador to the Third
German Reich up to September,
1939. His death at the age of 60, was
announced last Wednesday night.
See page 1.

**Oliver Stanley Sends New
Year Greetings To Colonies**

LONDON, Jan. 1.—In his New Year message to the colonial people, the Right Honourable Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, extended his good wishes during the coming year.

He revealed the lively interest he had been taking in the welfare of the colonies, how he had been reading colonial Newspapers and how he had appreciated the sentiments of the people in despatching the frequent changes in the appointment of Colonial Secretaries.

But much as he was in great sympathy with all these views, his immediate task was to settle down and get on to business.

He hoped to visit the colonies soon and see things as they are for himself.

Moreover, one of his chief aims during his tenure of office is to contact the colonial people themselves and that, in the meantime, he would do by means of regular broadcasts to the different territories on matters affecting their particular localities.

In doing so, he hoped for mutual goodwill in order to be successful in Britain, Colonial Secretary pointed out, the people have begun to take a lively interest in the welfare of the colonies.

Continued on page 4



COLONEL OLIVER STANLEY
Secretary of State for the Colonies
In his New Year message broadcast yesterday, he wished all the colonies good fortune and prosperity in the coming year.

**bat Eniola Agosto
To Mr A. K. Akeju**

... bride's arrival.

... A little after 10 o'clock, Mr. ... Omar Savage began the marriage ceremony by reading his "Khatuba" sermon on the occasion in English to enable the Christians to understand the significance of Islamic marriage and the injunctions thereof.

After the "Nikal" had been performed and the bride and bridegroom stood in holy wedlock, the Master of Ceremony, Mr H. A. Babar, Manager, National Bank of Nigeria, Limited, made a short ...

Closing Of Banks Order Is Aimed At Preventing Panic

According to an official communication, it appears that there is still some alarm about the closing of Banks regulations.

This alarm is quite unnecessary and is based on misunderstandings of the object of the regulations.

Government must have power, in an emergency, to close banks.

This power is needed, firstly, to prevent panic, and secondly to prevent currency from falling into the hands of the enemy.

The British Government has had similar powers in Britain for a long ...

such a similar grave emergency.

In the present military situation, the possibility that such an emergency will ever arise is, in any the least, extremely remote.

But Government must have the necessary powers just in case it does ever become necessary.

This is the only object of these regulations — to give Government the necessary powers.

As has already been stated, the regulations are not intended to induce or to compel persons to transfer their deposits to the Post Office ...

**Sultan Of S
More Aid To**

SOKOTO, Jan. 1.—The Sultan is that of an address given by the Sultan of Sokoto on the occasion of the Festival of 14th Eid.

I give thanks to God, I give thanks to God's Prophet, I give thanks for the blessed memory of Shehu dan Fodiyo.

I thank His Majesty the King of England, his representatives and all those of his race who help us.

I rejoice and thank God that I have guided us to this blessed Laysa that celebrates the birthday of the year in the eyes of ...

WEST AFRICAN PILOT

• Fig. 3: A bromide of West African Pilot, published Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe.

The period between 1937 and 1960 witnessed the era of journalism consolidation.³⁴ It was an age dominated by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe's oratorical powers and prolific writings. Azikwe, an American-trained political scientist, colorful politician and nationalist, was a student of Herbert Macaulay. One of his better known newspapers, the "*West African Pilot*," edited by youthful Anthony Enahoro, one of Nigeria's celebrated journalists and nationalist, seized the imagination of Nigerians as it provided a veritable platform for the ventilation of nationalistic fervor. Azikwe, popularly referred to as Zik, made tremendous contributions to the growth of the Nigerian journalism. This period also witnessed the establishment of the "*Nigerian Tribune*" in 1949.³⁵ The "*Nigerian Tribune*" was founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, popularly referred to as "*the best president Nigeria never had.*" Awolowo, a thinker, administrator and leader, was responsible for the consolidation of the Yoruba leadership in education in southwest Nigeria. As premier of the western region of Nigeria, he introduced the policy of free primary education. This enabled many poor Yoruba children to have access to western education. His newspaper (still surviving to date) was a vehicle for the propagation of his philosophy of *Awoism*. Both Zik and Awo went on to play influential roles in post-colonial Nigeria's political process.

The post-independence era witnessed the emergence of government-owned newspaper establishments. The Federal government founded the "*Morning Post*" and its stable mate, the "*Sunday Post*."³⁶ Regional governments following the footsteps of the central government also established Newspapers. These included the "*Eastern Nigeria Outlook*" in the east, the "*Daily Sketch*" and its stable mate, the "*Sunday Sketch*" in the west,

while the northern regional government acquired the "*Nigerian Citizen*" and christened it the "*New Nigerian*."³⁷



• Fig. 4: All the pioneers of the Nigerian Press.

The government-owned regional newspapers, view issues mainly from narrow regional perspectives. When new states were created out of the regions, the state governments also established newspapers in addition to radio and television stations in their various states. The "*Daily Express*" and

"Daily Service" were the privately owned independent newspapers of this era. "The Punch," easily Nigeria's most popular newspaper today, was first published in 1973 by Chief Olu Aboderin. The newspaper was widely acclaimed for its coverage of news, incisive editorial comments and radical bent on issues of national importance.

By 1979, at the beginning of Nigeria's second republic, the nation had witnessed a proliferation of newspapers and news magazines. They included national and provincial newspapers such as "National Concord," established in 1980 by multi-millionaire businessman and politician, Chief M. K. O. Abiola.³⁸ "The Guardian" was founded in 1983 by Sir Alex Ibru and "Vanguard," was founded by popular *Daily Times'* columnist, Mr. Sam Amuka-Pemu. Majority of these publications were privately owned. They provided the needed plurality of choices but their coverage became suspect because of their inability to rise above ethnic jingoism.³⁹

Their unbridled advocacy for ethnic interests coupled with their style of combativeness not only had negative effects on the nation's political and social development, it also created persistent tensions or a semblance of war in the nation. Two important reasons are responsible for the combative attitude of the Nigerian press. One is military incursion into politics. The military class, brutal and corrupt, was seen as a usurper. As could be expected, its hold on power was vehemently resisted to the last by the media. The other reason is embedded in the tradition of adversarial journalism bequeathed by John Payne Jackson, through his "*Lagos Weekly Record*," which spearheaded the vitriolic attacks against colonial authorities in the nation's battle for self-government.

The Beginning of the *Jacksonian* Tradition

John Payne Jackson grew up at a time when the political thoughts of the famous black leaders such as Edward Blyden and Marcus Garvey gained currency worldwide.⁴⁰ Influenced by the radical thoughts of these men on the sanctity of political and human rights, Jackson was poised to resist what was considered the condescending attitude of the ruling colonial authorities toward the natives. His brand of journalism was identified with the "progressive," uncompromising nationalists and the educated middle class. Lord Lugard detested Jackson's brand of journalism because it gave unflinching support to the nationalists' political agenda and was vehemently opposed to the continued colonial rule.⁴¹

Jackson was frank and fearless. So was his son, Horatio. They both left indelible footprints on the sands of Nigerian journalism. For instance, Jackson wrote in a *Weekly Record* editorial:

"Governors McCallum, Carter and MacGregor were enlightened gentlemen with a few human faults; Egerton was a materialist who cared very little about the moral welfare of the people; Lugard was a "negrophobist," an untrammelled despot and an "ogre."⁴²

The "*African Mail*" was one newspaper that opposed Jackson's brand of journalism. An editorial comment published in its September 10, 1915, edition, said:

"John Payne Jackson was the ablest West African journalist. Mr. Jackson's journalistic works varied very much, being sometimes good, sometimes indifferent and sometimes bad...But he had a much more

*wider grasp of fundamental problems than his contemporaries on the West African press and a more extensive range of ideas."*⁴³

However, Jackson's journalism was celebrated by the populace.

According to A. B. Laotan:

*"The Weekly Record of John Payne Jackson and Thomas Horatio Jackson was so powerful that at one time, on account of its uncompromising attitude in the national interest, all foreign advertisements were withdrawn, but it stood its ground unflinchingly...It was by far and away the best paper in West Africa ... "*⁴⁴

Another evidence of Jackson's fearless journalism is found in the comment of Ernest Sese Ikoli, the elder statesman of the Nigerian press and the doyen of Nigerian journalists:

*"[the] newspaper's popularity was often measured by the intensity of its assault on the only target that was available (the colonial government). Weekly Record was by far and away the most popular of all papers. Jackson's pungent criticisms expressed in lengthy editorials always hung on the edge of sedition."*⁴⁵

Indeed, an editorial in the *Weekly Record* is more of a literary assault on the colonial authorities. Here's typical example:

One cannot refrain from speculating upon the bankruptcy of the new imperialism and apparent decay of Britain imperial genius, so long as Great Britain continues to transcend the limits of political righteousness; to harbor the color prejudice (the logical outcome of the Americanization of England...) ...to legislate away the rights of her

colored subjects (as witness the South African Union Act); and to remain indifferent to the witness of her subject dependencies.

There can be no question that if the Nigerian system is not scrapped within the next five years, the unfortunate experiences of the Indian agitation will be witnessed in West Africa...every constitutional efforts directed against the nullification of the Nigerian system is a consecrated duty, a moral duty, and a national duty...Resistance to oppression is not only justifiable but necessary ...

...British politicians and administrators have been shouting us almost deaf with such catch phrase as trusteeship for the subject races but there does not seem to be any definite program as to how we are to be educated to take over the trusteeship. Not that we take the political utterances very seriously, but we know from the ordinary processes and laws of evolution that some day we should be obliged to take upon our shoulders the black man's burden, and the sooner our good masters give us the opportunity of cultivating the necessary qualities for the task the better.⁴⁶

The colonial authorities responded to such assaults with unpopular legislation that further boosted the popularity of Jackson's brand of militant journalism. In 1909, the Europeans passed into law the Seditious Offenses Ordinance. The law was met with scathing criticisms. In his rejection of the law during the legislative council meeting, Lagos lawyer the Hon. Sapara Williams argued:

"Freedom of the press is the greatest palladium of the British liberty...Sedition is a thing incompatible with the character of the

Yoruba people, and has no place in their constitution...Hyper-sensitive officials may come tomorrow who will see sedition in every criticism, and crime in every mass meeting".⁴⁷

The *Lagos Weekly Record*, ever ready to attack the initiatives of the colonial regime whenever such actions are perceived to be detrimental to the African political agenda, also vehemently denounced the sedition law in the usual Jacksonian writing:

"...subjected to methods and measures of government so distinctly unconstitutional and arbitrary, the people dare not by any act, word, deed or sign signify their displeasure or dissatisfaction with the regime of government without entailing the risk of the penalty of the law for sedition."⁴⁸

The *Weekly Record's* editor who wrote the editorial attacking the sedition law was himself prosecuted and jailed under the provisions of the same law.

Not much has changed for the press since the days of Jackson. Successive military regimes continued to make horrible laws under which journalists were hastily tried and sent to jail. The military junta under the unsmiling duo of Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon promulgated Decree No. 4 of 1984.⁴⁹ Under that obnoxious decree, two reporters of the "*Guardian*" newspapers, Messrs Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, were jailed for writing truth that "embarrassed" government officials.

During the regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's junta, several newspaper establishments were forcefully shut down by soldiers acting on Babangida's orders. Babangida, nicknamed "Maradona" as a sort of tribute to his political skills of dribbling and deceits, nursed the life ambition of

transforming himself from a military ruler to a civilian president. He was considered a political equivalent of Diego Amando Maradona, the Argentine soccer star famous for his soccer artistry and dribble runs, which confuses his opponents with false moves and body movements. Babangida's plan was to use the enormous power at his behest as the incumbent to achieve his aim by confusing not only his opponents but the whole nation. He was opposed by the media, which employed the Jacksonian strategies of aggressive journalism to truncate his plans and thus affected his ouster after he annulled a free and fair election that would have ushered in Chief M.K.O. Abiola as Nigeria's president.

Babangida's exit did not bring much reprieve to the journalists or the nation. He was succeeded by Sanni Abacha, a crude artillery general, who deceived the nation and rode to power on the crest of the confusion generated by the 1993 political logjam.⁵⁰ The press gave him the Jacksonian treatment. But Abacha responded in a most ruthless manner. He seized news publications and shut media houses without blinking an eye. Journalists were hunted down like dogs. Some were sent on forced exiles. Some were assassinated. Others still were framed up as coupists and sentenced to long prison terms. These include Chris Anyanwu, publisher of *TSM*, Kunle Ajibade, executive editor of *The News* magazine, George Mba of *Tell* magazine and Ben Charles Obi of *Classique* magazine who were sentenced by a secret military tribunal to various jail terms over alleged involvement in the 1995 phantom coup.

