

MASS MEDIA *and* ELECTION VIOLENCE

1965 and 1983 Experiences in Western Nigeria

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Olusola O. Isola

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, Mr J.F. Isola
and Mrs M.O. Isola

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Foreword

It has now been widely acknowledged, at least in Africa and many developing nations of the world as in the Western society, that elections constitute one of the laudable means for promoting peaceful political transition. However, Africa is still struggling to master the art and science of this democratic process. The outcomes of the failed 2007 and 2008 elections in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Kenya do not cast Africa as a fast learner. The elections in Zimbabwe and Kenya were not only flawed but were also characterised by violent eruptions that threatened the national security of the two states. The free and fair elections that were conducted in Ghana and South Africa a year later are consolatory; they suggest that there is still room for improvement in the continent. But past lessons must be taken to heart!

The focus of the present book, written by Dr. Olusola Isola of the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, is on the elections in Nigeria. Several books and journal articles have been published on the issue. The situation in the country has generated so much academic interest against the background of the fact that since the Nigerian independence in 1960, it has been extremely difficult for the country to have a peaceful election. Election seasons in the country are usually characterised by political brinkmanship as well as wanton loss of lives and invaluable property. The 1993 election which Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola was widely believed to have won would have broken this jinx. Though rated as the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria by both local and international observers, the election was annulled by the military junta that organised it. Things seemed to have fallen apart for Nigeria since then as subsequent elections conducted are said to be worse than the last one.

As Nigeria prepares for the 2011 elections the worst is anticipated by students of political history.

Dr. Isola's book focuses attention on the role played by the media in the problem. It starts with an acknowledgement of the important roles played by the media during the decolonisation process in Nigeria. In the process of dabbling into the murky waters of Nigerian politics, the media in the country soon got itself messed up. The rest of the book catalogues some of these less-than-noble roles of the print media during the elections in the first and second Republics in Nigeria. It documents specific activities of select newspapers which contributed to the aggravation of electoral crises that ultimately led to the collapse of the two Republics.

There are several lessons in the publication. The most instructive is that politicians would always want to use the media to attain selfish political objectives which in many cases are against public interest. Media practitioners are thus advised to detach themselves from partisan politics and rather pitch tents with the people during elections. The book calls attention to the situation in the older and more matured democracies where in spite of pressures from politicians, the media has successfully detached itself from partisan interests and concentrated more on national interests, which supersedes the narrow interests of the political class. Hence, the book points to the need for the media in Nigeria to develop the qualities of an unbiased umpire during elections and expose negative tendencies that could threaten Nigeria's democracy. In essence, the interests of the masses should be uppermost on the scale of activities of the media.

I commend Dr. Isola for this interesting piece which is being published as Nigeria prepares for the 2011 elections. In this context, I expect the publication to go a long way at making media practitioners become more alive to their expected roles in expanding Nigeria's democratic space.

Professor Isaac Olawale Albert, *fspsp*
Director, Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
29 August, 2010

Introduction

Conducting free, fair and violence-free election to switch from one government to another has become a serious perennial problem which have defied solution since independence in Nigeria. Election should ordinarily be a platform on which politicians test the popularity of their programmes, desires and aspirations for improving the lives of the people, but it has become a recurring battle where politicians and their supporters display physical prowess and test out dubious and naked violent tactics in the process of contesting for political power. Most of these tendencies manifested in post-independence politics. In Western Region of Nigeria, the 1965 election was marked by so many malpractice and violence that the opposition United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) refused to recognise the landslide victory declared in the elections by the ruling Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The election crisis was the major cause of the fall of the first republic.

The 1983 general election crisis was even worse. The naked violent tactics employed by the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to win the states of western Nigeria and the cold defiance with which the opposition parties, led by Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) members and their supporters, displayed in resisting the take-over of the states was the major ground on which the military justified their termination of

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the second republic. These election crises set Nigeria back by many years in its journey to democracy with consequences on the political, social-economic and human development of the country.

The mass media as an important institution in the democratic process has a role to play in elections in Nigeria. As the 'fourth estate of the political realm' the media provides the platform for narratives and discourses in the service of elections, political negotiations and other engagements among the political elites and the civil organisations involved in election administration in Nigeria. In the process, it has contributed to the successes and pitfalls that were witnessed in the various elections in Nigeria. Since it is in a privileged position to access public information, interact with parties in political conflicts and reach destinations that the public is unable to reach, the media is able to shape opinions and attitudes and influence agenda for public governance. Above all, citizens reflect and articulate their opinions and feelings about elections in the media, which goes a long way in determining the outcomes of elections. Since the political elites realise the importance and power of the media during elections, they often manipulate the media to further their political agenda during elections and during conflicts that accompany elections. In the process, the media inadvertently report election issues in manners that lead to escalation of election conflicts.

This book examines the role of the print media in the election conflicts and violence that accompanied the 1965 parliamentary elections and 1983 general elections in western Nigeria with the aim of exposing the consequences of negative reporting of the two elections on the social-economic and political development of Nigeria. It also makes proposals for peace reporting, whereby the mass media can contribute to positive conduct and outcome of elections for the progress of the country.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE BOOK

Election crises are a protracted problem and a sore point in transiting from one government to its successor in Nigeria. Initially, such crises were common in the western parts of the country, but it has spread to

other parts of the country where it is even becoming worse. Experiences of voters during elections constantly shake their confidence in the viability of democracy to enhance national development, while previous failed elections had led to tension between government and the governed with citizens sometimes questioning the legitimacy of government. Coup d'états which are often caused by election crises, lead to destruction of several political and democratic institutions which might have accelerated political development of Nigeria. The media has played important roles in all of these events. Records have shown that the media has been playing important role in politics and in political crises in Nigeria ever since pre-colonial period. The first newspaper *Iwe Irohin Yoruba* which was established in Abeokuta in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend was involved in the various political frictions among the sub-ethnic groups within the Yoruba nation in the pre-colonial period, the struggle for equitable trading between Europeans and Africans and the struggle for complete abolition of slave trading (Omu, 1965; Duyile, 1989). During the colonial period many other newspapers like *Lagos Weekly Record*, *The African Messenger*, *Lagos Daily News*, *West African Pilot*, among others, established by private individuals (Africans and Europeans) were involved in the struggle against colonial repression, racial and trading discriminations, abolition of colonialism and the struggle for independence. At independence, however, the nationalist struggle led by the media terminated in sectionalism with the emergence of newspapers that advocated for the interests of particular sections of the country.

It is remarkable to note also that it was not until after independence that government began to take active roles in running the media in order to counter the powerful political influence of privately owned newspapers. This trend equally had an influence on the role of the media in the political process.

The broadcasting media equally has powerful influence on the audience and political trend in Nigeria. However, while the electronic media may be playing pervasive roles in the contemporary political turf, the print media has been exerting such influence for almost a century before the electronic media. The first broadcasting station, a Rediffusion relay station of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC),

was established in Nigeria in 1933. The first television station began operation in Ibadan in 1959, a clear century away from when the first newspaper was established. Subsequently, many other broadcasting stations were established by only the federal and state governments until 1992, when the first private broadcasting station was licenced and allowed to operate under strict regulations. This century-long gap has obviously put the print media far ahead and enabled them to exert more influence on the political development of Nigeria than the broadcast media.

Another reason for focusing on the activities of the print media in this book is that in spite of the important roles played by the broadcasting media during the election crises under study (for technical reasons and due to poor record keeping culture in most of the broadcasting stations in Nigeria) it is extremely difficult to access primary records of the activities of electronic media during the election crises being studied. Most of the broadcasting equipment and tapes used during the election crises have been condemned and discarded due to technical dynamics. This is not the case with the records of the print media. Where previous newspaper editions of a particular period are not found in a publishing house, they are likely to be found in libraries or the archives. This makes it more convenient and prudent to concentrate on the activities of the print media during the election crises being focused on.

Enough attention has not been paid by the academia to the role of the print media in election crises in Nigeria. Most previous works had focused on the political, social, economic and other aspects of election crises. There is therefore the need to investigate the role of the print media in elections in order to have an insight into how it can contribute into alleviating extant problems in election conduct. This book is of immeasurable value to the academia, the media, the political class and the civil society in Nigeria. Policy makers, electoral systems managers, law enforcement apparatuses, politicians and community-based groups will benefit tremendously in their activities if they apply the recommendations made in this book to facilitate violence-free elections and in conducting political education to accelerate democratic practice in Nigeria. Media managers will benefit by taking an insight into the past to see how the media has contributed to the political pitfalls

of Nigeria and how this has hindered development and professionalism within the media. It will benefit scholars and action researchers in political science, media studies and peace and conflict study by providing a resource base for improving existing training curricular or in developing new curricular for training prospective journalists.

The main objective of this book is to investigate the causes and curses of the roles played by the print media in the escalation of 1965 parliamentary and 1983 general elections in southwestern Nigeria. The linkages between ownership and contents of the print media and their connection with conflict progression during the two elections will be the main focus of attention. In addition, the extent of social responsibility displayed by the print media in preserving the political system during the two elections are investigated. Recommendations are made on ways by which the mass media in general can contribute positively to electoral process and accelerated political development in Nigeria in the march towards the evolution of a peaceful and prosperous society.

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1

The Role of the Media in Political Process: A Theoretical Perspective

The activities of the mass media in democratic political contexts can be understood within a number of theoretical frameworks which expound the importance of the media in governance. The media is better understood as a public sphere which provides a space that mediates between civil society and the realm of power. This was articulated by Habermas (1989:49), who defines the public sphere as:

organs of information and political debates such as newspapers, journals as well as institutions of political discussion such as parliament, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs, coffee houses, meeting halls and other public spaces where socio-political discussion took place.

The principle of the public sphere involves an open discussion of all issues of public concern during which discursive argumentation is employed to ensure public good. The principle therefore assumes freedom of speech and assembly, a free press and the right to freely participate in political debates and decision making. Habermas contends

that after the democratic revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries, the bourgeois public sphere, which was the original public sphere, was institutionalised in constitutional orders which guaranteed a wide range of political rights, including the establishment of a judicial system which mediated between individuals, groups and the state. From these political rights also arises the freedom of the press to operate in open society. However, the structural changes that have taken place in contemporary times with the rise of capitalism, the culture industries and powerful economic corporations have prompted the big economic and governmental organisations to take over control of the public sphere, thus leading to its mutation. This development has reduced citizens to mere consumers of goods and services communicated through the media and have diminished the strength of the public sphere from a place of rational discussion, debates and expression of concerns for public interest into a realm of commercial transactions and administration by corporations and dominant political and economic elites.

Having been established as an indispensable institution in democratic governance, Bryant and Thompson (2002:306) identify eight important functions which the mass media perform in a democratic society:

- (1) Surveillance of contemporary events that are likely to affect citizens positively and negatively
- (2) Identification of key socio-political issues
- (3) Provision of platforms for advocacy for causes and interests
- (4) Transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and factions of political discourse
- (5) Scrutiny of government officials, their institutions and other agencies
- (6) Giving of incentives and information to allow citizens to become actively informed participants rather than spectators
- (7) Provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy
- (8) Respectful consideration of the audience as potentially concerned, sense-making efficacious citizens.

These functions inform media involvement in public activities,

public events and in influencing public policies in governance. However, the media is also implicated in contemporary societal conflicts based on the effects that its activities produce in the social conflict dynamics. Such effects can be as simple as increasing a single individual's knowledge or understanding of an issue or event, or it may be as complicated as influencing people's attitudes and behaviours in undertaking actions that could have destructive consequences on the society. This trend has provided reasonable justification for the attention communication scholars have paid to the effects of the mass media on the society since late 19th century when modern mass media began to emerge in its present form. Such focus has been on the media and the system within which it operates, including systemic components associated with media operations, the political environment, the sphere of activities of pressure groups and propagandists, public opinion and effects of emerging technologies in the media (McQuail, 2000). The first phase of media effect studies emerged with the attribution of an all-powerful strength to the media to produce automatic effects on the audience. This theory, articulated as the 'Hypodermic Needle' effect, was propounded based on the perceived power of the media to shape people's opinions, mould behaviours and even impose political ideologies against the people's will. Studies that boosted this theory include those conducted by Lippman (1922), Lasswell (1927) and Bruntz (1938).

The all-powerful assumption of the media was challenged in the second phase of media effects studies through empirical investigations that studied media contents and messages, linking them to the manifest behaviours of the audience. Such studies as Blumer (1933), Lazarsfeld et al (1944), Berelson et al (1954) and Hovland et al (1950), blazed the trail in this phase of media effects studies. The outcome of these studies assigned a modest role to the media in effect production and described the media as incapable of singularly causing any major planned or unintended effects on the audience. Klapper (1960) sums up the conclusion of the various researches at this phase by saying that:

Mass communication (media) does not ordinarily serve as a necessary or significant cause of audience effects, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors.

The import of this statement is simply that the media could only act substantially in concert with other social, political, economic and educational factors in effecting change of attitudes and behaviours of the audience at any particular moment. This led to the contemporary thinking in the media studies which tends to confirm a powerful media audience but also an equally powerful audience, whereby both the media and the audience engage in constant interaction and negotiation in media construction of meanings (Bryant and Thomson, 2002:40-47).

The media effect theory is central to understanding how the media can intensify socio-political conflicts and violence, such as election violence. Singer (1970) says the media can contribute to intensification of conflicts by simply indicating the occurrence and location of riots, publicising the causes of the riots or giving prior publicity to the likely occurrence of riots. McQuail (2000) equally recognises that media can instigate collective behaviour during situations of public turmoil such as rioting. Such collective public reaction could emerge in form of widespread panic in response to alarming, incomplete or misleading information, amplification or spreading of crowd or mob activity, and possible encouragement and aid given unintentionally to terrorists.

This collective reaction effect was confirmed by Cantril et al (1940) study of the 1938 American radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, when simulated news bulleting reported a Martian invasion of the earth.

Also, closely relevant to media interaction with politics and elections is the agenda-setting role of the media. This media functional theory explains how the media through their contents determine issues that attract public attention from the importance attached to such from among a plethora of issues that arise daily in the public domain. Lippman (1922) pioneered investigations into the understanding of how the media shape the perception of the audience about issues in their environment through the agenda-setting function, but Cohen (1963) is credited with refining Lippman's idea of agenda setting, when he wrote: "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963:13). In essence, the media attach more importance and prominence to issues that it thinks are important to the public by the

positioning of its contents, while neglecting other issues that it thinks are less important. McComb and Shaw (1972:176) offer a practical and more articulate interpretation of agenda-setting theory:

In shaping and displaying news, Editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position . . . The mass media may well determine the important issues — that is the media may set the 'agenda' . . .

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) extend the agenda-setting theory further with the idea of priming in the agenda-setting process. Priming explains the process by which the media deliberately draw attention to some aspects of political or social issues at the detriment of others, which could be much more important. This process could pose danger to the society, which could be deprived of the robust outcome of public discussions of the neglected but important issues. Lang and Lang (1983) also came up with another extension of agenda-setting theory, which they tagged 'agenda-building'. They describe this as a collective process by which the media, the government and the citizens reciprocally influence one another when it involves formulation of public policies. The basic premise of agenda-building is that the media profoundly affects how societies determine what its important concerns are by mobilising the various institutions towards a consensus. This idea suggests a whittling down of the power of the media to solely determine societal agenda for public discourses, nevertheless, the media is still a key factor in that process because of its enormous influence on other social and political institutions.

A macro-level consequence of agenda setting function of the media was articulated by Noelle-Newmann (1984), which he dubs 'Spiral of silence' theory. This theory describes a process whereby people holding contrary opinions to the dominant views in the mass media keep such views to themselves because of fear of rejection or isolation. Thus, in a spiralling process, the dominant view spreads easily because the adherents are encouraged to proclaim them by the media, while the other views held by the minority gradually disappear from public consciousness because their adherents had chosen to remain mute.

The long-term consequence of the persistence of spiral of silence is articulated by Baran and Davis (2003:316):

If various viewpoints about agenda items are ignored, marginalized or trivialized by media reports, then people will be reluctant to talk about them. As time passes, those viewpoints will cease to be heard in public and therefore cannot affect political decision making.

What this tends to suggest is that during a political conflict or in an election crises, if the media allows itself to be drowned in the interests of the political elite at the detriment of the opinion or interests of the majority of the populace, it could result into negative outcome in the confidence reposed in the media by the public and this may resonate in frustration in the political environment.

Economic and ownership influence also tends to affect the action of the media during political and election conflicts. Journalists are mostly employees who are strongly influenced by those who own and control the media. Like other employees in the capitalist enterprise, journalists are subjected to direct economic power of media owners. The fact that most news media organisations are constituted as lucrative capitalist enterprises, whose owners play key roles in the domestic economy and politics sometimes turn media owners and their employees into pro-systemic individuals. In the process, the normative role of the journalist in a democratic society is compromised or sacrificed to the business needs of the organisation that employs him (*see* McNair, 1998). This tendency could find expression in the election reporting process and the direction taken by media organisations while covering election activities. This could also resonate during election violence.

Sobowale (1985) confirms the pervasiveness of ownership influence on Nigerian newspapers' coverage of national issues, while Akinsanya (1981) confirms the pervasiveness of ownership influence on the editorial direction of Nigerian newspapers in his study of some Nigerian newspapers during 1979 general elections. Akinsanya reveals that the *New Nigerian* newspaper, situated in Northern Nigeria, and owned by the federal government, gave strong support for the programmes of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), whose stronghold was the North; while *Sketch*, *Herald* and *Nigerian Observer*, owned by different

states reflected their ownership preferences in their support for various political parties ruling in the states. It was during the second republic that the *Concord* newspaper owned by businessman and politician M.K.O. Abiola was established to support the NPN. But as soon as Abiola left the party, the *Concord* swung its support away from the ruling party and joined the ranks of the government opposition newspapers.

In a study of the role of the print media in election crises, the understanding of the structure of ownership and control of newspapers is important for the obvious reason that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. The influence of newspaper ownership on perception of journalists and newspaper editorial crew could colour their dispositions during coverage and reporting of elections and political conflict events. This could influence the outcome of conflicts and may determine the position of conflict parties during and after elections.

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Pre-Colonial Press and Political Conflicts in Western Nigeria

The notion of the public sphere as propounded by the 20th century German scholar and prominent member of the Frankfurt School, Jurgen Habermas, was inherent in the political constitution of the traditional societies of south-western Nigeria. To Habermas, the very essence of democracy lies in the ability of private citizens to freely deliberate and affect the ruling class through the power of public opinion. Today, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and parliaments are the media of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989:49).

The monarchical administrative system of most Yoruba kingdoms embedded in them public spheres which appeared in form of systemic checks and balances and other avenues through which people could contribute to political discourses and express their displeasure to traditional political elite and the ruling class when such occasions arise. Such means of public communication and political discourses in traditional societies were both formal and informal and they were nurtured and stimulated by the quest for democratic participation in

public affairs. These traditional means of communication include the use of symbols, ceremonies, masquerades, discussions in market places, in palaces and the use of the talking drum.

