

**PRESS AND POLITICS
IN NIGERIA:
ON WHOSE SIDE?**

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Provost and Deans,
Colleagues,
Staff and Students,
Gentlemen of the Press,
Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I want to thank God, the Almighty, for the privilege to stand before you to deliver this Inaugural Lecture. The Bible says "... it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth but of God that showest mercy." I am a product of God's abundant mercy.

I thank the Vice-Chancellor for giving me this platform and privilege to address this gathering.

INTRODUCTION

This is the second inaugural lecture from the Adebola Adegunwa School of Communication (AASOC). The first lecture was presented in September 2005 by one of Nigeria's leading communication scholars, Prof. Idowu Sobowale. The School of Communication is the only of its type in this country with a curriculum and mandate not only more extensive but more contemporary. At inception, apart from the popular traditional courses, Journalism, Broadcasting and Public Relations and Advertising, the school had courses in Human Communication, Book Publishing and Development, Information and Communication Technology, Photojournalism and Cinematography. This was quite novel and revolutionary in the country. But unfortunately, time came when the powers that be, more out of misinformation and poor understanding of development in other parts of the world, attempted to whittle down the structure and content of the School and hence destroy the vision of its founding fathers.

In the restructuring that followed, only the traditional courses, Journalism, Broadcasting, and Public Relations and Advertising were retained. However, recently, the Senate approved the curriculum for a degree programme in Photography, Film and Media Studies. On behalf

of my colleagues, I want to thank the Vice-Chancellor and Senate for this. We may recall here that the School was founded with the active involvement and support of the State Government which set up a Committee of Scholars and Practitioners to fashion the philosophy, objectives and structure of the school.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, with all humility and due respect, I want to say that there is no Department of Mass Communication in this country with a faculty as diverse in discipline as ours. Apart from those with background in Mass Communication, we have others in Information Science, Book Publishing and Development, Theatre and Film, Health and Development Communication, Peace and Conflict Studies and Literary Studies. Our concern and vision go beyond Mass Communication as popularly conceived but the totality of human communication experience placed within the appropriate historical and socio-cultural context.

For me, this accords with the historical root of communication as an academic enterprise.

COMMUNICATION IN THE ACADEMIA

If the prediction of one of the earliest scholars in the field of communication had been fulfilled, probably we would not be here today. Bernard Berelson published an article in 1959 in which he argued that communication research was “withering away”. In that article, Berelson, who many students of communication here will recognise for his famous definition of content analysis, must have come to his doomsday prediction based on his observation that:

The innovators have left or are leaving the field, and no ideas of comparable scope and generating power are emerging. The expansion of the field to new centres has certainly slowed down and perhaps even stopped.... Some of the newer places are currently repeating what the pioneering places did years ago and are now disappointed with.

By the ‘innovators’ who were leaving the field, Berelson was referring to the pioneer researchers including the political scientist, Harold Lasswell; the mathematician-cum-sociologist, Paul Lazarsfeld; the social psychologist, Kurt Lewin and Carl Hoveland who was also a psychologist. These were the men who gave the field its foundational methodological and theoretical impetus. They laid the foundation which

Berelson must have felt was not being built upon and therefore was withering away. This prognosis must have been informed by the fact that, apart from the fact that some of them were either dead or dying, Lazarsfeld and Lasswell had announced that they were leaving for their original discipline, mathematics and political science respectively.

Another pioneering scholar, Wilbur Schramm has also observed that they came into communication research “carrying their own disciplines with them” (Schramm: 1983, p.8). They were then preparing to return to those disciplines to continue their academic sojourn. The analogy offered by Schramm to describe the beginning is quite apt:

For many years, scholars, travelling with their own disciplinary maps, had stopped to look at communication problems, as travellers stopped to refresh themselves at the Jordanian oasis, and then moved on. (Schramm: 1983, p.9)

The point is that the roots of communication and media studies are deep in many older disciplines. Communication research is a point of convergence from these various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. What unites them and their disciples is human communication, i.e. all forms of human symbolic interaction, not just media studies and related professions (Craig, n.d.). The multidisciplinary nature of communication research means that any student in the field, as Wilbur Schramm observed some decades ago, must “look in many places for his basic material.” According to him, “to comprehend the sum total of existing knowledge of human communication,” such a student “must search at least half a “dozen scholarly field” (Schramm: 1974, p.6).

The other point clear in Berelson's lamentation was that, by late 1950s and early 1960s, some of the dominant theoretical orthodoxies in communication were already being critically challenged and even reversed. Berelson had worked with Lazarsfeld at Colombia University Bureau of Applied Social Research in the 1940s and 1950s. One of the canonical studies in communication research was conducted by the Bureau under Lazarsfeld's leadership during this period. Their interpretation of the study led to the premature conclusion that Mass Communication was not as powerful as earlier thought (Berelson et al (1954), Lazarsfeld et al (1948)). As Steven Chaffee has noted, many members of the Bureau “virtually gave up on Communication as a research topic” (Chaffee: 1983, p.19).

But communication studies and research did not end with Berelson and the other pioneers who went back to their earlier areas of academic concern from which they had ventured into Communication. As Wilbur Schramm and others later observed, the late 1950s was really a period of transition. An era was coming to a close bringing into being a new one. While in the opinion of Everett Rogers the pioneers “provided a rich diversity of intellectual backgrounds for communication research”, they did not create an institutionalised structure for communication research (Rogers: 1983, p.21). As one of the leading journals in the field of communication remarked in 1983, Berelson's lamentation marked “the emergence of a vital new discipline”.

By the 1960s, a new set of scholars was emerging. These were not itinerant visitors. They have come to stay and be identified as Communication scholars who, in the words of Schramm, “gave every indication that they intended to spend their careers in the new academic oasis” (op. cit.).

It is important to observe that these new scholars and the structures they created centred on teaching communication skills in journalism, speech and broadcasting. As the programme thus created began to develop, courses in theory, research method and effects of communication were added. “And so, gradually”, Schramm noted, “the name 'communication' or 'communications' began to appear in connection with those departments and schools” (op. cit.)

Today, not only has Berelson's prophecy failed, the field of communication research and scholarship has blossomed in all parts of the world. In Nigeria today, there are Departments of Mass Communication in 54 universities and 26 polytechnics. These figures do not include many others that have been forced to contract some form of matrimonial relationship with communication in order to save their departments from rationalisation because of poor student enrolment. Hence, you have in some universities, Yoruba and Communication Arts, Communication and Language Arts, Linguistic and Communication, Theatre and Communication Arts, and such double-barrel nomenclatures. Sometime, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has been reluctant in approving such “flirting”, preferring, to borrow the argot of Lagos street boys, that everyone bears his father's name.

The 'ferment' and explosion in communication research and scholarship is a worldwide phenomenon. The expansion is of course due to many factors. The Second World War clearly brought out the

power of mass communication. The use of propaganda by the two sides in the war stimulated a lot of research, particularly in the United States during and after the war. As the U.N. declared, war begins in the heart of men, the super powers that emerged after the war came to the realisation that to conquer and control others, mass communication will be crucial. It has since then been a battle over meaning, a struggle over who defines the social, political and economic landscape we all inhabit as humans. Mass Communication has been a strategic instrument in the struggle for hegemony, both within nations and globally.

The global institutionalisation of Western liberal democracy has also been a major impetus to the development of communication at both the applied and academic levels. There is a generally accepted assumption across ideological and political divides that Mass Communication, particularly journalism is symbiotically related to democratic politics. These days, Public Relations and Advertising are also assuming some importance in the political arena where symbolic politics looms so large. This has stimulated not only the practice of journalism but has also spurred academic interests in the study of political communication. Whether they love it or not, politicians and other interest claimants need the mass media to push their claims in the public space. The desire of powerful social groups to conquer and dominate the minds and hearts of their fellow human beings in the struggle for power has greatly increased the importance of mass communication. While authoritarian regimes could rely on instruments of force and coercion to command obedience, democratic regimes have realised that it is more efficient and effective to rely on symbolic manipulation to 'manufacture consent.' This is what some scholars (Nye 2002, Frazar 2003) called 'soft power' which flows mainly through the instrumentality of mass communication. As face-to-face communication has increasingly become more difficult and inefficient, the mass media have become highly prized and strategic resource for all forms of advocates, especially politicians and commercial corporate operators.

It is interesting to observe that this is one of the areas Berelson in the 1959 article earlier referred to as 'minor' and less influential during the period he regarded as the pioneering period of communication research.

Of recent, we have also seen the impact of Information and Communication Technologies in not only the way we communicate as individuals, but importantly in the practice (ICTs) of Mass Communication. Without doubt, ICTs have widened the public space, accommodating more voices, challenging the power of the ruling

classes in many parts of the world over the control of public communication and eroding and corroding the mediatory and agenda-setting power of journalism. In what is now called 'citizen journalism', everybody is a potential journalist just as everyone who can hold a microphone, especially if he/she has a good voice, a pretty face and dresses well, often claims some expertise in Public Relations. This has also opened up new areas of academic interests. The idea of Information Society has also further brought to the fore the importance of communication and its instrumentalities in this era of globalisation. In fact, the ICTs are the main instruments and channels of globalisation.

Another factor has been economic development, especially the development of big multinational companies. The applied side of communication, particularly advertising, has seen a phenomenal growth because of the needs of companies to market themselves, their products and the philosophy and ideology supporting their existence in a highly competitive economic environment. At the national level, particularly in the developing world, there is the academic tradition that holds that the mass media are crucial to national development (Oso, 2002). This tradition, promoted mainly by American scholars in the 1960s, has seen a resurgence lately in such areas as health campaigns, behaviour and attitude change communication through such U.N. agencies like UNICEF, UNFPA, etc.

We may also note the concentrated attention paid to communication by the whole world through the UNESCO in the 1970s during the debate on the New World Information and Communication Order. That debate, with all the acrimony and controversies it generated, stimulated a lot of scholarly and popular attention to the importance of information and communication. The period stimulated research in the areas of news flow, cultural/media imperialism and media education development and curriculum.

Mass Communication education in Nigeria was not prominent until after independence. Like the situation in Britain, early Nigerian journalists and broadcasters acquired their professional training on the job. It was not until 1954 that a two-week vocation course was organised for journalists at the University of Ibadan. Others were to follow. Although most of the country's education in terms of structure, philosophy and curricula was inherited from Britain, this was largely not so with mass communication education. This is ironical in the sense that the mass media (newspapers, broadcasting and films) were British transplants. The difference in the case of mass communication education was because the British had no model to offer. While early Nigerian

journalists turned to liberal British ideas and opinion in their pungent anti-colonial writings, the model of Mass Communication education came from America. And this was after independence. In 1961, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe (aka Zik) established a Department of Journalism called the Jackson College of Journalism at the newly established University of Nigeria, Nsukka. As should be expected, the college was an American transplant with emphasis on skill training. It will be recalled that Zik had been trained as a journalist at the prestigious Columbia University and practised the profession in Ghana and Nigeria where he established the first newspaper chain with the West Africa Pilot established in 1937 as the flagship. There is no doubt that communication has a deep root and foundation in praxis and this has largely influenced popular perception of its existence and the establishment of academic programmes in our universities.

The root of communication scholarship in journalism and other skill-based programmes has continued to define the field in the country. It seems to me that we have lost sight of our eclectic origin as a field that was planted by many people coming from diverse disciplines. While no one can deny the fact that in today's highly mediated world, Mass Communication is the most visible aspect of human communication, it is, as Denis McQuail has noted, "only one part of a wider field of enquiry into human communication" (McQuail: 2005, p.16). To me, communication studies is more than Mass Communication. It is a field, and not just a discipline which has, over the years since its beginning, drawn inspiration from many sources in the humanities and social sciences. While the social science perspectives (especially in its empiricist and functionalist tradition) seem to have prevailed especially in its research methodologies and even theories, the seminal contributions of literary and cultural studies could not be discarded. In addition, the field has branched into many areas, e.g. development communication, health communication, agricultural communication, political communication, marketing communication, film studies which in some cases are now assuming their own distinctive personalities.

The main strength of communication as a field of scholarly concern is its interdisciplinary nature "where a range of existing academic disciplines meet, bringing their own particular questions, concerns and intellectual traditions with them. (Deacon, et al: 1997, p.2) This is as it should be because, properly understood, communication is life. The encounters between and among these different intellectual traditions give communication studies its dynamism and relevance to contemporary social and cultural life. Our research and teaching must reflect this

broad interdisciplinary outlook in order to capture the rich diversity of contemporary life. I feel uncomfortable with those who want to limit the focus of communication studies to only mass communication translated to mean skill acquisition in Journalism, Broadcasting, Public Relations and Advertising. This, to my mind, does not only do injustice to the intellectual history of the field, but also easily falls into the current orthodoxy in education, i.e. the marketisation of intellectual enterprise. In parenthesis, let me observe that this process is already evident in its debilitating effect in the choice students make in the trinity that predominantly make up mass communication education in the country. Journalism is becoming the ghetto of the three as more and more students go for Public Relations and Advertising, and Broadcasting.

Zik's emphasis of the training and acquisition of journalism skills should be understandable. Apart from being a journalist, Zik and the indigenous elite of the colonial period saw in journalism a weapon to fight the colonial power for Africa's emancipation. The world created by colonialism and its dehumanising experience made journalism a ready weapon in the struggle against British hegemony. The instrumentalist conception of the press in the hands of Zik and his nationalist counterparts is evident in the motto of the West African Pilot, "Show The Light, The People Will Find The Way". The role of the press as light bearers has never diminished in importance, across societies of the world. This assertion is further elucidated in the discussion that follows.

THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF THE NIGERIAN PRESS

The Nigerian mass media system has developed within the dynamics of the country's political economy. While so much has been said and written about its political character and contributions to the struggle for independence and democracy, not much of sustained analysis has been devoted to the influence of its material and market situation. If the trend was not so noticeable some decades ago, the dual character of the media, as an ideological/political apparatus on the one hand, and as an industrial organisation on the other has now come into the open.

While the newspaper press started, and today remains, as private enterprise, broadcasting started and remains largely state-owned. Unlike in the 1970s and '80s when government owned newspapers overshadowed privately owned ones, no newspaper of consequence is today owned by any government in the country. Another feature of the sector is the very low circulation of all the newspapers. Although there are no reliable data, no newspaper in Nigeria sells up to 100,000 copies per day. The daily print-run of some is as low as 5,000 copies. And they

all go by the description 'national newspapers'. Ironically, this does not affect their influence in the nation's politics and among politicians. Another feature of the press is that almost all the existing newspapers are now part of some business conglomerates. The sector has been commercialised since the 1930s (Oso, 1991).

In the broadcasting sector, government ownership remains dominant. Figures from the website of the national regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission (N.B.C.) show that, of 82 television stations in the country, the Federal Government owns 41; State Governments own 29; while private proprietors own 12. The Federal Government owns 43 radio stations out of 121, while state governments own 54 and private proprietors own 24.