Also in this category is Niran Malaolu, editor of the independent Lagos newspaper, *The Diet* (and author of this thesis). Malaolu, charged with

concealment of treason, was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment by a secret military tribunal over alleged involvement in the 1997 phantom coup. In spite of Abacha's unprecedented assaults on Nigerian journalists, he was unable to suppress them, just as the colonial authorities failed in their bid to cow Jackson through arbitrary and punitive laws. The press is generally regarded as the hero of Nigeria's current democratic efforts, which emerged May 29, 1999, following the demise of Abacha.

However, since the advent of democracy, which is the goal of the press, the media space is still awash with the bellicose, belligerent and combative brand of Jacksonian journalism. Interestingly, there's a link with the past in this respect. Much as there was unity of thoughts, unity of purpose and unity of political aspiration toward the same goals and objectives, there was disunity amongst the ranks of the nationalist leaders.⁵¹ Such intra-group squabbles were not only reflected in the press, they made nonsense of the press' crusade.

Sir Hugh Clifford⁵² complained of such situation when he remarked that obtaining authentic Nigerian public opinion on many issues is difficult as a result of the hostility and internal petty rivalries among the various factions of the political and press organizations. Similarly, the *Nigerian Advocate* noted in a 1923 editorial: "*the fault in us in Nigeria is that we cannot exercise tolerance with one another, we quarrel over things that do not count.*"⁵³

The situation remains the same today. The press having helped the nation in attaining democracy is believed to be unwilling to assist in growing the democracy. One school of thought argues that the press has remained hostile to government initiatives, thus creating the semblance of a siege.

Proponents of such argument believe that while it is necessary to keep government officials on their toes, it is equally counter-productive to live under the atmosphere of perpetual tension. The danger in persistent adversarial journalism, therefore, is that it undermines the growth of the nation on all fronts. It creates unnecessary tension that gradually destroys the fabric of the nation. It's obvious that the press is probably traveling this path against the advice of former US president, Bill Clinton, who said: "*the ills of democracy can only be corrected with more democracy.*" Journalists of today have failed to learn from the vast experiences bequeathed by the pioneers of the Nigerian press.

Lessons from the Past

Townsend's experience, no doubt, exposed Egba people and indeed Nigerians to the uses to which the media could be put, the dangers of conflict of interests, as well as the risks inherent in pandering to primordial interests. But the media are yet to benefit from the lessons of the Townsend era. They neither learnt from the pitfalls of Townsend nor devised appropriate means of dealing with the attendant conflicts of interests. They are not only held hostage by the divisive evil of ethnic loyalty, they are still being propelled by the spirit of militancy and advocacy journalism adopted against the colonial invaders years after the usurpers have departed the African shores.

Townsend was torn between supporting the colonial authorities, who were angling for territorial and political space and the interests of his hosts, who desired self-actualization. In the same vein, the media today are torn between choosing ethnic loyalty and settling down to help in the construction of a new nation. Evidently, the media, in the words of Ayo Olukokun, a

political science teacher at the University of Lagos, have chosen the easy way out: *adversarial journalism that makes nonsense of everything*.⁵⁴

The Nigerian media landscape has indeed witnessed tremendous growth, particularly in the areas of technological application, skills acquisitions, journalism education and plurality of media choices since Townsend's experiment. For certain obvious reasons, the media are still shackled by the same environmental constraints that militated against Townsend. They are blinded by the effect of ethnic considerations.⁵⁵ They promote quarrel over what does not count. They believe, though erroneously, that media popularity is often measured by the intensity of assaults on the only target available: government and its officials. Often times, the media have been accused of over-sensationalism and downright irresponsibility. One of such ardent critic of the Nigerian press is President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Obasanjo's disdain for the press is legendary. He once hung at the gate of his farm a signpost that declared journalists alongside thieves as unwanted guests. President Obasanjo had often dismissed the farmhouse notice simply as a joke but his disposition toward journalists revealed serious resentment. He lambasts the press at every given opportunity. His monthly presidential press briefings oftentimes become unpresidential because of the president's verbal assault on the press. He can't understand why the press is hostile as if it was arrayed in battle against some foreign forces.

The more critical Obasanjo is, the more aggressive the press becomes. Thus a palpable tension is foisted on the nation. The implication is that neither democracy nor the economy is growing. The bottom line is: the nation is suffering. But Obasanjo is not alone. Also drawn in battle with the press at a

lesser degree is Wole Soyinka, professor of comparative literature and 1986 Nobel Prize winner for literature, who at every opportunity pummeled the press for what he termed its penchant for misquoting its sources and ignorantly or mischievously distorting the context of their comments. At the public presentation of the book, "*Kudirat: Steps In Time*," in Lagos, Nigeria, Soyinka did not only chastise the press, he announced a sabbatical from speaking to the press.⁵⁶

Soyinka's grouse is borne out of frustration. He had complained often times about professional sloppiness amongst media practitioners bothering on a seeming inability to understand the context of issues in the news. His charge, just as Obasanjo's, is interpreted by media observers and public affairs analysts, to mean: ignorance and irresponsibility. Other citizens are also complaining. Some have adopted an apathetic disposition towards the press. They can't understand why some journalists, media practitioners, publishers and broadcast media proprietors accused of mischief; corruption and unethical practices sit in judgment over accused government officials without bothering to clear similar charges hanging on their own necks. They can't reconcile how a press corps populated by corrupt journalists can check official corruption or hold government accountable to the governed as demanded by the constitution.

Indeed, concerned journalists, media owners and civil society organizations are worried about the abysmal level of ethical standards and professionalism as well as the negative effects of media's adversarial posture on the development of the nation. Consequently, they have begun a serious search for solutions as a mean to rescue the society and nation from the

claws of journalistic lawlessness. The negative development has, no doubt, ascribed to journalism in Nigeria, an unwholesome stigma of an unwieldy “profession” lacking in dignity, integrity and respectability. To stem this tide and thereby extract some modicum of respectability for journalism, a veritable vehicle in the collective desire to salvage the sagging image of the Nigerian nation, is a major challenge for this generation. The image of any nation is shaped by the perspectives created by its media. Perception is reality. The negative perception of Nigeria is largely created, amplified or orchestrated by its media.⁵⁷

Therefore, while the challenge before the nation is to ensure the creation of a suitable environment for the practice of journalism through passage of such legislation as Freedom of Information Bill, which will not only guarantee easy access to information but also ensure adequate protection for journalists in the line of duty, the challenge for concerned journalists, media owners and civil society organizations is to adopt a multi-dimensional strategy aimed at re-orientating media practitioners as a means to establishing internationally acceptable ethical and professional practicing standards. Part of the strategies should include collaboration with recognized media bodies and organizations such as the Nigerian Union Of Journalists, (NUJ); the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, (NBC); the Nigerian Guild Of Editors, (NGE); the Nigerian Press Council, (NPC) and others to get an acceptable all-embracing regulatory charter for the practice of journalism in Nigeria as is the case with medicine, law, architecture, surveying and lately banking. The regulatory charter will also specify functions and obligations for media owners. This has become necessary because the inability of most media owners to

meet their obligations to journalists and media practitioners gave rise to the current mercantile-style operation of the media.⁵⁸

Indeed, the leadership of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) had recognized the need for some form of intervention when under the guidance of some eminent senior practitioners, it proposed a Media Council Law, which was assented to by the Federal Government consequent upon which a decree was passed, banning the registration as journalists those who do not possess a minimum qualification of Ordinary National Diploma or its equivalent in Mass Communication or Journalism or a higher degree or qualification in the same discipline.

The decree further stipulates that those who had already spent not less than five (5) years in the profession without the required qualification before the passing into Law of the decree be allowed to register while any new comer is required by law to first possess a minimum journalism qualification before being employed or registered. Regrettably, this law has not been effective. Concerned practitioners believe the time to press for its enforcement is now. In addition, they are equally canvassing for a redraft of the law to include the stipulation of a compulsory qualifying examination for would-be journalists and media practitioners. Such qualifying examination, to be administered after a specified term of study in the areas of law, ethics, code of conduct, national history and ethos etc. will qualify a would-be journalist for registration. The vacuum created by the non-existence of guidelines of this nature is seen as partly responsible for the mercenary nature of today's media practice and the appalling image of the nation, which is created and sustained by a bad press.

A survey,⁵⁹ titled: "Questionnaire on Effects of Media Reports," and conducted for the purpose of this thesis between January and June 2004 in Nigeria studied the effects the militant cum adversarial posturing of the press on Nigeria's current democratic experiment. The survey, administered across the six geo-political zones of the country by the author of this thesis, was designed specifically to investigate Nigerians' reaction to news media's reports and offer necessary solutions. The analysis of returns showed interesting revelations. The study found that in spite of the perceived excesses of the press, some Nigerians still believe that the hostile posture of the press is desirable. Many respondents agreed that the press remains the only institution capable of checkmating public officials and their penchant for mismanagement of resources and bad governance. Though quite a sizeable percentage of respondents emphasized the need for journalists to embrace high ethical and professional standards, they viewed the tension generated by media's adversarial posture as a call for government to institute good governance and embrace an equitable cum justifiable mechanism of distributing the nation's wealth.

Chapter Three: An X-ray of Militant Journalism

Debates about journalism and its effects are an integral part of democracy. All over the world, politicians, government officials, journalism educators, media practitioners and others daily review the mechanism of information dissemination. This process of re-examination is usually with the aim of perfecting the practice of journalism and ensuring that it is socially responsible. Essentially, the problems may appear in divergent guises in different parts of the world, but the solution is usually the same: improving the practice of journalism for the overall good of the society.

In the United States of America, that debate is focused on Public Journalism, also called civic journalism, which is a reform agenda for strengthening journalistic social responsibility through the revival of public life by promoting citizens' active participation in problems resolution in the communities. Proponents of public journalism, including Davis Merritt, an astute scholar and author of *Public Journalism and Public Life*, have argued that the fulcrum of their thesis is for journalists to abandon several traditional definitions of news.⁶⁰

These flawed definitions include:

- valuing conflict as primary sources of news/story;
- treating readers as audiences instead as participants;
- packaging news as [commercial] products instead of intelligence required for societal growth;

- insisting that journalistic credibility can only be achieved from detachment, and most importantly,
- maintaining adversarial roles with institutions.

Merritt believed that journalism will not only perform its constitutional roles creditably well but also meet societal expectations and restore public trust if certain traditional values were changed. Several journalism educators, practitioners and scholars share similar opinion. They also believe that the development of a new journalism curriculum is essential at this point. Such curriculum must appreciate the importance of enriching journalism with the techniques of other relevant social sciences including anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology. The knowledge from these disciplines will further help media practitioners appreciate the trouble in the *dailyness* of news, which had turned news or stories into products manufactured in media factories solely for profits.

But critics of public journalism are quick to point out that its focus on community will result in the loss of independence. They also charged that proponents of public journalism are irritated by the growth of profit-driven corporate media. In the same vein, proponents of civic journalism have argued against the new Federal Communication Commission [FCC] rule, which seeks to allow take-over of local media by corporate business.⁶¹

In Nigeria, what in the United States is referred to as *maintaining adversarial roles with institutions*, can safely be rephrased to read: *maintaining adversarial roles with **Government***. The reason is simple. While the social and economic activity in the United States is dominated by private capital, the opposite is the truth in the case of Nigeria. Social and economic

activities in Nigeria are still dominated by government despite current democratic government's efforts to privatize the economy. Again, the central role played by government is seen as over-bearing and interpreted to mean excessive control. Sometimes, Nigerians joke that government remains the biggest business in Nigeria. Consequently, the seeming imperfections of government in the implementations of its policies and programs coupled with the pervasive poverty and social inequality in the society made government and its officials the ready target of assaults by the media.

Indeed, Nigeria's socio-economic condition had worsened following years of misrule by successive military regimes, which did not only plunder resources but also institutionalized corruption and elevated it to the level of state policy. Nigerians, expectedly, are in a hurry to witness a reversal of the rot. Therefore, the advent of democracy in 1999 with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as president was welcomed by majority of Nigerians with high expectations. The perceive democracy as a mechanism designed to quickly reverse the nation's worsening poverty situation. But almost six years after the restoration of democracy, the situation is yet to abate significantly. And thus expectations gave in to frustration. The more frustrated Nigerians become, following government's inability to restore public trust through good governance, social justice and economic prosperity, the more the journalists unleash unmitigated assaults on the system, the government and its officials, a practice cultivated and nurtured since the emergence of the media on Nigeria's political scene.