The traditional culture of the public sphere provided a concrete foundation for the modern newspaper press to emerge and thrive in Yorubaland in southwest Nigeria, where newspaper journalism started before the emergence of the Nigerian State. Missionaries who brought Christianity and emigrant ex-slaves¹ who arrived in the Yoruba area from Sierra Leone, the Americas and Europe buoyed the growth and development of Western education which provided the bedrock for the beginning and growth of newspapers. The first newspaper in Nigeria *Iwe Irohin Yoruba* was established in Abeokuta in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend a missionary of the C.M.S mission (Omu, 1965). *Iwe Irohin* started as a purely Yoruba newspaper and it subsequently became bilingual (published in English and Yoruba in same editions). Robert Campbell, an Afro-West Indian followed suit by establishing *Anglo-African Newspaper* in Lagos in 1863 and from then on the newspaper press experienced an accelerated growth in Yoruba southwest of the Niger until the British formally merged the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form the Nigerian State in 1914. However, colonial rule had commenced in both protectorates and the Lagos Colony before the amalgamation of the two protectorates into one entity along with the Colony of Lagos on the coast.²

The indigenous newspaper press was involved almost immediately at its inception in the political conflicts of its circulating environment in south-west Nigeria. Many of the early newspapers started out as tools to prosecute or support sides in political conflicts but invariably ended up as casualties of such conflicts. *Iwe Irohin*, which was established a

1. Most of the emigrant slaves settled down in Lagos and Abeokuta, which later became the cradle of the Nigerian Newspaper press and indigenous journalism practice in the pre-colonial and colonial era. The émigré brought new skills and education, which boosted printing businesses and journalism practice during the period.
2. Omu (1965) provides a more detailed account of the growth of the newspaper press in south-west Nigeria and in Lagos Colony in the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

clear 55 years before the emergence of the Nigerian State, was said to have been set up by Reverend Townsend to promote missionary endeavours and aid the spread of Western education (Duyile, 1987; Omu, 1965). The publisher stated in the first edition of the newspaper that the publication was aimed at inculcating a reading habit in the people and to propagate the Gospel as wide as possible in the 'dark part of Africa'. Having gathered some experience in his brother's printing business in England, Rev. Townsend was able to manage *Iwe Irohin* sufficiently to cover his costs and subsequently included English translated versions for the benefit of readers outside the Yoruba ethnic group. This initiative catapulted the newspaper into pre-eminence in the pre-colonial environment and soon the paper was adopted next to the Bible by its readers because of the religious and moral messages and other contents about the socio-economic life of the people which crept gradually into the paper.

Reverend Townsend, however, soon recognised the potential of using his newspaper to fight political causes and he hastily plunged into this. First, he deployed the contents of the publication into the anti-slavery struggle which was a popular cause in Africa, Europe and the Americas in the 18th and 19th centuries. In strongly worded editorials, *Iwe Irohin* spoke against the illicit trade in slaves, which was still going on in some parts of the West African coast. The paper opposed this inhuman treatment of people engaged in by both European traders and some local elites, and this hit the right cord among the readers who saw the paper as fighting a problem that was constraining development.

Iwe Irohin also went into the economic terrain. While reporting news and information about the produce trade, the movement of goods and merchant ships from Europe to West Africa, it was also carrying advertisements of products and businesses, which strengthened international trade in West Africa. The newspaper, however, criticised the unfair trading practices being engaged in by the European business community to the detriment of the local people. This drew the attention of the British Governor of the Colony of Lagos, which was close to Abeokuta, the operational base of *Iwe Irohin*. It was recorded by Duyile (1987) that at first Reverend Townsend received advice and a mild warning to reduce the extent of his criticism of the negative trade

practices, and was later invited over to London by Crown officials for a sterner warning because of his incorrigibility and obduracy on the issue. All these were good enough for the paper because it shot up its popularity and credibility among readers. Even though the paper was operating from Abeokuta, outside of the British colonial administrative mandate then, its influence and readership was spreading to the Colony of Lagos and other major West African colonies. The Governor of Lagos could not censor the contents of the paper or restrict the paper's reach because it was operating from outside his jurisdiction.

In addition to its criticism of the political and economic practices of the European traders on the West African coast, Omu (1965) records that *Iwe Irohin* also engaged in some other battles. The paper was employed in the shadow battle between Reverend Henry Townsend and Bishop Ajayi Crowther, the first black African Anglican Church Bishop, in their war of superiority. Townsend deployed the newspaper in criticising the election of Crowther as the first African black Bishop, in which some measure of racism was insinuated (*Iwe Irohin Yoruba*, 4 June 1864). Earlier in 1861, *Iwe Irohin* had vehemently opposed a scheme supported by Crowther for the repatriation of Canadian Negroes and ex-slaves to Abeokuta. This smacked of bitter hostility to Crowther, even though he belonged in the same Christian denominational stock as Townsend (*Iwe Irohin Yoruba*, 5 October 1861).

Iwe Irohin was also deployed to reporting conflicts. It reported extensively local armed conflicts and furnished its readers with accounts of battles in the famous *Ijaiye* war of 1860.³ However, the paper was deployed to the support of the Egba people against the people of Ibadan in that war by dwelling more on the exploits of Egba warriors against Ibadan fighters (Omu, *op. cit.*).

3. The *Ijaiye* war was fought by the Ibadan and the Egba over the control of trade routes linking the two Yoruba sub-groups with Lagos colony. This kind of bloody internecine war was common in Yorubaland during the period. The attempt to stem the tide was in fact one of the reasons the British offered to justify the colonization of Yorubaland. For more accounts of this war, see AdeAjayi, J.F. (1962) *Milestones in Nigerian History*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

It was the coverage and reportage of one of these bloody encounters that actually sounded the knell of *Iwe Irohin*. The paper was accused by the Egba of taking sides in the violent uprising (*Ifole*, 1867) involving the Egba and the colonial authorities in Lagos, which arose from a disputation over the control of the trading routes which linked Egba territories to Lagos. Consequently, the Egba retaliated by expelling all Europeans in Egbaland, sacking and vandalising the offices and the printing press of *Iwe Irohin*, which forced Townsend to flee. The closure of *Iwe Irohin* meant the loss of the source of livelihood to its publisher, workers and numerous others who benefited from the operations of the publication. The paper never recovered. This event signified the beginning of a trend in journalism in Nigeria which has extended into contemporary times.

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Colonial, Post-colonial Press and Political Conflicts in Western Nigeria

The colonial period in Nigeria marked another phase during which the press, although very active, witnessed stunted growth due to its involvement in political conflicts. Idowu (2001) reports that between 1880 and 1937, about 51 newspaper titles were established in Nigeria. The proliferation of newspapers, especially in Lagos during this period was because of a number of factors: first, the growing merchant trade in Lagos, which gave rise to the potential for advertising and a demand for information on trade issues; second, the quest by educated Africans to enlighten fellow Africans on issues around them; and third, the growing popularity of printing presses and the expansion of the printing industry which made investments in printing lucrative. But perhaps the greatest motivation for establishing newspapers during the colonial era was political. Young educated Africans, especially those who have been exposed to liberal democracy in Europe, sought to exert influence on the colonial government and to expose public matters in open discussion. They also needed a forum for agitating for equal rights and

the abolition of discrimination in public places.

Although, the political struggle was not very intense until the introduction of adult suffrage in the 1920s, years before the adult suffrage was used to plant and nurture the seed of political participation by educated black Africans, a number of black Africans domiciled in Western Nigeria were involved in the struggle to use the newspaper press for political agitations. They were noted for their ferocious criticism of European domination and colonial repression during this period. *The Lagos Times*, established in 1880 by R.B. Blaize, a Sierra Leonean immigrant with strong connections in Abeokuta, was regarded as the first truly indigenous newspaper of this brand. *The Lagos Observer*, owned and edited by J. Blackall Benjamin, was highly noted in the struggle. *Eagle and Lagos Critic*, owned and edited by Owen Emerick Macaulay, grandson of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, was also popular, although it was suspected to be slightly pro-government because of its advert patronage from the colonial administration.

But perhaps the most popular newspaper in the colonial period before the commencement of adult suffrage in Nigeria was *Lagos Weekly Record*, established by John Payne Jackson in 1891. The paper initially proclaimed that it was strictly a business venture with nothing to do with politics.¹ But its consistent and pungent attack of the colonial government and the exploitative tendencies of European enterprises in Lagos and the hinterland boosted its popularity, circulation and advert patronage by local entrepreneurs. The paper was described by Omu (1965) as a great stimulator of progressive thoughts and radical action. It strongly opposed racial inequality and the denial of basic democratic rights to Africans. The activities of the paper and its publishers were believed to have stimulated the first press repression law in Nigeria – the Seditious Offences Ordinance of 1909. The Editor of *Lagos Weekly Record* was the first victim of the law and he was jailed as a result of

1. Omu records that in the edition of *Lagos Weekly Record* of 21 April, 1894, the paper stated: "We deem it necessary to state for the information of our friends and public generally that our journalistic venture is a private enterprise undertaken for profit. We do not pose as a public benevolent institution nor a philanthropic charity."

his criticism of some of the policies of Governor Lord Lugard in Northern Nigeria. Lugard eventually implemented the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. When the paper refused to stop its criticism of Lugard's government on public matters, the government ordered the stoppage of all the paper's foreign advertisement subscription, which put the publication in a precarious economic situation. In spite of these challenges, the paper remained consistent and successful until the outbreak of the World War I when it acquired its own printing press, called *Samadu Press*, which was very popular in Lagos.

With the death of John Payne Jackson in 1915, the *Lagos Weekly Record* was taken over by his son Thomas Horatio Jackson, a well-educated firebrand, who brought fresh savvy to nationalist politics and newspaper business. This coincided with the beginning of a new era in journalism after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914. The combative style of journalism exhibited by Horatio Jackson at this time marked him out as a feared and hated writer by political opponents. Macmillan (1920) describes him as "an able and versatile writer and a bold and influential champion of the Negro race".

However, the colonial government of Governor Lugard did not surrender to the attacks of the *Lagos Weekly Record* and its contemporaries. It countered some of the criticisms of the hostile newspapers by prompting and supporting another indigenous politician to establish a newspaper that was pro-government. Kitoyi Ajasa, a prominent lawyer and politician, was encouraged to establish a newspaper called *Pioneer* in 1914 and the paper was effectively used by the government in countering the hostile press. *Pioneer* was favoured with government advert patronage. In return for his loyalty to the colonial government Ajasa (whose original name was Edward Macaulay) was nominated into the Legislative Council by Governor Lugard several times, and he was popularly regarded as a stooge of the whites among Lagosians at the time (Omu, *op cit*).

As the spirit of nationalism spread among young Africans, many other newspapers were established to oppose colonial policies. Other contemporaries of Horatio Jackson's *Weekly Record* were *The African Messenger*, established by Ernest Ikoli in 1921; *Eko Akete*, established by Adeoye Deniga in 1922; *Nigerian Spectator*, established in 1931 by

Akinwande Savage; *Nigerian Advocate*, established in 1923 by S.H. Braithwaite, among others.

According to Omu (1996), the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a decline in newspaper publishing business in Nigeria due to economic depression. Most of the vibrant newspapers in circulation then, including *Lagos Weekly Record*, were rested. This situation created an atmosphere of political uncertainty and apathy among the nationalists and the general populace. However, by the time the economic recession ended in the late 1930s, the vacuum created by the demise of most of the old newspapers which were being published weekly began to be filled with the gradual emergence of dailies.

This new era also brought another dimension into the newspaper business. The foremost Nigerian nationalist and politician Herbert Macaulay established *Lagos Daily News* in 1927 at almost the same time that he formed his political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The paper was the first daily newspaper in Nigeria and it was described as a fire-spitting newspaper, a thorn in the flesh of the colonial government (Duyile, 1987). Macaulay introduced active politics into the practice of journalism as he deployed the newspaper to the campaign for the NNDP, which won 3 seats in the Legislative Council election of 1927. *Lagos Daily News* henceforth became the mouthpiece of NNDP and a platform for Herbert Macaulay to expound his political ideas and exert pressure on the colonial government to expand the political space to accommodate adequate representation of the people of Nigeria. This quest earned him the accolade of Father of Nigerian nationalism and the 'Gandhi' of Africa, among his contemporaries. However, as a result of financial constraints, Macaulay could not sustain a daily and regular publication of his newspaper, partly because of the deliberate policy of the colonial government to discourage advertisers from using the paper. The paper receded into epileptic production until it eventually fizzled out.

At the demise of *Daily News*, however, Nnamdi Azikiwe had arrived on the journalism scene with his establishment of *West African Pilot* in 1937. Fresh from university and having gathered some practical experience in the Gold Coast where he was jailed as an Editor of *African Morning Post*, Azikiwe was full of nationalist zeal. He announced the

mission of the *Pilot* as: “the sentinel of popular liberty and guardian of civilisation” (Omu 1996: 6). *West African Pilot* anchored its ideology on a campaign against racial superiority and domination. The paper proclaimed that it “aimed at restoring the dignity and self-confidence of the black man”. It brought a refreshing era into journalism by introducing dynamism and a combative nationalist style. At the same time, it exhibited a new model in profitable newspaper business after the recession of the previous decade. In addition, Azikiwe deployed the paper in the political struggle by openly supporting the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), which he had formed earlier with two other nationalists, H.O Davies and Ernest Ikoli. *West African Pilot* exerted so much influence on the political and journalism terrain that it raised the popularity of NYM² beyond that of the rival NNDCP. The large number of professionals associated with the newspaper was also seen as a measure of the rapid growth of journalism in the 1940s and 1950s.

The commercial success of *West African Pilot* encouraged Azikiwe to launch other newspapers across Nigeria in the 1940s, all of which were deployed to the nationalist struggle and the political ambition of Nnamdi Azikiwe. He established *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* in Port Harcourt in 1940, *Nigerian Defender* in Warri in 1943, *Daily Comet* in Kano and Lagos, *Eastern Sentinel* in Enugu in 1955, and *Nigerian Monitor* in Uyo in 1960 (Azikiwe, 1970: 389). All of these were under the banner of Zik Group of Newspapers, the business holding company of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Omu (1965) contends that Azikiwe actually laid the foundation for modern Nigerian journalism and brought intellectual fervour into the profession. He describes the components of the journalism revolution brought by the Zik group as “democratisation of access, aggressive propaganda, commercialisation and technical revolution”.

2. In an interview granted to the author in his residence on 7 November 2005, Pa Emmanuel Alayande, a politician and close associate of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, disclosed that he met Chief Awolowo for the first time at a meeting of the Nigerian Youth Movement in Lagos in 1944, thus beginning a lifelong political friendship. The NYM was then the umbrella body for the political struggle engaged in by young Nigerians during the struggle against colonial domination.

Azikiwe pulled out of the NYM when a division occurred among its members to form a new political party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). In the process, the support which *West African Pilot* and its associate newspapers were giving to NYM was withdrawn and redeployed to the NCNC. However, *Daily Service* which was being published by another member of NYM, Ernest Ikoli at the same period, continued to support the NYM. Eventually, *West African Pilot* and *Daily Service* began to exhibit intense rivalry because of the political differences of their publishers.

The importance and centrality of the newspaper press for political struggle was fully ingrained into the Nigerian political scene by Azikiwe after Herbert Macaulay, through the activities of *West African Pilot* and the associated newspapers. This served as a precedent for other politicians to follow. By 1945, when Obafemi Awolowo established *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* as a socio-political platform for young Yoruba students in London where he was then studying, *Irohin Yoruba* a Yoruba newspaper had been established by Reverend T.A. Dolobiri as a platform to advance Yoruba political cause in Nigerian politics. By the time Awolowo returned to Nigeria after his studies in England, *Irohin Yoruba* had already established a reputation at the grassroots. It was, therefore, used effectively to propagate *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, which was a forerunner of the Yoruba mainstream political party, the Action Group (AG), which was established by Awolowo and others in 1949. In the same year, Awolowo established *Nigerian Tribune* to further propagate the ideals of the newly formed AG. Thus, both *Irohin Yoruba* and *Nigerian Tribune* became formidable tools in the ensuing political rivalry. Without further pretensions, *West Africa Pilot* and its sister publications were deployed intensely in the political struggles of the NCNC, thus setting the stage for intense rivalry among party newspapers. Meanwhile, even before the establishment of *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Service* had shown sympathy for the Action Group while counteracting *West African Pilot*, which was supporting NCNC. Of this rivalry, Omu (1978: 248-250) comments:

The feud between the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Service* (in the 1940s), contributed to the regionalisation of nationalism and the crystallisation of inter-group tension and animosity, which characterised

political developments for a long time. With . . . the emergence of modern political parties as well as party-controlled administrations, old antagonisms were intensified and the atmosphere of politics and the press seethed with bitter rivalry and enmity. With few exception, the newspapers were owned or supported by the rival political parties (mainly) the NCNC and AG, and it is one of the ironies of Nigerian history that in a crucial decade in the nation's development, a period which witnessed the taking of political and constitutional steps which led inexorably to independence, the newspapers were completely immersed in the vortex of partisan politics and were in no position to prepare the people for the challenge of independence and national unity.

The publishers of *Daily Service* and *Nigerian Tribune* later merged their publishing companies to form Allied Press Ltd, which had in its stable other titles such as *Sunday Express*, *Trohin Yoruba*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily Service*.

In spite of all the politicisation of the newspaper press in the later years of colonialism in Nigeria, the press was still regarded as the leading light in the struggle for independence. While other countries fought the battle for independence on the field, the founding fathers of Nigeria used the press in politics. In all of those years of the nationalist struggle, the newspaper press was used to seek the greatest good for the people of Nigeria and, in particular, advocated for good governance in spite of colonialism.³ The press was never used to incite the populace into violence against absurd political situations, and it generally advocated for the welfare of citizens.

THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PRESS AND POLITICAL CRISES

The unified struggle for nationalism and advocacy for Nigeria's common interest was fast receding in the press, giving way to sectional affinity. By independence, except for some newspapers and magazines which

3. This opinion was expressed by Alhaji Lateef Jakande during an interview with the author. Alhaji Jakande was a veteran journalist and politician who was a staunch member of the Action Group and who later served as Governor of Lagos State in the Second Republic. The interview was conducted on 27 November 2005.

had foreign interests and were engaged in commercial publishing, such as *Daily Times* and *Drum* magazine, other prominent newspapers in Nigeria were clearly exhibiting glaring sectional sentiments in their contents. *West African Pilot* was openly advocating the interests of Eastern Nigeria where its publisher Nnamdi Azikiwe was Premier; *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily* and *Sunday Express* and *Daily Service* were clearly exhibiting their support and sentiments for the government of the Western Region, while only the *Daily Times* was exhibiting some measure of neutrality on the political turf. Omu (1978: 250) remarks on this development:

The first few years of independence saw little change in the political style of the newspapers. Indeed, the struggle for power among the politicians assumed a new fury and the competing party newspapers advertised their fanaticism. A few times, they acted together in the successful agitation against proposed Preventive Detention Act of 1963 but the pervasive mutual suspicion made for little regular co-operation and persistent mudslinging vitiated opportunity for constructive work. In major events of the sixties – the Action Group crisis of 1962, the 1962-3 and 1963-4 Census, and the Federal election of 1964 and its aftermath – the newspaper press provided a remarkable example of overzealous and irresponsible partisanship and recklessness.

Also, by independence, the electronic media started to grow and gain prominence. Ownership of the electronic media was initially part of the Exclusive List, but the constitution of 1954 transferred broadcasting ownership and control to the Concurrent List (Maduka 1989).⁴ Before 1959, the only radio station in Nigeria, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), was owned by the Federal Government.

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4. Maduka reveals that representatives of the Western Region in the federal parliament embarked on intense lobbying which resulted in the transfer of broadcasting matters to the Concurrent List after Chief Awolowo, the Premier of Western Region, was denied the opportunity by the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) to defend himself on radio of the allegation of disloyalty levelled against him by the colonial authorities (see Maduka, I.V. (1989) "The Development of Nigerian Television (1959-1985)", in Peter P. Ekeh and Garba Asiwaju (eds.) *Nigeria Since Independence. The First 25 Years*. Vol. VII. Ibadan: Heinemann Books).

In 1959, the Western Region blazed the trail in regional broadcasting by establishing the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) encompassing a radio and a television station.