	Television	Radio	Total
Federal	41	43	84
State	29	54	83
Private	12	24	36
Total	82	121	203

Table 1:

Ownership of Broadcasting Sector

While broadcasting started as a public service institution modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation, it has been commercialised under a neo-liberal economic philosophy since the 1980s. I have been interested in showing that despite differences in historical origin, ownership and the cantankerous and highly voluble political orientation of the newspapers, the Nigerian mass media system is now market-driven (Oso, 2007). In the words of a former Minister of Information during the military era, Professor Sam Oyovbaire, Nigeria has a capitalist press. For instance, it was possible some years back to argue that public and private media organisations were operating under two different forms, philosophies and principles, separated by different funding and market principles. While this case may have some ring of truth to it in the case of broadcasting before the mid-1980s, it certainly could not hold in the case of the newspapers. Certainly not now for both.

Another main characteristics of the country's media landscape is that it is concentrated in South, particularly in the South-West, although, not necessarily predominantly owned by citizens from the South-West geo-political zone. Apart from the fact that this reflects the history of the

development of mass media, it is also determined by the country's political economy.

The legacy of the past, left by the early Nigerian proprietor-editors, the “Black Victorians” as Increase Coker would call them, continues to influence and haunt journalism in Nigeria. That inheritance is the combative political character of the pioneers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This legacy continues to form the basis of evaluation and discussion on the performance and role of the Nigerian press including its relationship with the state. Much of the academic and popular discussion on the Nigerian press tends to be cast within the concept of freedom of the press. There is a lot of emphasis on the role played by the press in Nigerian politics from the colonial days when politics and journalism were more or less fused together. It has been difficult to separate them. Peter Golding and Philip Elliot summed up the historical process thus:

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

I have been interested in the development of this process, paying particular attention to the factors that motivated the pioneer journalists in their critical onslaught on the colonial administration. It is my belief that we cannot adequately understand the media without situating them within the socio-historical context within which they exist. These factors, produced mainly by the dynamics of the colonial and post-colonial situation, have to be taken on board in any discussion of the performance of the Nigerian mass media during any period since 1859 when the first newspaper was established. Much of the current discussion tends to neglect them. While many commentators have laid a lot of premium on the 'political', I have been more interested in unravelling the material and market determinants which have largely been responsible for the type of media industry we have. The political/radical orientation of either the early press or later day successors was largely motivated by the economic and political interests of their owners and the market imperative for survival.

Any analysis of the media must take on board the way market imperatives determine the range and forms of media production and the resulting outputs. For instance, it appears to me that the disappearance of provincial and government owned newspapers is related to the changes in the Nigerian economy and politics. I am also interested in the question: “Who are the main beneficiaries of the power of the press?” (Oso, 2002)

My basic argument has been that, in the 'last instance', the Nigerian press operates within the changing framework of the country's political economy. Much of the current approach is to neglect this crucial dimension and focus almost exclusively on the constraints and controls exerted by the state on media development in general and news production in particular. In such an analysis, attention is concentrated on the relations between the mass media and political and state institutions. They are treated as separate power blocs with little or no connection to the structure of the economy. It seems this almost exclusive focus on media-state relationship bears witness to the historical origin of the Nigerian press; an institution born out of anti-colonial nationalist protest. The “political” character of the Nigerian press has further led many analysts to miss the material interests which underpin its development and products and the main interests the media serve.

The Birth of a 'Political' Press

The origin of the Nigerian press is closely linked to the Christian missionary zeal to educate, evangelize and civilize the 'natives' of their new colonies. In Nigeria, the British colonial administration was not initially interested, in cultural propagation; that sphere of the colonial enterprise was left to the missionaries. Although the Church and the School were the main centres of cultural activities, journalism was recognised for its supplementary role as an instrument of propaganda and publicity for Christianity and as a valuable medium for self-education. The newspaper was ostensibly an extension of the pulpit, an instrument to draw the native into the civilised world of Christianity.

In December 1859, The Rev. Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), brought out Nigeria's first newspaper, the *Ìwé Ìròhìn Fún Àwọn Ará Ègbá àti Yorùbá* (literally meaning the paper of news for the Egba people and Yorubas). Published in Yorùbá at a price of 120 cowries, the paper appeared every fortnight. In March 1860, it became bilingual, with the introduction of an English supplement. The objective of *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, according to Rev. Townsend was “to get the

people to read, i.e. to beget the habit of seeking for information by reading" (quoted in Hyde: 1972, p.61). The paper started by publishing church matters but later the content was broadened to include "commercial news about producer prices of palm-oil, etc. ..." The paper was also "a vigorous critic of the evils of the slave trade, an ardent advocate of the diversion of trade and commerce from human beings to produce and merchandise" (Coker, n.d. p.2). The paper carried advertisements from local firms and Government agencies.

A close reading of *Ìwé Ìròhìn* will put a lie to the ecumenical and philanthropic argument advanced for its establishment. The real impact of the *Ìwé Ìròhìn* was in local politics rather than in evangelism and education. The paper, according to an account, was Townsend's "chief weapon in his ambitious political propaganda and shrewd manoeuvring for power in Egba/land". He also used the paper in his involvement in Egba/Lagos politics. This earned him the displeasure of the Lagos colonial governments; thus attempts were made to control it based on the government accusation that it was aggravating problems of foreign policy (Omu: 1976, p.8). The paper died during a political uprising. The Egbas rose in 1867 to expel all Europeans in their midst, and in the struggle, destroyed the Mission's printing press. I am sure many of us can easily draw a parallel between what the Egbas did 145 years ago and what we are witnessing with Boko Haram today. The media, because of their perceived power, are hated by those who feel disadvantaged especially during political crisis.

Many analysts have made so much of *Ìwé Ìròhìn's* evangelical and civilising mission thus neglecting its role as part of the colonial ideological and hegemonic project. To ignore the connection between colonialism and missionary activities is to de-historize the role of the missionaries in providing the cultural apparatus for African reception of Western capitalist values and hegemony. The *Ìwé Ìròhìn* was not just an organ of information and education; it was part of the ideological superstructure of British imperial power. History has it that the paper was interested in the promotion of the so-called legitimate commerce and was "a faithful reporter and commentator on the political development of the times" (Coker: n.d., Pp.3-4).

We must also note the fact that the introduction of the English supplement over time over-shadowed the Yorùbá section (Omu: 1967), thus signalling the beginning of the marginalisation of Yorùbá and other indigenous languages in the mass media (Oso, 2006). While it was convenient for Townsend to hide under evangelism and education as his main objectives, it is clear to us that the fundamental material

interest was how to meet the commercial and mercantilist needs of the British when the slavery trade was no more economical. More fundamentally, this historical development indicates the political and elitist orientation of Townsend and his paper. Predictably, the readership of the paper was limited to the small circle of educated African elite who saw themselves as intermediaries between the non-literate indigenes and the colonial administration. It was also from this circle of educated Africans that Nigeria's pioneer journalists were drawn. Most of them were West-Indian or ex-slave returnees or their children from Sierra Leone.

These pioneers were products of the colonial situation. This situation had a lot of bearing on their outlook, approach and definition of journalism within the context and limitations provided by colonialism and of course their objective interests as colonial subjects.

Frantz Fanon has said that the colonial world was divided into two. There was the world of the coloniser and the other, for the colonised, The Lagos colonial society was like this: the white minority living in a world separated and quite distinct from the world of the African "natives". The structure of the Lagos political system was the crown colony type of government, consisting of a governor, an executive and a Legislative Council, all dependent on a bureaucracy. All these institutions were manned by European officials.

The British colonial policy was for an eventual devolution of power to Africans. It was stated that Africans would be trained "in the arts of civilization and government until they shall grow into a nation capable of protecting themselves and of managing their own affairs..." (quoted in Bamiduro: 1981, p.57). This policy was hardly followed, despite reiteration by the colonial government. The crown colony system did not provide the needed political education and experience for the indigenes. Africans were not allowed to participate in government. For example, employments were not open to them in the colonial civil service and other institutions. Those employed were in subordinate positions to their European counterparts, despite possessing equal training and qualifications. British officials received higher salaries and allowances than Africans for the same jobs. Residential and social segregation introduced initially for health reasons continued for a long time (Coleman: 1959, p.151). Qualified Africans were denied promotion and passed over because of 'character deficiencies'. The policy of indirect rule later introduced by Lord Lugard did not help the situation. As late as 1950s, a Briton, Miss Perham, was advocating that no African should be appointed to the administrative service, which she said was

an alien superstructure. She wanted them to be restricted to the service of the Native Authorities (Crowther: 1970, p.54). It was not until the mid-1950s that educated Africans started to participate "in the system to any meaningful extent" (Coleman: op cit, p.55).

This discrimination in the political sphere was also evident in business and trading. European firms dominated the trade in produce and the export-import sector of the colonial economy. Independent African traders were almost pushed out of this sector because of the monopolistic practices of the European mercantile firms grouped together in the Association of West African Merchants. For example, many African traders resented the activities of the Royal Niger Company, which, prior to 1900, was both a trading/commercial enterprise and a government in Northern Nigeria. The dominance of European firms especially the United African Company (UAC) could be seen from the fact that by the 1950s, the company was controlling "more than 40 per cent of Nigeria's import-export trade. As late as 1949, it handled 54 per cent of commercial merchandise imports into Nigeria and purchased, on behalf of Nigerian marketing boards, 45 per cent of all non-mineral exports" (Coleman: ibid, p.80). Apart from trading, the financial and shipping sectors of the economy were predominantly European. This further enhanced the dominance of the big mercantile firms who have access to credit facilities.

There was also the apparent government support for the European firms in the form of allocation of trading licenses, the administration of trade controls and the formulation of tax policies (Coleman, ibid, p.81).

According to Coleman, this "near totality of economic power exercised by a small group of European firms, together with apparent government support or toleration of that power, gave rise to a popular image of alien collusion and exploitation (ibid). Added to this was the growing disillusionment of the embryo African intellectuals with the Christian missionaries.

It was under this alienating and frustrating environment of political, administrative and social discrimination, virtual economic strangulation and the superior-inferior social relationships inherent in the colonial situation that the Nigerian press was born toward the end of the 19th century and matured in during the first half of the 20th century. It is no wonder then to observe that "the early press was inevitably a political press" (Omu, 1978, p.11). The highly critical tone reflected the social, political and economic climate of the period.

Journalism was one of the few areas left open to many of the educated elite both in terms of business undertaking and as a forum to vent their grievances, frustration and anger against the colonial establishment. Until the establishment of the Daily Times, the Lagos European commercial establishment did not bother to set up a newspaper. Having been denied the opportunities to participate in business and the colonial administration, some of them saw printing and the newspaper industry as an avenue to make a living. The newspaper was also an avenue for them to criticise the monopolistic practices of European mercantile firms and the government.

The frustration and resentment of these early newspapers meant a change in the philosophy of the press. Instead of the ostensible importance the missionaries attached to literacy and ecumenical issues, African journalists were more interested in political and cultural awareness by their fellow Africans. They wanted to influence events through their papers and create "a strong public opinion which the colonial government could not easily disregard" (Omu, 1978, p.11). They assumed the role of opposition as the voice of the indigenous population.

They also wanted to exploit the growth in education and the general expansion in literacy in Lagos. Many of them also hoped to capitalise on the growing advertising market following the expansion in commerce in the Lagos colony.

The early press could rightly be called a 'Lagos Press'. Most of them were established in Lagos, and until Ernest Ikoli established the African Messenger in 1920, the proprietor-editors were people of Yoruba origin. The contents of the papers were mostly about issues affecting Lagos and its immediate environs. Also the leadership was mainly among the educated Lagos elite whose interests were most frequently represented and vigorously defended. One critic then complained,

They all address themselves only to the comparatively small number of English reading people on the island ... the very large number of Yoruba readers is all neglected and left to suffer from intellectual starvation as if they also are not in the country... (quoted in Omu, 1978, p.31).

According to Bamiduro, "The interests and concerns of the large bulk of the unlettered native community were only publicised when they coincided with those of the educated portion of the community" (Bamiduro, 1981, p.61).

Another factor that made the issues relevant to those outside Lagos was the racial-cultural context in which they were presented by the press.

Despite the limited readership and low standard of these papers, they did exert a lot of influence on their environment. They bore the personality and philosophy of their owners, who used them to express their view points on issues of the day. The first newspaper to be established by an African, Robert Campbell, declared its editorial policy as:

To promote the interest and welfare of Lagos and its people, and not to serve those of any party, but in all question to the side of right-right, not in the estimation of this man or that, but in the estimation of its editor; and hence we shall never consult any one as to what we shall say or what we forbear to say
(quoted in Bamiduro, ibid, p.36)

Between 1880 when the Anglo-African first appeared and 1900, many other newspapers were established. Many of them died in infancy. Though short-lived, they left their foot prints in the sand of the anti-colonial struggle by providing “a means of criticism of the authorities and spreading dissatisfaction with official plans and policies” (Omu, 1978, p.11). They began the tradition among Nigerian journalists of seeing the press as “the opposition ... and rival of the government” (ibid). This critical oppositional stance of the Lagos press toward the government made many colonial officials regard Lagos as the “storm centre of administrative politics and the grave of reputation” (Bamiduro, op cit, p.55). According to an editor of one of the papers, “The issues of newspapers ... (were) regarded incomplete unless they contained attack on some Government official of high rank or prominent member of the European or Native community” (quoted in Bamiduro, op. cit, p.52). I have a feeling that many of us could hear the echoes of President Jonathan's recent lamentation that criticising him has become the stock-in-trade of the newspapers.

In the light of this strong press opposition, the government as far back as 1862, made effort to control the press through legislation. That year, Governor Freeman unsuccessfully sought permission from the colonial office in London to impose a tax on what he claimed was “dangerous instrument in the hands of semi-civilized Negroes” (Omu, 1978, p.173).

Despite the fact that a lot has been made of the patriotism of these early papers and their owners because of their political stand against the

colonial administration, I am of the view that their criticism of the government was limited and motivated by the self-interest of the African elite. Though many of them might not have accepted British colonial rule as enthusiastically as Campbell, none of them questioned the fundamental bases of colonialism. Such limitation could also be seen in the fact that their criticisms were conducted within the received ideology of liberalism as a political and economic philosophy.

What these proprietor-editors, as the other members of the African elite, were against, were their exclusion from the political decision making process and the virtual economic strangulation by the European trading firms. Their efforts and agitation were mainly directed at securing political and administrative reforms that would guarantee them a place and share in the colonial administration. In short, they wanted to participate as a junior partner in the exploitation of the unlettered 'native' masses. Their “grievances” were not the grievances of the rest of the Nigerian society. They were the 'grievances' of the educated elite about the plums of office; they wanted to share with the British which plums would have made them more and more partners in the exploitation of the unlettered masses” (Ayandele, 1974, pp. 73-74). The mainstream politics of today definitely has a long history!