Worse still, as admitted by the *Nigerian Advocate* in its 1923 editorial, the assaults of the press on the national leadership is skewed by tribal and

ethnic coloration. It thus became pretty difficult to differentiate a constructive criticism from a motivated attack elicited by primordial sentiments. Nigeria is a conglomerate of more 250 ethnic groups with different languages and distinct cultures the British colonialists forced together for colonial administrative convenience and economic purposes. The different ethnic groups, led by the three major tribes - Yoruba in the southwest, Ibo in the southeast and Hausa/Fulani in the northwest – were, to a certain extent, united in fighting the British colonialists. But since the departure of the colonialists, successive governments whether military or civilian have not been able to wield the country together. Some Nigerian academics, borrowing the expression of late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, sometimes refer to Nigeria as a mere geographical expression.

Indeed, Nigeria has not emerged into one united nation with one indivisible goal. Most Nigerians in leadership positions at every facet, still act as if the nation will suddenly fall apart at any moment. Hence, most of them show unalloyed loyalty to their tribe or ethnic groups at the expense of the larger nation. Every disagreement is viewed from the prism of tribalism or ethnic jingoism so much that Hugh Clifford's comments about the seeming inability to aggregate a Nigerian opinion from media reports had become a modern day reality. As noted by the *Nigerian Advocate* in its 1923 editorial: "*the fault in us in Nigeria is that we cannot exercise tolerance with one another, we quarrel over things that do not count*".⁶² The Nigerian political class leads the Nigerian media by the nose. The media, on the other hand, had become the appendage of the political class. They hardly subject politicians' motives, views and positions to proper scrutiny. They tend to take

politicians' utterances and actions hook, line and sinker. They allow politicians incredulous opportunity to spin issues at will once there's agreement at the level of ethnic or tribal solidarity. This coupled with the pervasive poverty ravaging most media establishments, media practitioners have become so pliable that ethics and professionalism have been thrown to the dogs. Things are so bad that money plays a great role in which views and positions get prominent mention or space. The totality of this is a raging confusion in the media sphere that defies all logic. By implication, the confusion in the media does not only affect the polity; it heats up the whole political environment thus foisting on the nation an atmosphere of instability, the fore-runner of economic stagnation.

However, just as a new movement promoting public journalism and essence of creating dialogue at the community levels has sprang up in the United States, similar interest groups have emerged in Nigeria seeking the abandonment of certain traditional values and definitions of journalism, which tend to divide the nation along tribal and ethnic lines, rubbish the image of the nation, destroy the achievements of its citizens and trash the efforts of journalists themselves toward the reinvention, recreation and rebuilding of the country.

The media have a great role to play in national development. Therefore, the essence of this thesis is not only to provoke thoughts but also to provide a body of knowledge capable of triggering actions that will stimulate the process of change in the re-orientation of the Nigerian media. It is a catalyst for the desired change that the media in Nigeria so much needed if they are to fulfill their constitutional duties and play their internationally

acceptable roles for the emancipation of the citizenry. The study at issue is specifically designed to find out:

- if adversarial posture of the media is still relevant in view of the nation's current democratic experiment.
- if there are better alternative strategies toward achieving good governance in Nigeria, which is the media's utmost desire.
- how much the Jacksonian hangover affects the press in the discharge of its constitutional duties and use the benefits of hindsight to correct the present and re-order the future.

Methods and Controls

A survey of 1,200 citizens including media practitioners, politicians, government officials, journalism educators and academics, members of the business community, military leaders, community leaders, students and members of the general public, was conducted between January and June 2004. The administration of the survey got tremendous assistance from a group of researchers from the Department of Strategy, Ogun State Ministry of Information and Strategy, Abeokuta. Respondents randomly selected were given questionnaires to complete. Questionnaires were also mailed to some categories of respondents listed in the current edition of the phone directory. Others were contacted by telephone. About 10 per cent of respondents were contacted between July and August 2004 for the purposes of quality control. Respondents were carefully chosen to ensure even demographical and ethnic representations (see: Survey below).

Fig. 4b: Survey

Questionnaire on Effects of Media Reports

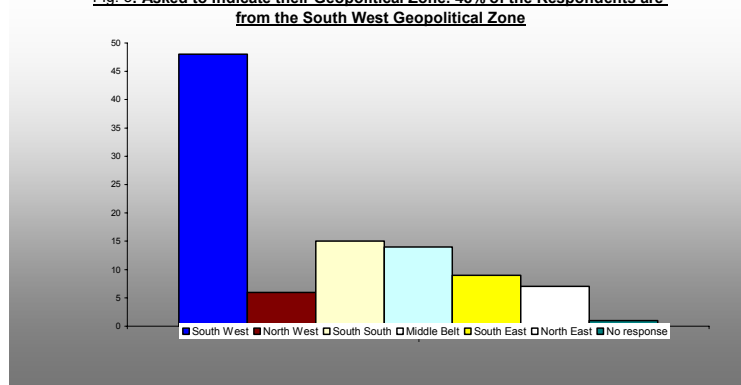
Note: This survey is simply to determine the effects of media reports. Your response will be held in strict confidence. Please underline or circle the answer of your choice.

1. **Age**
 - i) 18-25
 - ii) 26-40
 - iii) 41-60
 - iv) 61 and above
2. **Which geopolitical zone do you belong?**
 - i) Southwest
 - ii) Northwest
 - iii) South-south
 - iv) Middle-belt
 - v) Southeast
 - vi) Northeast
3. **What's your level of literacy/education**
 - i) Below primary education
 - ii) Above primary education
 - iii) Below secondary education
 - iv) Above secondary education
4. **What is your most reliable source of information?**
 - i) Newspapers/magazines/radio/TV
 - ii) Internet
 - iii) Churches/Mosques/Social Clubs or Age-grade meetings
 - iv) Opinion leaders
5. **How regularly do you use the mass media (i.e. radio/TV/newspapers/magazines/internet etc.) for sourcing information on political, social and economic issues?**
 - i) Daily
 - ii) Weekly
 - iii) Monthly
 - iv) Sometimes
6. **What percentage of information from the mass media do you believe?**
 - i) 70-100%
 - ii) 50-69%
 - iii) 30-49%
 - iv) Below 30%
7. **If (i) and (ii) above, why do you have high impression of information disseminated by the media?**
 - i) They report the truth objectively
 - ii) They champion the cause of the common people
 - iii) They resist official manipulation
 - iv) They serve geopolitical interests/others
8. **If (iii) and (iv) above, why do you have low impression of information disseminated by the media?**
 - i) They report half truth and lies
 - ii) They serve as megaphone of government cum the rich and powerful
 - iii) They succumb to official manipulation
 - iv) Their reports threaten national stability
9. **How do you rate the credibility of mass media reports/presentation on issues of national importance?**
 - i) 70-100%
 - ii) 50-69%
 - iii) 30-49%
 - iv) Below 30%
10. **If (i) and (ii) above, why do you have high credibility opinion of the media?**
 - i) They report the truth objectively
 - ii) They champion the cause of the common people
 - iii) They resist official manipulation
 - iv) Serve geopolitical interests/others
11. **If (iii) and (iv) above, why do you have low credibility opinion of the media?**
 - i) Too aggressive/emotive and thus create unnecessary confusion
 - ii) Too corrupt and not objective
 - iii) Biased in favor of official sources/primordial interest
 - iv) Serve mostly the government cum the rich and powerful
12. **What impression does contact with media reports give about the nation?**
 - i) Peace, stability and economic progress
 - ii) Confusion, insecurity and instability/looming war
 - iii) Corrupt and inept leadership
 - iv) Strong and united nation
13. **How do you view the impression created about the country by the media?**
 - i) Completely false
 - ii) Slightly false
 - iii) Completely true
 - iv) Slightly true
14. **What kind of effects does the style/mode of media reports have on the socio-economic and political development of the nation?**
 - i) Very positive effects
 - ii) Slightly positive effects
 - iii) Very negative effects
 - iv) Slightly negative effect
15. **Do you agree with the notion that the media helped in restoring democracy?**
 - i) Agree completely
 - ii) Agree slightly
 - iii) Don't Agree
 - iv) Disagree completely
16. **Do you agree that the media have been contributing to the growth of the nation's nascent democracy?**
 - i) Agree completely
 - ii) Agree slightly
 - iii) Don't Agree
 - iv) Disagree completely
17. **How can you describe the media's brand of journalism?**
 - i) Militant, junk and reckless
 - ii) Developmental
 - iii) Sectional/tribal
 - iv) Apolitical
18. **How would you want the media postured to achieve Nigeria of your dream?**
 - i) Less militant, free but responsible
 - ii) Less sectional/tribal but critical
 - iii) More development-focused, yet critical
 - iv) Apolitical, critical, free and responsible.
19. **How would describe Nigerian journalists of the pre-independence era?**
 - i) Very radical and nationalistic
 - ii) Very irrational and emotive
 - iii) Slightly radical and nationalistic
 - iv) Slightly irrational and emotive
20. **How would you describe Nigerian journalists of present era?**
 - i) Militant and nationalistic
 - ii) Tribal, sectional and corrupt
 - iii) Well-trained, focused and professional
 - iv) Irresponsible, ill-trained and unprofessional
21. **Which of the following media ownership would you prefer?**
 - i) Government-controlled
 - ii) Privately owned
 - iii) Internationally owned
 - iv) A mix of government/private ownership

For instance, Nigeria has been divided into six geo-political zones for ease of distribution of social amenities and even spread of political appointments. There are three zones each in the northern and southern part of the country. The zones are: (a) Southwest (b) South-south (c) Southeast (d) Northwest (e) North-central or (Middle-Belt) and (f) Northeast. The southern zones are populated mostly by Christian liberals with high levels of education. Significant population in North central is equally Christian but with lesser number of highly educated people compared to the southern zones. Majority of population in Northwest and Northeast is Muslim. The two zones have high population of Muslim with lesser number of highly educated people.

Consequently, the mass media are the first choice of source of information for the educated southerners while majority of the population in both Northwest and Northeast would attend to other sources of information. This notion was supported by the response on geo-political zones. Forty – Eight percent of respondents returned southwest as their geo-political zones. Only 6% of respondents are from Northwest while 15% and 14% respectively are from South-south and North-central. Returns from Southeast and Northeast are 9% and 7% respectively. [See Fig.5 below]

Fig. 5: Asked to Indicate their Geopolitical Zone. 48% of the Respondents are from the South West Geopolitical Zone



The response rate for the survey was calculated by dividing the number of completed surveys by the number of eligible survey respondents. The demographic characteristics of respondents were then compared to data from the most recent population census figure. Respondents were asked a series of questions about type of media ownership preferred, perception of the media, perception of the journalist, brand of journalism, credibility rate of the media, ethnic and religious preferences, attention to news, political knowledge, level of education, believability of media reports, the slant of media coverage, and the effects of such coverage on the country's image as well as national unity and economic development's efforts.

This study involved two experimental manipulations. The first manipulation consisted of the placement of a block of media knowledge questions relative to the assessment of interest. In the first condition, interest was assessed first, whereas in the second and third conditions knowledge was assessed first.

The method adopted in this survey is simply to make accurate observations on an issue that's fundamental to determine the effectiveness of media's strategy in the goal of developing Nigeria socially, politically, economically and technologically. The goal is to construct a method that does not influence the information gathered. Expectedly, no research procedure is totally immune to human errors. Nonetheless, this study is designed to adopt certain prophylactic measures to alleviate or minimize some of these egregious problems.