Another trend emerged in the ownership structure of the newspaper press after independence. Most newspapers had previously been owned by private individuals with or without political interests. But in 1960, the Eastern Nigerian government decided to establish *Eastern Outlook* as mouthpiece within and outside the region. The Federal Government followed suit by establishing the *Morning Post* in 1961 and much later in 1964, the Western regional government established *Sketch*, while *New Nigeria* was established by the Northern government in 1966 from the relics of *Nigerian Citizen*. With the establishment of government newspapers, another dimension was introduced into journalism practice, whereby journalists in the employment of government-owned newspapers were not expected to enjoy as much opportunity for personal expression as those in privately-owned newspapers (Omu, 1996). This signified a gradual recession of the crusading brand of journalism, since journalists working with the government newspapers were expected to function within the confines of official interests, just as the civil servants. This, however, did not prevent the privately-owned newspapers from operating and continuing to protect their political interests, or remaining neutral in the political terrain.

4

The Press and 1965 Parliamentary Elections in Western Nigeria

Months before the October 1965 parliamentary elections in the Western Region of Nigeria, political discourse in the popular press was laden with incitements of the public and the demonisation of political parties and key politicians by the polarised newspapers that were circulating in the region. The major newspapers were partisan and sometimes vitriolic in their contents, giving an early indication of the direction in which the parliamentary elections could head. In effect, the polity was heated up while the public was indirectly educated on what to do if their wish to have the government of their desire was frustrated by anyone.

Several issues relating to the election were thrown up in the newspaper discussions before, during and after the elections, which generated negative exchanges among politicians, aided by journalists who mostly ignored their social responsibilities of providing unbiased information. Instead, they published volatile and vitriolic contents for public consumption, ignoring the potential consequences of their actions in pursuit of matters that favoured the political parties that were

sponsoring their newspapers.

The two major contending political parties, the NNDP and the UPGA (a coalition of the AG and NCNC), had major popular newspapers championing their cause and serving as platforms for their supporters. Remarkably, the NNDP which had the support of the NPC, the ruling party at the federal level, had *Morning Post*, a federal newspaper, deployed to its support. *Daily Sketch*, which was established by the incumbent NNDP government a few months before the elections and was still trying to make an impact in the newspaper journalism scene, had within it a reluctant staff that could not make up their minds on whether to support the ruling government or remain neutral in the campaign towards the parliamentary elections. This was eventually to the regret of Premier Ladoke Akintola and his political associates who had thought the paper would be useful in their campaigns. This development led to the hurried establishment of *Morning Star*, a private newspaper sponsored by Premier Akintola.¹ Unfortunately, the *Morning Star* never had enough time to make its impact felt before the parliamentary elections. The UPGA alliance had the support of the immensely popular *West African Pilot* of Azikiwe and *Nigerian Tribune* owned by Awolowo, who, although in prison at the time of the election, remained the acknowledged leader of the AG. The immense popularity of *West African Pilot* and *Nigerian Tribune* in Western Region could, however, not be compared with that of *Morning Post*, which was only popular in Lagos and the Northern Region where the NPC had its base but which, in any case, was also circulating in the Western Region; and that of *Sketch*, which was still finding its feet as a newly established newspaper. Other popular newspapers during the period which maintained neutrality were mainly privately owned. These include *Daily Times*, *Daily Service* and *Drum*, a weekly publication.

The debate about what date to hold the parliamentary elections provided an important insight into the pervasive anxiety among politicians both on the ruling and opposition sides, and this found adequate expression in the contents of the newspapers a few months to the elections. While the opposition members were anxious to have the

1. This information was given to the author by Chief Richard Akinjide, a close associate of Chief Akintola.

elections, borne out of confidence of the possibility of snatching power from the ruling party, the ruling party, on the other hand, was reluctant to fix a definite date for the parliamentary elections, which was within its constitutional powers. The NNDP's position found expression in the following news story:

UPGA MUST KEEP PEACE OR — NNDP

The NNDP has warned leaders and supporters of UPGA not to create a situation which may compel the Western Nigeria government with the support and co-operation of the federal government to take constitutional steps to extend the life of the present regional legislature. The party also declared that it was the prerogative of the government party in a democracy to choose its date in matter of timing of any election. "We are determined to enjoy this prerogative to the fullest," it further declared in the statement. The NNDP then advised those who wanted election in the region this year not only to be law abiding, but also to abstain from importing hooligans and thugs from abroad into Western Nigeria.

(Morning Post (hereinafter, MP) Friday, August 6, 1965, front page).

In response to the NNDP's threat to postpone the elections using its privileged position as the ruling party, the opposition AG quickly issued a statement prominently carried in its own newspaper as follows:

BID TO SIT TIGHT TILL DECEMBER: NNDP AFRAID OF DEFEAT IN WEST POLL — AG

The Action Group of Nigeria has described as a "mere bluff of a political party that is now absolutely sure of unqualified defeat at the polls," the statement credited to Mr N.A.B. Kotoye of the NNDP to the effect that elections to the Western House of Assembly might not be held until December this year. In a reply to the statement yesterday, Mr Bola Ige, the Publicity Secretary of the AG remarked that the UPGA "is not surprised at Kotoye's statement because it is a mere red herring devised to direct public attention from the virulent plague of rivalry and jealousy that is almost killing the NNDP just now". The political internecine "war" that is destroying the NNDP has prompted Kotoye's statement. The AG then said that the UPGA had reiterated that whether election were held this year or in 1970, the alliance, by the grace of God would certainly control the next government of Western Nigeria.

(West African Pilot (hereinafter, WAP), Friday, August 6, 1965, front page).

This statement, coming from the publicity secretary of the AG, Mr Bola Ige, seemed to set the stage for opposition members to mount pressure on the NNDP to fix a date for the election and it boosted the courage of other members of the UPGA alliance to mount more pressure. It elicited a barrage of statements, which were even more virulent from a militant group within the opposition:

... In another release by the Okpara Youth Brigade in Ibadan, the youths described the statement of Mr Kotoye, NNDP publicity secretary as hypocritical and utter rubbish. The Brigade noted that the diabolical tactics which the NNDP had tried to employ in finding ways and means of rigging the impending elections had exposed their sordid intentions . . .
(WAP, Friday, August 6, 1965, front page).

And yet, there was an even more virulent statement from another sector of the opposition:

Also, the Western wing of the Zikist Movement has in a press release this morning regretted that the NNDP has proved to the world that the party is not prepared to go to the polls for the purpose of purification...It therefore called on the prime minister, the president of the republic and the Governor of the West, to use their good offices to save the impending political "warfare that was looming over the region". (Emphasis mine)
(WAP, Friday, August 6, 1965 Front Page).

But perhaps the most virulent of the reactions to the NNDP's reluctance to fix a date for the elections appeared in a personal column by Olu Ibitola of *Nigerian Tribune*:

TRAITORS SELDOM END WELL

That the Western House of Assembly will not be dissolved before the end of this month is completely out of the question; that the NNDP may not name the date of election till December is not only a child's play, but also an expensive joke . . . The law of retribution is irrevocably here on earth . . . but God the honest referee of mankind and the masses are solidly behind the UPGA . . . the UPGA is resolute to go all out for a dedicated struggle to right those grievous human wrongs committed by the reckless outgoing position-seekers . . . (Emphasis mine)
(*Nigerian Tribune*, hereinafter referred to as *NT*, September 20, 1965 page 4).

The tension generated by the statement from the NNDP revealing its reluctance to announce a date for the parliamentary elections was doused by another statement credited to the Prime Minister:

PM ON EXTENSION OF ASSEMBLY LIFE

The Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa told newsmen at the airport yesterday that he did not see how a legislature could exceed its normal life except it was acting within the law . . . He was commenting on the threat of the NNDP who had boasted earlier that they could extend the life of the Western House of Assembly to December . . .
(WAP, Friday, August 6, 1965, front page).

The Prime Minister's declaration offered succour to opposition politicians in the Western Region and it was, indeed a relief to the people who had hoped that an election could ease the mounting tension in the region and the impending chaos which was becoming obvious in the political terrain. The Prime Minister's declaration also sent a signal to the government of the Western Region and the regional parliament that any unnecessary delay in holding the parliamentary election could generate more heat in the region and would further diminish the credibility of the government. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was known to be a supporter of Akintola's government, but, if he had made such a statement against further delay of the parliamentary elections, it was a signal that Akintola government's popularity was waning even among his supporters who had decided to act in the interest of the public. The PM's position could have been informed by security and intelligence reports about the impending political violence judging from the preparation of politicians towards the elections and their utterances in the media in the Western Region.

Already, the stage was set for a massive demonisation of the ruling NNDP in the opposition newspapers. The opposition was at an advantage because of their ownership of most of the popular newspapers. Indeed, the merger of the AG and the NCNC to form UPGA turned out to be a situation where *Nigerian Tribune* and *West African Pilot* would work in concert to reinforce not only their criticism of Akintola's government but also its demonisation with the hope that this would lead to the eventual fall of the government. In addition, the massive demonisation was meant to psychologically instigate the public and prepare them to react against

any irregularities in the impending elections, or against any outcome that could enable the incumbent government to continue in power. Even if there was not going to be any irregularity, the people were already being made to realise that the continuance of the NNDP in government could mean an extension of their pain and suffering. A sense of panic was created by the newspapers and the public were told in constantly orchestrated and reinforced media messages that the government was working against their interests, as shown below:

1,000 UPGA SUPPORTERS FLEE HOMES

More than 1000 UPGA supporters have fled their homes for fear of NNDP victimization and have sought refuge in Ibadan and Lagos. This was a result of alleged arrests of innocent political opponents and prosecution by the local government police, sanitary inspectors or tax assessment committee in Western Nigeria . . .
(WAP, August 13, 1965, front page)

Such stories certainly served effectively to reflect the intention of the *West African Pilot* to inform the people of the readiness of the ruling government in the Western Region to use state security apparatuses to inflict hardship on the opposition. Local government police, sanitary inspectors and tax collectors were dreaded state organs among the people, because of the nature of their activities which involved enforcing compliance with the relevant portions of the law that established them. Delivering these apparatuses to victimise and terrorise the opposition could cause hatred and a sense of panic not only among the opposition but also the entire citizenry. Such stories had the potential of aggravating anxiety and panic in the political terrain, and could accentuate people's desire to oust the incumbent government even by means other than the election process if such means were available. Below are samples:

**NNDP ORDERS DEMOLITION OF HOUSES:
ONLY UPGA SUPPORTERS IN THE AREA AFFECTED**

A house at 9, Kasumu Street, Agege belonging to the divisional leader of the NCNC, Mr V.A. Osijirin is in danger of demolition by the Ikeja Area Planning Authority. The instruction for the move came from NNDP Secretariat, Agege . . .
(WAP, September 14, 1965, front page).

MUSHIN NNDP PLANS MASS ARREST

The AG Youths Association in Mushin and district has alleged that the NNNDP in the area had listed at one of its meetings the names of some AG leaders in the area on whom special operation were to be mounted by the NNNDP thugs. The Youths also alleged that at the meeting, the NNNDP also decided to be arresting the masses indiscriminately, particularly the supporters of the UPGA before the coming of the West regional election . . . (*Emphasis mine*)
(*NT, September 20, 1965, page 2*).

KOLANUT THEFT

An NNNDP local leader, Ganiyu Adebayo last Thursday made a brief appearance at the Shagamu Chief Magistrate Court on a charge of stealing some kolanut pods valued at 15 shillings. According to the charge sheet, the accused went to the farm of one Olatunji Adefo on September 10 at Ojere to pluck the said kolanuts. Adebayo pleaded not guilty to the charge . . .
(*NT, September 22, 1965, page 2*).

In criminal proceedings in Nigeria, the court normally would not inquire about the political affiliation of an accused person. It is, therefore, interesting that *Nigerian Tribune* reported and emphasised that the accused in the story above was a party member of the NNNDP. In view of the many proceedings that go on in courts each day, it is interesting to observe also that this particular case was singled out for coverage because a "local leader" of the ruling party was involved. This and other preceding stories attested to the deliberate demonisation of the ruling political party members and government and efforts at instigating the public into hatred for the government.

Eventually when the regional parliament decided to ratify the much awaited parliamentary elections in the Western Region, media attention gradually shifted to issues concerning the elections. Negative issues about the enabling electoral law were emphasised, especially those that were likely to put the opposition at a disadvantage or that could favour the ruling party during the elections, as illustrated below:

NEW ELECTORAL LAW FOR WEST — GBENRO DESCRIBES IT AS A FRAUD

Parliamentary Electoral Amendment Law of 1965 was passed in a stormy session in the Western House of Assembly today . . . The electoral amend-

ment law provides that where an elected candidate dies by malicious act of another person between the date of the candidate being declared elected and the date previously appointed for the holding of an election in the constituency covered, the nominators or sole surviving nominator as the case may be, may be elected in the place of the deceased — Leader of the opposition, Alhaji D.S Adegbenro described it as a device by the NNDP, the ruling party, to rig the impending election . . .

(WAP, September 18, 1965, front page).

It is interesting and remarkable that the Election Amendment Law of 1965 passed by the Western House of Assembly had anticipated violence in the 1965 election as revealed by the above story. This particular section of the law was intended to make it unattractive to murder an already elected contestant into a political office in the election since the defeated candidate would not have a chance of occupying the position. As a pre-emptive law, the portion was aimed at discouraging violence. However, members of the opposition UPGA perceived this clause as a ploy by the ruling party to perpetuate an unduly elected person in office even after he had been (rigged) into the office. These different perceptions by the incumbent parliament and opposition parties confirmed the deep-seated distrust among the political class which eventually manifested in the violence that accompanied the October 1965 parliamentary elections.

The opposition press could have interpreted the electoral law and educated the public about the importance of the law to the success of the forthcoming elections. However, because of the prejudiced view about the government which sponsored the law and the lack of confidence in its ability to organise a free, fair and violence-free election, the opposition press opted to take sides with and publicise the views of the opposition politicians on the electoral law. This negative interpretation obviously blocked people's perception of whatever good intention was behind this electoral law.

However, the opposition's attack on the electoral law was not without some merits. Other portions of the law which prescribed tight conditions for the opposition members to file election papers and especially the ban on public meetings shortly before the election were all rightly interpreted as a ploy of the incumbent government to manipulate the elections:

**BAN IN WEST — ATTEMPT TO STEAL POWER:
DR K.O MBADIWE**

The federal Minister of Trade and Parliamentary leader of UPGA has described the recent ban on public meetings and procession in Western Nigeria as an attempt to steal political power . . .
(WAP, Monday, September 20, 1965, front page).

NO POLL IN WEST, UNLESS — CHIEF BISI ONABANJO

Head of AG Bureau of Information has said that the impending Western election is bound to fail if UPGA candidates do not succeed in filing their nomination papers . . .
(WAP, Friday, September 24, 1965, front page).

The massive opposition to the electoral law and preparation for the election reached a peak when *Nigerian Tribune* went to town with a front page editorial criticising the government of the NNNDP and virtually inciting people to react to any attempt at manipulating the election:

DEMOCRACY RAPED

Crisis, economic stagnation, strife, sporadic commotions and political instability have been reigning supreme in Western Nigeria in the past three years. The occasion has now come. But is the NNNDP prepared to allow the oppressed and suppressed people to have unfettered hands in the election of their next rulers? From all indications, the NNNDP because it is mortally afraid of the people is resolved to stultify the aspirations and yearnings of the people. **If the NNNDP succeeded in planting itself in office for another lease of five years, without the peoples CONSENT what had happened in the West, nay Nigeria, in the past three years, will be a child's play compared with what would follow another imposition . . . We are sure that the people will defend their inalienable rights and will crush anything or anybody that may tend to steal their right . . . It is too expensive for any human being to sit on an expensive keg of gunpowder for five years.** This is what the party wants to experiment. All lovers of Western Nigeria must come out stoutly now or never to appeal to Akintola to allow the people elect freely the god they will worship. (*Emphasis mine*)
(NT, Monday, Sept 20, 1965, front page editorial).

In the process of conveying the points of view of its political patron to the public, *Nigerian Tribune* in this editorial ignored the vital responsibility of non-partisanship of the press and jettisoned its role in

preserving the political environment from destruction. By glorifying the political conflicts and violence that had taken place in the Western Region since the beginning of AG crises in the previous five years and in projecting the escalation of the political chaos, the newspaper surreptitiously encouraged the public to engage in violence as a measure to enforce their political rights. This irresponsible journalism led to even more daring incitements, which eventually culminated in the violence that accompanied the October 1965 elections.

In furtherance of the irresponsible mode of journalism practice pursued by the press before the parliamentary elections, ethnic and religious sentiments were introduced to rouse public emotion in readiness for violence during the election. This front page banner headline is illustrative:

**WESTERN NIGERIA ELECTION JIHAD: SARDAUNA MOVING
TO IBADAN WITH POWERFUL TEAM**

The Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the North, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello is to move into Western Nigeria capital with a powerful team on Sunday September 9 on an election Jihad . . .

(WAP, Thursday, September 16, 1965, front page).

Because of historical reasons, the people of south-western Nigeria are very sensitive to any suggestion of territorial expansion by the government of Northern Nigeria under any guise. This WAP story made allusion to the 18th century Hausa-Fulani conquest of some of the northern territories of the Yoruba nation, which still remained a sore point in the political relationship between the south-west and Northern Nigeria. The political alliance between NNDP and the NPC which ensured the victory of the NPC in the 1964 federal elections was insinuated to be part of the efforts to entrench Northern hegemony on the Nigerian state. The support of the federal authorities enjoyed by the incumbent NNDP government in Western region, especially in the run-up to the October 1965 elections was insinuated as a move in this direction.

Premier Akintola was presented in the press as a traitor in the image of the late historic *Are Ona Kakanfo* of the old Oyo Kingdom who, because of selfish motives, allowed Ilorin town and some other

parts of Yoruba northern territories be captured by the invading Hausa-Fulani Islamic jihadists. Since the Premier of Northern Region, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, was popularly acknowledged as an offspring of Othman Dan Fodio, the insinuation in this *WAP* report was simply that what the Northern rulers could not capture historically through the use of force they were about to capture using politics.

The *WAP* story had the potential of raising public anxiety and rousing the emotion of the historically conscious Yoruba nation, the opposition political elite especially people of other faiths other than Islam, who might perceive the campaign of Alhaji Ahmadu Bello in support of the ruling NNDP as something beyond the ordinary. It could be interpreted as a ploy for the North to subjugate Yorubaland. It also had the potential of sparking off ethnic and religious conflict among the peoples of Nigeria who had already mingled across the various divides in the country.

Another example of whipping up ethnic sentiments among the voters in the impending parliamentary election is seen here:

**WEST ELECTION STRATEGY:
STRANGERS ORDERED OUT OF OSHUN**

Thousands of strangers in Oshun Division, including Ogbomosho the home town of the Western Premier and leader of NNDP, Chief S.L Akintola have been ordered to quit the division. The strangers affected by the quit order are the Ibo elements, Ijebus, Egbas, and Ijeshas . . . Last Saturday, UPGA members said they would ask their supporters in the area to defend themselves if the local NNDP resorted to using acts of violence for the purpose of forcing the stranger elements to quit the division . . . (*Emphasis mine*)
(*WAP, Wednesday, October 6, 1965, front page.*)

This *WAP* story was orchestrated to create panic among the electorate a few days before the parliamentary election and possibly to stimulate public emotion against the ruling party. The story was not explicit on who ordered the 'strangers', who were all Nigerians in any case, out of Oshun Division. The story did not mention any official or unofficial directive from the divisional or regional government to the effect except for an insinuation that the directive was a local decision of members of NNDP in the areas considered as strongholds of the party where the so-called 'strangers' could vote for the opposition

parties. In essence, the story could be considered as untrue.

The *WAP* story could also be a preemptive strategy by UPGA to forestall the prevention of non-indigenes from voting in the parliamentary elections. Since it was generally believed that the bulk of votes for UPGA candidates could come from non-indigenes and settlers in the various divisions in the Western region, *WAP* could have carried the story to ensure more votes for UPGA candidates. The injury which such an alarming story could cause public sensibilities was, however, ignored by *WAP* because it wanted to protect party interests.