We could see the point we are making about the limited scope of the grievances of the early journalists if we note that a major and constant theme in their agitations and politics was the principle of representation. After Lagos had been separated from the Gold Coast (now Ghana) administration in 1886, the Observer called for the establishment of a legislature and declared: “In the name of the whole of Lagos community, we ask ... how long will we tamely submit to taxation without representation” (Omu, 1978, p.148). Also the Lagos Times while assuring the colonial administration that “we are not clamouring for immediate independence for the sufficient reason that we are not prepared for it,” declared that:

It is time for us to boldly ask England to associate us with themselves in the matter of regulating and superintending our affairs... none would say that we have no men intelligent enough or patriotic enough to devote some of their time to act as our representatives in the council (quoted in Bamiduro, op cit, p.60).

The issue was to dominate the political agenda for a long time, well into the 20th century. The important point however is that the 'intelligent and patriotic' men spoken of in the above Lagos Times editorial were the

educated elite whose interests and lifestyles were quite different from those of the uneducated masses who, for a long time, resisted British colonial rule until they were subdued by the maxim-guns.

Most commentators on the history of the Nigerian press, especially this early part, do not take cognizance of this apparent self-interestedness in the anti-colonial campaign of the press. That is to say that their agitation for constitutional changes were motivated by what they stood to gain as members of the governing class or as representatives of the 'native' population. As Coleman has pointed out, "Nationalism is not merely the sum of accumulated grievances; it is equally an awareness of greater possibilities and opportunities" (Coleman, 1958, p.89).

More importantly in this regard, the commentators have down-played the economic conditions which forced the early journalists into the trade. We need to recognise that it was the frustrated ambition of the nascent indigenous entrepreneur class that made some of them go into journalism as a profession, a business, and an avenue for political agitation. As could be expected, these commercial and political aspects were down-played by these pioneers. They emphasised the philanthropic, educational and nationalistic motives above all else. Omu pointed out that "the newspaper men themselves helped in no small measure to create this tradition of sacrifice and philanthropy. They advertised themselves as motivated by a 'strong sense of obligation' which they owed to their country and as doing public duty which the people did not appear to appreciate" (Omu, 1978, p.28). After noting the strong commercial and economic push, he (Omu) categorised them into two:

Those anxious to recover from financial ruin arising from the bankruptcy of European firms in or with which they were employed or associated or from the monopolistic practices of Europeans who came to dominate the profitable trade between Lagos and the River Niger; and those in want of employment owing to dismissals and resignations from jobs, prohibitions from legal practice and incapacitation from illness. In other words, the early newspaper press was the refuge open to many whose careers had been ruined (ibid).

As we shall see presently, it could also be argued that economic considerations contributed to the development of the patriotic or racial feelings of the proprietor-editors in the depressing economic situation of the 1880s and after.

One of the most prominent proprietor-editors of the time, J. Payne Jackson, was honest enough to admit that his paper, the Lagos Weekly Record was not "a public benevolent institution (or) philanthropic charity". Jackson's paper relied on government advertisement subsidy; though there was no evidence to show that this directly affected its editorial policy. The government advertisement came from Governor Carter as a compensation for Jackson's support for the European during the Anglo-Ijebu war. He had earlier gone into journalism and opposition to European interests after failing in business because of what he later described as "the cruel greed of European commerce" on the Lower Niger. His son, Thomas Horatio Jackson, who took over after his death, was equally motivated by commercial interests. He aspired to be the African Northcliffe, one of the pioneers of the Fleet Street commercial revolution. His aspiration was to have a chain of newspapers all over West Africa as part of his SAMADU Group, which included a shipping company, and a palm produce trading company on the Niger.

The paramountcy of economic consideration in the calculation of the 19th century journalists was also evident in their support for British policy on what Governor Moloney called the 'Interior Question'. The issue arose from the internecine warfare between the various Yoruba sub-groups in the interior outside Lagos. This was of great concern to the British and the Lagos elite because these wars disrupted trade between Lagos and the hinterland. As a commercial centre, Lagos depended on trade and commercial relations with these areas. The Saros (as the Sierra Leonian emigrants were called), being 'sons of the soil' had an advantage over the Europeans in this commercial transaction as middlemen between the interior and the mercantile firms in Lagos. Before 1877 the disruptions caused by the wars affected many Saros as well as indigenous Lagos traders. Among these traders were the newspaper-men, their businesses varying from the comparatively large establishments of Richard Blaze and J.S. Leigh to the commercial agencies of John Jackson. Apart from this direct effect, the wars also affected the papers' advertisement patronage. Their owners were also interested in increased circulation which would follow the opening up of the interior.

It was therefore in their primary economic interest to support the colonial conquest of the Lagos hinterland. This they enthusiastically did. They carried out strong propaganda in support of British military intervention and expansionist policy in these areas. The high point of such propaganda support came in the 1890s when Jackson's Lagos

Weekly Record ceaselessly urged Governor Carter to use force in settling the 'Interior Question'. As Robert July has noted, Jackson's "cordial view of British influence in Africa reflected in part Jackson's belief, shared by many Lagosians, that only strong action by the administration at Lagos could bring about the peace in the land necessary for the commercial health of the country" (July: 1968, p.350). In May 1892, the Lagos government invaded and conquered Ijebuland. Jackson accompanied the army as a war correspondent. For his support, Governor Carter compensated his paper with government advertisements.

This action of Lagos elite was contrary to their opposition to British and French policies outside Yorubaland. The press was vigorously against the Berlin Conference and they campaigned against the activities and rule of the Royal Niger Company. They were against the extension of the company's influence to the Oil Rivers, which could have affected them.

The point I will like to stress is that the collaborative role of the press in the expansion and consolidation of British rule in Nigeria and/or resistance to it including agitations for political and constitutional changes were as much dictated by economic self-interest as any other nationalistic or humanitarian reason. In this vein, Omu has argued that "The desire to make money often blended with the desire to influence public opinion and advocate causes for personal and communal ends; and economic ambitions were often intertwined with threads of philanthropy" (Omu, 1978, p.29).

The ownership and control of the press during this formative period was limited to these small groups of educated individuals who often combined both management (proprietorship) with professional (editorial) activities. They were the publishers, printers, editors and sometimes vendors. This was the dominant trend till the end of the First World War.

End of the Pioneers: The Instrumentalisation of the Press

With the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 and the increase in nationalist tempo, there was an increase in the number and variety of newspapers. In contrast to sixteen papers published between 1880 and 1914, sixty-four were published between 1914 and 1945. The amalgamation led to an increase in the market and circulation of newspapers and new opportunities owing, for instance, to better communication. However, the most important factor that stimulated the growth and changes in the newspaper industry was

the advent of electoral politics. The industry expanded with the constitutional changes which gradually devolved power to the indigenous educated elite. The changes were not limited to ownership and control but included pattern of media partisanship. The close parallel between newspapers and political parties began during the period starting with the legislative council election under the 1922 Clifford Constitution. All the leading newspaper owners and journalists were also leaders of the main political parties, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P.) and the Nigerian Youth Movement (N.Y.M.) The newspapers aligned themselves to each of these parties during the campaign. According to Fred Omu, from the 1920s, the newspapers "shifted their focus from that of political group supporters to organs of the political parties." (Omu: 1978, p.232)

The newspaper became a major instrument not only of political party publicity but of recruitment and a vehicle for attaining political power. To a good number of the pre-independent political parties, having a newspaper as an ally was an organisational imperative. Writing of the Nnamdi Azikwe led National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (N.C.N.C.), James Coleman provided this instructive observation:

... during the period ... the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons, then the leading nationalist organisation in Nigeria, existed only in the pages of Nnamdi Azikwe's chain of newspapers; organisationally it was moribund. (op. cit, 1960, p.350)

The importance attached to the party newspaper was so enormous that Coleman believed that party organisations were built "around the press, rather than around organised members." (ibid) Further, the newspaper industry benefited from the growth in private commercial printing establishments. It was now possible for newspaper owners to publish without owning a printing press.

The most important changes in the structure of ownership came with the dominance of Nigerians in the industry. More importantly, the small-scale owner-editor operations of the pre-war years gave way to corporate ownership. The focus and horizon of the papers, if not the interests represented was now broadened, going beyond Lagos.

The new trend in corporate ownership started with the establishment of the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company (N.P.P.C.) in 1925. The company was set-up by a group of European individuals and firms led by the Chairman of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Richard

Barrow and some Nigerians, notably Sir Adeyemo Alakija. Around this time, Ernest Ikoli's paper, the African Messenger, was in financial trouble. By agreement, the N.P.P.C. took over the Messenger, and in 1926 launched the Nigerian Daily Times with Ikoli as the Editor. Another of the limited liability companies set up during this time was the Nigeria Press Limited. Established in 1930 by T.A. Doherty, I.A. Ogunlana and Victor Babamuboni, it continued the publication of the Nigeria Daily Telegraph. Herbert Merculay, who was to become the father of Nigerian Nationalism, and Dr. T.A. Caulcrick also combined to form a joint venture which also continued the publication of the Daily News, the first Nigerian daily newspaper. These two companies due to poor financial support and inability to compete successfully with the Daily Times, soon collapsed.

From the start, the *Daily Times* was a successful newspaper. It was pro-government and pro-European business interests. It was established "chiefly to serve the interests of local expatriate commercial houses" (Coker, n.d. p.36). According to Increase Coker, the *Daily Times* was founded as a response to Macaulay's acquisition of the Lagos Daily News as an organ of his three year old Nigeria National Democratic Party (Coker, n.d. p.17). The paper's foreign link was reinforced in 1947 when it was bought over by the London Daily Mirror Group. Apart from being pro-business, the paper later diversified into many sectors of the economy and every branch of the newspaper industry.

The *Daily Times* was technically superior to its contemporaries; it was not of much importance in terms of nationalistic politics of the day. A former reporter with the paper and prominent politician, Chief Obafemi Awolowo assessed the paper in the following words:

The Daily Times was technically the best then in circulation but ... an unpardonably dull journalistic and literary product; a veritable stagnant pool of stale, colourless news; and a musty-reservoir of articles which lacked animation, pungency and nationalist flavour (Awolowo, 1960, p.82).

The *Daily Times* was not a nationalist newspaper in the mode of its predecessors and contemporaries. But neither was it independent nor apolitical. It was established by European commercial interests to promote metropolitan capital and its local allies.

It was the failure of the *Daily Times* to fire the imagination of Nigerians and reflect the rising tide of nationalism, which Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe was able to exploit with the establishment of the West African Pilot in 1937.

The paper accordingly was regarded as "a fire eating and aggressive nationalist paper of the highest order" in the tradition of Macaulay's Lagos Daily News, and the Nigeria Daily Telegraph (ibid).

The Pilot became a very popular newspaper attracting the best and the brightest young Nigerians, many of whom were later to become prominent journalists and politicians. Between 1937 and 1960, the Pilot dominated the Nigerian press scene; rising to overshadow other papers including the better produced Daily Times and its later main political rival, the Daily Service, organ of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). In fact, the Mirror take-over and reorganisation of the Daily Times was to meet the challenges posed by the popularity and dominance of the Pilot. The Pilot, like its owner, Zik, was to assume a prominent place in Nigeria's political history.

Dr. Azikwe was educated in America where he also worked as a journalist. He, therefore, brought his experience and political interest to bear on the Pilot and Nigeria journalism in general. On arrival in Nigeria from Ghana where he has also worked for three years as a journalist, he established the Zik Press Ltd. – a limited liability company with an initial capital of £5,000 with £2,644 paid up (Azikwe 1970, p.287). By 1960, the Zik Press had established newspapers in many parts of the country. These papers were: West African Pilot (Lagos), The Eastern Nigerian Guardian (Port Harcourt), The Nigeria Spokesman (Onitsha), The Southern Nigeria Defender (Warri), The Daily Comet (Kano), The Eastern Nigeria Sentinel (Enugu) and the Nigeria Monitor (Uyo). These towns were politically and economically strategic. Politically, they were important for Zik's political career. Economically, they have high potentials for better circulation and advertisement as urban centres. It is therefore not surprising that Zik described these ventures as "successful business". Actually he has seen the establishment of the papers as "my efforts to be economically secure and free from want" (Azikwe, ibid, p. 286). He had gone into journalism, among other reasons, to demonstrate that it could be a successful business enterprise (ibid, p. 291). Within a year of establishing the Pilot, he was able to do this.

After one year of existence, we declared a dividend of 15 percent. For the years 1939-43 we declare 7½ per cent for each year. In 1944 it was 12 per cent. The year the war ended, it was 8 per cent; in 1946 it was 15 per cent, in 1947 it was nil, in 1948 it was 15 per cent and in 1949 it was 20 per cent (Azikwe, ibid, p. 301).

From this initial base and the capital accumulated in the newspaper industry, Zik diversified into other areas including banking — the African Continental Bank which he formed in 1944. Other companies included the Zik Enterprise Limited, Nigeria Commodities Limited, African Book Group Limited, Nigeria Paper Company and the Nigeria Printing Supply Company Limited.

Just like their 19th century forebearers, Zik and the others downplayed the economic aspect of their journalistic enterprise. Rather, much capital was made of their nationalistic zeal – their struggle against colonial rule. In the maiden issue of the Pilot, Zik wrote “Our programme is based on the quest for social justice ... Economically, we aim at the eradication of such forces of profit motive which overlooks the African producer as a human being, and which lay unnecessary emphasis on material values” (Azikwe, 1970, p.296). But the Zik press was a profit making venture.

The Pilot was later to become Zik's political voice and weapon after his disenchantment with the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) and the formation of his National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (later changed to National Convention of Nigeria Citizen, NCNC). Before Zik arrived in the country, Lagos politics was polarised between two political parties, the NNDP led by Herbert Macaulay and the NYM. Zik joined the NYM and later became one of its leading figures. The NYM won all the three seats in the 1938 Lagos Legislative election. But trouble soon broke out among the top echelon of the party. This was over the selection of a candidate to contest a Lagos seat on the Legislative Council which became vacant in 1941. The party did not recover from this crisis. Zik was at the centre of this conflict and the Pilot served him well in the campaign against his opponents who won the selection contest and the subsequent election. In response to Pilot's attack, the other faction of the NYM converted the movement's newsletter, the Service, into a daily newspaper in 1938. Before then, the movement had relied on Zik and the Pilot for the dissemination of its objectives and activities.

Zik regarded the Daily Service as a competitor to his “financially-limited” enterprise as both papers were serving the same small reading public (Nnoli: 1978, p.142). Zik later left the NYM to form the NCNC in 1944. The Igbos in the organisation left with Zik and the NYM became mainly a Yoruba organisation. From then on, a press war began between the Daily Service and the West African Pilot, each representing different factions of the emerging political class. The war was conducted with appeals to primordial sentiments. The inter-ethnic

conflict thus generated has become the bane of the Nigerian press ever since. It has become an albatross, constraining its potential as a pan-Nigerian public sphere. This conflict though proclaimed by the various contending factions of the ruling class, masked the material interests of this class. In essence, Zik and his counterparts revived and continued the policy of the 19th century pioneers of using their papers both as a business enterprise and a propaganda machine for their political ambitions.