However, in spite of the fact that the press is paid glowing tributes for its contributions to the establishment of democracy, it still stand accused of

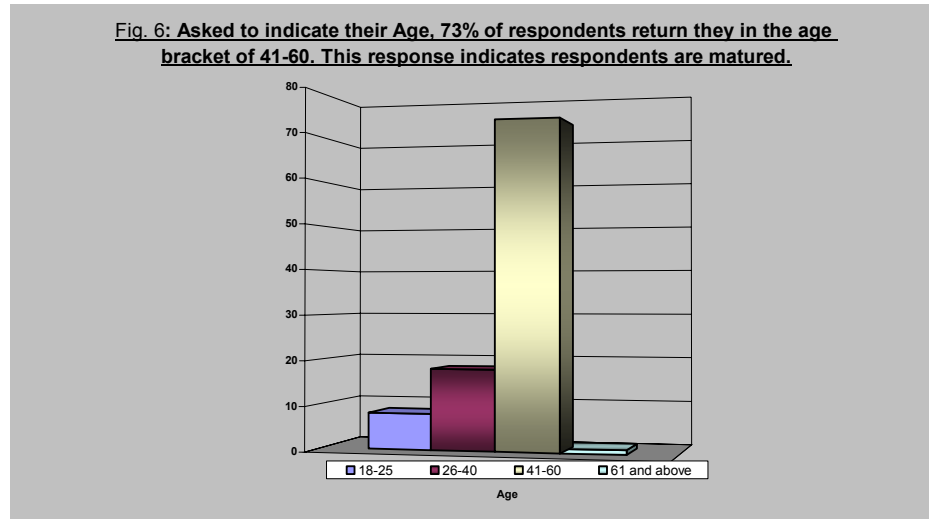
unwarranted sensationalism and unbridled excesses, which have serious deleterious effects on the political foundation of the nation. These research findings will interest everyone who's desirous of acquiring knowledge about nature of the media in Nigeria.

They will equally interest any academic and, most importantly, journalism educator seeking to develop a body of knowledge that'll signpost a turn-around in media behavior toward making journalism more responsible and responsive to the real needs of the society.

Findings: Analysis of a Dilemma

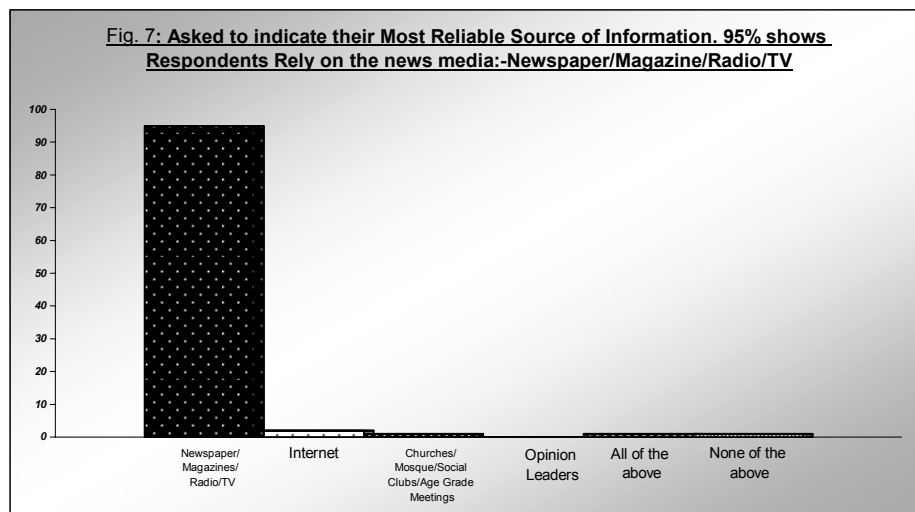
For the purposes of accurate demographic representation, respondents were grouped into four broad categories of age-bracket. The first category is age 18-25. The second is age 26-40. The third is age 41-60 while the fourth category is age 61 and above. Eight percent of respondents fall between the age-bracket of young adults (18-25); 18% of respondents are in the 26-40 age-bracket while 73% of respondents fall into the 41-60 bracket. Only 1% of respondents are in the age-bracket of 61 and above. The breakdown above is equally a reflection of the respondents' purchasing power. Respondents in the 41-60 age-brackets are matured minds with considerable exposure and understanding of issues in question [see Fig.6 below]. In the same vein, the returns from the particular question designed to determine respondents' level of education corroborated the first response from the age-bracket returns. In this category, 97% of respondents possess education above high school level [popularly called secondary education in Nigeria] while 1% each possesses below elementary education, above elementary education and below high school education. What these returns have shown in clear terms is that

respondents possess the mental capacity to understand and appreciate the issue in question and its importance to the collective desire to correct the situation and re-order the future.



Unlike in the United States, Britain, France, Canada or some other western European nations where the modern mass media remain the major source of information dissemination, the situation in Nigeria and some other Third World countries is different. Besides the modern mass media, other sources of information have even higher believability rate than that of the mass media. Those sources equally have high manipulability rate. They include churches, mosques, social clubs and age-grade meetings as well as township associations. Returns from this segment indicate that majority of Nigerians now source their information needs from the mass media, particularly newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Ninety-five percent of the respondents attend to these mass media. But only 2% of respondents, from the southwest geo-political zone, source their information from the internet, an indication that worldwide web is still in its infancy in Nigeria.

This is instructive because constant energy supply and advance telecommunication mechanism, which are essential to the use of internet are still largely insufficient in Nigeria. [See Fig. 7]. It is also significant to note that Nigeria is gradually translating from what German philosopher; Ferdinand Tonnies⁶³ termed "**Gemeinschaft**" society to "**Gessellschaft**" society. **Gemeinschaft** refers to a pre-industrial society where people are bound together through family ties, friendship, kinship and other social factors. In other words, **Gemeinschaft** refers to a "reciprocal, binding sentiments...which keeps people together as a member of a totality".⁶⁴ But **Gessellschaft** society is one dominated by specialization of the labor force under an industrial climate. Instead of reciprocal social bond, what acts as the essential condition for social relationship is the contract.⁶⁵ The contract is a rationally agreed upon voluntary social relationship under which consenting parties promise to fulfill specific obligations to each other or forfeit specific things if the contract is breached.⁶⁶

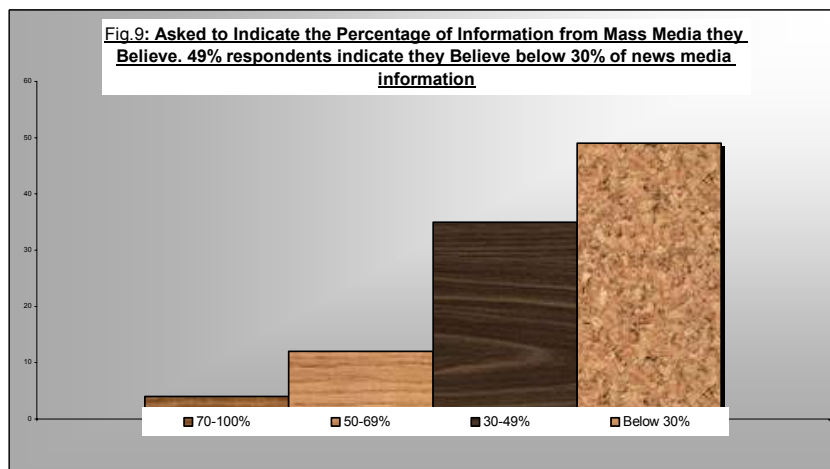
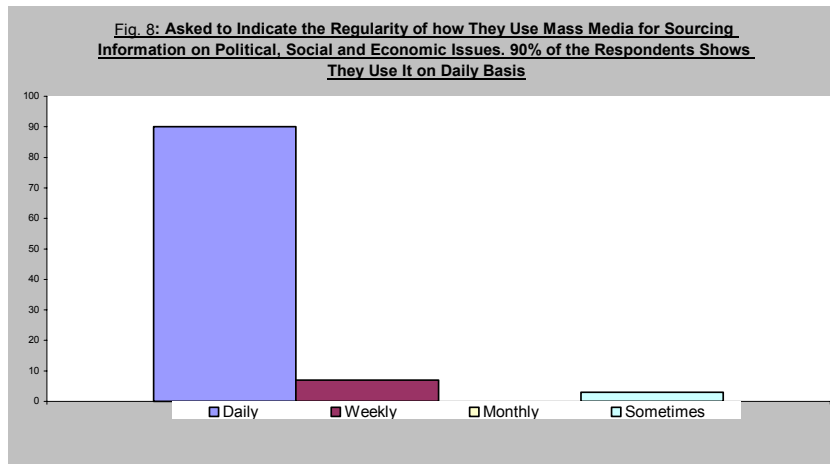


In such societies, as reciprocal sentiments break down and give way to contract, people become more and more individualistic and their reliance on

family and friends for information is reduced. They become dependent on mass media for their information needs. This segment is a corroboration of the fact that the Nigerian society is moving towards the contract society as only 1% of respondents seek information from churches, mosques, social clubs and age-grade meetings. Also, only 1% of respondents meet their information needs from opinion leaders while another 1% claimed they make use of all the sources together. Again, it is also significant to note that 90% of respondents attend to the mass media daily for information needs. Seven percent attend to the mass media on weekly basis while 3% do so sometimes. Because no one claimed to attend to the mass media on monthly basis, one can then safely assume that Nigerians appreciate the importance of information so much that they seek information on daily basis. [see Fig.8]. This inference underlines the importance of the modern mass media in Nigeria and with that identified value comes the need for the media to be socially responsible as a pre-requisite to meeting public expectations.

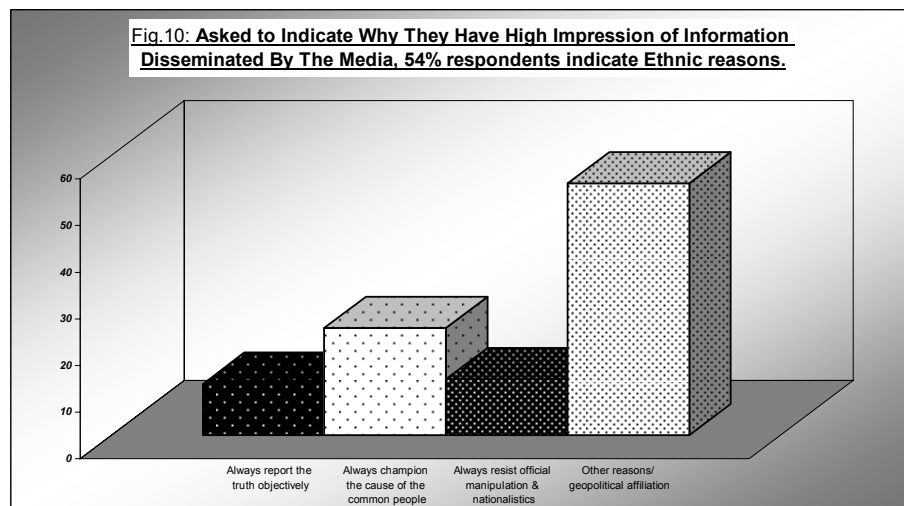
In spite of the fact that the media in Nigeria enjoy high attention rate, believability rate is poor. This is indicative of loss of faith, trust and confidence in the media. Breakdown shows 49% of respondents believe a negligible percentage of information disseminated by the mass media – less than 30%. Thirty-five percent of respondents believe 30 – 49% of the information they get from the mass media. A paltry 12% believe only 50 – 69% of information they get from the mass media while only 4% of respondents believe 70 - 100% of information disseminated by the media. What is instructive here is that Nigerians take the media seriously in spite of the low rate of believability returned. [see Fig. 9]. This underscores the fact that Nigerians still patronize

the media their shortcomings notwithstanding. Media analysts attributed this to anticipated changes Nigerians expect in the media. They desire a change both in the attitude and orientation of the media. They seek a responsible and responsive media driven by the core values of professionalism. The media that enjoy such magnitude of populace attention or following have no reason to be flagrantly irresponsible.