As the day of election drew near, more party propaganda, some hinging on the bizarre, were carried in the newspapers, as exemplified below:

SURE WIN FOR UPGA

"The NNDP want action; they (the NNDP) would get. Henceforth, we will gear up our machinery to prevent any fraud from being committed," the UPGA asserted in Ibadan last night. Addressing a routine press conference on the announcement that the Electoral Commission had returned 15 candidates unopposed, Mr Bola Ige, Federal Publicity Secretary of Action Group appealed to all supporters not to be down-hearted . . .
(*NT, September 30, 1965, front page*).

NNDP WOMAN SEES AWO FREED

'I spoke to him in my dream'

An NNDP woman leader in Oka, Madam Elege Aiyenowa last Thursday told a gathering of her party supporters that she had seen the AG life President, Chief Obafemi Awolowo in her dreams. Our correspondent understands that following this startling disclosure, Madam Aiyenowa had been banned from further attending NNDP meetings . . .
(*NT, Wednesday, September 22, 1965, page 2*).

The allusion to Chief Awolowo, the jailed leader of the AG in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, was in furtherance of the goal of whipping up public sentiment and sympathy in support of the AG. Chief Awolowo was very popular and was recognised as close to a Messiah because of his good performance when he was Premier from 1954 to 1959. References to the revered AG leader who was in federal prisons during the campaign was an insinuation that any extension of the Akintola government would mean a further erosion of the Awolowo legacy and

an ultimate prolonged incarceration of Chief Awolowo in the federal prisons. Banning the dreaming Madam Ayenowa from NNDP in the above story automatically meant a defection into AG, which was the exact message the story was meant to convey. The ruling NNDP members were also not mute in the face of the attacks hurled at their party in the opposition newspapers. Even though the opposition had the upper hand in the press war, there were occasional reactions to the attacks:

AKINJIDE ATTACKS EYO ESUA, "NNDP WOULDN'T QUIT OFFICE EVEN IF IT FAILS"

Mr Richard Akinjide, General Secretary of NNDP and Federal Minister of Education, yesterday accused Mr E.E. Esua, chairman of electoral commission of running the election arrangement without full consultation with other members of the commission . . .

(WAP, Saturday, September 25, 1965, front page).

WAR BEGINS OVER LCC POLL

Barely three days to the nomination of party candidates for the forthcoming Lagos City Council election, a serious crisis is brewing within Action Group (AG) in Lagos on arrangements for selection of official candidates.

(MP, Friday September 3, 1965, back page).

TROUBLE IN LAGOS AG CAMP

Trouble which has been brewing within the Action Group in Lagos is now threatening to split it open. It is all over struggle for the party nomination for the forthcoming Lagos City Council election.

(MP, September 9, 1965, back page).

The Lagos City Council (LCC) election preceded the regional parliamentary elections in Western Region. As a forerunner to the parliamentary elections, the LCC election was regarded as a test-run. Even though Lagos was fiercely an opposition turf, *Morning Post* owned by the federal government, was based in Lagos where it was not popular. Nevertheless, it was popular elsewhere outside Western Region. Being an organ controlled by the incumbent NPC federal government which formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) with the NNDP government of Western Region to win the 1964 federal elections, *Morning Post* was deployed to attack the opposition UPGA

and its members with the hope of making some impact on the LCC election outcome. However, the strength of *Morning Post* could not be compared to that of opposition newspapers which already had a large spread among readers in the hinterland of Western Region.

Eventually, the LCC poll was moved forward and it held on November 13, one clear month after the Western parliamentary elections (see *Nigerian Tribune*, October 2, 1965 for detailed reasons why the election was postponed).

As the countdown to the parliamentary elections began, the opposition newspapers became more alarmist. Stories that were capable of generating panic were slammed on the front and other strategic pages of the newspapers. Various reports from the different parts of Western Region pictured general insecurity and debased the capacity of the law enforcement agencies to protect both life and property in the region.

OSHUN, IFE, ILESHA BECOME TROUBLE SPOTS: NNDP THUGS HIT WEST

The NNDP has unleashed an unprecedented wave of thuggery and lawlessness throughout Western Nigeria. The situation has reached a stage that many citizens have abandoned their villages and towns. Reports reaching us from OSHUN, IFE, ILESHA and IBADAN districts show that the NNDP thugs are prepared to scare away voters before the polling day.

IBADAN: NNDP thugs have completely sacked both Ajibade and Obada villages. All the villages (sic) in the two villagers (sic) within the Ibadan North West II constituency have deserted their homes to hide in thick bushes.

OSHOGBO: Wild thugs retained by the NNDP have taken virtual control of the town parading the towns in jeeps and vans. The form of the 'operation annihilate all UPGA leaders and supporters' take the form: Hit and run to the nearest local government police station to lodge complaint (sic). Invariably, the people assaulted become the accused in the hands of the local government police.

(*NT Saturday, October 2, 1965, front page*).

POLICE WARNED

An UPGA leader, Chief Bisi Onabanjo, has warned that if the Nigerian Police drafted to Western Nigeria to maintain peace cannot offer protection

to the ordinary citizens of the region, they should not aid the Local Government Police in "Oppressing the people". Addressing a press conference at Ibadan yesterday, Chief Onabanjo observed that the Nigerian Police are providing "ARMED GUARDS" for the Local Government Police to continue harassing the people of Western Region . . .
(*NT, October 2, 1965, front page*).

The general picture of insecurity painted in the papers and the connivance of the security apparatuses with the members of the ruling party obviously generated panic among the public who, having lost confidence in government and security agencies, could only resort to forming vigilante groups to protect their lives and properties. This situation, occurring just before the election, expectedly contributed to the general violence that engulfed Western Region shortly before, during, and after the parliamentary elections. When the security apparatuses are seen to have been compromised, and the public have been fed with negative information by the media about the inability of the government to ensure their safety and welfare, the tendency is there for people to take the law into their hands on the excuse of striving to protect themselves and fighting to ensure the future of the polity.

As a result of the rumour that government was planning to rig the result of the election and the determination of the opposition to prevent this by whatever means, the police and the other security agencies began a pre-emptive arrest of people perceived to be a threat to security. Incidentally, these people were more on the side of the opposition. This drew a reaction from the leaders of the opposition and escalated the already tense situation.

CURB MASS ARREST OF UPGA MEN

Mr. Adeoye Adisa, leader of NCNC Mobolaji Grand Alliance yesterday called on the Commissioner of Police for Western Nigeria to check mass arrest of UPGA supporters by the NNDP controlled Local Government Police in the region, otherwise, he said, **UPGA supporters will be forced to fight mercilessly . . .**
(*WAP, Monday, September 27, 1965, front page*).

DEMOCRACY BETRAYED IN WESTERN REGION — McEWEN
Mr Frederich McEwen, National Secretary of NCNC has said that the

recent happenings in Western Nigeria has provided eloquent testimony of how political traitors have betrayed democracy and plunged the region into shame and mockery . . . **The UPGA would fight the NNDP to a standstill because there is a conspiracy in certain quarters to prevent UPGA from contesting all the 94 seats.**

(WAP, Tuesday, October 5, 1965, front page).

The naked use of violence-laden language as depicted in the above stories is obviously capable of aggravating the sense of panic amongst the reading public during the warm-up to the election. This process of stimulating panic eventually culminated in controversies over the filing of nomination papers by contestants in the election. From newspaper reports, while it was easy for contestants from the ruling party to file their papers, for members of the opposition parties, the process was likened to a "camel passing through the eye of a needle". As a result, several seats were declared won unopposed by members of the ruling party a few days before the elections. This equally aggravated the sense of panic that was already pervasive amongst voters. By this time, the stage was set for the first wave of violence, arson and kidnapping that accompanied the election.

Before the election date, a number of candidates were already declared winners unopposed. This trend became rampant as attested to by the next stories:

SURE WIN FOR UPGA

"The NNDP want action. They (the NNDP) would get. Henceforth, we will gear up our machinery to prevent any fraud being committed" the UPGA asserted in Ibadan last night. Addressing a routine press conference on the announcement that the Electoral Commission had returned 15 candidates unopposed, Mr Bola Ige, Federal Publicity Secretary of Action Group appealed to all supporters not to be down-hearted . . . *(Emphasis mine)*

(NT, September 30, 1965, page 5).

NO SIGNATURE ON WITHDRAWAL LETTER

The UPGA has said that it was not satisfied yet as to what prompted Mr L.A.D. Oyewo an UPGA candidate in Ogbomosho who was credited with the statement that he withdraws his candidature and thereby made it possible for the NNDP candidate for the constituency, the outgoing Premier of the

region, Chief Samuel Akintola to be returned unopposed.

The UPGA expressed shock over the announcement and warned that it would resort to grave consequences, if the candidate, who is a legal practitioner, was not traced. The Alliance said that the circumstance surrounding the withdrawal of Mr Oyewo still remains a mystery to the alliance and also the whereabouts of the young lawyer is yet to be traced . . .

(WAP, Monday October 4, 1965, front page).

The wave of declaring candidates elected unopposed even before the election took place reached a peak with the declaration of the incumbent Premier of the Western Region, Chief S.L. Akintola as elected unopposed. Coupled with the disappearance of his opponent a few days to the parliamentary election, this piece of news obviously had the implication of accentuating public panic and expectedly stimulated violent reactions from the opposition. For the opposition, therefore, it stood to reason that if they did not fight such injustice before the election, when would they?

Already, the confidence in the electoral body was eroding fast, with the numerous announcements declaring unopposed seats. Rumours were rife that the electoral body was perfecting the strategies of rigging elections to enhance an easy victory for members of the ruling party, who were contesting with opposition candidates. The opposition newspapers did not fail to expose some of these strategies, even though they could not support such with any evidence and could not quote any credible source from where the information emanated:

RETURNING OFFICERS LEARN SIX WAYS OF RIGGING ELECTIONS?

The *West African Pilot* learns that on October 5, at 11am, some returning officers for the Wednesday polls in the West were summoned to the Ibadan House of Chiefs where they received lectures on how to help NNDP at the election . . . Some of the returning officers were each made to swear to an oath that they would not reveal the plan to anybody . . .

(WAP, Saturday October 9, 1965, page 5).

Finally, the D-day for the parliamentary elections came on 11 October 1965. The papers were full of stories of the election. Some of the stories encouraged voters to exercise their civic rights by

participating in the election while others were outrightly canvassing for votes on behalf of each of the participating political parties.

WHY THE UPGA MUST WIN

Today, for the entire people of this republic and the people of Western Nigeria in particular, is a day of decision. The fate of the Republic rests in the hands of the Western electorates. If they return the NNDP to power, they condemn their region and the entire federal republic to another 5 years of servitude, poverty, unrest and victimization . . . They should take a cue from what has happened in the West since the past two years. The only sensible thing for them to do: **VOTE SOLIDLY FOR UPGA in TODAY'S crucial election.** UPGA alone can save the West from the grips of greedy reactionaries. **Chief Awolowo must be freed from Jail.** *(Emphasis mine)*
(WAP, Monday, October 11, 1965, page 4).

The *Pilot's* reference to the release of Chief Awolowo, who was still in prison before and during the parliamentary election, was not without importance. In spite of the fact that the acclaimed leader of the opposition was still in federal jail, his popularity among his followers never waned and the mention of his name during any political event in the West evoked strong emotions amongst his political followers and the people in general. Awolowo's name was very important in securing more votes for the opposition. Therefore, at any opportunity, the opposition did not fail during their campaigns to impress it on the people that the parliamentary election was another opportunity for them to effect the release of the incarcerated opposition leader by eliminating the incumbent regional government which supported the federal government to jail Chief Awolowo.

In the same edition published on election day, the WAP also came out with this strong editorial:

WEST'S DECISION DAY

The job of the *West African Pilot* today is a simple but very vital one. It is a plaintive summons for all eligible voters in Western Nigeria to **COME OUT TODAY AND VOTE** for the United Progressive Grand Alliance. In voting for the redemption of the West from the jackboots of the NNDP, we don't need to remind the Western electorates that no half measure will do. The NNDP is a festering cancer, which only a concerted and determined

total action can thoroughly wipe away . . . **If through monetary gains or flamboyant promises any Judases stay at home and refuse to vote, then whatever turn the election takes will be nobody's palaver but that of the Westerners themselves.**

A change of government is now imperative in Western Nigeria. And only by voting for UPGA can the perennial confusion and lack of progress in the West be brought to a standstill. Today therefore is **DECISION DAY** in Western Nigeria.

Let no voter fail his fatherland in this hour of reckoning. **VOTE FOR AG, VOTE NCNC, VOTE FOR UPGA.**

(*WAP, Editorial, October 11, 1965, page 4.*)

This blatant and open canvass for votes by WAP was not without implication. The opposition press at this time had completely shed the toga of neutrality, which is an important prerequisite in journalism practice. The only thing that mattered then was the interests of their proprietors and their political cleavages. While some schools of thought believe that the press could endorse political parties and candidates in an election, it could be regarded as an aberration to campaign openly and blatantly, especially in a volatile and fragile political environment. What the newspapers did at this point could be regarded as irresponsible because of the tense political atmosphere shortly before the election.

Violence erupted across the Western Region on the eve of the election, as reported by WAP edition of election day. In a way, the time of reckoning had come and the festering media war had begun to yield fruits. Witness the following:

ELECTORAL OFFICER ASSASINATED AT IBADAN

Mr. A. Oke, an electoral officer for one of the constituencies in Ogbomoshos was shot dead in broad daylight in Ibadan yesterday . . .

(*WAP, Monday, October 11, 1965, front page.*)

By the time the election was over, the entire Western Region of Nigeria had been engulfed in violence, the kind of which had never been witnessed before, as reported by the same newsmedia which had engaged in whipping up violent emotions among the voters before and during the elections.

**AFTERMATH OF WEST POLLING DAY: FIVE KILLED AND
250 ARRESTED**

Five men have been reported dead in the confusion which ensued throughout Western Nigeria as elections were still being held in the region yesterday. At Ibadan, an UPGA polling agent in Oshun South-East II constituency was reported shot dead . . .

(WAP, Tuesday, October 12, 1965, front page).

IBADAN BECOMES ARMY STATE?

The city of Ibadan has since yesterday seemed to have become a Police and Army State when announcement was made that the NNDP had won election. An NBC announcement yesterday evening that Governor, Chief Odeleye Fadahunsi re-appointed Chief Akintola Premier of Western Nigeria caused greater tension as men and women were patrolling the streets in Ibadan shouting Awo! Awo!! UPGA on top! UPGA on top!! . . . Newsmen who attempted to go inside the premises of Chief Awolowo were barred by armed Northern Nigeria policemen and soldiers who were causing confusion rather than maintaining peace and order. *(Emphasis mine)*

(WAP, Thursday, October 4, 1965, front page).

NNDP DELAY TACTICS ANGER MUSHING VOTERS

The last of the NNDP strategies to rig yesterday's election was demonstrated in the Mushin constituency where Chief Richard Akinyemi and V.A. Oshijirin both UPGA candidates were contesting . . . Women in the entire Mushin, some near sobbing, each time they called on Akinyemi's name and the possibility of his not going because of NNDP's machinations to rig an election which the whole world knows they should loose (sic) with shame in normal democratic circumstances . . .

(WAP, October 12, 1965, front page)

8,000 PROTEST

More than 8000 eligible voters demonstrated in the main street of Abeokuta today in protest against the results of last Monday's election . . .

(WAP, Friday, October 15, 1965, front page).

In the midst of the confusion that followed the parliamentary elections, *Nigerian Tribune* came out with a front page editorial in which it strongly criticised the conduct of the press before, during and after the election. Even though it also played a key role as one of the most popular newspapers in the Western Region, the paper recognised that the conduct of the press before and during that election negated

democratic practices and that their action was one of the main contributory factors to the pervading mayhem that attended the election:

WEST POLL FIASCO

The *Nigerian Tribune* has been studying critically the conduct of the October 11 west fiasco called general election . . . What of the so-called journalists? They are supposed to be molders of public opinion many of them dance around politicians in the thick of the night to be briefed about what and what not to publish. Most newspapers and Radio Editors have withdrawn their staff from the field and prefer to publish releases dished out to them by the big politicians who are financing them privately apart from their hirers. Though we cannot rightly condemn these newspaper executives for the damnable role they are playing in the west crisis because they have vested interests, but when the politicians continue to rape all decent institutions in our society, we feel they ought to be outspoken.

(*NT, Saturday, October 16, 1965, Front Page Editorial*).

Later, one would have thought that *Nigerian Tribune* would be repentant and desist from displaying blatant partisanship in order to reduce the mayhem that followed the election. But the paper wanted other papers to adopt its outspokenness even in the midst of the election mayhem. It went ahead with other vitriolic editorials that were capable of inflaming more of the violence that followed the elections:

THE PEOPLE WILL WIN

Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa has exposed himself to ridicule by misinterpreting deliberately the constitution he had sworn to protect . . . When we ask the PM to intervene in the West crisis now, it is not out of any fear that our people will weaken in their resolve. Balewa may continue to flood the west with army and the police so that Akintola may be able to rule the people who do not want him.

In five weeks, they (the people) have not shrunk from paying the supreme penalty to achieve their objective. Whether Abubakar intervenes or not, the *Nigerian Tribune* is convinced that this is a war the people are bound to win. With all the cunning of a fox and all the trickery of a monkey, we are pretty certain that Akintola simply cannot rule. Concluding, we are happy to note that the Prime Minister is now aware that the festering sore of the west has engulfed the whole young republic. It is a pity that he has cleverly been evading the application of

a panacea to the sore; fearing that to cure the sore may mean the political death of his friend . . . (*Emphasis mine*)
 (NT, Thursday, November 18, 1965, Front Page Editorial).

Shortly after the parliamentary elections, the Western House of Chiefs was to be filled with selected traditional rulers as the constitution required. Obviously, government would play a dominant role in this selection since the same politics that informed the parliamentary elections was also bound to extend to the filling of the House of Chiefs. This became another nerve-centre of destructive partisan politics and conflict in which the press ought to have played the role of an unbiased umpire. However, this role was jettisoned by the press; rather, more public sentiments were whipped up and this further inflamed the existing mayhem in the political environment of Western Region.

WE WARN AGAIN!

Yesterday, this paper carried the alleged plan being conceived by the NNDP to rig selection of Obas into the Western House of Chiefs . . . It will appear incredible to say that the NNDP can aim at rigging selection of Obas and Chiefs when the people are still demonstrating against the conduct and outcome of the October 11 fiasco. Those who have been talking of peace should tell Chief Akintola and his NNDP not to cause anything to be done which may invoke higher passion. **They, the genuine peacemakers, must tell the NNDP leaders in the language they can understand that the people of Western Nigeria will NOT take further non-sense even if it means paying supreme penalty in defense of other cherished liberty...** We should think that the ugly events during the last disputed West election and its aftermath would serve as a salutary lesson to all those who will be assigned to conduct future parliamentary elections in any part of this country.

No person, on account of few dirty pence or any material gain will like to forfeit his or her life and property five weeks after the elections, many officers who directed the election could not move freely for fear of being attacked. **We hope the tutored secretaries of these councils will learn their lessons and run away from the wrath to come. But if they choose to receive the devil's money and sidetrack the constitution, they must be prepared to damn the consequence of their folly. Let's hope a word is sufficient for the wise.**

(NT, Friday, November 19, 1965, Front Page Editorial).

Right beside the above editorial was a story with another headline which seemed to corroborate the *Tribune* editorial:

NO AWO NO PEACE!