Zik's use of the Pilot for his political campaigns against his political opponents and later in the slanging match with the Daily Service could be regarded as the formal beginning of another dominant feature of the second phase in the history of Nigerian journalism. This was “a vituperative and cantankerous party press”. The emergence of the party affiliated newspapers was closely linked to the beginning of the formal incorporation of Nigerian politicians into the structure of state power. It also marked the beginning of the ethnization of the Nigerian press.

Though it is appropriate to recognise the contribution of the Pilot to the nationalist struggle, this must not make us lose sight of the economic and material interest underneath its style of journalism and its politics. Its adoption of sensational style of journalism and focus on human interests were part of journalistic strategies to boost sales and circulation, and attract followership.

Apart from Zik's commercial interest and the economic potential of taking a radical stand in terms of larger readership, the Pilot's nationalist fervour should be seen within the context of Zik's political ambition. Though the NCNC was the main political party in the country in the 1940s after the collapse of the NYM, the remnants of the movement still posed a challenge to Zik's dominance in Nigerian politics. This challenge increased after the formation of the Action Group. The Pilot was also in competition with the Daily Service and the European controlled Daily Times. There was therefore a running battle over the minds of Nigerians, that is, the control of popular images and meaning by the small group of emerging politicians mostly based in Lagos. Zik has also been charged with using the Pilot to denigrate non-Ibos, especially the Yorubas (Awolowo: 1960, Chapter 11).

The West African Pilot consolidated the instrumentalisation of the press as an organ of political competition. The Zik Press chain became a model for the Action Group when it was formed. It too established newspapers in many parts of the country to disseminate its messages and propaganda.

Table 2:
A.G.'s Chain of Newspapers

Name of Paper	Year Established	Location
Daily Service	1949	Lagos
Ìròhìn Yorùbá	1958	Ibadan
Nigerian Tribune	1949	Ibadan
Eastern Observer	1958	Onitsha
Middle Belt Herald	1958	Jos
Bornu People's Voice	1958	Jos (meant for the Kanuris in Borno area of the then Northern Region).
Northern Star	1958	Kano
COR Advocate	1958	Uyo
Mid-West Echo	1958	Benin

Other individual politicians established their own newspapers either to complement the activities of the major political parties or to champion their individual interests. Prominent among the latter was Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe's *The Daily Telegraph* which he started after he and some others left the NCNC to establish the Democratic Party of Nigeria. Among the former were the *West African Vanguard* based in Ilesha and the *Mid-West Champion* in Warri — all allies of the NCNC.

Though the NPC did not start any newspaper, it relied on the government owned media particularly the *Nigerian Citizen* and the quite influential Hausa language paper, *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo*. The *Gaskiya Corporation* published other indigenous language papers, namely *Nwanger v Tiv*, *Albishir*, *Nna Nyintu*, *Oka K'Idoma*, and *Jakadiya*. However, in 1961, the NPC launched a newspaper, *Daily Mail*.

One thing that is noticeable about the NPC is that, unlike the NCNC and AG, it did not make any effort to establish any newspaper outside the North. This was in line with NPC's policy of consolidating its political hold on the North unlike the other two which wanted to have a pan-Nigerian following in order to capture power of the Federal level. With the electoral arrangement and population distribution of the period, the NPC was sure of controlling power at the centre, once it could have effective control of its Northern base.

We can also observe that the NPC through the Northern Regional Government, concentrated effort at publishing indigenous language newspapers in the minority areas (among the Tiv, Idoma, Kanuri) of the North. These were areas where Hausa-Fulani hegemony was not totally secured and the areas the opposition parties were making incursion into.

We can also note that during this period, with the exception of the *Daily Times*, the major newspapers of the time were those linked organisationally and materially to the main political parties. Other independent efforts tended to be short-lived.

With the exception of the *Nigerian Tribune*, all the party affiliated newspapers did not survive the political crises that the nation witnessed in the 1960s and early '70s — military coups, civil war and the subsequent political and constitutional changes.

However, the Second Republic (1978 – 1983) saw the re-emergence of party-affiliated newspapers in the country. Probably, the most prominent of these papers was the *National and Sunday Concord* owned by the business mogul, the late M.K.O. Abiola, who was then a prominent member of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); and *The Guardian* owned by another business mogul, Alex Ibru. Other papers of the era included *The Democrat* owned by a group of Northern politicians and businessmen, the *Advocate* owned by Chief Adisa Akinloye, the National Chairman of the NPN, the *Weekly Eagle* owned by the flamboyant politician, K.O. Mbadiwe, Vice-President Alex Ekwueme's *Trumpet*, *Nigerian Call* owned by Victor Akan, the *Sun* owned by Anthony Enahoro, *The Nation* owned by Dr. Nwakemma Okoro; all the four were also NPN members, and they used their newspapers to consolidate their positions as champions of their respective ethnic groups within the party's zoning formula. The *Nigerian Tribune* resumed its function as Chief Awolowo and his party, *Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.)*'s propaganda organ.

The media were used during the period as veritable instruments to wage electoral warfare. For instance, Chief M.K.O. Abiola started the *Concord* newspapers more or less to fight Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his *Unity Party of Nigeria*. He later left the NPN in frustration, and so the editorial focus of the paper changed.

The press functioned more as organs of propaganda and publicity than objective carriers of information. What the late University of Lagos scholar, Delu Ogunade said of the *National Concord* is true of the others.

According to him, the paper “was a shrill, invective politically partisan paper that was more of embarrassment to the fine crop of professionals who wrote and edited it.” Prominent journalists were either active participants or mere close allies of the various political parties or their policies. A good example are the trio often referred to as the three musketeers of Nigerian journalism, Segun Osoba, Felix Adenaike and Peter Ajayi who were more or less card-carrying members of the U.P.N.

Needless to say broadcasting organisations, though owned by the states and run ostensibly as statutory public service institutions, were aligned to the political party in power in either at the federal or regional/state levels. Many state governments particularly in the U.P.N. states had to establish their own television stations in response to the perceived poor and negative coverage they were receiving from the Federal Government owned N.T.A. In order to limit their coverage and influence, the Federal Government limited them to UHF.

The mass media could be said to have temporarily buried their political orientation and partisanship during the era of the military. On coming to power, the military usually 'ban' politics, political parties and political activities under the pretext that “political parties and like organisations are synonymous with political discord”. The other reason is that such organisations could “constitute a source of opposition, a base for social mobilisation against the military and their aims and programmes.” (Dudley: 1982, p.85).

Within this context, the mass media constitute an important social institution that the military would like to control, court and incorporate in order to obtain the much needed social support and legitimacy. Many legal and extra-legal measures, including bribery and other material inducement, were taken in this regard. In my study of press and the Babangida regime (Oso, 2006a), I was able to establish the main corporate mechanism utilised by the regime to buy the support of the press. These included a network of patron-client relationship within the context of what Richard Joseph has called “prebendal politics” (Joseph, 1983). Despite these measures, the media, particularly the newspapers still exhibited its historical political orientation, high political profile and partisanship especially when contentious issues arose, 1973 census, corruption charges (e.g. the Tarka-Dabor and Gomwalk controversies during the Gowon regime), June 12 Crisis etc. It seems however that the height of such was during the Abacha regime. A section of the press due to constant government harassment went underground in what is now known as the Guerrilla press. Those involved became the active propaganda organs of the pro-democracy

struggle against the Abacha regime. Some of the journalists like Dele Alake, Bayo Onanuga, and Dapo Olorunyomi served as the foot soldiers of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) formed by the pro-democracy and human rights organisations to spearhead the struggle. On the other side of the battle were the Federal Government owned media organisations: the NTA, FRCN, New Nigerian and the Daily Times, and some privately owned newspapers like The Third Eye (based in Ibadan).

I have argued that the consensus engineered by IBB through various strategies and his romance with the Press ended when the civilian faction of the ruling class got frustrated by his “transition without end”. In addition, the constraint of the economy during the period occasioned by corruption and the poor implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme took its toll on various elements of the civil society including prominent members of the business and political class. Having being directly out of power for about 13 years, the politicians had to summon their ideological weapon to fight their way back to power. In that struggle, they have to choose and employ a discourse that resonate with popular beliefs; democracy, anti-corruption, freedom of the press, human rights and constitutionalism and rule of law. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election won by M.K.O. Abiola, a business mogul and newspaper proprietor finally broke the camel's back. IBB, till he announced he was stepping aside, the Sonekan Interim National Government he constituted and the Abacha regime that toppled the interim arrangement came under a sustained onslaught by the press in active collaboration with opposition groups in the civil society.

While no newspaper is currently owned by any of the political parties, the political sympathies of the main national newspapers are quite evident. Their link to the political parties is through their proprietors. Since 1999 when the current dispensation began, the main newspapers are those established by politicians.

In the broadcasting sector, apart from the dominance of the government in ownership, the proprietors of three of the most popular radio and television organisations, Raymond Dokpesi (Raypower and AIT), Murray Bruce (Silverbird TV and Rythm FM), Mike Ajegbo (Minaji TV and Radio) are P.D.P. members. Bola Tinubu of A.C.N. is affiliated to the Lagos based TVC. Apart from the fact that these proprietors are politicians, they are also actively involved in the major sectors of the nation's economy. For instance, Jimoh Ibrahim has been a major beneficiary of the privatisation programme and actively involved in the insurance, hotel, aviation and oil industries.

Table 3:
Newspapers Established by Politicians

Newspaper	Proprietor	Political Party Affiliation
Sun	Orji Kalu	P.D.P. / P.F.A.
The Nation	Bola Tinubu	A.C.N.
Compass	Gbenga Daniel	P.D.P.
The Independent	James Ibori	P.D.P.
The National Mirror, and Newswatch ¹	Jimoh Ibrahim	P.D.P.

In the broadcasting sector, apart from the dominance of the government in ownership, the proprietors of three of the most popular radio and television organisations, Raymond Dokpesi (Raypower and AIT), Murray Bruce (Silverbird TV and Rythm FM), Mike Ajegbo (Minaji TV and Radio) are P.D.P. members. Bola Tinubu of A.C.N. is affiliated to the Lagos based TVC. Apart from the fact that these proprietors are politicians, they are also actively involved in the major sectors of the nation's economy. For instance, Jimoh Ibrahim has been a major beneficiary of the privatisation programme and actively involved in the insurance, hotel, aviation and oil industries.

It is however to be observed that the degree of political partisanship has now been attenuated by certain factors. First, all the political parties are legally expected to be national in their structure. Related to this is the fact that the leading political actors with their eyes on the presidency, are trying to present themselves as “national leaders” not champions of ethnic, regional or religious groups.

Without any doubt, none of the political actors on the scene today can create the same level of passion and followership or has the charisma that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe or Alhaji Ahmadu Bello had in their time that could be channelled into newspaper patronage and readership. The creation of states has also further restricted the sphere of influence of current politicians.

There is no doubt that the newly found power of some ethnic minorities, particularly the South-South based on oil has somehow weakened the stronghold of the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) in the country's power game. This does not of course mean that the newspapers are not partisan along the political and business interests of their owners. The most noticeable example is the perennial struggle between the Compass (owned by Gbenga Daniel, the former P.D.P. Governor of Ogun State) and The Nation (owned by Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State and leader of A.C.N.) for what has been called the soul of the South West. Ironically, The Nigerian Tribune supports the mainstream matra of the Yoruba faction of the P.D.P.

This of course does not mean that the dominant social groups either in politics or business have lost the power to influence news production. Apart from outright ownership, the dominant class has been able to influence the press through the promotion and articulation of certain concepts and discourses which are largely taken for granted, though ideological. Such concepts include national interest, development and security, democracy and constitutionalism. In my study of press coverage of Obasanjo's second term bid in 2003, I found that the South-West press was 'blackmailed' to support him based on the use of the fear of collapse of democracy and the so called need for the Yorubas to be part of the 'mainstream' represented by Obasanjo and the P.D.P. (Oso, 2012a) The articulation of the press to the discourse of preserving democracy could be justified by an appeal to the social responsibility and media development theories of the press. The two theories impose a task on the media to support the institutionalisation of democracy and national integration and development. However, many journalists must be made to realise that these are not value-free concepts and neither are they class neutral in their implications.

The instrumentalisation of the Nigerian Press has also been aided at another level. Borrowing from Blumler and Guretvich, this could be described as “the degree of political affinity and socio-cultural proximity that obtains between media personnel and the political elite” (1995, p.66).

As already noted above, early Nigerian journalists shared a lot with the political elite. They were all socialised into the Lagos colonial society and had a common antipathy towards colonialism. In fact, the two spheres were more or less fused — journalism was politics, politics was journalism. Some journalists like Lateef Jakande, Bisi Onabanjo, and M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu became prominent politicians while some like the

1. Jimoh Ibrahim bought the two media organisations from their original founders and owners.

late Bola Ige maintained newspaper columns and had a network of young journalists as friends. Some journalists are now occupying prominent political positions as parliamentarians, governors and party apparatchik.

In the last few years, many journalists have also gained appointments as press secretaries, media advisers and political consultants to governments and prominent politicians. Many state governments maintain media consultants made up of prominent journalists who meet regularly to advise them on their publicity and public communication activities. Such individuals act as a form of informal channel of influence flow to media organisations.

Another factor in this informal relationship is corruption and bribery. This has been a major ethical issue in the practice of journalism in Nigeria. During the Babangida regime (1983 – 1993), what is now known as 'settlement' syndrome became very prominent. The regime was able to draw many newspaper proprietors and journalists into a close relationship as friends of Babangida himself or sympathisers of the government through various means — state appointments, bribery, contract awards etc. In response to an allegation that some journalists were bribed by the Babangida government, the then Secretary-General of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association and Managing Director of the Daily Times, Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi said:

... if you talk of a measure of closeness, I agree. Two reasons account for that: some of those in government today are about the same age as those in the media, and they were friends before those in power took over. General Babangida and Sam Amuka, publisher of Vanguard, were the best of friends when Babangida was a young Colonel Same thing applies to a man like the publisher of Concord, Chief Abiola, Alex Ibru², publisher of The Guardian and the president are good friends (National Concord: Nov. 26, 1990, p.33).

Through such 'friendship' and other corporatist strategies, Babangida was able to gain a lot of support and legitimacy in the media. Following the debacle that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections, many journalists became the foot soldiers of the

pro-democracy groups. During the current dispensation, many state correspondents and political journalists are on the pay roll of state governors and/or prominent politicians. The politicians give them gifts of lands, cars and sponsor them on pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem, among other inducements.

President Obasanjo's son must be referring to this illicit and compromising relationship between some state governors and journalists in an interview published in the Lagos-based news magazine, The News when he said "As per the state governors, I think a few of them know how to handle the press very well.... Folks like Ibori, Gbenga Daniel, Bukola Saraki and Nnamani and a few." (The News, January 23, 2006).

Journalists and other commentators had often attributed the high degree of unethical practices in Nigerian journalism to the parlous economic situation of many media organisations. Many of them cannot adequately take care of the welfare of their workers in terms of payment of salary, training etc.³ This has seriously whittled down any form of commitment to professionalism among journalists. It has also made the news making process so porous that it is very easy for parochial interests in political society to penetrate the news columns and capture the media to advance their selfish interests.