In the same vein, asked for the reasons respondents have high impression of information disseminated by the media, the response was quite revealing. The reason people have high impression of media reports is not because they “report the truth objectively,” neither is it because they “champion the cause of the common people.” It is not also because they are

perceived to “*resist official pressure,*” or “*nationalistic.*” The high impression rate is for ‘*other*’ reasons. Fifty-four percent of respondents chose “*They serve geo-political interest and other reasons,*” a euphemism in Nigeria for sectional interest. In this case, it clearly means media support for their tribal or ethnic issues. Twenty-three percent of respondents are impressed that the media at all times champion the cause of the common people while 11% believe the media report truth objectively. Twelve percent of respondents think the media at all times resist official manipulation and are thereby nationalistic. It is interesting to note that majority of respondents who have low impression of information disseminated by the media think so because they feel the media “*serve as megaphone of government/the rich and the powerful.*” Forty percent of respondents are in this category while 27% think the media “*report half-truth and lies.*” Eight percent think the media often “*succumb to official manipulation,*” while 25% believe media “*reports/presentation styles threaten stability/ national cohesion.*” [see Fig. 10]

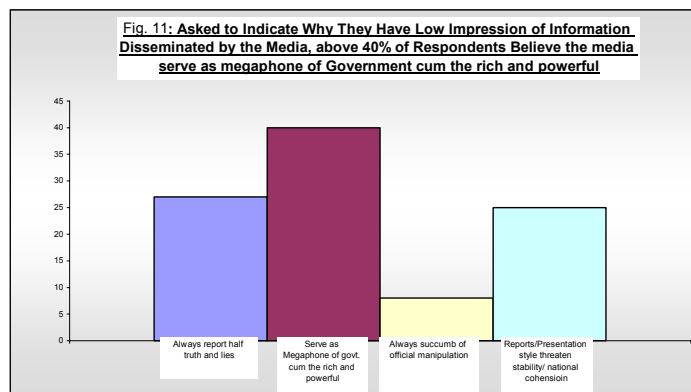


Ralph Akinfeleye, a notable public affairs commentator and professor of journalism at the University of Lagos described the Nigerian media situation

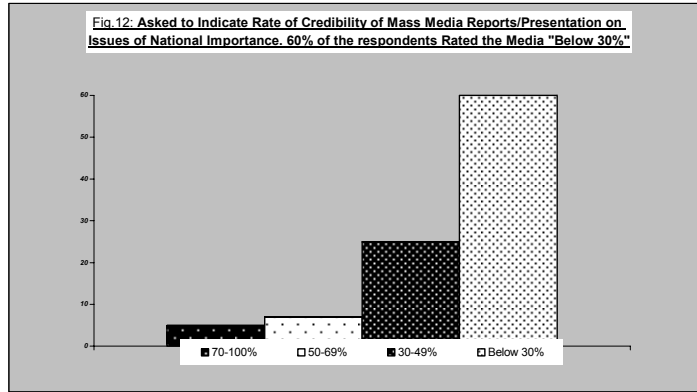
as peculiar⁶⁷. What Akinfeleye means is that the problem is synonymous with the Nigerian state's skewed federation and unjust distribution of national resources between the federating units by the central government. This has for sometimes now remained a factor in Nigerian politics as there have always been agitations to restructured the country. The theme of the struggle for restoration of democracy between 1993 and 1999 was restructuring the federation. Most analysts consider Nigerian system as federal only in name but unitary in operation. Reuben Abati, an editorialist, popular columnist, writer and chairman, editorial board of *The Guardian* newspaper, Nigeria's most respected news publication, believed perception of the media is usually affected by tribal and ethnic coloration. "This is why," argued Abati, "most Yoruba people of the southwest would readily commend the media for their supportive roles in the struggle for restoration of democracy."⁶⁸ Akinfeleye posited that the correlation between the Yoruba interest (restoration of democracy) and the media's position (exit of the military) means whatever the media reports on the issue would be believed by people of Yoruba stock and everyone who shared the dream of returning the nation to democratic rule and restructuring the polity. Conversely, most northerners, particularly those who have benefited from military rule and those who, for certain reasons, did not believe in democracy would disagree with media reports on the issue. This situation, Abati insisted, means believability of the media is also a function of tribal or ethnic loyalty. Consequently, the contest for power and political relevance between each tribal and ethnic grouping affects peoples' perception of media's performance. Sometimes ago, when media ownership was dominated by Yoruba tribe, Akinfeleye volunteered, the other tribes and ethnic

groups derisively refer to the media as Lagos-Ibadan press.⁶⁹ "Today, with proprietors from other tribes and ethnic groups setting up their own media establishments and pushing their own tribal/ethnic agenda," Abati informed, "you don't hear the refrain Lagos-Ibadan press anymore."⁷⁰

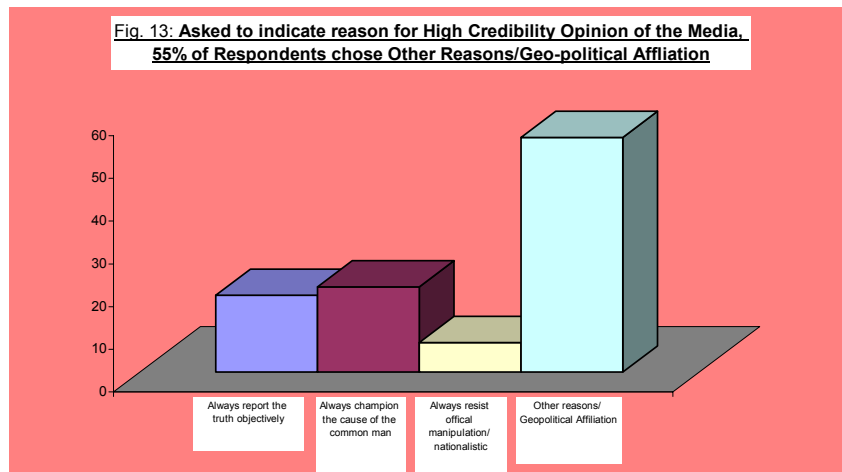
The most instructive lesson here, Nasir el-Mohammed, a sociology teacher maintained, is that the perception of the media is dependent on how good, bad or fair a particular respondent thinks his or her tribe/ethnic group has been treated by the media⁷¹. In other words, believability cum high or low impression of the media is wholly dependent on the variables explained above. [see Fig.11 below]

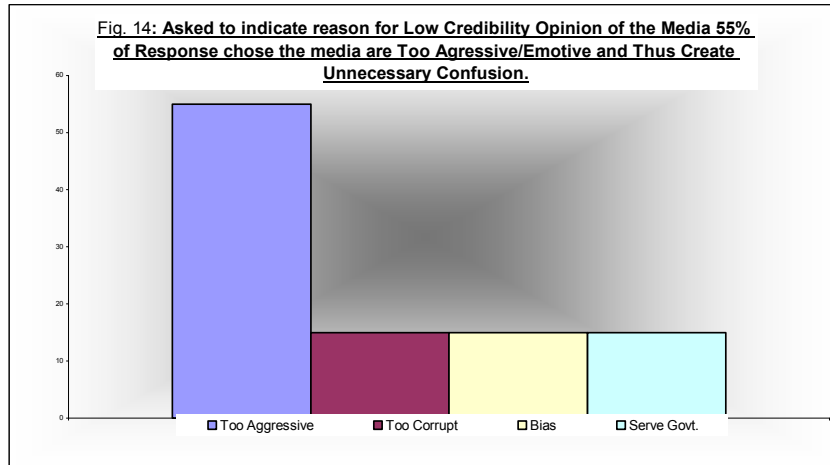


What about the credibility rating of the media? Three separate questions were designed to examine how credible Nigerians perceive their media's reports and what informed their perception. [see Fig.12, 13 &14]. Five percent of respondents, the findings showed, believe that up to 70 – 100% of mediated information is credible. Seven percent of respondents think 50 – 69% of media report is credible while 25% believe 30 – 49% is credible and 60% think what's credible in mediated information is below 30%. This is a damning verdict. It is a serious indictment of the media. It gives the impression that credibility is low with reference to the Nigerian media.



Interestingly, in trying to decipher why respondents returned low credibility score of the media, our findings showed only 18% of respondents think the media are credible because they *"report the truth objectively."* 20% of respondents think the media are credible because they *"champion the cause of the common people."* Seven percent believe the media are credible because they often *"resist official manipulation and nationalistic"* while 55% think they are credible for other reasons with geo-political leaning. Respondents have different reason for having low credibility rating for the media.





Fifty-five percent of respondents think the media have low credibility profile because they are 'too aggressive, emotive and create unnecessary tension.' Another 15% think the reason for low credibility profile is because the media are “*too corrupt and not objective.*” But 15% think the reason for low credibility rating is because the media are biased in favor of official sources cum primordial interest while 15% returned low credibility rating because the media are serving government interest and those of the rich and powerful in the society.

Summary of Study

As noted by Akinfeleye, the public affairs commentator and professor of journalism at the University of Lagos as well as responses from survey questions [indicated in the graphs], the news media in Nigeria have become a part of the problems of confronting the Nigerian nation rather than a vehicle for their resolution. The news media, the study has shown, have become champions of ethnic interests, citadel of corruption and harbinger of negativity. Nigeria's major problem is tribal/ethnic distrust, which the media promote with relish. Though the sensationalism involved impact on sale but, on the long run, the effect is loss of credibility, loss of trust and confidence in the media as

this study has shown. The way out is for the media to reassess their operations. They need to play a leading role in reorganizing the polity by being less emotive, more constructive and more responsible in their judgment of what to amplify and what to downplay. They must educate the people and the politicians about the responsibility of power and the restraint required in its application. The media must not only understand but also appreciate Nigeria's peculiar problem of skewed federation, uneven distribution of national resources, the error of operating unitary system in a federal set up and the attendant troubles emanating from the lack of political will to fully tackle these issues. It's only a responsible, dispassionate, patriotic and professional news media that can appreciate these needs in the current atmosphere of confusion.

In contrast, by publishing the Pentagon papers and the Watergate scandal, the news media in United States played a major role in strengthening American democracy and defining the American society. They became a reference point in America's development. The news media in Nigeria are now being challenged to do the same. They have the intellect, the resources and, most importantly, the opportunity to do it now. As the study has shown, Nigerians are disappointed that the media are shying away from this onerous responsibility.

Chapter Four: Anatomy of Political Instability

"Colonial Nigeria was designed in 1914 to serve the British Empire, and the independent state serves as a tool of plunder by the country's modern rulers. Nigerians spend a good part of their lives trying to get the better of government for their own benefit or that of their family, their village, or their region,"
-Karl Maier (2000)⁷²

Poynter Institute's senior scholar and vice president, Roy Peter Clark⁷³, at a seminar entitled: 'Values and Ethics in the News: The purpose of journalism,' employed the proposition of Kovach and Rosenstiel⁷⁴ in their book: *Elements of Journalism*, to explore the essentials of values in the news, the place of value in journalism and how it affects journalist's work. Emphasizing that craft without purpose has no meaning, he implored participants to always look for the master narratives in their writing as a means to check and evaluate the messages their reports send to readers.

This is very instructive. Journalists tend to be consumed by the desire to write a good story, fulfill the commercial requirements of their news organizations or create controversy so much that they sometimes fail to give proper consideration to the consequences or implications of their writing or reports. "Slave narratives," he argues, "suggest that we live in unsafe environment." What in essence Roy Clark is pointing out is that the aggregate

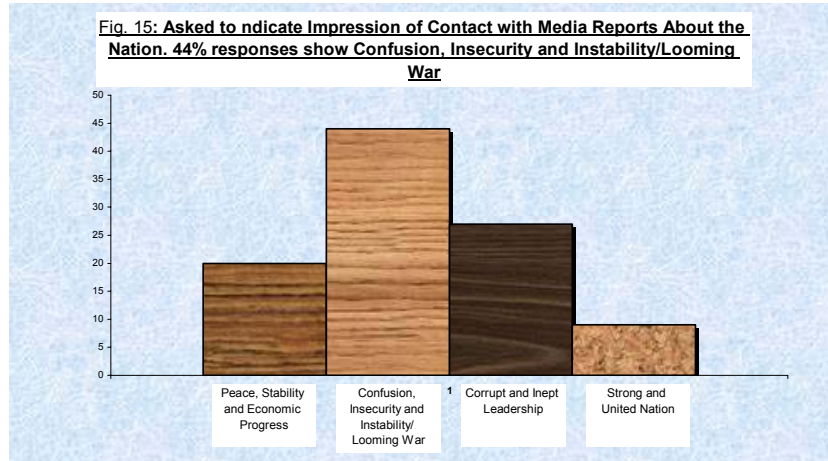
impression of any media message is the 'master narrative.' To fully understand this supposition, let's rewind to the opening page:

Salvadore Domingo, a Brazilian-born Belgian businessman with interests in petro-chemical industries, arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, two days ahead of his planned meetings with some members of the Lagos chambers of commerce and officials of the ministry of trade. Domingo ordered for newspapers and magazines the morning after his arrival. The hotel supplied six magazines and 10 newspapers.

All the publications without exception had a cover story on either the president or the state of the nation's political and economic well-being. From the front pages to the back pages, the coverage was not only negative but scary. The style of reporting was adversarial. The posturing was combative. To Domingo, the publications were indicative of two things: political instability and insecurity. He packed his bags and left the country without attending the planned business meetings.