The student's wing of the AG of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has said that there can be no peace in Western Nigeria and indeed Nigeria, with Chief Awolowo in jail . . . We regard it as foolhardiness for some politicians to feel they can deprive the people of their rights and get away with it. **The continued importation of Hausa "Killers" to Western Nigeria cannot silence the people . . .**

(*NT, Friday, November 19, 1965, front page.*)

After much effort had been exerted to persuade the incumbent regional government and the federal government to reverse some of the results of the parliamentary elections, the papers resorted to playing the ethnic card. By whipping up ethnic sentiments through their presentation of the security apparatus as being dominated by a particular ethnic group from a section of the country, the opposition newspapers created panic among the citizens of Western Region. This further aggravated the political violence that continued after the elections.

HORROR AT MUSHIN WITH FRESH ANTI-AKINTOLA SHOW: 'S' POLICE KILL MORE

The number of Yorubas killed by men of the "Special" Nigeria Police imported from the North to Western Nigeria immediately after the October 11 "election", rose up by one yesterday when a lorry driver was shot dead early in the morning at Mushin. According to a report, the driver, Raimi Adigun, was driving along Ishola road, when a Landrover carrying Nigerian Policemen of Northern origin suddenly emerged and started chasing him. The driver was said to have later defied an order by the police to stop. Following the refusal to stop, the police were said to have opened fire and killed him.

Meanwhile, the sporadic anti-Akintola demonstration against the conduct of the so-called west parliamentary election hitherto only featuring arson, killing and looting took a new turn yesterday when customary court judges and members of various council management committees started to resign their appointments . . . (*Emphasis mine*)

(*NT, Friday, November 19, 1965, front page.*)

Finally, in the thick of the parliamentary election mayhem, *Nigerian*

Tribune introduced "Thought of the Moment" column on its front page daily. These thoughts consisted of short, pungent and sometimes inciting quotations from prominent and not-so-prominent political and literary figures around the world. The intent of these "thoughts" obviously was to stimulate a subliminal hatred among the audience for the political environment and leave them thinking to arrive independently at a conclusion on the next action to take. Some of the thoughts are cited below:

NIGERIAN TRIBUNE THOUGHTS OF THE MOMENT SERIES

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure. — Thomas Jefferson
(*NT, Thursday, November 18, 1965, front page*).

Is life so dear, or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death! — Patrick Henry
(*NT, Friday, November 19, 1965, front page*).

There can be no real and effective freedom in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites. — Levin
(*NT, Monday, November 29, 1965, front page*).

The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers, but the happiness of the common man. — Lord Beveridge William
(*NT, Wednesday, November 17, 1965, front page*).

I believe this government cannot endure parliamentary half-slave and half-free. — Abraham Lincoln
(*NT, Friday, November 26, 1965, front page*).

CARTOONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Cartoons and illustrations were also used for political propaganda and the demonisation of opposing parties by party affiliated newspapers before the parliamentary elections and during the mayhem that accompanied the elections. For example, *Nigerian Tribune*, on the front page of its Wednesday, September 29, 1965 edition, carried an

illustration of an NNDP man running beside a £22,000 luxury car being driven by the Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) through a cocoa farm. Inside the car were some men with large turbans strapped on their heads. Right in front of the car was a man clutching a machete, obviously tending his crops. He is dubbed "West Farmer". Just before the luxury car reached the farmer, the NNDP man shouted: "Come on, cut down that cocoa for them to pass, and make sure you vote us in!" (*Appendix I*).

The effect of this illustration on the public psyche was very pertinent in the highly sensitive political environment pervading the Western Region before the parliamentary elections. Cocoa farming was then the main occupation of most farmers in the Western Region. As a major cash crop, cocoa was the source of affluence for prosperous farmers, and so a lot of political issues were influenced by the prices of cocoa and the real income to farmers from the crop. In fact, cocoa pricing was a major campaign issue in the coming parliamentary elections and so a lot of public emotions were attached.

The insinuation in the cartoon that the NNDP in concert with the NNA would destroy cocoa farms on their way towards capturing the Western Region in the parliamentary election had the potential of inciting farmers into action in order to protect their source of livelihood from being destroyed by the NNDP and NNA. The car was meant to depict the extravagance and profligacy of the ruling NNA government at the Centre. Shortly before the election, the importation of a luxury Mercedes Benz car of the same amount by an unknown individual had been a subject of controversy. The controversy was, however, resolved when it was eventually revealed that the car was imported by a prominent Emir in the Northern Region who was a patron of the ruling NPC.

Another cartoon carried on the front page of *Nigerian Tribune*, September 30, 1965 edition, a few days to the parliamentary election, was also inciting enough to generate tension and a negative public reaction to the ruling NNDP government. In this cartoon, three men engage in a kind of commercial transaction. The first man, obviously a Yorubaman because he has Yoruba tribal marks on his cheeks, is dubbed 'NNDP'. Standing in the middle, the second man, also a Yorubaman, is dubbed 'DEMO'. He carries a box on which is written

the legend, 'WEST'. Right on top of the box is a 'FOR SALE' sign. The third man, dressed in the Hausa-Fulani royal attire, is dubbed 'FEDERAL LORD'. While the DEMO man carrying the WEST is grinning, the NNDP man says to the FEDERAL LORD: "HURRY UP AND BUY IT". After a brief reflection, the FEDERAL LORD responds: "THIS MY FATHER'S LOST TERRITORY" (*Appendix 2*).

The meaning of this newspaper front page cartoon and its relevance to the prevailing political situation in the Western Region could be very deep to an average westerner because of a historical deep-seated suspicion of the expansionary tendencies of the Northern oligarchy, who had attempted to conquer part of Yorubaland in the 18th century. The NNA alliance in which the NNDP was a principal player was interpreted as an attempt by the NNDP leadership to offer the Western Region on sale to the Hausa-Fulani led federal government, which obviously was delighted in taking over the whole of Western Region as a way of achieving a feat that their ancestors could not achieve by the Jihad by which they had annexed parts of the western territories to the North in the 18th century. This message could also be interpreted as selling the Western Region into slavery and perpetual servitude, which obviously had the potential of rousing the anger and injuring the pride and dignity of an average westerner, with the possibility of incitement to violence. The cartoon could only accentuate the deep-seated hatred of the people for the ruling NNDP government and boost their resolve that the forthcoming parliamentary elections must not return the NNDP government into power because of their fear of being sold into servitude, real or imagined.

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The Press and the 1983 General Election Crisis in Western Nigeria

The genesis of the political conflicts that culminated in the 1983 election violence in Southwest Nigeria was multifarious. There were conflicts around the issue of corruption as a result of which a lot of mudslinging took place among the politicians; there were disagreements on the proposal that was sent to the National Assembly by the electoral body, FEDECO, that the votes in the general elections should be counted at polling booths after each election; there were disagreements on the proposal to establish a body that would control public-owned media organisations because of their indiscretion in the preparation towards the election and their anticipated partisanship which may lead to public violence over the outcome of elections. Other points of conflicts were how to prevent violence and election rigging; the sour relationship between state governors and state Commissioners of Police who saw their allegiance only to the federal authority; and there were disagreements on whether to engage the army in the conduct of the 1983 elections, among several other points of conflicts.

On all of these conflictual issues, the newspaper press played a conspicuous role in carrying messages which, rather than suggest solutions to the conflictual issues, aggravated the pervading frictions which the issues generated in the political environment.

Three newspapers were focused and sampled for analyses in this book because of their pre-eminence in the Western Nigeria and because of the roles they played in conveying the discourse among the political class and between politicians and the general public on the numerous conflictual issues that culminated in the election violence. Importantly, these newspapers saw their allegiance in the political conflicts to their owners and their political struggles rather than to the society within which they circulated. The sampled papers are *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Times*.

Nigerian Tribune and *Daily Sketch* extensively served the interests of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), which was the ruling party in the LOOBO States (Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Bendel and Ogun States). Although, it was owned by only three of the states — Oyo, Ondo and Ogun — *Daily Sketch* was equally committed to the interests of Lagos and Bendel States because of the political solidarity that bounded all the Southwest states at that point in time. *Nigerian Tribune* was still owned by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader and presidential candidate of the UPN, and so there was no controversy as to which political party the paper owed its allegiance before and during the 1983 elections.

Daily Times, which was the largest circulating newspaper in the country at the time, absolutely supported the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the ruling party at the federal level. This paper, initially privately owned, largely played a neutral role during the First Republic and even in the 1979 general elections (see Akinsanya, 1981). However, a majority (controlling) share of its holding company was acquired in 1975 by the then military administration of General Murtala Muhammed. This ownership structure was retained by the succeeding civilian administration which subsequently converted the newspaper into its political instrument. Even though there were other mushroom local newspapers serving the political interests of their owners across the Southwest, these three newspapers were immensely popular and vibrant among the public and their impact was felt more in the political

environment than other local newspapers before and during the 1983 election crisis.

The very conduct of the government-owned newspapers and electronic media was a major source of concern to politicians and the general public during the preparation towards the election. In an effort to monitor the conduct of these media organisations, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) proposed in Section 120 (1) of the 1983 Electoral Act, the establishment of a National Advisory Council on Mass Media for the 1983 election. This proposal generated intense debate in the National Assembly and in the political environment, and even resulted in physical combat among legislators on the floor of the National Assembly as reported below:

LEGISLATORS EXCHANGE BLOWS

There was drama at the premises of the National Assembly yesterday as the Acting Speaker of the house, Alhaji Idris Ibrahim and a UPN member, Mr. Kayode Blessing engaged in physical combat. Fighting erupted between the two members over the motion to set up National Advisory Council on Mass Media . . .

(Daily Sketch (hereafter, DS,) Wednesday, June 15, 1983, back page).

While the NPN federal government was not too well disposed to the establishment of the National Advisory Council on the Mass Media because of the perceived advantage a network of radio and television stations, including some newspapers across the country, would offer to it in its re-election bid, opposition members were in favour of efforts at diluting the influence of these media networks through the establishment of the Media Advisory Council. The intense debate around s. 120 (1) of the 1983 Electoral Act polarised the mass media itself, with a section of the media expressing the fear that the advisory council was an attempt to gag the press.

Daily Sketch, in an editorial with traces of incitement, expressed its position on the federal control of the media apparatus and the gross abuse of access to such media by local politicians.

GROSS ABUSE OF FEDERAL POWER¹

If there were still any doubts that those in control of the apparatus of power in the federal level are actively digging the grave of this second republic, Chief Akin Omoboriowo's appropriation of the facilities of the FRCN, Akure to broadcast to the people of the state should finally dispel such doubts . . . But in a larger and more dangerous sense that he had access to federal facilities demonstrates the monstrous extent to which the so-called federal might has grown and is being used by those controlling it with barely hidden contemptuous disregard to the feelings of people of Nigeria...It is through the mouths of the highest leaders of the ruling party that Nigerians learnt that federal development projects have not been sited in certain areas because the people there voted wrongly in 1979 . . . Spokesmen of this government have in the past told us how they will use the federal might to acquire government houses in the states, to take over commercial enterprises and the media under the control of the state . . . The leaders of this government do not tell themselves the truth, which is that it is not at all healthy for themselves and the country to try the people's patience beyond endurance. Who does not know that but for the almost inhuman patience and forbearances of most Nigerians, those thugs who now routinely disturb the peace everywhere under the noses of a complacent police force will have been taught the lessons that they richly deserve? And yet, such an eventuality should not by any acts of omission or commission be allowed to come to pass . . . We all remember that the first republic crashed precisely because those wielding federal power embarked on a series of action that defied all good reason. If their successors believe that they can tread the same path and get away with it, then they persist in incorrectly reading the mood of the people. At a certain point, something will have to give. (*Emphasis mine*)
(*DS, Friday, June 10, 1983 Editorial*).

In the editorial above, *Daily Sketch* could be said to be right in condemning the appropriation of federal information facilities by a

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1. This editorial was stimulated by a broadcast made on Radio Nigeria, Akure, a federal-owned radio, by Chief Akin Omoboriowo, the former Deputy Governor of Ondo State and the gubernatorial candidate of the NPN in the 1983 election. The editorial was most likely orchestrated by the UPN who obviously was wary of the use that the federal radio could be made of to the UPN's disadvantage in the coming election because of the wide reach of the federal electronic media.

section of the political class to the detriment of the larger society. It, however, went beyond the boundaries of criticism to display emotional sentiments by harping more on the possible sanction from the public against the activities of the NPN men who were mismanaging the federal facilities. The truth, however, was that all the states governments, including the UPN-controlled states, were also using state media to orchestrate their political positions, just as the NPN was doing at the federal level. References to 'stretching the patience of the people' and the 'outcome of the first republic' were a reminder of the failure of the first republic. It could also be interpreted as *Daily Sketch's* own way of dancing to the tune of its owners, as the paper itself was not excluded from the same ownership excesses and arbitrariness which it was accusing the federal media organisations of. The reference to the events that led to the fall of the first republic is a testimony to the carry-over of the political prejudices of the first republic into the second. Ironically, the same group of politicians who participated in the first republic found accommodation in the second republic, while the dichotomy in the media had followed the same pattern in the two republics. 'At a certain point, something will have to give' is a pregnant statement that could convey several meanings to the audience. It could as well be interpreted to mean: 'Be ready to fight like you did before in order to have your way'.

The Media Advisory Council never became a reality before or during the 1983 election because its constitution was stalled by a court injunction.

Corruption amongst politicians was also a sore point at this time. Most of the UPN-dominated media organisations did well in condemning the corrupt tendencies of the NPN federal government even though corruption was also rampant in the UPN-controlled states and other states controlled by the other parties. This problem degenerated into mudslinging in the political class who took delight in exposing the dirty deals of opponents and members of the other political parties in a manner that could incite the public. *Daily Times* did well in defending the activities of the NPN men and also made itself available for exposing the deals of the opposition members.

SO FAR, SO GOOD – UMARU DIKKO

“. . . You talked of corruption some time ago; like I said before, these other parties which form the state governments are the people who mostly engage in it because they want to spoil the name of the Federal Government. What is more, how can people who were found guilty of corruption now have the guts to accuse others who have even not been tried, but let alone found guilty . . . we had enquiries and up till tomorrow these corrupt people are not able to defend themselves. And so they think that their only answer is to create problems through hooliganism and through other means, that is what they think will frighten Nigerians and make Nigerians vote for them . . .”

(This excerpt was published from an interview granted to the BBC by Alhaji Umaru Dikko, the powerful NPN party member and Minister in the President Shehu Shagari's administration.

(Daily Times (hereafter, DT), June 4, 1983, page 13).

In the above excerpt, Dikko made veiled references to the controversial Coker Commission of Enquiry set up in the First Republic which found some of the UPN party men, who were then in the AG, guilty of corruption. The Coker Commission's report continued to be a political sore point, even after the previous military government failed to recognise it and in fact had dismissed it. While trying to cover up for his own party men's corrupt deeds, Dikko was trying here to bring back the old memories to the public in his ridiculous defence, ignoring the fact that the NPN government never found the courage to investigate the acts of corruption in the government at the time. Another member of his party, Dr Wahab Dosunmu, who was an ex-minister in the same government, was even more direct in his attack of the opposition for accusing President Shagari's government of corruption:

LEAVE OPPONENTS ALONE – AWO TOLD

A former minister and now senatorial aspirant, Dr. Wahab Dosunmu yesterday told Chief Obafemi Awolowo to stop witch-hunting his political opponents . . . He said Chief Awolowo's smear campaign against him about alleged fraud in the implementation of the federal government housing scheme was to embarrass and blackmail the Federal Government before the electorate. The former minister declared: "He (Chief Awolowo) is only interested in embarrassing the Federal Government so that this administration does not reap the benefit of its laudable housing programme. I wish to assure the whole nation that there has been no case of embezzlement

of funds in that scheme”.

(DT, June 4, 1983, page 13)

The secretary of the NPN, Senator Uba Ahmed, was also blatant in the game of muckraking against the opponent:

NPN TO TAKE OVER YORUBA STATES

... Senator Uba Ahmed said the NPN had in its possession receipts of how Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Governor Jakande had been selling plots of land in the state for N ¼ million per plot respectively . . .

(DT, Saturday, June 4, 1983, page 5).

Much of the evidence the NPN claimed to have against the opponents were never presented publicly, but their opponents were able to point to chains of evidence of corruption including acquisition of private jets, exotic cars and luxury estates by the NPN kingpins who were in government.

Another point of controversy in the preparation towards the 1983 elections was the suggestion made by the opposition parties that the armed forces be used to prosecute the election in order to forestall rigging. In addition, a proposal made by the electoral body, FEDECO, that votes be counted immediately after elections in polling booths generated a furore in the public arena with the opposition parties supporting the move while the NPN kicked against the arrangement. Again, the newspapers pitched their tents on each side of the divide.

ARMY WON'T BE INVOLVED IN ELECTIONS.

The army will not be involved in the 1983 general election, President Shehu Shagari declared in Lagos yesterday . . . He told media executives at a special briefing in Lagos that he was against the use of army because “it is not their role”. President Shagari said he hoped the national assembly would reconsider the issue of vote counting and not insist that counting should take place at polling stations. He added: “The difficulty is that we do not have enough policemen to man every polling booth. It is going to cause a problem. We hope the national assembly will see reason”, he said.

(DT, June 2, 1983, front page).

The outcome of the election, which took place amidst chaos, re-invigorated the call for the use of the army by the opposition:

ARMY CAN HELP, SAYS UPN

The UPN yesterday gave its full backing to the call that the country's armed forces should help organise free and fair elections. A statement issued in Lagos yesterday by Chief Ebenezer Babatope, the party's Director of Organisation, stressed, "**The Nigerian Armed Forces as things stand today, are the only group in the country that can save Nigeria from the brink of total and absolute collapse . . .** The UPN sincerely believe our country's armed forces could help organise free and fair election in Nigeria now . . ." (*Emphasis mine*)
(DS, August 24, 1983, back page).

From the above report, the opposition was already giving the signal to the military to be ready to take over government again if the election outcome was not in their favour. The military, of course, heeded the call few months later.

However, the controversy that aroused the greatest passion in the newspaper press was perhaps the issue of violence and vote rigging in the 1983 election. There were records of many inciting and reckless statements attributed to politicians and orchestrated by the newspapers. The influence of inciting contents that were published was suspected to have increased the scope of violence that took place before, during and after the elections. The enormity of this violence is still palpable in some localities across southwest Nigeria in the number of widows and orphans it produced and properties that were lost in the election carnage, almost 25 years after it took place.

The trend started with accusations and counter-accusations of sponsorship of political thugs amongst the various political parties, especially the dominant ones – the NPN and the UPN. Whether real or imagined, these accusations sometimes preceded violent incidents which characterised numerous campaign rallies and the conduct of elections.

OLUNLOYO MAKES ALLEGATIONS

The NPN gubernatorial candidate in Oyo State, Dr. Omololu Olunloyo has accused the UPN of hiding some ballot boxes with someone at Oshogbo. He also accused the party of keeping assassins at the Premier Hotel, Molete and Trans Atlantic (sic) to bomb the place (sic), adding that they have been arrested . . .

(DS, June 4, 1983, page 3)

The UPN never denied nor confirmed Olunloyo's allegation but his opponent in the election, Chief Bola Ige said that:

WE'RE NOT OPPOSED TO OSHUN STATE

. . . The Oyo State UPN gubernatorial candidate warned the UPN supporters in the state not to do anything that could throw the state into chaos during the forth-coming election. **But he quickly added that if any NPN attacks them in their homes, they should not allow such thugs to go scot-free.** Chief Ige reminded his supporters about their obligations during the election which include keeping vigil on NPN activities. The NPN, he said, was hell-bent on rigging the elections . . . *(Emphasis mine)*
(DS, June 4, 1983, page 3).

SHEHU'S CAMPAIGN: NPN PLANS DIS-ORDER IN LAGOS

A plot hatched by the NPN to eliminate selected leaders of the UPN in Lagos during its presidential campaign has been exposed . . . According to the UPN, these NPN agents have finalised plans to perpetuate organised attacks on the persons and residences of some notable UPN leaders, market women and innocent people on mere suspicion of being anti-NPN. The party said that the NPN had planned all these atrocities to intimidate members of the public and provoke law abiding citizens to cause confusion and chaos.