Whether under the colonial regime or the politicians that took over from them in 1960 and the military that toppled the politicians first in 1966 and later in the 1980s, the media were regarded as a major tool in the political struggle and hegemony building; hence the various attempts to control or domesticate the institution of mass communication either through outright ownership or legal and extra-legal means. This is not peculiar to Nigeria, but the Nigerian situation has a special dimension to it which is inherent in the role of the state as a source of private accumulation by the ruling elite, "a prime prize for contestation for private gains" (Agbaje: 1992, p.28), and the plural nature of the state.

On the first reason, the struggle to control and dominate the state by the elite class has been very intense and desperate, often degenerating into violence among the competing groups. As Claude Ake has remarked, the result is that:

3. To some of the business men — media proprietors, journalists and other media workers are no more than expendable commodities. The Managing Director of a weekly news magazine shut the organisation while away in Dubai without any prior notice to the workers. Recently, Jimoh Ibrahim suspended the publication of Newswatch without informing the other directors (who coincidentally were the original founders) and the workforce. He later dismissed the Directors from the Board of the company.

2. Alex Ibru later served as a Minister in the Abacha Government. So also were Lateef Jakande, a prominent journalist and Ebenezer Babatope, a prominent newspaper columnist and politician.

Those who prevail in this struggle privatise the state and take what they can, and those who lose effectively lose all claims to the resources of the state, including protection by the law, and suffer what they must. In these circumstances, everyone desperately wants to be incorporated in the sharing of state power (Ake: 2003, p.38).

The control of the means of shaping popular consciousness, social reality, primarily the mass media becomes crucial under this situation. Apart from the struggle for political power among the political elite, elements in the civil society are easily prone to incorporation because of their dependence on the state for contracts, appointments or in popular parlance 'connection' which may include offer of political covering or protection for businesses and investments. Such dependence readily makes the press penetrable to state interference which may compromise its autonomy and freedom (Agbaje: op. cit.).

The second point is the plural nature of the Nigerian society. Because of its ethnic configuration, it has been difficult to create a 'united nation' out of the various ethnic groups making the country. All the ethnic groups want access to state power, and as such, recruit the press in the hot contestation for it. This has been both beneficial and inimical to the press in the country. While it has given the press its strength to limit a centralist and authoritarian tendency in the polity, safeguarding some level of divergence or differences, it is also its Achilles' heel.

It has been inimical in the sense that it has sometimes compromised the credibility of the press. It makes the press a captive instrument of parochial interest groups and a vehicle for the circulation and promotion of primordial cultural symbols antithetical to national ones. Thus it has been difficult for the press to offer a national platform for any pan-Nigerian project as such a project could easily be labelled as ethnic or religious. This was the fate of the June 12 struggle which was at a point labelled a 'Yorùbá affair'. The recent anti-petrol price increase protests was also presented as sectional by some shadowy groups. There is also a good number of commentators who see the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency along regional/religious divide. The failure of the media in contributing to the task of nation-building could also be seen from this angle.

We may also note that the political elite through its use of ethnic and other divisive primordial factors can easily use the press to whip up emotions and recruit and mobilise the lower classes as cannon fodder

in their political warfare for state power and resources. This has been the case during elections and the various social conflicts the country has witnessed in recent times.

However, on the positive side, the inter-ethnic struggle and various divisions among the elite class have created a room for multiple voices to be expressed in the press. There is no doubt that the absence of consensus among the Nigerian elite and the amalgams of conflicting interests its various factions pursue have enhanced the latitude of freedom attributed to the Nigerian press. It has been difficult for any group to have total control of the Nigerian state and society. The various openings within the elite have been exploited by both those excluded from power and elements in civil society to offer alternative voices at crucial moments in the nation's history. A Nigerian political scientist, Adigun Agbaje has elaborated this view in his book, *The Nigerian Press, Hegemony, And The Social Construction of Legitimacy* (1960 – 1983):

In a nutshell and within the framework of the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian state, the press was, for instance, able to where necessary to reach for and activate long-established and long-cultivated alliances with other powerful elements in civil society in order to hold on to and expand its sphere of autonomous action vis-à-vis dominant interests, political society and the state.

It is in this context that I have argued that the failure of the Third Term Agenda promoted by the PDP faction loyal to President Obasanjo was due more to this intra-class division over the ill-fated anti-democratic project which was exploited by the vocal section of the press. The high profile disagreement and dissensus within the ruling elite created the elbow room for the press to articulate the largely national opposition to the attempt to amend the constitution so that Obasanjo could stay in power beyond the constitutionally allowed two terms.

The point is that any account of the relationship between the press and politics in Nigeria must be situated within the manner political power is organised in the country, e.g. the largely unstable political terrain and the precarious hegemony of the fractious ruling elite. This has created the large measure of freedom the Nigerian press has enjoyed over the years. The Nigerian press has most often exploited the divisions and disagreements within the ruling elite to enhance its freedom and role in political society.

Two main factors have influenced the development of press' relationship with politics in the country. First is the issue of ownership and second the role of the state. As we have discussed above, the Nigerian press has been closely linked to politics through ownership. All along over the years, there has been a high degree of political parallelism. The major newspapers were either directly owned by the political parties or by politicians affiliated to the political parties. Such link is reflected in contents, the degree of affinity between media discourses and partisan political/ethnic discourses and readership. Hence the labelling of newspapers in ethnic terms — Ngbati press (referring to South-West newspapers), Igbo press (Igbo-owned newspapers), Arewa press (referring to Northern-based newspapers) and now Niger-Delta press (referring to newspapers owned by proprietors from the South-South).

The role of the state is most noticeable in the broadcasting sector, though a comparative study of the military and civilian regimes will also indicate the shifting role and influence of the state in the newspaper sector. Up till now, the state continues to exercise dominant influence in the development of broadcasting. This is not to take anything away from the impact of liberalisation of broadcasting in the country. The establishment of private radio and television stations has opened the airwaves to more voices and varied programmes, to some extent, weakening the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the state.

However, a new factor has entered and is redefining the relationship. This is commercialisation. Commercialisation of the media and culture in general is not a new phenomenon. It has been the main plank of the Frankfurt School's critique of culture and Haberman's notion of the refeudalisation of the public sphere. The main assumption is that commercialisation turns media and other cultural products into commodities the main criterion for their production being their cash and profit value and profitability logic overriding social utility logic. As already noted above, no political party owns any newspaper at the moment, while government owned newspapers have lost a lot of influence. Those that now exist are mostly confined to their states, none has a national presence. The most influential newspapers are commercial rather than political in orientation. With the exception of a few, they do not espouse any obvious political partisanship. The press and the privately owned broadcasting stations appear to want to take the 'popular' path that will maximise readership/audience rather than follow a particular party line.

THE MEDIA AND THE MARKET

Whatever the political or ethnic inclination of any of the existing media organisations, the market has become a decisive moderating force. Despite the ethnic, religious or political affiliation of their owners, most newspapers and broadcasting organisations are now run as commercial businesses with the eyes of their managements on the balance sheets. If we concede, as many scholars have argued that the early press was political, their current successors have "a fervent interest in the business side of journalism" (Abati: 2000, p.106). Reuben Abati who until recently was the Chairman, Editorial Board of The Guardian Newspapers, should know. According to him,

Present-day publishers are business men with much interest in the issues as in the numbers. The more successful papers are published by proprietors who are proving to be more adept at balancing the two equations (Op. cit, p.107).

The point is that the material and market situation of the news production process must be a necessary element in any adequate account of the process. Siquerd Allern has rightly observed that "In practice, it is hard to understand journalistic news criteria without taking the news organisations' market strategies into account. News is literally "for sale" (Allern: 2002, p.142; Oso: 2012b).

But this is a crucial element that many Nigerian commentators and journalists ignore or even deny. The impact of the market and material circumstances on the type or range of available media, their production process and the actual products offered to the public have always been there, though it has not always been visible particularly when government ownership was dominant. However, in recent years, governments' policies of liberalisation and commercialisation have brought it out quite clearly. It will be recalled that in Nigeria, for instance, the news was the first to be commercialised when state-owned broadcasting organisations were asked by the government owners to wean themselves from budgetary allocation and find their way in the market. Organisers of events were charged for coverage. The practice has continued and it is becoming increasingly difficult to recognise news that is sponsored/paid for by an advocate from news disinterestedly and independently gathered by professional journalists.

We may also observe that the Nigerian media have become highly industrialised thus demanding better and more expensive technology, business and marketing strategy and of course higher level of financial outlay.

All these are to be considered within the context of the country's worsening economic situation and the global media environment, which means tough competition for all media organisations. An evidence of the change in the structure of the mass media in the country is the fact that the major newspapers and broadcasting stations are now part of conglomerates spanning about all sectors of the economy. On their own, each media organisation now engages in commercial activities ranging from entertainment, training workshops, seminars, capacity building, and hiring out of facilities.

Without doubt, a major shift has occurred in the structure of media ownership. This has been accompanied by a change in philosophy and goals. Time was when the main goals were political and social prestige; economic and profit making goals were secondary. The philosophy underpinning media ownership and operation, particularly broadcasting, was more of public service than profit making. But times have changed. Journalism is now driven by the market.

The media respond to the market in several ways. Also different media organisations respond in quite different ways. For instance, a quality newspaper like The Guardian treats news differently from a popular tabloid like The Daily Sun. This difference is accounted for by certain factors — the type of audience they serve, the budget available to the news department and the competition among media organisations.

The Guardian, as an elite-oriented newspaper, pays more attention to hard-news than the Daily Sun which is oriented towards the down-side of the market. The Daily Sun carries more human-interest personality-based stories which tend to be sensational. The paper also uses more banner headlines to attract attention while its stories are shorter and simplified. Even here, the Guardian has reduced the length of its stories. When the paper started in 1983, the stories were longer providing for more details than what the paper now carries in its news columns. At inception, the style was more literary and high-brow, but now it is more 'journalistic'.

Despite the differences between the two types of newspapers — quality and popular — there are certain things that are common to all of the news media due to the imperatives of the market.

As already mentioned above, all news organisations use such strategies as simplification and identification to attract or curry the favour of the audience. To a great extent, the choice an editor makes on what stories to use and how to display or present them is not entirely his but largely based on his "judgement as to what will absorb the half

hour's attention a certain set of readers will give to his newspaper." The writer who made this observation in the 1920s, Walter Lippmann, further explained the influence of identification in the news thus:

... the problem of securing attention is by no means equivalent to displaying the news in the perspective laid down by religious teaching or by some form of ethical culture. It is a problem of provoking feeling in the reader, of inducing him to feel a sense of personal identification with the stories he is reading. News which does not offer this opportunity to introduce oneself into the struggle which it depicts cannot appeal to a wide audience. (Lippmann; 1922, pp. 223-224)

The important point is that the search for audience and efforts to retain and expand such an audience have become the decisive consideration in media operation.

The absence of certain categories of news, e.g. news from rural areas and developmental news is also a reflection of the market imperative of the media.

We also have to take on board the influence of advertising. Apart from subsidy, both open and hidden from their owners and sympathisers, almost all mass media organisations survive on advertising.⁴ Advertising patronage means the survival or death of a newspaper. Therefore, directly or indirectly, it influences the editorial direction of a media organisation. The influence of advertising goes beyond the overt practice of advertisers withdrawing their patronage from an offending medium, i.e. censorship as a former Group Managing Director of NNPC was reported to have done when he instructed NNPC joint partners to stop patronising news media that are against the Third Term Agenda of President Obasanjo and his political party, the P.D.P. (Ishiekwene, 2006). More importantly, advertising influences the amount of space available for news. Time was when the editorial department was more or less solely in charge of producing the newspapers. These days, the advertising department allocates space to the editorial department after it must have taken the space already sold to advertisers. The parlous state of the economy has deepened the dependence of media organisations on advertising.

4. An example in this regard is the congratulatory and obituary adverts generated on events involving prominent public office holders and politicians. Most of such adverts are paid for from the public coffers.

Apart from corporate organisations, some political organisations with some anti-democratic agenda are taking advantage of the precarious economic situations of many newspaper organisations to influence not only the type of news they carry but more importantly how, when and where such news are presented, and this compromises the agenda-setting function of the press. Termed wrap-around, the newspapers often sell their fronts and/or back pages to an advertiser. These pages, often reserved for the most important news stories of the day are where the power to influence and set agenda lie. This was quite evident during the anti-fuel price increase protest when an organisation named Neighbour-to-Neighbour took over the front pages of many newspapers with adverts supporting the increase and against the popular protest.

We can also see the increasing amount of editorial matter directly linked to products and services that the media carry. This may come in the form of supplements, advertorial or straight news and features. On regular basis in the newspapers and news magazines, we find supplements on particular industries, products, services or even individuals. Such supplements are initiated by the media organisations themselves with the express aim of attracting advertisement by offering positive editorial environment (Murdock and Janus: 1985).

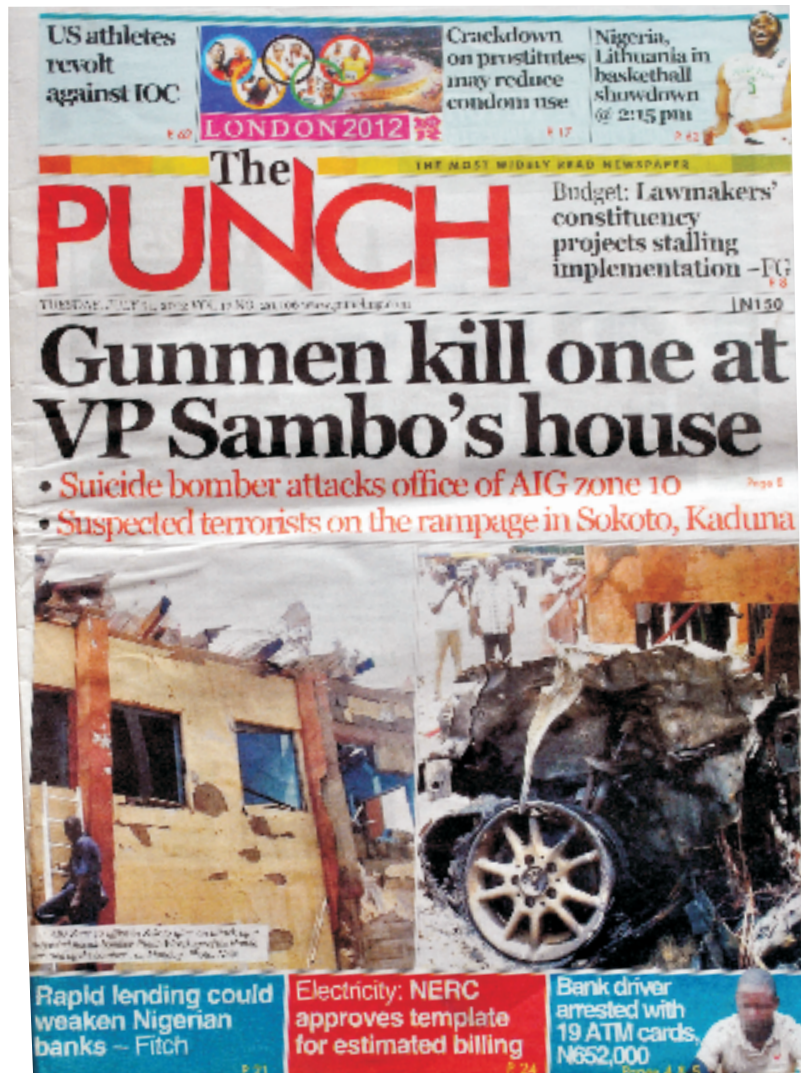
The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Network News was extended some years ago when the station became more commercial-oriented to 45 minutes in order to accommodate more adverts. Beyond the direct adverts the programme carries in-between the news segments, a good number of the stories are from sponsored events.⁵ The attraction of this News Programme to sponsors of such events is that, apart from the credibility the news confers, the programme has probably the widest reach in the country, and it is watched by the ruling and educated elite.