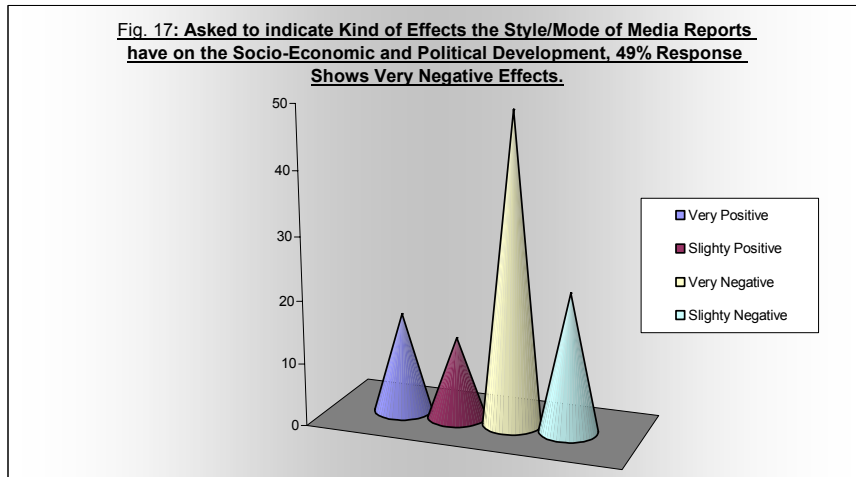
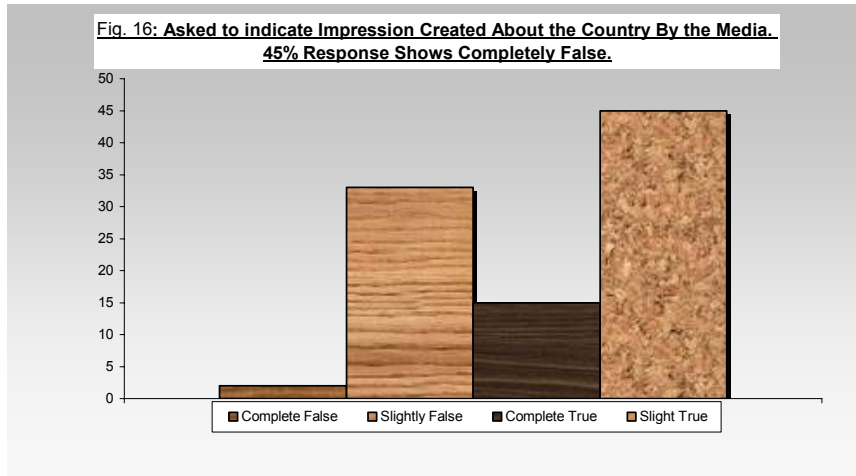
The aggregate impression from newspaper reports available to Domingo is called 'master narrative.' It is incontrovertible that the master narrative about the Nigerian nation in spite of its great potential (both human and material) is negative. It is also an irrefutable fact that the Nigerian media are responsible for the impression created about the Nigerian nation. Statistical evidence from our study supports this assertion. Asked about the impression they get from exposing themselves to media reports on Nigeria, 44% of respondents returned a verdict of “*confusion, insecurity and instability cum looming war,*” another 27% of respondents say the impression they get from contact with the Nigerian media is that the nation has “*corrupt and inept*

leadership”. But 20% of respondents say they get the impression that the nation is “*peaceful, stable and making economic progress,*” while 9% of respondents think the nation is “*strong and united.*” [see Fig. 15].



In the same vein, 45% of respondents think the impression created about the country by the media is “*completely false.*” Thirty-three percent of respondents believe the impression is “*slightly false.*” But 7% of respondents think the impression the media create about the nation is “*completely true,*” while 15% of respondents feel media created impression about the nation is “*slightly true.*” [see Fig. 16]

Consequently, respondents are worried about the effects that media reports and styles of presentation have on the socio-economic and political development of the nation. The effect is seriously deleterious. Forty-nine percent of respondents believe media reports have “*very negative effects,*” 22% of respondents think media reports on the nation have “*slightly negative effects.*” However, 16% of respondents believe media reports on the nation have “*very positive effects,*” while 13% of respondents think media reports on the nation have “*slightly positive effects.*” [see Fig. 17]



Champions of Ethnic Interest

Several public affairs commentators have argued that it is preposterous for the media to pander to the whim of tribal political warlords and ethnic champions. Such politicians hide under the pretense of championing the collective interest of their people to feather their own nest. A common anecdote in Nigeria tells of a governor whose re-election campaign was filled with the refrain: *“Imagine your child enjoying free education from primary school to university, ‘Imagine a fourth bridge on the lagoon,’ ‘Imagine a new city plan that will guarantee optimum Medicare facilities.’”* The governor was re-elected. But halfway through his second term, he had not done any of

things he promised the electorate. When his political opponents made an issue of the campaign promises, his aides' defense was that he only asked the electorate to imagine those things and not that he promised to accomplish them. Political observers and some media analysts were worried that majority of the media conveniently skipped that governor's political manipulation in their analyses of political office holders' performance. As a matter of fact, he was on the contrary celebrated and credited with political savvy.

There were unconfirmed allegations that the governor in question had greased the palms of several journalists and media operators but analysts believed that exposing the deceitful postures of such leaders by the media is an indication that Nigeria will definitely undergo the process of self-cleansing and thereafter emerge a re-invented nation where things work. Abati admitted that indeed there's corruption in the media but argued that the media reflect the larger society. "The media," he said "only reflect the angst, the frustration and the corruption in the larger society. The anger, mixed with frustration, acts as the fuel that fire the confusion and insecurity the media portray about the nation."⁷⁵ Nasir el-Mohammed had a divergent view. The sociologist read pure tribalism in media reports of the erring governor's case. Buttressing his point, el-Mohammed pointed attention to what he termed "double-standard" approach of the media. He recalled the case of perjury against the former speaker of the House of Representatives, which attracted sustained media attention until the speaker fell from office. The speaker is a northerner. He compared the fallen speaker's case with that of a governor, who was accused of similar offense. The latter's case received cosmetic treatment from the press. The governor in question is a southerner. "The reason the media

treated similar cases differently," el-Mohammed insisted "is simply because of tribal consideration".⁷⁶

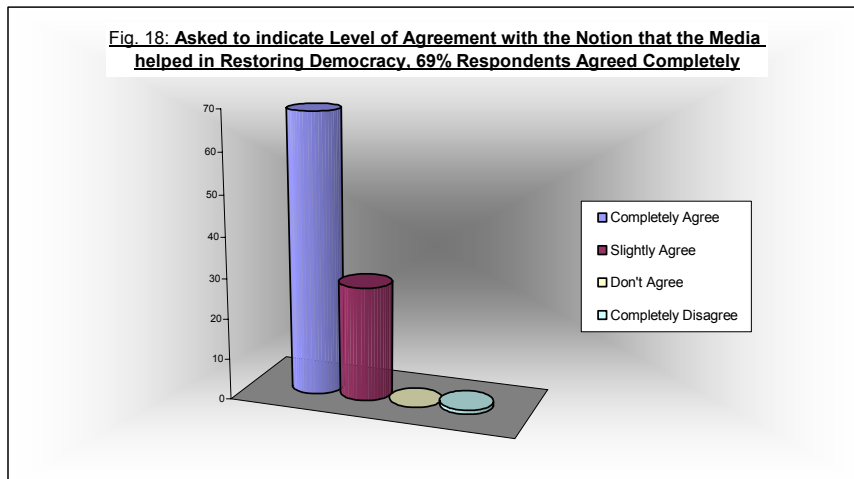
"The media owe it a duty to be fair." Akinfeleye said and added: "It is a social responsibility that must be upheld at all times through the highest ethical standards and professional principles".⁷⁷ Nasir el-Mohammed believed the media must change their orientation as a matter of deliberate policy, if they must help Nigeria gets out of the woods. "Constant negative portrayals of the country create psychological reality out of an exaggerated situation. Once the people accept psychologically that the situation is irredeemable, it becomes difficult to engender the necessary change. The media are best suited to provide leadership in the collective desire to change the system. But before they do that, the media must recognize their own limitation and make the necessary adjustments.

In pursuit of the desire for reinvention, the media must, as a matter of deliberate policy, adopt some ethics formula and ensure their enforcement. Adoption of strong ethical principles will boost public confidence in the media. Under the new regime of ethical standards, media practitioners must be re-orientated to believe that values become principles; principles become mission and mission guides decision. The champions of ethnic interest must internalize the following formula for socially responsible journalism.

<u>Values</u>	==	<u>Principles</u>
Honesty & Truth	--	Tell the truth
Fairness	--	Report with balance
Love/Companion	--	Minimize harm
Industriousness	--	Work hard

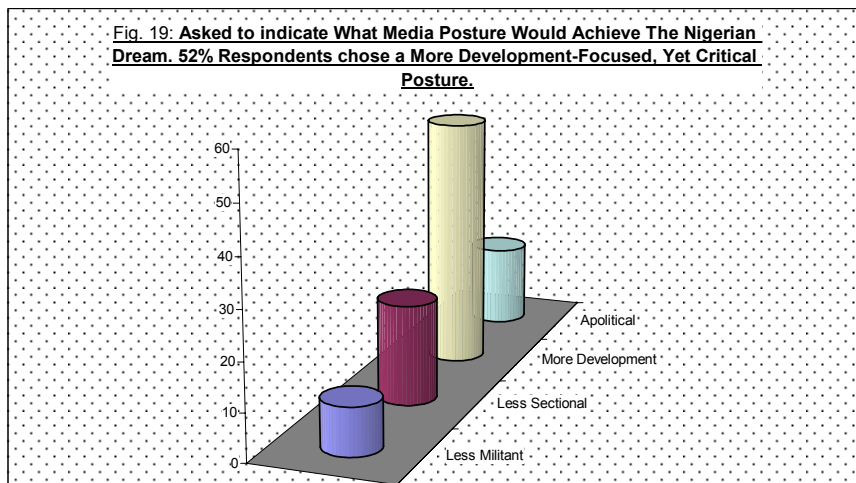
Integrity	--	Be honorable
Freedom	--	Act independently
Creativity	--	Embrace the craft
Justice	--	Serve as a watchdog.

Beside the constant relapse to playing the champion of ethnic interest, the media at other times, have proved to be the dependable ally of the common people. An instance was the long and winding struggle for the restoration of democracy in Nigeria. The media played an admirable role at huge personal cost to hundreds of media practitioners. This assertion is corroborated by the study under review. Sixty-nine percent of respondents “agree completely” that the media helped in the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria. Twenty-eight percent of respondents say they “agree slightly” to the notion, 2% sat they “don’t agree” while 1% say they “disagree completely.” [see Fig. 18].



Conversely, 63% of respondents think the media's brand of journalism is not only “militant, but junk and reckless”, 26% of respondents think the media is “sectional and tribal”. Five percent say the media's brand of journalism is “apolitical” while 6% believe the brand of journalism the media

practice is “*development-oriented.*” Respondents desire that the media change its posture and adopt a new approach, which they think would lead toward realizing the Nigerian nation of their dream. Fifty-two percent of respondents think the media should adopt a more “*development-focused, yet critical*” approach to media reports. Twenty-two percent of respondents believe if the media are “*less sectional or tribal but critical*”, the Nigeria of their dream could be achieved. Nineteen percent of respondents think an “*apolitical, critical, free and responsible*” media approach is what's necessary to achieve the Nigeria of their dream while 10% of respondents think a “*less militant, free but responsible*” media approach is what's required to realize the Nigeria of their dream. [see Fig. 19]



New Challenges, Old Tactics

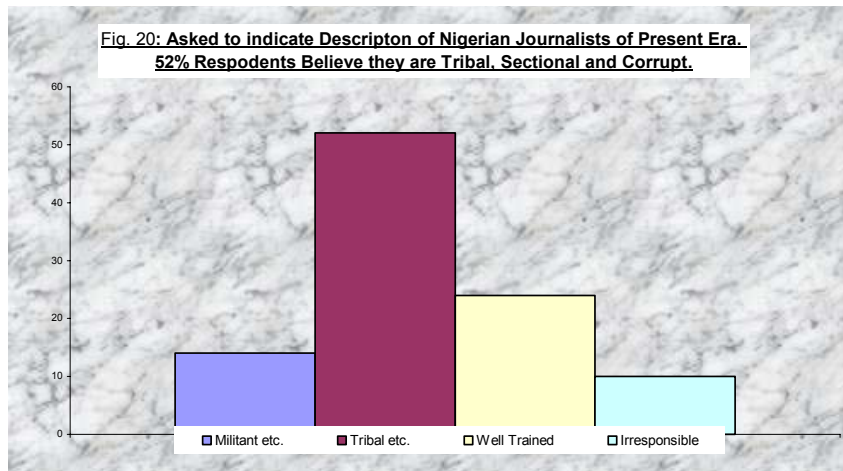
Nigerians, no doubt, have tremendous admiration for journalists of the pre-independence era. They admire their pioneering roles and are enthusiastic of the leadership position they played in the country's fierce battle for self-government. Often times, today's media practitioners criticize the armed forces calling them an army of occupation. This is premised on the fact that the army at the onset was a colonial regiment, which supported the British

invaders against the natives. They helped the colonialists to maintain peace and order and thus brutalized media men who were fighting for the total emancipation of the people. After independence, the armed forces became the instrument decadent military dictators and their corrupt civilian counterparts used to contain legitimate civil protests; leaving the press to quickly point out that the armed forces are acting true to type as they have never been the people's army. Against this background, the thinking in the media is that the tradition of militant media is a noble one, which must be sustained.