(NT, June 1, 1983, back page).

ARREST NPN LEADERS

The Police in Oyo State have been called upon to arrest and prosecute Alhaji Busari Adelakun, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu and other members of the NPN whose names were mentioned in connection with the attack on UPN supporters in Ibadan on Wednesday. **Failure to do this might result in the people taking the law into their hands to deal ruthlessly with their enemies.** This call was made yesterday by Governor Ige . . . **"Bola Ige will not be able to restrain the people of Oyo State from dealing ruthlessly with their enemies if the police failed,"** the governor said . . .

(NT, June 24, 1983, front page).

As the Governor of Oyo State, Chief Bola Ige was expressing helplessness about the security of the state. He was also indirectly telling the public to begin to brace up to take their destinies into their hands as a result of the political incidents. Very soon all the counter-accusations of supporting thuggery and violence among the politicians

began to manifest in glaring violent activities during the campaigns.

ATTEMPTS ON IGE'S LIFE

Governor Ige of Oyo State was almost shot yesterday but for the vigilance of some of his listeners at a campaign rally. The incident occurred at Tonkere village in Irewole LGA of the state . . .

(*NT, June 24, 1983, front page*).

2 KILLED AS THUGS ATTACK NPN CONVOY

Two people were feared dead and many others injured when the campaign convoy of the national chairman of the NPN, Chief Adisa Akinloye was attacked yesterday along Fiditi-Oyo Road by people believed to be UPN thugs . . .

(*DT, Tuesday, June 14, 1983, page 5*).

It is remarkable that each of the three newspapers analysed gave prominence and attention to only violent stories that involved members of the party they supported. This is a negation of the neutrality code which required the press to cover all sides of an event in the public interest. The papers again went as far as defending the involvement of their political patrons against opposition's accusations and even backed up such defence with strongly worded editorials such as this:

NO POLITICS BEHIND MODAKEKE KILLINGS

The incident at Modakeke in which six people lost their lives last Thursday was not politically motivated. This was stated by the Jagun of Modakeke, Chief A. Animashaun in an interview at Modakeke yesterday. Chief Animashaun said what actually happened was that Modakeke started its Egungun festival which was expected to last for 21 days. "During this period, it is against our tradition for any political party or organisation to hold any campaign rally or public procession, which could disrupt that Egungun festival" . . . In his own account, the secretary of the Oyo State NPN, Alhaji Shuaib Oyedokun . . . said that members of the UPN gubernatorial entourage knocked down a girl on entering Modakeke and this might have provoked the people, especially during the time of their Egungun festival, for which they have already got a police permit . . .

(*DT, Tuesday, July 12, 1983, page 5*).

In the above story, what *Daily Times* failed to mention was that the local chief who issued the statement denying political motivation behind

the killings in Modakeke was a close associate of Oyo State chairman of the NPN, who was also an indigene of Modakeke.

ADELAKUN DENIES ALLEGATION

The Chairman of Ibadan/Ibarapa NPN Senatorial district, Chief Busari Adelokun yesterday defended himself against the allegation that he inflicted machete cuts on a top UPN leader, Alhaji Busari Obisesan at Alekuso area in Ibadan during a political clash . . . Chief Adelokun described the allegation as “baseless, ridiculous and wicked.” He wondered: “How can a man of my social standing, a traditional Chief and a religious leader in Ibadan, raise a machete against Alhaji Obisesan who is my compatriot?” (DT, June 28, 1983, page 5).

The newspapers even highlighted ridiculous statements of defence and utterances by politicians on the violent activities which were already threatening the pending elections. Unfortunately, some of those politicians had a history of active participation in political violence in previous political dispensations. Celebrating their utterances in the press did not help the tense political environment during election campaigns in view of the anxiety those utterances generated among the public.

WE DON'T PLAN ARSON – NPN

. . . the Chairman of Ibadan Municipal area of the party (NPN), Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu alleged on Wednesday's clash between the NPN and UPN supporters, that Alhaji Busari Raji was attacked by his own people because he failed to satisfy their aspiration...He further alleged that Alhaji Raji did not bring his peoples share of rice to them and this was why his people wanted to kill him. The NPN leader warned that if any of his party men was beaten, five of the attackers would be beaten in retaliation . . . “I did not participate in the clash, but if it comes to taking cutlass there is nothing wrong with it. I did not carry cutlass or even stick, but if it comes to carrying cutlass or something more, there is nothing bad in that. When the time comes to carry cutlass, I shall carry it, but I didn't carry cutlass on Wednesday,” he maintained. (Emphasis mine) (DS, Friday June 24, 1983, page 3).

By highlighting the kind of utterances above, the press conferred undue status to individuals whose behaviours were an aberration in the political process. Such individuals who adulate violence and are often

involved in it, sometimes with the protection of the security apparatuses, ought to have been conferred with criminal status no matter their position in the political party hierarchy. Giving undue prominence to them could only aggravate the already tense political environment.

ADEDIBU CHALLENGES IGE

Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, NPN Chairman in Ibadan Municipal Government, has challenged the Oyo State Governor Chief Bola Ige to a "physical confrontation, if need be." This the Governor should do rather than "his verbal threat of violence through the media." ". . . if out of fear of defeat, which is undoubtedly imminent, Bola Ige thinks he could be so unchecked in his threat of violence, **I make bold to say that Bola Ige will not see the end of such violence if started, or even the beginning of this election,**" he declared . . .

(DS, July 29, 1983, page 3).

In an editorial to condemn the Modakeke violence where about seven people were killed, *Nigerian Tribune* obviously chose to be on the side of the UPN instead of condemning the violence in its entirety irrespective of the political party involved.

MODAKEKE CARNAGE

Last Thursday, NPN thugs assailed the advance party of Oyo State UPN gubernatorial campaign team at Modakeke . . . But in what looked like a well-rehearsed operation, NPN thugs arrived with guns, machetes, axes and other dangerous weapons, turned on the defenceless UPN campaigners, leaving deaths, injuries, agonies in their trail . . . As we said before, **violence is not the monopoly of any one political party. NPN leaders and their thugs are on borrowed time. In the fullness of time, they will be dealt with, for he who lives by the sword will perish by the sword . . .**

(NT, July 13, 1983, Editorial, page 2).

As Nigeria moved towards the election, *Nigerian Tribune* started to publish a series of slogans which were daily positioned beside its nameplate. The contents of these slogans could only be described as inciting at best. The intention obviously was to provoke readers against the NPN controlled federal government whose socio-economic policies and conducts in government were criticised. Samples of the slogans are shown below:

Countdown – 24 days

Chanj dole (Hausa words meaning – Change, A must)
(NT, July 13, 1983, front page)

Countdown – 23 days

Failure shouldn't be rewarded; a blunderer deserves nothing but the boot.
(NT, July 14, 1983, front page)

If misrule continues, we have only ourselves to blame.
Vote right!
(NT, July 16, 1983, front page)

Countdown – 10 days

To prevent peaceful change is to make violent change inevitable – John F. Kennedy said. Vote for peaceful change.
(NT, July 28, 1983, front page)

Ask yourself this: Do you want their cheeks to grow more robust while yours become as hollow as a shell?
(NT, August 2, 1983, front page)

Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable.
(NT, August 8, 1983, front page)

In the same vein, the *Daily Times* was equally carrying campaign advertisements which were targeted at maligning the personality of the leader of the UPN, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Excerpts from his book, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* were quoted out of context to conjure a deep-seated hatred for some segments of the civil institutions and communities in order to reduce his chances in the election and probably to portray him as a political hypocrite. The series was issued by the NPN Gubernatorial Campaign Office in Oyo State.

AWO ON THE IBOS

“They are extremely individualistic. A group of families consisting of 400 or so people claim to be an autonomous unit...In Onitsha today, there are no distinct sections of the community, which conform to the Patrician and Plebeian . . . and the Ibos happen to be most impatient of all peoples of Nigeria . . .” (Quoted from *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, page 79)
(DT, Wednesday, August 3, 1983, page 25).

AWO ON TRADITIONAL RULERS

"Events of history and in Europe in recent times have shown conclusively that Kings or Paramount Chiefs are not divine creatures that uncivilized mankind thought them, and that, in the long run the machinery of government works more smoothly and swiftly without them than with them" (*Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Page 65) **Chiefs, be reminded of the history (humiliation, deposition, etc) . . .**

(*DT, August 3, 1983, page 10*).

AWO ON HAUSA-FULANI, ISLAM ETC.

"Of all the people in Nigeria, the Hausas are at the same time the poorest and the most heavily taxed. They have never been known to grumble . . ." (*Path to Nigerian Freedom*, page 78) **VOTE FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE!**

(*DT, August 3, 1983, page 10*).

This series of advertisements so much incensed the sensibilities of the public, even of those in government for its potential psychological effects that President Shehu Shagari publicly called for its stoppage, even though it was being issued by his partymen. The same *Daily Times* later reported:

POLITICIANS TOLD TO DISCUSS ONLY ISSUES

President Shehu Shagari yesterday called on politicians to attack issues rather than personalities in their campaign . . .

(*DT, August 8, 1983, back page*).

Politicians with the connivance of the press also played up ethnic and parochial sentiments in the campaign towards the election. Communities that were living peacefully together suddenly realised that they were different due to the activities of politicians which fuelled the tension in the civic environment.

OJUKWU URGES IGBOS NOT TO VOTE FOR AWO

The Ikemba of Nnewi, Chief Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, last Saturday told the Igbos why they should not vote for the UPN leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the next election . . . "lest you forget that this was a man who installed indigenisation policy when we were destitute of war and could not benefit thereof . . . this is the father of tribalism in Nigeria, lest you forget . . ." He described Chief Awolowo and his

counterpart on the PPA group, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as "Partners in deceit" and reminded the people that Dr. Azikiwe who took them to war later abandoned his people in the mid-stream . . .

(*DT, June 6, 1983, page 5*).

NPN TO TAKE OVER YORUBA STATES

The Chairman of the NPN, Chief Adisa Akinloye has declared in Lagos that his party would not rest until Yoruba speaking states of the country are taken over by the party . . . Chief Akinloye said this had become necessary in order to fully integrate the Yorubas in the scheme of things in the country...He said he (Chief Awolowo) had misled the Yorubas for so long and could never win as a leader of the country . . .

(*DT, June 4, 1983, page 5*).

The NPN gubernatorial candidate in Oyo State, Dr Omololu Olunloyo has . . . said in Ibadan yesterday that Ibadan people did not hate Ijeshas because Ibadan people are known to be very friendly . . . He said that the NPN had no plan to send the non-natives of Ibadan away. He therefore called on the people of Ibadan to vote massively for the NPN because ". . . it is a vote of Kinsmen "alajobi," and it is a family affair . . ."2

(*Excerpt from OLUNLOYO MAKES ALLEGATIONS. DS, June 4 1983, page 3*).

NON-INDEGENES OF MODAKEKE ORDERED TO QUIT

Non-indigenes of Modakeke in Ile-Ife have been ordered to leave the quarter immediately. And to make sure that this instruction was carried out, all indigenes have been obliged to take oath of secrecy in connection with the elections starting on August 6 . . .

(*NT, July 30 1983, front page*).

Already, before the first election on August 6, violence had occurred in Ife-Modakeke, Ibadan, Ekiti, Abeokuta, Oshogbo and other major cities across Southwest Nigeria. The presidential and gubernatorial elections, which took place in two consecutive weeks of

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2. This story was a reaction to a rumour that Dr Olunloyo made statements in private discussions that as soon as he becomes governor in Oyo State he would expel all Ijeshas people from Ibadan city because they were supporting his opponent and incumbent governor, Chief Bola Ige, who was an Ijeshas indigene.

the election, marked the climax of the violence. The utterances of politicians on the various mass media only became more intense especially with allegations of election rigging and other malpractices flying around. These utterances largely contributed to the escalation of the violence with the people being urged on to embark on more violent activities to "claim their rights which were being denied them in the election."

FEDECO WARNED

Nigerians has been warned of the dangerous repercussion of the several fraudulent malpractices and irregularities that were perpetrated by FEDECO in the conduct of last Saturday's presidential election. In a statement issued in Ibadan yesterday, Justice Adewale Thompson, Oyo State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice . . . said: "It is my duty to warn the nation that such malpractices in 1983 cannot win election for anybody. The best thing to do at this stage is to surrender, otherwise there will be total chaos in Nigeria, the repercussion of which none of us could foresee . . . It is now a matter of survival and if an announcement is made contrary to the voting of the people, those who made the announcement should hold themselves responsible for the dismemberment and total destruction of the Nigerian federation. My warning goes further that from what I have seen and heard, the ordinary man is no longer prepared to accept Shagari as President and if they wish to destroy everybody in this country in order to install Shagari as President, the country is ready to die." (*Emphasis mine*) (DS, August 10, 1983, page 9).

Just after the gubernatorial election, which was marred with violence and irregularities Chief Bola Ige, the Governor of Oyo State, made an official broadcast to the state about his perception of the outcome of the election, which was also published widely in the newspapers:

STOP EVIL MEN BEFORE THEY SET NIGERIA ABLAZE - IGE

All important people in government, both federal and state, both civil and police have been urged to dissuade "evil men" from setting Oyo State and Nigeria ablaze. Making this appeal in a radio and television broadcast to the people of the state last night, Chief Bola Ige, the state governor said evil men were planning this by falsifying results of last Saturday

gubernatorial election . . . "I have just received a very disturbing and terrifying news which shows a deliberate attempt to change your ways as you have all stated through your votes yesterday . . . I have brought this situation to the notice of all important people in government both federal and state, to dissuade these evil men from setting ablaze our great and progressive state and our fatherland, the Federal Republic of Nigeria." (DS, Monday, August 15 1983, front page).

This official broadcast by the governor was followed a few days later by another statement by him:

WE REJECT FEDECO'S VERDICT - IGE

"As far as I, the UPN and the vast majority of the people of Oyo state are concerned, I won the election with a landslide." This was the declaration of Chief Bola Ige, Governor of Oyo State in a broadcast to the people of the state yesterday . . ." my party and the people of Oyo State will decide my next course of action. I am sure that the people of Oyo State will not allow political robbers to rule them. They certainly cannot and will not . . ." (Emphasis mine)

(DS, Friday, August 19, 1983, front page).

Already, other parts of the Southwest were burning with violence and the newspapers were reporting them with photographs to support the reports.

AKURE BURNS

Hundreds of people in Akure yesterday trooped out into streets to demonstrate against the declaration of Chief Akin Omoboriowo as winner of last Saturday's gubernatorial election in Ondo State. Some notable personalities were killed while many houses were set ablaze . . .

(DS, Wednesday, August 17, 1983, front page).

AJASIN APPEALS TO 'CHEATED PEOPLE'

Ondo State Governor, Chief M.A. Ajasin yesterday appealed to the people of the state to allow normalcy to be restored in the state . . .

(DS, August 20, 1983, front page).

The *Sketch* went to town with a front page editorial following the gubernatorial election, which practically asked the people to go into the streets to protest against the falsification of election results:

BE DETERMINED, BE VIGILANT, HAVE COURAGE

A spectre is haunting Nigeria, the spectre of fascism and terrorism of the many by a few . . . put simply, the suffering masses of Nigeria in the overwhelming majority pronounced for a total change in this country, but a handful of individuals in responsible position deliberately and cold-bloodedly refused to recognize that verdict . . . Their votes have been stolen and those who did it did not have the courage to say so in daylight . . . Nigerians are now face to face with the moment of decision. To acquiesce in illegality or to say no to illegality . . . the man who calmly stands by and watches without struggle his wife being raped by a burglar is not a man, and should rather become a eunuch and a slave. In the current grave moment in this nation's history, all that Nigerians have to do is to tell themselves that they have not lost their individual and collective will to say no to whoever schemes to rob them of their right to justice and freedom. Those who threaten to deal with them are mere paper tigers that have no fangs. In any case, the majority is always superior to the minority, no matter the temporary advantage of the power of coercion the minority has. The flagrant rape of constitutionality and legality that has been committed will be contested every inch of the way through constitutional and legal means in the law courts. What is needed in addition to that is total vigilance, resolute determination and the unshakeable belief that sooner or later, truth will triumph over dishonesty. Have courage!!! (*Emphasis mine*)
(DS, Wednesday, August 17, 1983, front page editorial).

Several days after the above editorial, the *Sketch* also followed up with another editorial which added more pep to the already exploding political environment:

THE GATHERING DARKNESS

One remarkable feature of the current happenings is that there are still too many people who believe that Nigerians are engaged in an election exercise where one particular party so far seems to have clearly worsted its rival . . . Those who still believe that the present system in its unbastardised (sic) form has any virtue should search their consciences and see if they do not have a duty to save it from a premature death by adding their voice to those of the poor uneducated masses. The only alternative of course will be that those masses will sooner or later, change that system and replace it with something entirely different. After all, those who are already down need have no fear of falling.
(DS, Monday, August 29, 1983, front page Editorial)

IGE X-RAYS '83 POLLS – TALKS OF A DEADLY GAME BY 2 BIGWIGS

Chief Bola Ige has described Oyo state Governor-elect, Dr. Omololu Olunloyo as “a pawn in a deadly game being played by two NPN bigwigs in the state” . . . He however warned that darkness would envelope the state if NPN succeeded in robbing the people of the state. According to Chief Ige, the people would have to judge whether those who want to bring darkness are from within or outside the state. “All I know is that our people will not allow themselves to be conquered. Anybody who wanted to use Oyo State as a launching pad will fail,” he remarked . . . (DS, September 26, 1983, front page).

In the same vein, the *Nigerian Tribune* also wrote an editorial during the crisis, which could only aggravate the violence.

Today, the spectre of the dreadful one party state haunts Nigerians. By the time the on-going elections are concluded, no one will be left in doubt that decreeing of a one-party Nigeria is a matter of time . . . The popular mandate of Nigerians has been tinkered with to produce victors Nigerians do not want. The constitutional means of changing a discredited and an unpopular government through the ballot box has been blocked. Nigerians will be called upon in the coming weeks and months to assert their mandate and restore it to their chosen candidate that have been cheated out of it. This can and will be done by providential intervention employing man as its instrument. (Emphasis added)
(NT, Tuesday, August 23 1983, front page editorial).

The front pages of the *Nigerian Tribune* were adorned with a series of alarming headlines on days following the presidential and gubernatorial elections, such as:

NPN STEALS OYO 'GUBER'

(NT, August 16, 1983, front page), ONDO AWARDED TO OMOBORIOWO

(NT, August 17, 1983, front page)

And then a statement by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the presidential candidate of UPN:

PREVENTIVE DETENTION ACT SOON – AWO

Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the National President of UPN yesterday prayed that the NPN did not get away with the open robbery it now unleashed on

the people of Nigeria. And if by any chance it did, "this country will go permanently into darkness . . . The first thing they will do is to abolish or place ban on all parties except the NPN. And secondly, it will introduce preventive detention act so as to detain those with dissenting voices especially journalists. It will clamp down on anything that is decent . . ." Chief Awolowo was optimistic that the masses would react. "If somebody comes to your house to burgle it and the police won't do anything, the people have to do something about it", he said.
(*NT, August 18, 1983, front page*).

OYO, ONDO MAY STILL BURN – SOLUADE

The calm currently pervading in Oyo and Ondo states will be short lived unless justice is allowed to prevail, the deputy governor of Ogun State, Chief Sesan Soluade has declared . . . Chief Soluade said the people had been robbed and denied their choice of governors and had to react. According to the deputy governor, the people for now were merely waiting for what the results of subsequent elections would be. "I do vehemently believe that the masses will still react," he said. Chief Soluade declared that both Chief Omoboriowo and Dr. Olunloyo would not assume power. "God forbid", he exclaimed. "They may in future, but not now" he said, adding, "Unless we want to throw the Nigerian electoral law to the dogs . . ."
(*NT, Friday, August 26, 1983, front page*).

CARTOONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Some cartoons and illustrations in the newspapers were also used to convey meanings which could at best be pessimistic about the political environment during the period and could encourage mass action.

In a cartoon on August 18, 1983, the *Nigerian Tribune* drew a burial ground for democracy in Nigeria, so to say, with this inscription on a huge tombstone:

With Regret, to announce

The death of DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA, which sad event took place in the hands of FEDECO, Police and NPN. R.I.P.

Below the epitaph is written the legend, **Especially those who have jets!** (*See Cartoon in Appendix 3.*)

Also, on Monday 26, September 1983, the *Nigerian Tribune* carried another cartoon showing people wielding cudgels and other weapons in preparation to lynch a petty thief. A man appears on the scene and reacted, saying:

What has this man done?
 Stolen only one naira?
 What of those who stole your votes?
 (See cartoon in Appendix 4)

This cartoon obviously was meant to encourage the public to lynch politicians and other individuals who they perceived as standing in their way in the election.

Daily Sketch of September 5, 1983 carried a cartoon of a skeleton in a burial ground carrying a placard on which was written an inscription: WE DON'T SUPPORT THE ELECTION. Below the cartoon was a caption: "Stand up for your rights." (See cartoon in Appendix 5)

When it became obvious that election results were in favour of the NPN, the *Daily Times* began to toe the pacifist path. It started pleading for peaceful co-existence in its contents and issued editorials advising the public to desist from violence and accept the election results. However, it was too late in the day, and the violence, which had commenced before the elections, continued even after the elections until the military finally struck in December 1983, putting an end to the Nigerian second republic.

6

Media Responsibility and Peace Building in Nigeria

Unless a society changes its direction, it is likely to arrive where it is headed. — Chinese proverb

THE NIGERIAN PRINT MEDIA AND ELECTION CONFLICTS

The last two chapters have given insight into the performance of the Nigerian print media during the 1965 parliamentary and 1983 general election conflicts in Southwest Nigeria. In general, the contemporary activity of the print media is based on a model built during the pre-colonial era and reinforced during the colonial and pre-independence era. The earliest Nigerian press was fashioned after the press of the liberal democratic countries of Europe where most of the earliest journalists and pressmen in Nigeria were trained. The practice of journalism during the pre-colonial period was centered on politics and conflicts within and among the Yoruba city states, the struggle for equality of the human race and the abolition of the slave trade. During

the colonial era, journalism practice was focused on the nationalist struggle for independence against the Europeans. Unfortunately, all of these tendencies terminated into sectional political struggles in the post-independence period owing to how the Nigerian political class co-opted the media elite into their competition for power in Nigeria. Hence, it may not be entirely strange to observe that there is often a close relationship between the contents of the newspapers analysed in this book and the numerous political conflicts and violence that occurred before and during the two elections examined.

Ever before the 1965 and 1983 elections were held, there had been a massive demonisation of rival political parties and individual politicians in the press, depending on who owned a newspaper organisation. In a way, the psychological and emotional dispositions of the audience were influenced by the images of "us and them" conjured in the newspapers as a result of the glaring polarisation among them. One of the existing political parties was presented as the friend of the poor masses while the other was depicted as corrupt and hostile to the interests of the common people. When examined from the perspective of the influence the mass media could have on the attitude and perception of the people, this political dichotomy between the press certainly provided an attitudinal and behavioural structure within which the audience reacted in any conflict that accompanied the elections.

During the major violence tagged 'Wetie' (meaning: douse with petrol and burn) which accompanied the 1965 election, and which engulfed cities and towns such as Ibadan, Ilesha, Oshogbo, Mushin, and so on, the press projected the ruling party in a negative mode when accusations of election rigging were rife. It would be recalled that the public in the Southwest were yet to recover from the major political crises that occurred in the region in 1962, 1963 and even in 1964, and no effort had been made to reconcile aggrieved parties either by the press or the government. Rather than reconciling the aggrieved people, the press continued in its partisan activities even more intensely before the 1965 parliamentary election while the government in power was busy plotting its survival. Although, the influence of the electronic media was equally becoming pervasive during the period, newspapers were much more popular and easily accessible to the people than electronic

media and so they provided a better forum to prosecute political contestations. The influence of newspapers on the audience of Southwest Nigeria was undoubtedly strong.

In the same vein, by the middle and towards the end of the second republic, especially before the 1983 elections, there was virtually no politically neutral newspaper in circulation in southwest Nigeria. Most of the hitherto neutral newspapers which could have served the democratic transformation better had been repressed during the thirteen years of military rule that preceded the second republic. The remaining ones had been compromised by politicians while new ones were being set up to achieve political objectives.

The sampled newspapers were completely immersed in the pervading political conflicts in the Southwest, which had created a dichotomy between them. The UPN-controlled newspapers and other media organisations centred their support on the various state governments which were being ruled by the UPN. The UPN had also cultivated the support of the majority of the people at the grassroots mainly because of its welfarist programmes. This pool of supporters readily provided adequate foot soldiers that participated in the subsequent election violence. The NPN-controlled media organisations focused more on the urban areas, even though some of their audiences were in the rural areas too. This trend partly accounted for the reason why the violence in the rural areas was mainly one-sided against the supporters of the NPN, while violent acts in urban centres were more fierce because there were resistance and revenge among the two major political party supporters.

In a sense, this trend created a kind of imbalance in the strength of the media among the two political divides in the propaganda war that ensued in the Southwest before and during the elections, as state-owned and state-controlled newspapers had a larger audience than the federal-controlled newspapers. This also applied to broadcasting outfits. The imbalance tilted the political information war largely in favour of the states government in the Southwest. By the time the election violence commenced, there was ample evidence that the UPN-controlled newspapers were more patronised by the audience who tended to follow instructions offered by the newspapers to prosecute violence. It was

also observed that while the violent activities of the UPN supporters were open and glaring, those of the NPN supporters were more discreet but no less effective. The newspapers justified the violent activities of the supporters of the political parties they sympathise with while condemning the activities of supporters of rival political parties.

NEWSPAPER REPORTS AND INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE

The manner of press report about members of rival parties was negative and at best inciting because of the enemy image conveyed through the newspaper contents to the readers. Many of the pieces of evidence provided in the previous chapters confirm the strong relationship between the contents of the newspaper press and public violence during the two elections.

Most of the contents of the analysed newspapers never reflected neutrality and objectivity in information on political events. The newspapers only reported political events and disagreements among politicians from the angle of the parties they were supporting. In fact, in many instances, there was an intense struggle and a pervasive willingness among the newspapers to please their political patrons, whose utterances and press releases were reported verbatim in spite of the tendency of such utterances to inflame public passion in the sensitive political environment. This, no doubt, contributed to the escalation of the conflict and violence that ensued among the politicians before and during the two elections. The papers only covered events from the perspective of their owners and the political parties they supported, and so no effort was made at all to verify some of the pieces of information that were perceived to favour such patrons.

In several instances, press releases issued from party offices and statements issued at press conferences held by party officials were published without balancing the information contained in them with reactions from rival parties. On specific issues, none of the newspapers, for example, ever reported that the party they were supporting was engaging thugs or was planning to rig elections, even though this trend was widespread among all political parties during these periods. To the papers, it was only the rival parties that engaged in such misdeeds

while members of the parties they supported were often victims. In essence, most of the time, objectivity was sacrificed on the altar of partisanship. Expectedly, this did not help in mitigating any of the attendant conflicts or violence during the elections.

OWNERSHIP INFLUENCE AND NEWSPAPERS' PERFORMANCE

Ownership influence and ownership pattern greatly influenced the performance of the newspapers during the two election conflicts examined. Where a newspaper was not outrightly owned by a top official of a political party, it was owned and financed by any of the two tiers of government. Their allegiance was glaringly to their owners and financiers. During the first republic, only a few newspapers were run as purely business interests and this greatly affected the trend in the political scene. The influence of the *West African Pilot* and *Nigerian Tribune* owned by Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, respectively, was palpable in their support for the NCNC, the AG and later the UPGA coalition. *Morning Post*, owned by the federal government, strictly supported the interests of the NNDP and the NPC, which went into a coalition to form the NNA.

It was unthinkable to imagine that *Nigerian Tribune* would criticise Awolowo and the UPN during the second republic. The same applied to *Daily Times* and President Shagari's government. *Daily Sketch*, which was jointly owned by all the states in the southwest, had special pages for information and releases from each of its owner state governments during the period analysed. Apart from appointing the key management staff of the newspaper establishments, some form of subventions also came from the owners of the newspapers to cushion their operations in the harsh economic environment in which they were operating. As shown in the evidence provided by the newspapers contents, most of the political stories were favourable to the political parties the owners of the newspapers belonged to, while the unfavourable political stories belonged to the rival parties.

It is not certain whether profit making was part of the motivations for establishing and running newspaper organisations during the period under study, since this is beyond the scope of this book. One thing is

clear, however; most of the newspapers, except *Nigerian Tribune*, never survived beyond the political periods during which they were active. For example, after the first republic, *West African Pilot* and *Morning Post* were rested. After the second republic, although it took them some years to finally close down, *Daily Times* and *Sketch* were also off the newsstands. There is no doubt that the involvement of the newspapers in politics rubbed off on their credibility and popularity among the reading public and affected their survival. But this is a subject for further investigation. However, there are enough evidences to suggest that ownership influences and political party affinities were largely pervasive in the contents of the various newspapers analysed in this book.

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL SHADOW PARTIES ON NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL

There is enough evidence from data that newspapers were collecting information directly from political party secretariats and from party stalwarts and publishing such information without bothering to investigate their truthfulness. Some editorials were actually written for newspapers by political party stalwarts during the election conflicts and this was confirmed from interviews with some of the politicians. This accounted for the reason why, in some of the coverage and contents of the newspapers analysed, partisan political considerations were given priority over the social responsibility roles of the newspapers even in their coverage of social issues. Little or no thought was given to the likely effects of the contents of the newspapers on the reading public. What were uppermost in the minds of journalists were the political interests of their patrons and the political parties they supported. This led to recklessness in the reportorial process. One would have expected the papers to report, condemn and criticize violence and destruction which were negative to the development of the society in a dispassionate manner notwithstanding the political parties that sponsored such actions. In a rational environment, press attention ought to have been focused more on the human sufferings and losses from the burning and looting that accompanied the elections, but this was not the case according to analysis.

The extent of coverage and the level of criticism of election malpractices and violence by the newspapers were often dependent on which political party was involved and which political party members were victims. In addition to this, undue attention and prominence were given to glaring sponsors of political violence by the newspapers as long as they belonged to the 'right' party. Unnecessary coverage and space were given to their defences. Even bizarre utterances concerning their involvement in political violence were published prominently. This does not portray any commitment to neutrality and social responsibility on the part of the papers. All these point to evidence that shadow parties were having pervasive influence on the contents and reportorial direction of the newspapers.

NEWSPAPERS COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY DURING ELECTION VIOLENCE

Editorial opinions, which are usually strong instruments to object to anti-social issues, were relegated to instruments of political maneuvering and propaganda by newspapers during the study periods, as revealed in the analyses. As earlier mentioned, during the periods under study, the editorial opinions of some of the newspapers were written for them by party officials in political party offices. This does not connote any serious commitment to social issues and protection of the political system from destruction by the newspapers. It also largely accounted for the loss of credibility by the newspapers among segments of the reading public who did not support the papers' political views. The newspapers no doubt failed to use their agenda-setting power to direct the attention of the general public to other salient issues that could have determined the survival or otherwise of the democratic system. Attentions were focused only on political issues, while other social consequences of the collapse of the democratic system were ignored.

Another vivid instance depicting a lack of commitment to protecting the political system by the newspapers relates to the contents of cartoons and illustrations published by the newspapers before, during and after the election crises. These conveyed powerful negative messages and

images into the minds of the audience. Cartoons and images are capable of being interpreted much more strongly and could generate stronger emotions than written texts (Bandura et. al., 1963). These cartoons and illustrations were suspected to have had a strong influence on readers and could have stimulated the audience into undesirable action during the study periods as the subjects around them were burning controversial issues.

The same applies to the various quotations lifted from different sources and published especially on the front pages of the newspapers, which urged the public into action against perceived enemies. Most of the time, the contexts within which such quotations were made were never provided and of course, the aim of the editors was for the readers to relate the quotations to the prevailing political contexts at the time of publication. It is doubtful if the editors or editorial teams of the newspapers gave any thought to the likely reactions of the reading public to such inciting quotations and contents, which were carried in the newspapers when tension was pervasive in the political environment. This negative mode of reporting was capable of shaking public confidence in the political system and the public could begin to explore other alternatives to the prevailing political system. If this was precisely what the editors intended to achieve, then they indeed succeeded a great deal in contributing to the collapse of the two republics.

During the study period, most other social issues were relegated to a secondary place on the scale of coverage of the newspapers. The front and other strategic pages of newspapers were devoted to political issues while other issues related to the development of the society were not given their deserved prominence. In spite of the fact that social infrastructures and social welfare were deteriorating and economic problems pervasive, the attention of the press was focused on politics and political gladiators. Later, all the economic, social and political problems facing the country were cited as reasons by the military juntas that took over after the two elections to justify their incursion into government.

Journalists are mostly privileged to obtain information about impending violence and be at the scene of violence. They could alert the public and security forces on the imminence of such violence;

monitor the preparation of security agents and give an account of what transpired at the scene of violence, sometimes to prevent further violence. The mode of reporting political issues by most of the newspapers affiliated to political parties during the election crises studied prevented them from giving thought to how violence and destruction could be forestalled. Though the newspapers were struggling to outdo each other in reporting the havoc done to lives and properties by thugs and supporters of rival political parties, no proactive actions were taken to prevent and stop further violence and destruction. In most of the violence reported, efforts were concentrated on body counts of victims, the number of properties destroyed, and the preparation of rival political parties to launch the next attack. No genuine efforts were made by the press to objectively condemn the violence by political party supporters and there was no record of their assessment of the preparation of relevant security agencies to prevent further violence. In some instances, the newspapers even justified violence as a way of teaching the incorrigible election riggers the lessons of their life, especially when such violence was planned by the supporters of the political parties that had the sympathy of the newspapers.

In addition to this, the inciting contents of the newspapers could have contributed to the aggravation of violence. In instances where the newspapers rationalised the use of violence to achieve political goals, the reading public was made oblivious of the consequences of such violence. Since newspapers were encouraging it, violence was seen as a rational way of attempting to attain political goals by a largely illiterate population. In essence, the irresponsible reporting and reckless activities of the newspapers contributed in no small measure to aggravating the violence that accompanied the elections.

7

Media Dilemma in Covering Conflicts and Violence

Good news is no news, but conflict sells – Ellen Gardner

This phrase aptly describes the perception of the press about news and events in the society. In contemporary schools of journalism, it is taught that one of the attributes of news is its possession of conflicts and clashes. This, expectedly, influences the attitude and professional judgment of journalists on the field as well as other gatekeepers in newsrooms. A story can hardly make the headlines or other strategic positions in newspapers, journals and the electronic media without possessing an element of conflict, irrespective of the consequences of such stories on the society. That is why Tehranian (1996) describes the nature of the press as “naturally attracting to conflict as magnet attracts iron.”

The press has a strong influence on conflicts and the outcome of conflicts. Baumann and Siebert (2001) posit that the press possesses the capacity to impact conflict pre-emptively, restoratively and could

even intervene in conflicts as mediators. This implies that the press has an enormous potential for peacebuilding and for transforming conflict, but it often delights in encouraging and, sometimes, in inciting various forces in the society against one another for its inherent benefits, but to the detriment of the society. Media economics and incredible competition in reporting the news have been identified as an important factor that contributes to the press reporting in a manner that promotes conflict escalation. The 24/7 or around the clock news environment and new technologies have also aided the trend which encourages the reporting of momentary events, while ignoring the contexts of events which could have produced better and more robust information to the audience (Howard and Prentoulis, 2003). The pressure of deadline journalism and the competition to be the first to get the big story encourage journalists to concentrate on conflict behaviours rather than providing information about the background and context of conflicts. In most of the political, ethnic, religious and other conflicts in Nigeria, reporters are sent to cover such events at short notices, without preparations and without understanding the complexities of the events that had led to such conflicts. Reporters often rely on sources that are hardly neutral. Such sources could be political or factional leaders who plan to use the media to execute personal or group agenda. Reports produced from such environments are often focused on horrific and dramatic events of the conflict without adequate explanation of the background and complexities of the conflict, which could help in mitigating rather than intensifying accompanying violence in the conflict.

Many media organisations are constrained from sending reporters and sustaining them long enough in conflict zones because of financial reasons. As a result, media organisations rely on materials from foreign news agencies such as Reuters, Inter Press, Agencie France Presse (AFP) and others who provide information and visuals at prefixed prices. In addition to buying information from the news agencies, media organisations also buy into the prejudices and biases of such news agencies, who are guided by the political and economic interests of their home countries. Even though this arrangement could enhance rapid coverage and reporting of events, the associated factors could

influence the turn of events in local conflicts. The conflict in the Niger Delta is a current and appropriate example of this trend. Most news materials reported in the media are concentrated on the hostage-taking activities which are now common in the region. However, because most of the events are reported from the prism of foreign news agencies who hardly provide background accounts of the Niger Delta crisis, the media reports seriously impede a negotiated resolution of the conflict. Kidnapping incidents are reported mainly when it is British or American citizens who have been taken hostage. Hardly do we find reports treating in-depth the plight of the indigenes whose environment has been degraded as a result of oil exploratory activities in the Niger Delta.

Perhaps the most important factors in press coverage of conflicts are the issue of content and professional code of practice among journalists who are often influenced by commercial and social realities of news organisations with consequences on the general society. Unlike other professions, such as law and medicine, journalism practice is much less formalised and regulated, and is lacking in a specific set of educational requirements and professional rules. To a great extent, the absence of these ingredients inhibits journalism's professional prestige, responsibility and legitimacy. Lacking formal rules and procedures, journalists are guided by ethics, which are often self-imposed, and sometimes by an individual sense of social responsibility.

Apart from ethics, the practice of journalism is universally guided by the principles of objectivity, balance, fairness and neutrality. These principles are used to justify the claims to professional autonomy which journalists proffer in most democratic societies. These claims are offered more extensively by conflict reporters who are pressurised by societal expectations to provide information in an unbiased form, in addition to protecting and preserving the cherished values which should advance the society. This dilemma leads one to re-examine the underlying principles of journalism practice vis-à-vis the realities met on the field by the journalist.

Objectivity as a concept underscoring professional journalism practice and the expectations of the public is inherently ambiguous. Objectivity is associated with 'truth' and 'impartiality'. In pursuit of objectivity, the journalist may not be entirely truthful and impartial to

parties involved in the news because of the realities on the ground in the news environment. For example, in a journalist's quest to reach the truth, he may strive to be impartial but that does not imply that the means used or the means he could use are objective. Schudson (1978) argues that reality and the knowledge of reality are both socially constructed and coloured by the journalist who is covering an event. Objectivity is embedded within the social reality within which the journalist is operating. It is, therefore, much more helpful to treat objectivity, truth and impartiality as theoretical imperatives underpinning reporting and as strategic rituals enabling the defence of the journalism profession, rather than as an idealistic expectation that must inform the practical conduct of the journalist on the field. The truth about contemporary journalistic practice is also that the structural environment of reporting is restricted by economic and political factors, which are not unconnected to media ownership, political interests and commercial patronage. These could lead to subjective outcomes in the reporting process and could put objectivity to test in the coverage of many conflicts.