Advertising has also impacted on the type of content and style of presentation. The adoption by most news organisations of 'tabloid' news values exemplified by the increasing use of sensational headlines and conflict/negative stories, entertainment features, and human interest stories, shorter story length and reduced coverage of 'hard news', is part of the strategy of attracting advertisement particularly for products appealing to youth and women. In many newspapers, the front page which is traditionally meant for the most important news story



Front Page sold for advert.

5. NTA charges about ₦350,000 for 30 seconds and more than ₦500,000 for 1-minute advert on the 9:00 p.m. Network News. Commercialised news coverage of events termed, 'Let them pay' (LTP) starts from ₦500,000.



Front Page as news billboard

of the day is now for advertising news stories in screaming headlines, buried inside the other pages. This is to attract the readers to buy. The heightened commercial pressures and the infiltration of marketing principles into journalism have led to a situation of looking for the common lowest denominators in news selection and presentation. Many scholars have also argued that this type of journalism has displaced 'rationalist' discourse for sensational one (McQuail: 2000, p.106) thus limiting the level of civic engagement by the citizenry. In other words, the mass media have contributed to the process of depoliticisation and disempowerment of the people and the promotion of politics as theatre and spectacle. In fact, a scholar has accused the media of being means not to know. (Tuchman, 1976)

We can also observe that papers with readership possessing strong purchasing power appeal to advertisers, more so in this period of falling circulation figures. What James Curran observed about the British press is to a good extent applicable to the Nigerian scene. According to him, "... while political prejudice declined as a factor in advertising media selection centrist and right-wing papers — most notably quality papers reaching elite audiences — have continued to receive more advertising support per copy than left papers, mainly due to the greater purchasing power and influence of their readers. Advertising has thus contributed in a number of ways to producing and maintaining a press weighted to the centre and right." (Curran: 1980, p.109).

In this connection, we can observe that every attempt made at publishing a left or labour oriented newspaper or magazine in the country has not succeeded mainly because of poor advertising support and weak capital base.

The determining influence of the economic and market dynamics of media production could be seen if we consider the inability of many of the publications started in the Northern part of the country to survive. It appears that the promoters of these publications fail to realise that just as the news is an ideological product and a way of exercising power, it is also a commodity, manufactured like any other industrial product to make money. This means it must appeal to consumers, in this case advertisers and readers. Dallas Smythe has argued that the audience is the commodity that media organisations offer for sale to advertisers (Smythe, 1977). Colin Sparks asserts in this connection that:

... the newspaper sells the readers' presumed attention to potential suppliers of other commodities. The advertisers wish to reach as much as possible of

their target audiences and therefore advertise in the appropriate media.... A newspaper with a rich audience will start to make money with a smaller audience than one that has a poor audience (Sparks, 1992, p.39).

The account of Mohammed Haruna, former Editor and Managing Director of the New Nigerian, will illustrate the point, on the influence of economic and market consideration on media production. Haruna and four of his professional colleagues decided to establish a news magazine in the late 1980s. The first problem they encountered was inadequate capitalisation of the venture. Their consultants advised that they would need N12,000,000.00 to start with, but they could only realise N1,000,000.00 “partly because we as professionals wanted to retain control of the magazine and therefore limited the equity from the non-executive shareholders” (Haruna: 1996, p.67). By the time they realised that they could not cope on their own terms, the potential financiers having seen how unprofitable the business was, backed out. The result, according to Haruna, was “a cash flow problem that led inevitably to our demise” (ibid).

Another important point in his account was the fact that the news magazine, despite its professional success was unattractive to advertisers. This, according to the well-acclaimed journalist, was because of its location, ideology and poor circulation.

... for reasons not unconnected with its location and its ideology, it found it hard, if not impossible, to persuade advertisers who are mostly located in Lagos, to patronise it. Second, although it was well read, it never had mass circulation; for lack of funds it could neither print nor circulate more than 20,000 copies even at the best of time (Haruna, ibid, p.66).

The inability of the magazine to match its professionalism with success in the market led to its demise in its fourth year. This has been the experience of most publications from the Northern part of Nigeria: the Analyst (owned by the radical politician and former Governor of Kaduna State, Balarabe Musa); Sentinel (owned by the late Gen. Musa Yar'Adua), and the Hotline (owned by Hassan Sani Kotangora). Other radical groups have faced similar problems. A recent example of an excellent newspaper that died because of poor advertising support is the NEXT published by the only Nigerian to have won the Pulitzer Prize, Dele Olojede.

The need to attract audience and consequently advertising has led to a situation where most media organisations concentrate news coverage on 'popular' issues, corruption and Boko Haram, being the current reigning ones. The coverage are often presented and framed within discourses that resonate with popular beliefs and expectations.

News organisations are becoming more responsive to their market situation, not only in their business and marketing strategies, but in the orientation of their reporters. Reporters are being trained not only in the acquisition of professional skills and ethical conduct but on how to ensure that their products remain market leaders, how to face competition and remain at the top while offering readers a reason to stick to the brand, how to identify and retain key accounts and clients (TELL: January 2, 2006). The language of the market — products, brands, accounts and clients are becoming common in the nation's newsrooms to describe the newspapers and readers. Reporters are being sent to business schools to learn not journalistic skills but business and marketing principles.

In this context, almost all national media organisations actively court the friendship and patronage of the business sector and its major actors. In a review of its editorial policy in 1991, The Guardian describes itself as:

A service and market-oriented newspaper which consciously and decisively promotes business and industry in a way no traditional newspaper is equipped to.

Our approach has been the editorial cultivation of a business community of homogenous interests and loyal readership. It has thus become an intrinsic and consummate tradition of The Guardian to offer editorial support for business and industry ... whatever your business or industry is, there will always be a place for you in our diverse editorial cum editorial schemes (The Guardian, Thursday, Aug. 15, 1991).

The commercialisation of news (“editorial cum advertorial schemes”) raises a number of issues in terms of the autonomy and independence of journalists and the press. It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate news independently and disinterestedly gathered and produced from public relations stories and advertisement (they call it advertorial) that have been paid for (which properly should be called advertisements). News on radio and television sounds more like public

relations releases from multi-national companies than news in the journalistic sense of the word. Apart from government 'say-so' and 'promisory' news, broadcast news has tilted towards commercial and promotional news, which are paid for by the organisations concerned.

In the print media, the advent of specialised pages has been motivated more by economic reasons than by the desire to educate and inform. One can notice that the most popular and successful have been those with potentials for corporate support to generate adverts: property, computer and infotech, property business and finance, and of course sports for readership.

The visibility and impact of private capital is more evident in entertainment on radio and television. Most of the programmes on prime-time belt are advertisement-based independently produced entertainment programmes. My investigation shows that hardly can a non-revenue generating programme be shown during the prime-time belt. Prime-time television on NTA Network has been effectively taken over by drama serials sponsored by business and financial concerns. It seems we are seeing the end of single plays, with the exception of Nollywood video drama, on Nigerian television screens. The in-thing now is the production of serials or series with familiar plots (mainly sex, scandals, intrigues and sensation) and identifiable actors and actresses. The reason for this is that sponsors prefer these serials and series because they are assured of a stable audience every week. It is also cheaper to produce an episode of a serial than a single play.

Entertainment programmes (music, variety and phone-in programmes and chit-chat shows) have become the most popular on radio. Most of these programmes are very cheap to bring on air. In fact some of them need nothing more than a 'comedian' or DJ to sit by the microphone and just 'jive away' for hours, most often on irrelevant issues, sometimes expensive and dirty jokes that offend all the ethics of broadcasting. Talk radio has become the in-thing.

We should also note that generally the high cost of entry into the media industry has meant that only those belonging to the propertied class could establish newspapers.

The high cost of establishing and maintaining a newspaper organisation has also meant that it is the papers owned by rich individuals and linked to some other businesses which now dictate the pace in industrial and personnel management, technology, and in the practice of journalism.

Serious journalism is being relegated to the background as the consumerisation of news and economic pressure on media organisations become the order of the day. In this context, what is of interest to the public influences news making judgement more than what is of public interest. In some newspapers, we read more of column and opinion articles than news stories; views overshadow news. Following Ritzer's thesis of McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 1998) of our contemporary social life, we are witnessing the rise of McJournalism (Franklin, 2005). What is produced for public consumption as news is standardised, predictable and according to the economic logic of efficiency with emphasis on quantity rather than quality: instant news, ever-constant instant interviewees, instant press conferences. It does not nourish democracy, though like Mr. Bigg's fast foods, it fills the stomach. An increasing abundance of media channels with so much content but of little or no democratic value.

The above account runs contrary to the received liberal narrative of a free press. In this account, it is assumed that once the press is weaned from the apron string of the state or government ownership and control, it will be independent and autonomous, and as such, be able to serve the common will. As the fourth estate of the realm, the press is expected to be independent of the three other realms, i.e. the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. In fact, with this independence, the press is supposed to be superior to the other three, and such should watch their activities and make them accountable to the society. The emphasis on freedom from government ownership means that freedom of the press can only be guaranteed when there is a free play of market forces.

The constraining power of government in the Nigerian situation cannot be glossed over. But putting too much emphasis on it to the neglect of the power of capital is not only partial, but unjust to those at the receiving end of our inegalitarian social order.

As an important element in the legitimising ideology of journalism, the concept of fourth estate or freedom of the press looms so large not only in liberal discourse on the role of the press in society, but in the general normative expectations of the citizenry. But we tend to forget its social and historical origin. These concepts were socially created to serve the interest of the emerging commercial middle class during the 19th century in their contention for hegemony with the English aristocracy. George Boyce has also described the concept of fourth estate as a political myth created to "establish (the press') credentials in the eyes of politicians and public..." (Boyce, 1978)

PRESS FREEDOM AS MYTH: THE FACTS AND THE FICTION

A myth, contrary to popular opinion, is not totally false. It "can combine fact and fiction without any uneasiness existing between the two..." (Boyce, op. cit., p.27). The idea of the fourth estate is such a mythical concept which expresses a normative ideal about the role of the press in the society just as it conceals certain constraining factors and power and class relations.

The idea did not develop with the press. The press started as an organ wielded to and controlled by the court under a system that Siebert et al called the authoritarian theory of press control (Siebert et al, 1956). As rightly observed by Rivers et al, "Modern communication was born in 1450 into an authoritarian society", (Rivers et al, 1980, p.31). These writers of the historical development of the changing nature of press-government (state) relationship have remarked that the nature and characteristics of any media system must be situated within the socio-historical context of the society within which that media system exists. It is the change in class relations and the corresponding 'power shift' that gave vent to the agitation for a Fourth Estate of the realm in England from the 18th century. It was the struggle of the evolving middle-class of the English society against the landed aristocrats and the court which led to the agitation for freeing the press from monarchical control. The rising class needed the press as an organ to articulate its new world view. Their interests, as an emerging capitalist class, also coincided with those of journalists who wanted to free themselves from the apron strings of politicians and political parties and secure a respectable place for themselves in the society. These 'agitators' also found intellectual support from 'Enlightenment' and libertarian ideas.

The idea of the Fourth Estate was enunciated to mean freedom from state control and interference. The press was to be "a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law making" (quoted in Boyce, op. cit., p.19). The press was to act as a link between public opinion and the government. For it to truly and properly reflect that public opinion, it must be free from government control and interference.

The press was also seen as the organ to feed the public with information from which public opinion could crystallise and emerge and on which decisions could be made. According to the English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, referring to the press as an organ of public opinion, "in this instrument may be seen not only an appropriate organ of the public opinion tribunal, but the only regularly and constantly acting one."

Represented in the concept of the Fourth Estate are certain key ideas which have formed the bases for evaluating the idea of freedom of the press. Apart from independence from the state, these ideas include access, diversity and pluralism in ownership and control, professionalism and media as watchdog of government and its activities

On access, it is believed that the press should serve as a 'market place of ideas', a forum where all available voices, perspectives and interests could and should find expression and compete. It connotes some idea of the media acting as a mechanism for representation by competing social forces within the society.

Diversity and pluralism mean that there should be many and different types of mass media, ownership should not be concentrated in few hands. Accordingly, the press should consist of:

many organs, representing every variety and nuance of sentiment which prevails in the community, and expressing through numerous and divergent channels that aggregate of thought, feeling, prejudice, and passion, which we term public opinion.

This is similar to libertarian concept of market-place-of-ideas and Habermas' concept of public sphere. The mass media are expected to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas which will empower the citizens to act in the political realm. According to James Curran,

By generating a plurality of understanding, the media should enable individuals to interpret their social experience, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture.... It will give subordinate classes increased access to ideas and arguments opposing ideological representations that legitimate their subordination, and enable them to explore more fully ways of changing the structure of society to their advantage (Curran, 1991, p. 103).

Media diversity and pluralism is, according to this scholar, not just progressive social engineering but for emancipation and empowerment "giving people the right to define their normative vision of the world and their place in it through access to alternative perspectives of society." (ibid). Communication is essential for the exercise of full citizenship rights.

The crucial points raised by the above are access to the media by all social groups constituting the society, a system that encourages and permits plural and diverse ownership and control of media institutions, different types of media (commercial, public, national, community), and fair representation, i.e. no group interest should be marginalised, ignored or misrepresented in the media.

Quoting Glasser (1984), Denis McQuail has said that diversity "stands very close to freedom as a key concept in any discussion of media theory." He listed its main elements as:

- Media should reflect in their structure and content the various social, economic and cultural realities of the societies (and communities) in which they operate, in a more or less proportional way.
- Media should offer more or less equal chances of access to the voices of various social and cultural minorities that make up the society.
- Media should serve as a forum for different interests and points of view in a society or community.

Media should offer relevant choices of content at one point in time and also variety over time of a kind that corresponds to the needs and interests of their audiences. (McQuail, 2000, pp.170-171).