Akinfeleye, a well-known professor of journalism and public affairs commentator, agreed with that position but raised questions on what he termed "blind militancy." The press, he argued, run the risk of goading itself into a *cul-de-sac*, if it blindly embraces opposition without logic. Many a media scholar shares this view. Israel Obi, a social scientist and media analyst, believed it is a wrong notion for the media to think blinded opposition is virtue. The media, he insisted, must lead by giving expression to all shades of opinions. This would afford the citizens opportunity to be educated and thus be able to make informed decision. Obi argued further: "This is very essential because in the social science, there's nothing like right or wrong answers. Everything or almost everything is about perception. I think it is sheer arrogance for the press to arrogate infallibility or monopoly of strategy to itself." Abati concurred and stressed that while the pre-independence adopted by the media was good for its era, it is obviously lack of good judgment for the same strategies to be adopted for the present dispensation. Indeed, asked to describe the media practitioners of the pre-independence era, 74% of

respondents believe they were “*very radical and nationalistic*,” while 3% think they were “*slightly irrational and emotive*.” However, 21% of respondents believe the media practitioners of the pre-independence era were “*slightly radical and nationalistic*,” while only 2% think they were “*slightly irrational and emotive*.”

Conversely, asked similar questions about the present generation of Nigerian journalists, responses were much different, perhaps even indicting the media. Fifty-two percent of respondents think the media are “*tribal, sectional and corrupt*.” One consolation is that respondents acknowledged that today's practitioners are better trained as they availed themselves of available academic and professional training opportunities. Twenty-four percent acknowledge that the corps of today's media practitioners is “*well-trained, focused and professional*.” [see Fig. 20].



Indeed, the media practice in Nigeria has witnessed tremendous improvement particularly in the areas of manpower training. Gone are the days when the profession was reserved for what was derisively referred to as the “floatsam and jetsam” of the society. Compared with the ratings of the pre-independence era media practitioners, 14% of respondents think today's

journalists are “*militant and nationalistic*,” while another 10% think the present corps of journalists are “*irresponsible, ill-trained and unprofessional*.” Also, asked to state the media ownership mix of preference, 55% of respondents believe in “*privately-owned media*,” while 38% think they'll prefer a mix of government and private ownership of the media. However, 2% of respondents preferred “*government ownership*”, while 5% thought “*internationally owned media*” would be good for the nation.

Chapter Five: Restoring Public Trust

The finding of the study as analyzed in the preceding chapter is instructive. It draws attention to a general desire for change and highlights the need for restoration of public trust. This is essential if the media are to fulfill their roles and the nation is to overcome the problems of political instability and then move forward to achieve its full potentials. The media in Nigeria may learn from the experiences of other nations, which have had long history of participatory democracies. A comparison between Nigeria and United States is necessary in this regard.

For this purpose, it is pertinent to examine the history of the American press. The evolution of the media in the United States has witnessed at least nine stages of development. There was the era of the *colonial press*⁷⁸ when *Public Occurrences*, suppressed by the British authorities, became the first colonial newspaper. It was published in 1690. This was followed by the emergence in 1704 of *Boston Newsletter*, the first weekly regular newspaper. In 1721, James Franklin published the *New England Courant*, the first independent newspaper. The second stage was the era of the *revolutionary press*⁷⁹. This period covered the years before and during the American Revolution when publishers were split between the colonists and the British. Patriots drove several publishers out of business by raiding their shops and attacking them in the street. *The patronage and the party press*⁸⁰ era was the third stage. It was in early days of the republic when political figures and party

funded newspapers which supported their views. The era of the *penny press*⁸¹ came thereafter in the 1830s. The loosening up of voters' restriction, which led to greater civic participation coupled with improved technology created the environment for penny press as newspapers were sold one cent to ordinary citizens in the streets. Prior to that time, newspapers were sold only subscription. By 1844, the emergence of a new invention called telegraph created a new era called the *telegraph and newspapers*⁸². Telegraph made gathering and sharing of news easier for newspapers and greatly helped transmission of news from the battlefield during the civil war.

The sixth stage was the era of *sensation or Yellow journalism*.⁸³ This was between 1870 and 1890. This period did not only mark the beginning of chain ownership of newspapers, it was also regarded as the lowest point of the journalism profession when the ludicrous, the dramatic and even untrue stories about celebrities became the focus of newspapers. This was the era of William Rudolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. By the 1920s, radio enters the mix and thus became a commercial success. Television news format was introduced by 1950s. This era was known as the *broadcasting mix*⁸⁴. Great changes began to take effect in the United States' media sphere by the late 1940s when the newspaper industry came under attack as being under the control of monopolists and advertisers, out of touch with the needs of the people and communities. This era was known as the *consolidation and changing roles*⁸⁵. These complaints are still pervasive today in spite of tremendous changes that have taken place. The ninth stage is known as the age of *convergence*⁸⁶. Today, with advent of personal computers in the 1980s and 1990s, most media are converging. A local example of convergence in

Tampa Bay area is the experiment of Media General Inc., which is assiduously pursuing convergence with passion. From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that the performance of the media in the United States is far from being satisfactory. There are complaints against the media. Some involve issues such as intrusion, privacy, libel and slander for instance. Others are concern such fundamental operational issues. Complaints in this respect include charges that big businesses are buying up the local media thus increasing possibilities of muffling the voices of the common people. There are also fears that the big corporations will shut out the communities from their newscasts and concentrate on commercials and *infotainment*. The current apathy in civic activities by the ordinary people is seen as direct effect of failure of the mass media to galvanize people interest in public affairs. However, from the pattern of its evolution, it is obvious that the American public and its media have been engaging in robust debates, which had consistently resulted in some form of popular changes in the operation of the media. Such changes, to certain extent, have been helpful to the growth of democracy.

In the United States, media practitioners frequently engaged in self-cleansing processes by sanitizing their practice as a means to retain public trust. The belief in social responsibility of the press has made it mandatory for the press to strive to live above board. It seems there's an unwritten law in US media that whenever a breach of public trust occurred personalities involved must pay the price of their misdeeds. For instance, *New York Times* did not sweep the Jason Blair saga under the carpet despite the effect on some loyal and high ranking executives. The concerned executives themselves realizing

the need to protect the sanctity of their institution [*New York Times*] and their profession [journalism] accepted their punishment with equanimity. Indeed, in the United States, the role of journalism and its practitioners or the media generally are not only respected but also constitutionally recognized as an important segment of the nation's socio-political development efforts. In return, the free press must justify the trust bestowed on it by the U.S. constitution by ensuring that it is socially responsible. But the opposite is the case in Nigeria as the media have no separate constitutional backing. The media in Nigeria, though courageous in the face staggering difficulties, still have serious shortcomings. Journalists hardly get sanctioned for breaching public trust. Media organizations hardly offer public apology for misinformation or libel unless compelled by the court of law. Journalists often hide under misrule of military dictators to flagrantly misbehave.

Besides, there is a dearth of organizations such as The Poynter Institute, FAIR and others to guide the press and monitor its performance in public interest in Nigeria. The argument here is not that the media in the United States are perfect. As a matter of fact, there are legion of strident accusations against the U.S. media following the recent Federal Communications Commission's rule governing media operations. Specifically, the fresh accusations include: redefinition of news by satellites and 24-hour news cycle; merging of news and entertainment by the big corporations' continuous foray into media business; blurring of the line between news and commerce and the seeming obsession for hot story – the sensational stuff, which drain resources from the reporting of the communities among others. However, the fact that there exist some form of self-regulations or check and

balances is heartwarming. Therefore, the point is: while the U.S. media, at least, try to ensure that the watchdog itself is guided by adherence to some rules, the media in Nigeria still operate in an environment where there is no limit to journalistic recklessness. Expectedly, that situation had earned the Nigerian media negative reputation, which requires collective action to reverse. A recent example of corrupt allegation leveled against the press will suffice in this respect: The Registrar of Trade Unions had written the President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists [NUJ], threatening to de-register the union over 15 years of un-audited account.

Trying to explain the situation, the NUJ President, Mr. Smart Adeyemi told the *Sunday Sun* newspaper of November 14, 2004 in an interview:

...NUJ was queried for three of four reasons. The first reason was that the NUJ claimed it expended N26million (about \$197,000) in 1993 in getting the vehicles IBB [Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, ex-military president of Nigeria] brought to NUJ, which was N30million (about \$228,000) .Then [there was] another [unexplained] N30million [donations] from governments and individuals. The external auditors [also] queried N36million (about \$273,000) claimed to have been spent on public relations. Again, the NUJ claimed that it expended N800,000 (about \$6,100) on local runs. So, these are the major areas I can still remember now about the query... Between 1993 and 1999, there was no account of the union that was audited. My quarrel with them is that I was not in office and this executive that was indicted; the principal officers are still alive. So, I should not be held responsible for the sins I did not commit."

Sensing that the NUJ leader was evasive, the interviewer asked pointedly: *"Talking about the principle on which the Registrar is speaking, don't you think it is genuine? The man is saying the account is not audited but now you're saying..."* The NUJ President cuts in and said: *"I am not saying that I do not believe in the need for auditing and I equally believe, to a large extent, that what the Registrar of Trade Unions is doing is the right thing. But I blame the Federal Ministry of Labor and Productivity. They should be held responsible..."*

The above snippet is a vivid illustration of the corruption and rot bedeviling journalists and journalism in Nigeria. Their union leaders romanced military dictators. The relationship gave opportunity for large chunk of taxpayers money to change hands. The money was not properly accounted for and the union leader didn't want to accept responsibility. It is still baffling how such an organization that has demonstrated grave incompetence at accountability can hold others accountable. A corrupt media cannot judge or lead an equally corrupt society. At least, he who must come to equity must do so with clean hands. Most importantly, the illustration corroborates returns of respondents, which indicate a verdict of corruption on journalists.

Glimpse of Official Brutality from Personal Experience

Journalists in Nigeria often shrug at complaints of recklessness. They sometimes argue that guerrilla journalism is the only option available in the face unjustified official brutality and incessant harassments. A glimpse of what journalists experience could be gleaned from following abridged article⁸⁷ depicting my personal experience in the hands of military dictator who threw me unceremoniously into the gulag for 15 months in 1997.

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'Before the sudden death of General Sanni Abacha, Nigeria's former head of state, the then External Affairs minister, Chief Tom Ikimi, denying the charges of human rights abuses in Nigeria by the United States and the international community, told a gathering at an international conference that there was no political prisoner in Nigeria and that freedom of expression was not in any way hindered. A Nigerian at the conference reacted to Ikimi's statement thus:

"Indeed, we have as much freedom of expression as Americans do. In the US, you can stand at the gate of the White House and shout what you think of the President of the United States. In Nigeria, you can also stand at the gate of Aso-Rock and shout what you think of the President of the United States."

Expectedly, that statement drew a lot of laughter, which was a most welcome comic relief. But beyond the glacial façade, it was classic cynicism that only the situation such as was then prevailing in Abacha's Nigeria, is capable of provoking⁸⁸.

Between 1993 and 1998, when Abacha, an infantry general, ruled Nigeria with 'iron-fist,' over 1000 attacks on freedom of expression were recorded. Some of these attacks included forced occupation of news media houses by armed soldiers, seizure of publications, closure of broadcast media stations, torture, harassments, indiscriminate arrests of journalists and media workers, imprisonments without trials and death by bombing and assassination of two newspaper publishers and two journalists. Chief Moshood Kashimawo O. Abiola, politician and publisher of Concord

group of newspapers, was killed in mysterious circumstances while in detention. Abiola, winner of June 12, 1993 presidential election, was denied his popular mandate. He was instead detained and killed via lethal poison after spending four years in confinement. Okezie Amurube, journalist and publisher of Enugu-based quarterly magazine, **News Service**, was shot dead by policemen attached to the Enugu state command of the Nigeria Police Force.⁸⁹

Bagauda Kaltho, a reporter with Lagos-based popular **The News** magazine, was bombed to death by Abacha's Libyan-trained goons. Tunde Oladepo, a correspondent of **The Guardian** newspaper, was shot dead by gunmen who invaded his residence.⁹⁰

Beside these horrific assassinations, several journalists were hauled into jail without trial. Some were accused of coup-plotting and thereby sent to jail via the instrumentality of special military tribunal set up by decrees. Chris Anyanwu, publisher and editor-in-chief of **The Sunday Magazine**; Kunle Ajibade, executive editor of **The News** magazine; George Mbah, a reporter with **Tell** magazine, and Ben Charles-Obi, editor of **Classique** magazine were jailed for publishing reports that irritated Abacha's dictatorial regime.