The mass media, according to the liberal thinkers should act as the public watchdog overseeing the activities of the government and its institutions. In this regard, it must enjoy complete independence from government. In this sense, freedom of the press is defined primarily as freedom from restriction by the state. As Curran once observed, "Once the media becomes (sic) subject to public regulation, it will lose its bite as a watchdog and may even be transformed into a snarling Rottweiler in the service of the state." (Curran: 1991, p.84). It is contended by liberal and conservative advocates that only the free market can guarantee such independence and freedom. It is on the basis of this argument that the privatisation and deregulation of the media, particularly broadcasting has been promoted and justified by neo-liberal politicians and their supporters.

To bring into effect some of the inherent advantages of a free press, the ideas of professionalism and ethics were developed to safeguard the press from outside control.

While no one will dispute the fact that the idea of Fourth Estate and all it

connotes have helped the development of democracy, so also we must not lose sight of the fiction it contains. The point must be stressed that the mass media have not been able to live up to the ideals that advocates of the concept put forward for its justification.

As Alfred Opubor said, "... in the midst of freedom, there may still be chains" (Opubor, 2005, p. 16).

Historically, while the professionals and campaigners might have succeeded in ending government control of the press, the influence of powerful politicians continued, either through personal relationship with individual journalists or through ownership of media organisations.

Equally, while the press was weaned from the control of the state and political party, it went into the open arms of commercial and corporate interests. It was more of a case of the exchange of state control for the control of capital. As we pointed out above, the agitation for a free press was led by the English middle class, the rising capitalist class who wanted to legitimise their emerging interests in the British political economy of the time. In an historically informed article, "The Press As an Agency of Social Control", James Curran has argued that

Underlying this enthusiasm for the operation of the free market was a growing commitment to the ideology of competition and free trade that legitimised the interests of both the professional and industrial middle class ... enthusiasm for the free market also reflected a growing confidence in the middle class, and an awareness — at least amongst some of the principal organisers of the press freedom campaign — that the operation of the free market in publishing would be heavily weighted in favour of middle-class entrepreneur and middle-class ideas (Curran, 1978, p.58).

We must, in this context, note the sardonic observation of A.J. Liebling that 'freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who have one.'

The ideas of fourth estate, freedom of the press and social responsibility essentially accept the liberal democratic pluralist conception of society and the distribution of power within it. In this social arrangement, the press and those who run the institution are assumed to constitute an autonomous group in the society. They are expected to convey, quite impartially and objectively, the views and ideas of other autonomous individuals, groups, institutions and other centres of power.

The state is assumed to be neutral, mediating the conflicting interests of different groups in society, while the press is supposed to act as a check (a watchdog) against abuse of power by any of the competing and/or governing social groups.

This theoretical position is flawed. Studies of post-colonial state in Africa have shown that, apart from being authoritarian, over-developed, over-bearing, oversight, and swollen (Agbaje, 1992), “the state has very limited autonomy.” The late Political Economist, Claude Ake has argued quite persuasively that:

The unique feature of the state in Nigeria, ... is that the state has limited autonomy. That is, the state is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys little independence from the social classes, particularly the hegemonic class, ... (Ake: 1985, p.9)

Ake has also further argued that “the Nigerian state is constituted in such a way that it reflects a very narrow range of interests mainly that of the Nigerian bourgeoisie and metropolitan capital.” Apart from the “do or die” approach to ‘capturing’ power, another major implication of this limited autonomy of the Nigerian state is the “privatization of control and use of state power.” (Ibid, p.17) This involves control and use of social institutions like the press and other resources. Elsewhere, Ake has reflected on the enormous power of the State, “... in post-colonial Africa, the State was everything. It controlled the economy, polity and civil society, its presence was ubiquitous and its enormous power unchecked by constitutional constraints, a mature political culture or vibrant civil society.” (Ake: 2000, p.37)

We must also note the close relationship between state and capital. Thus, it is argued that especially in the context of the post-colonial state, “the state plays an important role in fostering the accumulation of wealth and capital by the emerging bourgeoisie ...” (Ekekwe: 1985, p.55).

With the importance of the state as an avenue to wealth and capital accumulation, the struggle for its control has been so fierce and grim by the various factions of the Nigerian ruling class. The media being a major cultural institution for the struggle for class hegemony have become a major victim in this regard. Its so called freedom has been compromised through ownership, organisational connection, alliance or affiliation with the various factions of the ruling class.

The privatisation of state power which is a result of its limited autonomy also has other implications for freedom of the press in the country. In a political culture where state resources are dispensed as favours or as

prebends to clients by patrons who control state institutions and its resources, and in which formal rules (Weber's rational-legal authority) are less important relative to personal and primordial connections, professionalism tends to be weak and journalists are easily drawn into clientelist networks (Halin and Mancini, 2004). As we have presented above, this accounts for the high level of media instrumentalisation and political parallelism.

So in our situation, it is almost vacuous to argue that professionalism and adherence to code of ethics will attenuate the influence and power of ownership and capital in the news production process.

Conceptualising The News

News remains the “central ingredient” of the press. It is so central in accounting for the position of the media as a privileged social institution” (McQuail, 2010, p.376). Its special position comes from the fact that:

..... it is one of the few original contributions by the mass media to the range of cultural forms of expression. It is also the core activity according to which a large part of the journalistic (and thus media) occupation defines itself Media institutions can barely exist without news.... (ibid)

In Nigeria, the news is highly privileged and a highly contested space by both the political and corporate elite for its propaganda and publicity value. This is more so in broadcasting.

The news is an agency of representation and public knowledge. It affords those with access, the power to define and frame public issues and thus not only set agenda but also provide the interpretative and evaluative frameworks. Hence, it is argued that there is no neutral news; all news is ideological. Those who seek such access invest many resources to gain it and control or influence the pattern and substance of coverage. As Bennett asserts: “Failure to control the news is often equated with political failure” (Bennett, 2001 p. 118)

Quite often when we speak of the power of the mass media, its constitutional role, the fourth estate, freedom of the press, the reference is often to the news. The news remains central to politics and political communication. The news media are the central institution of the public sphere. The title of Timothy E. Cook's book, *Governing with the News*, underscores this centrality and importance of the news in the political process and governance. The news furnishes the intellectual and

cognitive resources required for citizens' participation in the political process. It is the intermediary institution among the different actors in the political system.

The importance of news has created for it, not just a special quality and hallowed place in media production but some special criteria to be observed by those in charge of its production, the journalist. Prime criterion, though highly contested, is the idea of objectivity. The concept is central to journalism practices. It is, according to Judith Lichtenberg "a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies" (Linchtenberg, 2000, p.238).

Inherent in the concept are ideas like detachment, neutrality, non-partisanship, accuracy, completeness (ibid). The drive toward the achievement of objectivity in news production is epitomised in the dictum of a British Journalist, C. P. Scott that "Comments are free, facts are sacred".

The study of news has shown that objectivity is an historical development and that it is also ideological. It arose out of the commercial necessity of journalism to serve a wider and heterogeneous audience.

In terms of the argument that objectivity is ideological, media sociologists posit that invariably objectivity leads journalists to regurgitate the views of the powerful. To be an objective journalist is to report 'facts' as given by sources without any comment or interpretation. The reporter functions more or less as a stenographer. The press thus became a mere broker in symbols abandoning its classical role as independent interpreter of events.

Gaye Tuchman (1972) has also described objectivity as a "strategic ritual" employed by journalists in the defence of their work. Journalists employ different devices to ensure that what they produce meet the criteria of objectivity and defend themselves against charges of bias. In his historical study of the development of the concept, Dan Schiller has argued that objectivity facilitates the otherwise difficult belief that newspaper "mirrors" or "reflects" reality (Schiller, 1981. p.2). Despite these criticisms and sometimes the acceptance by journalists and critics that it is unattainable, objectivity remains the ideal of good journalism practice.

The sociology of news has further shown that the news production process is not "random reactions to random events" (Murdock: 1973, p.163). In this context, Michael Schudson submitted, that "News items

are not simply selected but constructed." (Schudson: 1991, p.142). News like many other products is manufactured or made according to certain procedure and practices by journalists.

To help put some order in the search for the news, journalism has over the years evolved some criteria to judge the news worthiness of an event. These are called news values. They include: timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence, human interest, oddity, personality.

Many scholars have criticised the implications of the reliance of journalists on these elements or news values for selection of news. For instance, it has been argued that they have routinized the news selection/production process. They have tended to promote an orientation towards events to the neglect of social processes and structural determinants. Further, studies have shown that news tended to focus almost exclusively on the elite and the powerful and things that affect them while marginalising, if not totally neglecting the poor and the powerless. The news net is often cast to catch the big fish. The operation of news value and the dependence of journalists on influential sources "generally ensure that access is available to the social top ..." (McQuail: 2005, p.318). Howard Becker's idea of "hierarchy of credibility" also helps us understand the over-privileged access the elite have to the news media. Becker explains the concept with reference to the social structure and cultural value of the society:

In a system of ranked groups, participants take it as given that members of the higher group have the right to define the way things really are. And since ... matters of rank and status are contained in the mores, this belief has a moral quality ... thus credibility and the right to be heard are differently distributed through the ranks of the system (Becker: 1967, p.241).

The focus of the elite is not only economical, but also helps in subsidising the news production process and acts as a defence for news producers. More fundamentally, it orients the news in support of the existing inegalitarian social order.

It has also been argued that the news personalises social issues. News emphasises the individual – the so called personal angle. The personalisation in the news is a commercial strategy to create identification and attract the audience. The activities of institutions are treated in the news as the interactions of individuals, especially the leaders of such institutions. In other words, social activities are

rendered as interpersonal relations. In my study of industrial relations news, I found that industrial disputes are often explained as disagreements between labour leaders and management, the so called intransigent attitude of both sides. During such disputes, it was also found out heroes, stars and villains are made out of ordinary human beings. The reporting of politics is similar to “a gladiatorial spectacle in which the conflict of policies is reduced to the clash of personalities...” (Chibnail: 1977, p.27)

The search for the 'personal angle' and the event-orientation of the news is also reinforced by attraction to the 'dramatic elements' in the news. News plays up the 'dramatic' or the spectacular in any occurrence. Drama attracts audience. It entertains or titillates. It is sensational. In getting the drama out of an issue, opposing views are usually pitched against each other. Interestingly, journalists and columnists are beginning to use the language of dramaturgy to describe certain events. In many newspaper write-ups on the recent scandal involving Hon. Farouk Lawan and oil merchant Femi Otedola, many commentators described it as theatre or drama (of absurd). The reporting of politics has more or less been reduced to the reporting of politicians and their allies.

The tendency towards the dramatic and the sensational is further promoted by the news penchant for the negative and the odd. Bad news is good news. One prominent criterion for judging the newsworthiness of an event is this statement: “When a dog bites a man, it is no news, but when a man bites a dog, that is news.” News is more about the disruption in the normal running of life; issues that have obtruded themselves. The journalist is expected to survey the environment, and register anything event or occurrence that threatens the normal fabric of the society. The question that we need to ask is who defines those threats? The mass media by their orientation to the negative become agencies of social control “defining by default both the status quo and the sources and nature of threats to it” (Golding and Elliot: 1979, p.120).

If the 'event-quality' posed by a situation qualifies it to enter into the news net, it then follows that those who are desirous of media coverage must master the rules of turning their activities into coverable events and themselves into “actors”. Events are stage-managed to attract media attention. This is the main thrust of Public Relations and Marketing experts who are adept at creating, managing and branding these pseudo-events.

One characteristic of politics, especially in this age of television, is hype or showmanship. Politicians, and even issues, are packaged and staged for media publicity and audience applause. PR specialists as

spin doctors write the script, politicians perform the script as actors, the media provide the stage, and journalists report the drama for the entertainment of us, the audience. Apart from the fact that Public Relations works more on behalf of the powerful in the society, spin-doctoring distracts attention from the substance of politics.

Marketing driven journalism with its tendency to emphasise professionalism, simplification and personalisation of issues, and scandals may be dangerous to democracy. By trivialising serious political issues, it tends to promote cynicism and lack of interest in politics.

In political news, image has taken over substance. Politicians, bank executives, businessmen and women and even academics are competing with Nollywood actors and actresses for media publicity. They want to be seen as “good products” hence they go all out to brighten their images in the media. Some are now even referred to as brands. It is an age not just of government by publicity but of 'politainment'. In obedience to the rules of news production, political actors have come to adapt and adopt strategies of theatre to gain access to the mass media in the attempt to influence and control popular consent in their favour (Oso, 2004).⁶ In a recent study, Adenle and Oso found that women politicians are poorly covered by the newspapers studied because, in the word of a senior journalist, they were not making enough noise, i.e. they are unable to turn themselves and their activities into spectacular newsworthy events.

Whether we talk in terms of ownership and control, the influence of commercialisation and the market in news production or the routine criteria guiding the selection and production of the news, the media are wittingly or unwittingly biased against the poor and marginalised social groups in the society. Access to the media is an important issue here in explaining the 'fit' between the interests, views and perspectives of the hegemonic class and mass media ideologies and practices. Journalists do not create the events that make news. They 'construct' the news by applying the criteria of newsworthiness to events generated and/or promoted by individuals, groups and institutions. But access to the media by these individuals and groups is structured by the disposition of power within a given society. The powerful have a ready access to the mass media; that is the mass media are in a position of 'structured

6. The Governor of Osun State, Rauf Aregbesola recently said in a newspaper report that “People must realise that politics itself is display of drama, theatre and anything you can use to mobilise people to accept your platform and give you the endorsement ...” (The Nation, May 30, 2012, p.43)

subordination' to the powerful social groups. Two main reasons may be advanced for this relationship.

First, the beat system privileges the powerful and elite institutions, particularly state institutions. New reporters are assigned to 'legitimate' organised institutions of or sanctioned by the state. This is of course both for economic and practical reasons. But the implication is that journalists become dependent on sources who either are able to generate regular (daily) news out of their normal routine of duties or pre-schedule and promote their activities. The economics of news production has further led to a greater reliance on ready sources and event promoters in news gathering. The promoters produce facilities to 'assist reporters thus not only subsidising the news production process, but subtly influencing it.

The second reason is that in trying to be objective and impartial, journalists are trained to look for statements from authoritative figures or accredited sources. These figures and sources are mainly within the 'legitimate' institutions ostensibly representing and working in the national interest or such organised interest groups whose activities are by and large sanctioned by the state and certified experts. In effect, the explanation and definition of social issues prevalent in the mass media tend to be those sourced from the members of the dominant class and its allies. In this situation, the tendency is for the media to reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power and privileges in society's institutional order (Hall, et al, 1978).

The implication of the structured and pre-emptive access by the powerful is that such people or group become those Hall and his colleagues have called the 'primary definers'. They have the advantage of not only setting the agenda but frame with in which issues on the agenda will be discussed. It is an herculean task for those outside the 'mainstream' of the social order or who did not enjoy the credibility or authority often conferred by the mass media to insert alternative or oppositional items and/or frames into the agenda and discussion.

CONCLUSION

The mass media constitute a unique social institution. This is in the sense of its dual character. It is both a business, increasingly being subjected to the fundamental logic of commerce and the market, and an ideological institution providing the dominant symbolic and discourse environment through which we make sense of the world we live in. the mass media are "at the heart of social and political power" (Blumler 1990, p. 113). In this sense those who are interested and involved in the

struggle for power, hidden persuaders and other advocates, and interest-claimants see the mass media as a strategic resource. The framing and agenda-setting power of the media is of concern to them because "control over the definition of a problem is a major stake in the policy process" (Cobb and Elder, 1981, p.400).

There is no doubt that there is inequality of access to the media by social groups in the society. This inequality of course mirrors the inequalitarian social order existing in the society. The distribution of discursive power is directly related to the distribution of social, cultural and material resources between social classes in the society. Supporting or more appropriately reinforcing this, are the structural constraints, the political economy of the media and professional routines which guide media professionals.

The point is that the mass media have not been able to give full, adequate and comprehensive expression to the diverse voices in the Nigerian society. A large segment of the populace, mainly the poor and powerless social groups, women and young people are largely invisible and muted in the media.

Yet liberal democracy expects the channels of public communication to be open and inclusive enough to accommodate the full range of voices available in the polity.

As I have tried to show above the Nigerian press, as currently constituted has not lived up to this democratic expectation. The problems are inherent in the structure of ownership and control, the various fault lines in the country which willy-nilly structure political discourse dominated by the elite and the commercial imperatives underpinning media production on the one hand and on the other the inequalitarian social order which denies the majority the required resources to fully participate in the political and social process. There is no doubt that there is a link between access to the public sphere provided by the mass media. Those who lack power in accessing economic resources invariably are denied symbolic and cultural power.

The question of 'in whose interest the mass media operate' is of crucial importance if, as C. Wright Mills has argued, that our consciousness is influenced by the received and manipulated symbols disseminated through the means of public communication. Without consciously being under their daily control, the mass media, through professional routines and ideology of daily journalism practice, and the material and economic context of the production process the powerful social class in

the society has been able to fix the terms and limits of social discourse in the society. The process of meaning-making is elite-sensitive and dominated. In other words, the public sphere is restricted to the popular masses who lack the power and resources to actively participate and articulate their interest-based perspectives and meanings in system.

As far as media organizations are articulated to the structure of power and constrained by economic and commercial imperatives, the channels of public communication will largely express the voices and interests of dominant social groups in the society.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I submit that those who benefit most from the existing social order are those being predominantly served by the mass media. The mass media are agents of the powerful.

SUGGESTIONS

The opening up of the mass media and their accessibility to all competing and diverse social groups has been a great challenge all over the world. Having so many media organisations as the case in a commercial media system does not necessarily translate to pluralism in terms of discursive competition in the political process. A market-based approach to media diversity is misleading in the sense that it fails to consider the class of people competing in the market and the source(s) of opinions prevailing in such media market. Often the difference between the dominant voices in the media is the difference between six and half-a-dozen. But as James Curran has noted, a:

... more complex process of contestation takes place between rival social groups as the level of ideology. Different ways of making sense of society, different premises and chains of association privilege some social interests against others. The media's role is never solely confined to imparting information: it always involves arbitrating between the discursive frameworks of rival groups. Which frameworks are included or excluded can affect collective opinion and, through the political process, the distribution of resources and life chances in society (Curran: 2005, p.137).

In this context, media pluralism should be “conceived as a contest that is open to different social groups to enter.” To achieve this demands structural reforms that “widen social access to public debate or extend social representation.” (ibid) An important suggestion in this regard is

the creation of grassroots media organisations and other alternative structures of public communication.

Creating New Media Structures: Community Media

First is how new media structures can be created to empower those currently marginalized or shut out of the media space. In this regard, there has been the global active promotion of community-based media organizations particularly radio. These type of media which I have called “voices of the oppressed”, (Oso, 2003) run on the normative value of democratic ownership and they are grassroots based. Ideologically, they are oppositional, participatory, people-centred and developmental in orientation. They are regarded as the voices of challenge from below. They are owned and operated by community people. Two scholars have said, they:

... not only satisfy demands for different contents, catering to tastes interests, and orientations not catered to by mass media output and sometimes challenging that output, but are also vehicles for direct participation in the mediated communications process and for the extension of the voices of groups and ideas otherwise not heard (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1979, p.221)

From this perspective I want to submit that the licensing of campus radio by the NBC is far away from the imperative of having community radio. Campus radio is totally different from community radio as envisaged by its advocates all over the world.

As a matter of urgency and in the interest of the country's economic, cultural and political development, the NBC should start the process of licensing community radio for those interested. Except for the fear of those currently benefiting from the existing system nothing should stand in the way of the people having their own medium of public expression. Community-based and civil society organisations and individuals sharing common interests should establish publications to disseminate their views and perspectives. Such publications, like the Lagoon Echo published by the speakers' society based at the University of Lagos, existed in the 1970s even under military governments.

New Media and the Possibility of New Voices

The other suggested new media structure has been made possible by the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

With ICTs, particularly the Internet, cell phone and social media, many people believed that we are entering a new era of participatory or deliberative democracy. The assumption is that these new technologies will facilitate access to information and open-up new possibility for two-way horizontal communication. The inherent characteristics of these technologies make them potentially powerful instruments in removing the monopoly the mass media have over the flow of public information. The power of the government and other elite groups in the generation and dissemination of information has considerably been whittled down. These technologies create the possibility of a multi-voice pluralism which can enrich democracy in the country. Thus the function of agenda-setting and framing of issues almost exclusively performed by journalists and now by political PR and image making consultants has been eroded. Through the Internet, blogs and social media (Facebook, Twitter etc), neglected issues could be put on the public and media agenda, influence media coverage and eventually, public policy.

Many commentators now see a glimmer of hope in the New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the attempt to ameliorate the debilities of the mass media as an essential institution of political communication. This techno-utopian argument is 'based on the presumption that a new political order of a majestic and, indeed, Athenian perfection can be borne by new communication technologies' (Golding, 1990, p.92). The uprising in many North African and Arab countries has boosted the confidence of many people in the power of these technologies in the political communication system. From the developed to the developing countries, many are hailing the cell phones, social networks like Facebook, Twitter and the Internet as the magic wands to revitalize deliberative and participatory democracy by these devices' abilities to remove the filters which encumber political communication through the old media of newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Even these old media are being transformed by these new media. It is a brave new world of unrestricted communication; a true market place of ideas.

The faith placed on the internet and the other new media forms is not new. The arrival of any new medium had always been accompanied by such utopian expectations. However the characteristics of these new arrivals make them somehow unique. First, one must note the abundance of a communication channels now available. The importance of these new media is not just in their availability but importantly in the fact of their affordability, portability and accessibility. For instance, the cell phone has democratized access to the phone and,

in an oral society like Nigeria, and has made talking cheaper and accessible. Second, the barrier between the producers of public communication and their consumers has been greatly eliminated. They have seen to the death of distance and geography. Anyone with the skill and access can produce, disseminate and receive information anytime, anywhere. In other words, the mediatory power of the brokers and gatekeepers of public communication, the journalists, PR experts, has greatly been reduced.

The phenomenon of citizen journalism captures the potentiality on offer to the ordinary citizen not only to create his/her own news but offer personal account and construct realities which may contradict the official hegemonic line of the mainstream media. With the new technologies of information and communication, the ordinary citizen who was hitherto a mere spectator and passive consumer of news has become more active as a creator and disseminator. He/she now has more alternatives to turn to in search of information and entertainment.

The ecology of media practice is changing. These new technologies and their deployment are challenging the hierarchical, top-down model of traditional journalism. Another important feature of these technologies is their interactivity. This feature is made increasingly possible by digitalization.

Based on convergence and digitalization, the new media incorporate many features which enhance their richness in terms of content and use. The Internet is a library which can be accessed either visually or orally anywhere. The old media are adapting themselves, newspapers can now be read on the internet. On the internet we can listen to radio and watch television. TV stations are now available on the Cell Phone, iPod, Black Berry. While the internet offers a platform for one-to-many communication, the e-mail offers one-to-one communication and mass mailing of information.

It is also important to note that the ICTs are cost effective and barriers to entry is relatively low. With this, it is potentially possible for many people to participate in political debates.

The ICTs are also facilitating the emergence of a global public sphere and networking, thus reducing the power of government to control the flow of information. While one need not be a cyber-enthusiast or techno-utopian to recognize that these new technologies can be catalysts for change and expand the margins of the public sphere, open to alternative discourses and political engagement of the average citizen, we must also not overlook their limitations.

The most noteworthy of these limitations in our context is access. Owing to poor infrastructural facilities, economic inequality, inadequate social and cultural capital many Nigerians are still shut out of the cyberspace. We may also note that the internet is in the main, a technology for the youth. To the majority of youths the internet is seen and used as a play and entertainment medium than a tool for democratic politics. The apparent digital gap is mainly a reflection of the existing in-egalitarian socio-economic system in the country. Many techno-utopians and technology determinists in their euphoria tend to forget the historical fact that “technologies tend not to be determinative but rather are conditioned by what is going on in the society in which they grow...” (Barber, 1998). In this context discourse on the internet can hardly be cast in any mode fundamentally different from what already exists in the traditional media. We may also note that the anonymity offered by the Internet and social media can give some people power without responsibility which is the power of a prostitute. In his column in The Nation newspaper of February 21, 2011, Sam Omatseye observed that though Nigerians discuss politics a lot “but they discuss the matters without the sense of collective disgust or unity of vision that we see in the Arab world” He further observed that:

while both Twitter and Facebook are sites of consensus, Nigerians do not agree on those sites on too many things that bind us as a people... The same ethnic divide that we see in the real world resonates on zoning, and the lack of harmony in Jos also resounds on twitter.

As it has happened to the 'old media', the new media are already being invaded by the elite in their competition for attention and agenda-setting. A good number of Nigerian politicians are on Facebook and Twitter. As Jay G. Blumler said some years ago of the use of the mass media by political actors, they are on these social media in “a competitive struggle to influence and control popular perceptions of key events and issues ... (Blumler, 1990, p.103). They are on the Internet and the other social media rather more for “their instrumental end than to enrich democracy” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2005, p. 17). President Jonathan used the Internet not only to mobilise support for his election bid in 2011, but to set agenda for the campaign (Oso et al, 2011).

With the way these technologies have been used in some parts of the world recently, I doubt if anybody will doubt their revolutionary potentials. Despite certain obvious structural constraints (accessibility and digital gap, infrastructural inadequacies, poor cultural capital of

majority of the people etc) these technologies are making in-roads into all aspects of our individual and national life. The influence of the social media is being felt in the dark corridors of power. It appears that in the realization of their possible revolutionary impact, some senior members of the Nigerian ruling class are already jittery going by recent comments by some of them emphasizing the negative use of these technologies, thus drawing attention to the unintended effects of the new media.

The important point arising from the suggestion for the licensing of community radio and the use of ICTs is the need for alternative public spheres. Such alternative public spheres will operate as parallel discursive arenas, where members of the subordinate social groups can generate and “circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest and need” (Fraser: 1992, p.123). Each segment of the envisaged multiple public spheres organised differently and performing different functions will connect to different publics. This will be a more democratic media system than what we have now.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF JOURNALISM

There has also been attempt to restructure the practice of journalism itself based on the inherent inadequacies of objective journalism as discussed above. This is in relation to the advocacy, particularly in the United States for other models of journalism. Some have called for advocacy journalism, investigative journalism and civic or public journalism. While advocacy journalism (Oso 1997) seems to de-emphasize the idea of objectivity in news reporting, investigative journalism (Oso, 2008) proceeds from the principle of watchdogism to advocating that journalists should be independent in carrying out their duties and making public officials more accountable. The recently enacted Freedom of Information Act has boosted the call for more investigative journalism in the country. As a legal instrument, the law has the potential of enhancing the practice of journalism; but like any other tool that potentiality can only be realized if the law is put to use and the structural constraints which may hinder its effectiveness are removed. There is more to freedom of the press than legal and constitutional provisions (Oso, 1991).

Civic journalism seeks that journalists should be more engaged with the people. Journalism is seen as part of the community and hence the people must be able to influence media agenda and the issue the media cover. Civic journalism encourages and promotes public deliberation, a hallmark of participatory democracy. It seeks to empower the citizens

as actors in the public sphere rather than spectators of debates among the elite. Some of its advocates and practitioners have also argued that “the journalist's primary orientation should be towards citizens and their concerns, with the relationship to politicians and insiders seen as secondary, important only in so far as it illuminates what matters to citizens” (Friedland, et al 1998).

The idea of civic journalism is related to Clifford Geertz idea of “thick description”. The idea is that in its more-in-depth reportage, journalism also embarks on an elaborate venture in thick description. Some scholars have described this as 'thick journalism' (Cottle, 2005) or 'strong journalism' (Heikkila, 2000). Cottle described such journalism as referring to “reportage... which seeks to go beyond “thin” news report, headlines, and news values, to reveal something of the deep structures, contending perspective and lived experience that often underpin if not propel news stories forward and which grant them meaning both for the participant and protagonist involved as well as potentially for us, the audience...” (Cottle, *ibid*, p.109). This type of journalism is expected to address its audience or readers as stakeholders with vested interests and promote rational and critical discussion of issues and of news journalism itself (Heikkila, *ibid* p.84). It is expected to foster debate and participation.

SKEPTICISM AS A VIRTUE

I will also like to suggest that journalists should be a bit more skeptical in their relationship with their sources. Skepticism should be a cardinal journalistic virtue which every reporter should cultivate. It appears that many journalists are ready to accept any information from sources without bothering much about the credibility and veracity of such information. In this age of packaged politics and politicians, spin doctoring, news management, branding and promotion of pseudo-events, every strategy is employed to create a close assimilation between journalists and their sources. To reduce the influence of these strategies on the news making process, journalists must maintain a high level of social distance from sources. Else, they become mere ventriloquists or conveyor-belts for the views and interests of such sources. At no time than now is this virtuous skepticism required when virtually every member of the global community can freely participate in the processes of news gathering, interpretation and reportage, for good or for the ill of the society.

While the creation of new media structure and models of practice may be a long term prospect and even utopian given the powerful and entrenched interests, habits and conventions that may be difficult to

forgo, committed individuals and groups must be able to exploit the small openings in the conventional media space for the expression of alternative voices for generating oppositional counter-hegemonic discourse. It must be realized that the media space is not totally closed and as an institution, it is not monolithic. The mass media structure is not immutable; structures are constituted by human beings. As Stuart Hall has rightly observed, the media system is leaky (Hall, 1986). The mass media are sites of social struggle by differing social groups for visibility and representation, to be heard, seen and control the field social discourse.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I believe we need a more socially conscious set of journalists and media workers. The mass media have become so central to the way we understand and organise our contemporary society and the place of different social groups and the life chances open to individuals that we can no longer see those who produce the materials that so profoundly influence us as craft men and women. Journalists and other media producers produce knowledge. We need to take another look at the way we train and educate them. We need a more comprehensive curriculum that goes beyond mere skill acquisition. Social relevance and public interest must be the main criteria in news selection and editorial judgement. Journalists must pay more attention to alternative social actors. We need to pay attention to media literacy. In addition, the welfare of journalists must be taken more seriously by media owners.

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