Like most dictators, Abacha resorted to creating unreal uprisings against his unpopular junta as a clever means of eliminating his opponents and muzzling the press. Phantom coups were one of the devious innovations in this respect. I was a victim of this horrendous practice. I was arrested in a commando-like operation by armed soldiers, who broke into my office where I worked as editor of the independent Lagos daily, **The Diet** newspaper, in

December, 1997. I was subjected to torture and most dehumanizing treatment.

Here's what happened in the Torture Chamber: They gave me what they called 'shock treatment.' After ten minutes of it my eyes were bleeding, and there were wounds all over my body. I had been beaten with whips, belts, rifle butts, clubs, electrified batons, you name it. My head ached. I tasted the blood which dripped from my mouth. I felt the ultimate fear of death. A barked command jerked me back into the present. I felt a hand holding my neck in a vice-like grip. The chief torturer, a lieutenant colonel, forced my eyelids open and blew tobacco smoke into my eyes. The pain was excruciating. Then there was a sudden explosion in my brain and darkness descended on me.

*This was January 10, 1988, fourteen days after my abduction by soldiers. They had come at midnight, stormed my office at **The Diet** newspapers and bundled me away from the familiar world. I was held incommunicado. No contact with my wife and two sons. No contact with the outside world at all. I was denied food and when I started to get fevers I was denied medical attention. My hands and feet were manacled with heavy chains day and night. I was humiliated, de-humanized.*

Then on January 10, I was moved to a special unit in the city of Jos and there Abacha's torturers started to work on me. The floor of the torture chamber was bare. It smelt putrid. It looked revolting. It was stained all over with the blood and tears of previous victims of Abacha's murderous gang of thugs. It was a dreadful place. Many have not emerged from the place alive. Others have had their bones broken and walk on crutches to this day.

It seems that for each of their victims the torturers decided on a particular anatomical target. With me they decided to attack my eyes. They wanted me blind. I came round after passing out and there was the colonel. I tried to speak but no words came from my battered, swollen lips.

“Welcome back from the dead,” mocked the colonel as he jerked my chin up violently. “Do you know why you’re in the torture chamber, Mr. Editor?” He lifted me off the ground by the neck. I offered no resistance. He looked me in the eyes. “Stupid journalist,” he spat. “I’ll use you to teach your stupid colleagues a lesson.

”As he held me suspended mid air, his colleagues beat me for a while. Then the colonel grinned and said: “You, Mr. Editor, are under investigation for a coup plot.”

Suddenly he let me go and I crashed to the ground. I screamed in agony and the more I screamed the happier the colonel and his gang seemed to be. They laughed with demonic excitement at my pain and anguish. I began to pray for death, because by then death seemed preferable to torture. But death refused to come and my agony was prolonged as I stumbled through the valley of the shadow of death. Then the question started:

“Who are your business partners, friends and contacts in high places in this country?” the colonel asked me, his eyes blazing.

“I don’t have any such contacts,” I muttered, barely audible because of fatigue, pain and hunger. “I am only a journalist, an editor. Not a businessman.”

“Who are your foreign contacts and friends?” the colonel bellowed again. “Who are your friends in the American embassy?”

"I don't have any contact there," I replied. "I only have a friend who works at the embassy, an American. But what has this to do with coup plot?" I asked lamely.

My question triggered an explosion of anger. "You must be crazy," shouted the colonel. "Don't you know they are all CIA agents? I'm going to kill you. I'm going to shoot you. You won't be the first journalist to die. And I've already dealt with top military officers, generals...Do you think I'd have any problem dealing with a stupid journalist like you?"

My heart sank. I thought of the generals who had already been arrested for the alleged coup plot: Oladipo Diya, Abacha's number two man, and others. Had they really been given torture treatment? Was this their blood on the floor? If so there was no hope for me.

The shock treatment started again. They hung me by my ankles from the ceiling. They poured ice-cold water on me and applied electrodes to my body. The cold cut through me like a knife. The city of Jos is high on the plateau and it was the season of cold wind.

When eventually it was over, they hauled me into a Black Maria and dumped me in prison with condemned criminals. For 147 days I was not permitted to wash or bathe. Rashes developed on my body. I got pneumonia and typhoid. But the worst was the damage done to my eyes during the torture sessions over several months. Tried and sentenced in a secret trial, I was released March 4, 1999 after 15 months in solitary confinement.

I, like several other journalists, was a victim of Abacha's effort to cow journalists and prevent them from exposing his regime for what it was. Now he is gone, but the scars of his reign of terror remain. And so are the

draconian, archaic statutes meant to muzzle the press. The existence of these laws, inherited from Britain since the colonial days, means the environmental condition for journalism practice is fraught with serious dangers. It is imperative therefore that such environmental condition will present unusual ethical challenges. In other words, what ethical standards should apply when a thieving, illegal, immoral, decadent and destructive regime is engaging in blatant deceit of the public? Does a journalist acquiesce or find whatever means to expose its criminal misconduct in public interest?

The environment in Nigeria brings to the fore different ethical challenges for three reasons. One, there's no First Amendment. Two, though the military-drafted constitution in operation since the emergence of civil rule in May 1999 recognized freedom of expression for all citizens, there's no special provision for the press. Three, the civil service administration and the justice system (inherited from Britain) put heavy burden on the media in favor of government or public officials to the disadvantage of the citizenry.

*In essence, almost every government document is classified 'secret.' Besides, there's what is called the official 'Secret Act', which makes illegal the publication of government document other than those given through official releases. Also, there are several defamation laws, which makes publication of information, even if true, accurate, and correct punishable by prison term, once it embarrasses any government official or the government itself. The duo of Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, **The Guardian** newspaper's foreign correspondent and news editor, respectively were jailed in 1984 under that obnoxious law....*

Unlike in the US where media defendants in a libel action do not bear the burden of proof, in Nigeria media defendants must prove with admissible evidence that ALL of their damaging factual allegations are true in every material particular. So many media houses and journalists have suffered untold hardship in this respect. The situation becomes extremely horrible when self-appointed cum illegal regimes of military adventurers hold the reigns of power. In such circumstance, what are the ethical limits of an investigative reporter in trying to expose such evil contraption that foists itself on an unwilling nation?

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From the account above, it is obvious that the challenges before the media in the U.S. and Nigeria are quite different. While the media in the United States are faced with issues relating to public interest, limit on ownership, cross-ownership and more voices; the concern in Nigeria is somehow still rudimentary. It is still about the basic rights, which can be justifiably denied if the media adamantly refuse to embrace the process of change that has seen the press in the United States pass through nine distinct eras in the course of its evolution.

Chapter Six: Voice of the People or Voice of Some People

Ugochukwu Eze, a young reporter was attracted to a scene in Mushin, a sprawling low-income neighborhood of Lagos. On enquiry, he learnt that a two-year-old girl fell from the fifth floor of high-rise building. Miraculously, the girl survived but she broke her limb. Local authorities' medical personnel recommended prompt surgical operation, the cost of which her poor parents could not afford. The reporter in Eze took the better part of him; he seized the opportunity of his presence at the scene of the accident to conduct interviews. He gathered enough facts for a moving human interest story; a reality story which he thought would appeal to readers' sense of humanity and thereby bring succor to the injured kid and relieve for her indigent parents. Eze submitted his story with the belief that its publication is part of his newspaper's service to the community.

At the other end of the town, a similar accident of different magnitude occurred. A top politician cruising in a Japanese jeep with a concubine had a crash. No one died. Neither was anyone terribly injured. The jeep was damaged. But that incident made the news for many days as newspapers made an issue of the passenger in the politician's jeep for weeks. A disturbed Eze asked his editors why such profanity was given pride of place in their newspaper and others. His editor's response was the politician has name recognition. He was told, "Names make news and readers are always willing

to read about big names not some unknown people who fall from high-rise buildings”.

The above anecdote is instructive. It is an illustration of the mindsets of media practitioners, their definitions of news; which are a function of newsroom socialization and media structures. It is a structure that is not really anti-poor *per se* but is designed operationally to serve at all times the interest of the rich and powerful. The short anecdote tells in graphic manner the story of a media that represent the voice of “some” and NOT all the people. Indeed, the way the media are structured worldwide whether in the developed western democracies, in the emerging democracies of the eastern hemisphere or in the developing Third World countries, it is certain the media do not wholeheartedly represent the voice of the common people. They represent the voice of some people.

In some instances, depending on the structure of the leadership in different countries, they amplify mostly the viewpoints of the vocal minority: the rich and the powerful few who control commerce and industries; the members of the ruling party who call the shots at the politburo; the military class who oversees civil business in poverty-stricken developing countries; the political class who regulate all socio-economic activities in the Island nations and the feudal lords who control every resource in the Middle-Eastern countries. They have more access to the media. The media, in turn, have been socialized to grant them unfettered access; to see things from their perspectives; to source information from their ranks; to judge issues from their angle.

There are certain elements in the organizational structures of the media that have inadvertently slanted the operations of the media in favor of the rich and powerful as against the interest of the people. These, for instance, include, newsroom routines, including definitions of news, allocation of space or airtime; dependent on known sources cum heads of organizations or institutions among others. There have been complaints about the structure of the media even in advanced democracies such as the United States where discussions on the issue have led to some changes in journalism education curriculum, focus of journalism such as the advent of public journalism or civic journalism for example. Similarly, the study in question has equally shown the need for a change of focus in the operations of the media in Nigeria. Most importantly, it has been established empirically that Nigerians, generally speaking, attend to the media. This shows they take the media seriously and desire information from the mass media. The problem as identified by the study is that mediated information do not enjoy high rate of believability. There are various reasons for this seemingly lack of trust in the media. In some cases, it is simply because the media are perceived to be corrupt and lack objectivity. In other cases, it is because the media are considered to be serving the interest of the rich and powerful alone or that they are easily manipulated by official arm-twisting. Most importantly, the media do not enjoy high rate of believability because Nigerians have strong suspicion that they are intrinsically biased in favor of tribal and ethnic interest.

Again, the study has revealed that while Nigerians appreciate the roles played by the media in the struggle for independence as well as the recent efforts for the restoration of democracy, a fierce battle which did not only claim

lives of journalists but left many more fatally bruised. The study has shown that Nigerians would prefer that the media are less militant, less combative and less aggressive in the pursuit of their constitutional duties of monitoring government and holding the government accountable to the governed. What this means is that Nigerians recognized the constitutional provisions in article 22 of the 1999 constitution, which enjoins the media to monitor governance. Indeed, the study has revealed the fundamental flaw in operational style of the media. It has shown in clear terms that the master narratives gleaned from media reports about Nigeria is negative and therefore detrimental. Consequent upon these, Nigerians believe the media are central to the perennial socio-economic and political problems bedeviling their country, the 10th most populous nation in the world. To reverse this trend, as the study has shown, the media must do some soul-searching and thereafter embrace some fundamental re-orientation, which will change their attitude and focus. In this regard, the media must appreciate the brand of journalism that Nigerians desire. They want a purposeful media that exhibit at all times the highest level of ethical standards and professionalism; an independent media that is not only socially responsible but also committed to national goals and, above all, a development-oriented media.

Last Word

It is propitious to conclude this paper with the challenge for action. This is encapsulated in a quote from Karl Maier⁹¹ in his book, *This house has fallen* — *Nigeria in crisis*: "

...we, the outside world, ignore Nigeria at our peril, and we are ill served when our governments demonstrate...indifference. From

almost every point of view, Nigeria truly matters. However deep it has sunk into the mire of corruption, repression and economic dilapidation, Nigeria remains one of the world's strategic nations. It is the biggest trading partner the United States has in Africa. It is fifth largest supplier of oil to the US market...As the world's 10th most populous country; Nigeria represents an inherently sizable market that could provide trade opportunity for North American and European companies. Nigeria is Africa's equivalent to Brazil, India or Indonesia. It is the pivot point on which the continent turns.

The moment to think about Nigeria is now.

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