Similarly, the principle of balance refers to granting of equal amount of space and time to conflicting sides or parties in the news and to state their case in the process of covering and reporting the news. In a way, 'balance' is also related to the concept of 'neutrality' which may also be problematic when one considers the moral imperatives and societal expectations that inform journalistic practice. Balance and neutrality presuppose open and free access to media contents for anyone involved one way or the other in the news. However, there is limited space to offer to everyone and, therefore, access is determined by social and economic values which reporting can make available to the medium that is offering the space. Again, this portends clashes of perception between the journalist and the public around the unfolding realities of balancing and neutrality in a story. While public expectations of the journalist are high, sometimes with regard to tilting his report towards issues and events that public opinion favours, the journalist is at the same time under pressure to reflect contrary views and events that could be perceived as antisocial in order to maintain balance and neutrality. The coverage of terrorist incidents across the globe is a

good reference point on this. Reporting underlying causes of terrorist activities is often perceived as aligning with the terrorist to justify the act of terrorism, yet it is also known that such reports, if examined closely, could assist in resolving the underlying issues that inform terrorism and related activities.

VIOLENCE-WAGING MEDIA

Galtung (1965) recognizes that violence could come in three forms. There is direct physical violence, there is indirect violence, and then, there is structural violence. Direct physical violence involves inflicting injury deliberately on another person with the aim of causing pain to that person. Indirect violence involves inflicting harm on another person by open or covert verbal attacks such as gossips, rumour spreading, character assassination and the like. Structural violence involves inflicting harm on fellow humans through institutions of society such as slavery, racism, class system and other activities which deny equal rights to members of the society. Galtung explains that even though structural violence is built unconsciously into political, economic and cultural structures, it possesses the same ability to harm and cause injuries. It operates at a slower pace than physical violence. Structural violence embodies both intentional and unintentional harm done to human beings where responsibility for the damaging action cannot be easily attributed to an individual's will, but its material effects are tangible on the victims. In developing countries, structural violence, such as corruption, political repression and injustice, manifests in societal inequalities, such as poverty, short life expectancies, high rates of child mortality and other social problems, which occur slowly but surely.

Indirect violence is much more relevant to describing the consequences of the negative activities of the mass media in the society. Explaining the forms of indirect violence which include inflicting harm on fellow humans by verbal attacks and negative contents, such as gossip, rumour spreading, libel, defamation, character assassination, etc. Galtung argues that indirect violence could be more devastating on the society and on individuals than direct and structural violence.

This is simply because it possesses the inherent ability to stimulate other forms of violence. By manipulating contents, angles of coverage, focusing on and reporting the news, mass media are able to engage in both positive and negative social control that could enhance or impede the progress of the society under the guise of freedom of speech. Even though freedom of speech is a fundamental right which must be rightly protected in a democracy, it comes with enormous responsibilities. In the hands of the unethical, freedom of speech is a dangerous weapon (Gardner 2001). And this also applies to press freedom.

A perennial problem associated with contemporary news media, especially during conflict, is the issue of hate contents. Hate contents are associated with hate media which Gardner (2001: 304) defines as:

Encouraging violent activities, tension, or hatred between races, ethnic or social groups or countries for political goals and/or to foster conflict by offering a one-sided or biased view or opinion, and/or resorting to deception.

Gardner describes hate media as a good example of how freedom of speech could be exploited to worsen existing tensions between and within communities and countries by whipping up nationalistic feelings and inciting ethnic and tribal hatred. She expatiates:

Hate speeches are not new; hate speeches via radio were used by Nazi Germany to whip up racial hatred and prepare the ground for the Holocaust. More recent obvious examples of this are the prominent roles played by the local media justifying, supporting, and sustaining the wars, genocides and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. (Gardner, 2001: 304)

Radio has been recognised as the worst culprit in terms of the deployment of hate speeches in prosecuting conflicts and violence in most places that have recorded massive loss of lives as a result of the activities of hate media. This, according to Gardner (*ibid*), is mainly because

Radio can reach large and varied targeted audiences quickly . . . Radio broadcasts can be quickly prepared, which is important when attempting to capitalize on targets of opportunity. Illiteracy does not prevent the listener from receiving the messages and forming their own individual

images and ideas, and a skilled radio announcer can exert tremendous influence on the listener simply by how the message is transmitted The difficulty in recognizing those who use hate media is that they often operate in remote areas or use local languages not easily recognizable, thereby escaping international attention until it is too late.

As illustrated in this book, newspapers are also culprits in the deployment of hate messages during conflict situations. Unfortunately, those using hate media exploit their right to freedom of speech in spreading their messages of hatred. This is a big dilemma facing journalists and other media practitioners, as freedom of expression is more of an ethical than legal issue. The code of ethics for journalists in most countries places three duties upon them. These include: to seek after the truth; to be independent; and to minimise harm (Bettina Peters, 2001:312-318). Most journalists who engage in disseminating hate messages justify their actions by making reference to the second duty of being independent while ignoring the first and the third. Often, the government is in a dilemma and sometimes confused on what to do in situations when hateful messages are being spread. Closing down such media organisations engaging in unethical practices would amount to a repression of the media, which is an antithesis to democratic norms. Ignoring to do so could wreak unfathomable havoc on the society, which was what happened when the French and American forces stationed nearby refused to jam and put off RTLM radio in Rwanda in 1996, leading to the massacre of no less than 600,000 people over a few days (Gardner, 2001: 305).

The dilemma of balancing societal interests with press freedom is resolved in most countries by self-regulation among journalists through journalism associations. In the quest to prevent government or other bodies from enforcing actions to regulate the practice, journalists themselves strive to enforce their codes of ethics by sanctioning registered members who embark on activities that are contrary to the section of the professional code which guards against incitement and the spread of false information. At the international level, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the umbrella body of journalist associations across the world, often condemns the misuse of the media in spreading national and religious hatred against other

peoples and communities. It has set up projects to educate journalists across the world on conflict reporting and other techniques that could prevent damage to the social fabric of conflict environments in which journalists carry out their duties, most especially in volatile areas across the world (Gardner, 2001).

The IFJ is also attempting to establish an international commission to investigate war propaganda and hate media. The commission will be saddled with the responsibility of investigating journalists, media organisations and official authorities who publish or broadcast war propaganda or promote ethnic hatred across the world. As a prelude to this process, several international seminars on journalism ethics have been held in various parts of the globe to sensitise journalists on the evil of unethical media practices. Nigerian and other regional journalism associations participated in these seminars and the feedback was very impressive.

However, in spite of all the regulations, institutions and actions that might be put in place to forestall unethical media practices, when a journalist confronts the reality of covering conflicts on the field, the temptation to ignore the regulations and the ethical codes is always very strong. Many environmental factors, including efforts to stay alive to cover conflict events distract journalists from taking proper actions to observe prescribed behaviour. Sometimes, the emotional being of the individual journalist comes to the fore and overwhelms his ability to reason rationally especially in life-threatening situations.

Election coverage presents a peculiar challenge to the journalist. The journalist has to contend with his personal political view and how to maintain a balance between this view and the public interest. In addition to this, he has to contend with the temptation of inducement by politicians and sometimes even his employer on issues that are contrary to his expected role of protecting the public interest. These are peculiar challenges that he faces in addition to all other challenges that are common to the coverage of other types of conflicts. In most cases, the credibility of the journalist and his integrity is always at stake. Sometimes, his job is also on the line if he reports one way or the other. A way out of this dilemma is suggested by Peters (2001:313):

To confront the ethical dilemma with confidence, journalists need to be as free as possible from pressure to follow a particular line. **The line journalists should follow is that dictated by their own conscience.** (*Emphasis mine*)

As a custodian of public confidence, the journalist should constantly have it in mind that his report could make or mar the outcome of any election. It could advance or stunt the move towards progress in the democratic march. It could destroy and protect lives and properties. Therefore, the journalist should be alive with his conscience during elections and strive to protect his integrity.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN BUILDING A PEACE CULTURE

As a major stakeholder in the democratic project, the press has the responsibility of contributing towards the emergence of a peaceful society to sustain democracy. Contrary to common beliefs, peaceful societies are not Utopias (Kemp and Fry, 2004). Such societies consist of human beings facing the same kinds of problems that confront other people elsewhere in the world. They also experience internal, political, economic and social conflicts, domestic disagreements, threat of violence from within and outside their societies, and other forms of conflicts experienced by other societies. The distinguishing factors that favour such peaceful societies are that they have identified forms of socialisation and have developed cultural mechanisms that promote peaceful interaction among the people. They have developed beliefs that favour non-violence over aggression. They have identified means by which humans can manage their conflicts without having to resort to violent behaviour. And they have fostered attitudes and perceptions about violence that prevent its establishment as a social norm.

A number of ethnic and traditional societies have been identified as peaceful societies by anthropologists who have carried out studies in such societies to identify those factors that support the preservation of peaceful ideals cherished by such traditional groups in spite of the turbulence in the immediate and global environments (*see* Schlegel, 2004; Howard, 2004; Gardner, 2004; and Fry, 2004). Among contemporary modern societies, the Scandinavian countries (Norway,

Sweden, Finland, and Denmark) are often identified as peaceful societies because of their low level of violence and the high standard of living enjoyed by citizens of those countries (Dobinson, 2004). These modern states and traditional societies are not perceived to have become peaceful by accident. The culture of peace was created by the people and nurtured over time. In the same vein, social institutions within those societies were orientated to reinforce peaceful co-existence among the people in those societies.

In the modern developed peaceful societies that have been identified, such institutions like the media, schools, religious organisations and governmental agencies have been orientated and made to contribute towards the sustenance of the peace culture. More importantly, since the activities of the mass media are so pervasive and felt by every components of society, peace media systems have been developed to nurture and sustain the culture of peace in those peaceful societies.

A peace media system can be described as one that successfully minimises violence and is able to promote peaceful behaviours in the society. It is a media system that has orientated its culture and the cultural development of the society within which it operates towards peacefulness. It is a media system that has developed ideas, ethics, mores, value systems and institutions that minimise violence and promote peace within it and among the audience. In identifying peaceful media, not only the state of the media should be considered but also their orientation. The fact that violent incidents are reported in such media does not necessarily mean that they are not peaceful. The cultural orientation of the media and how it is able to minimise the impact and spread of violence in the society in addition to preventing the culture of violence ingrained in its reporting are the most important factors that determine the virility of peace media. In essence, the cultural dynamics of such media is towards peacefulness. In a peace media system, we not only simply see a media in a state of peace but also a media that:

- (a) Desires to be peaceful and seeks to orientate its culture in that direction;
- (b) Has developed cultural and technical means to achieve

peacefulness, and

- (c) Has achieved success in this endeavour. (Adapted from Kemp, 2004:6)

The success of a peace media system is in how it deals with conflicts and violence when, for whatever unfortunate reasons, it occurs in the society. The Nigerian mass media system can be transformed into a peaceful media system by which it can play a central role in the promotion of peace in Nigeria's multicultural and diverse socio-political environment. It can emphasise the benefits of peace by raising the legitimacy of groups and political leaders that are working for peace. It can help transform the image of the enemy among rival political and social groups that are involved in the country's recurrent social and political conflicts. In the midst of most social conflicts, the media is privileged to be in a position to contribute to peace initiatives, especially in reconciling various factions after political turbulence because:

- (a) They help in defining the atmosphere in which peace negotiation takes place in political processes.
- (b) They have active influence on the strategy and behaviour of stakeholders in political and social conflicts in conflict environments.
- (c) They have important influence on the nature of debates during peace processes and negotiations.
- (d) They can buttress or weaken public legitimacy of the stakeholders involved in peace processes.¹

An understanding of this vantage position of the media by media personnel is important in their agenda-setting role, since any peace process after political turmoil is subject to several interpretations in the public arena. This understanding will guide media men in the careful selection of information sources and in the construction of news stories about peace processes in order not to fall into the hands of political interests who may want to manipulate the media during political conflict negotiations.

1. For more information on the potential contributions of the media in peace process, see Sanjana Hattotuwa (2005) *Role of Media in Peace Processes*, in www.thehoot.org

Sometimes, during peace negotiations, consensus among political leaders or parties in conflict could help the media in their assignments. When there is such a consensus over an issue or issues involved in the negotiation, the media has little problem in reporting the process. However, when political leaders or parties in conflicts are unable to generate a consensus, the ensuing disagreements could negatively shape the reportage of the negotiation process. In such a context, the media may not be able to report peace processes with any degree of accuracy and this may affect the outcome of the peace process. But this is where the role of the media is very salient in assisting the parties in negotiation to reach consensus on issues in the public interest. The media should stand up to the intellectual challenges of harmonising and articulating all the divergent views to assist the negotiation parties in advancing the peace process for the ultimate interest of the society.

It is also very important for the media to note the distinction between an event and the process of peace negotiation after political conflicts. Peace negotiations are often the culmination of people's willingness to co-exist in a just and non-violent environment after the experience of conflict. This should be rightly recognised as a process and not just an event. The media owe it as a responsibility to the society to report the chain of events that makes up the peace process responsibly, impartially and accurately in order to achieve the ultimate – which is the emergence of a peaceful political environment desired by stakeholders in peace negotiations.

But the media must also be free to critically examine the processes of reconciliation by reflecting disagreements, contrary viewpoints and drawing attention to alternative reconciliation methods championed by other groups. This way, healthy debates that encourage exchange of ideas are celebrated and other methods that have been proven to work elsewhere could be suggested and promoted. Through this the media help in displacing ignorance and silence which may give birth to extremism and undue emotions that could undermine peace process.

8

The Media as Mediators in Political Conflicts in Nigeria

A raging controversy in the Nigerian political environment is whether the media should maintain and intensify their role as an unbiased umpire during political conflicts or whether they should be playing a mediatory role. Opinion varies among a broad spectrum of politicians and journalists in this regard. Politician, veteran journalist and newspaper publisher Lateef Jakande has this comment on the issue:

It is not the function of the press to reconcile in any conflict, but it is the function of the press to state as clearly as possible the facts of any matter, whether those who matters feel comfortable with the truth or not. The press is a mirror; it mirrors what goes on in the society, whether good or bad. To take on the job of reconciliation is not the function of the press.¹

Another veteran journalist, diplomat, and peace activist Segun Olusola

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1. Excerpts from the interview granted to the Author by Alhaji Lateef Jakande in his residence on 27 November 2005.

has a contrary opinion:

The press must assume the role of mediators for peace in national (political) conflicts. Since what the public read in the press is interpreted either as a call to war or a call to peace, and the politicians are only concerned with power, for the press not to assume the role of mediators could mean self-consuming of themselves and destruction for our society.²

Playing a mediatory role could be difficult in political conflicts in the Nigerian society because, most of the time, the mass media are co-opted by politicians into political conflicts, as revealed in this book. Until recently when broadcasting was liberalized, radio and television stations apparently owned by governments often got incorporated into political conflicts involving their own governments at both state and federal levels. Ironically, such broadcasting stations were eventually commissioned to produce programmes that could reconcile warring parties and advocate for peace after the de-escalation of political conflicts involving their owners.³ It could, therefore, be inferred that playing the role of mediators and peace advocates is not totally strange to the Nigerian mass media especially after all the numerous conflicts that the country has experienced since independence. For instance, after the Nigerian Civil War, the media played very important roles in the rehabilitation of war victims and in advocating for the re-integration of the rebels in its campaign of 'No Victor, No Vanquished' in the early 1970s.

This conflict resolution and mediatory potential, which is largely under-utilised in the Nigerian media, has played an important part in helping other post-conflict societies to rebuild. Although, many journalists resist the role of mediators and feel such role is outside the

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2. Excerpts from an interview granted the Author by Chief Segun Olusola in December 2005.
 3. Chief Segun Olusola recalled that the WNTV/WNBS was commissioned by the government of the Western Region to produce programmes that could reconcile the political factions after the 1963 regional conflicts. This same trend occurred after the protracted political crisis Nigeria experienced between 1993 and 1999, which culminated in the current political dispensation.

bounds of their profession, this role has, in many instances, counted in stabilising societies. One of such mediatory roles which the media sometimes inadvertently play is bringing together parties in conflict and bridging the communication gap that has led to conflict in the first instance. Usually, conflict parties do not always want to talk to each other after protracted conflicts. The media do often provide the platform for dialogue and in the process gradually bring together conflict parties, which sometimes spiral into constructive physical interaction and engagement by estranged parties in conflict. Many intervention projects across the world have carefully engaged the media in mediatory processes which have proved successful in facilitating dialogue and peaceful negotiation in conflict environments.⁴ These projects facilitated direct engagement of conflict parties through the mediating power of the media and contributed to bringing peace into conflict environments.

At the individual level, journalists can serve as mediators because of the enormous opportunities offered by their ability to intervene in conflicts at any and every stage through access to conflict parties. They can intervene at the latent stage of conflict, at the manifest stage and at the reconciliatory stage of conflict. This offers enormous opportunities for journalists to offer social services by managing conflicts and not exacerbating them. In this wise, Baumann and Siebert (2001) suggest that journalists can borrow a number of skills from mediation techniques in intervening as mediators and in fostering dialogue and reconciliation before, during, and after conflict. They can do this through the following means:

- (a) By bringing parties in conflict to the negotiation table since they have unparalleled access to conflict parties. Through this, they can encourage dialogue and negotiation on conflict

4. Examples of such intervention projects are the 'Video Dialogue' project in post-conflict South Africa; the 'Inter-Ethnic Team Project' in Macedonia; the 'Search for Common Ground/Studio Jambo' project in Burundi, and several other initiatives to train journalists, reported in Gardner, E. (2001) 'The Role of Media in Conflict' in Luc Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz (eds.) *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.

- issues by demystifying enemy perception among warring parties.
- (b) By actively listening to all parties, journalists can encourage people to express their grievances and this, in itself, is a balm to sooth aching hearts that have been devastated by conflicts.
 - (c) By moving parties off their positions towards interests, journalists can help in soften hardened positions and shifting attention to common grounds shared by the conflict parties. Instead of focusing on the gruesome events in conflicts, attention could be shifted to the context, the root of conflict and the potential for benefits even in the conflict, thus helping the parties in moving towards a solution to their disputes.
 - (d) Through the power of agenda setting, journalists could bring into focus issues critical to the conflict in the mass media. By bringing such issues into the consciousness of the conflict parties and the general public, such issues are raised high on the agenda for public discourses. This could help in accelerating peace negotiations among conflict parties when they know that the public is closely watching their efforts to negotiate peace.
 - (e) By helping to dispel misperception and stereotypes in conflict environments, journalists can help conflict parties in quickly finding solutions to conflictual issues. Usually, antagonists in conflicts have misperceptions about one another due to the demonisation and blackmail that had taken place during the formative and escalation processes of the conflict. Journalists can explore these misperceptions and skilfully dispel them. This effort can be reinforced by bringing liberal elements in the conflict environment together to serve as models to hardliners and to showcase the fact that people from opposing sides can still interact without fear of danger.
 - (f) By questioning their own assumptions and the assumptions of other parties in the conflict environment, journalists are able

to explore and arrive at an accurate understanding of the true situations of issues involved in conflict. Since most conflicts are based on wrong assumptions and perceptions, this self-examination will assist in ventilating vexed issues and encourage dialogue and negotiations with open minds among conflicting parties.

- (g) By engaging in deliberate language laundering in reporting conflict and peace processes, journalists can assist in finding quick resolution to conflictual issues. Normally, the use of language can be used in perpetuating stereotypes and in creating divisions among conflict parties by, for instance, dubbing one side as victims and the other as perpetrators. This can do an enormous damage in negotiation and reconciliation by locking the conflicting parties into narrow mindsets. By paying attention to language usage, journalists can avoid employing explosive words and this can contribute tremendously in finding a quick resolution to conflicts.
- (h) Finally, journalists can facilitate joint problem solving among conflict parties by drawing attention to more important issues while de-emphasising less important matters. By providing a platform for dialogue, and by careful observation and reporting of the negotiation process, they can help in moving conflict parties from dialogue into action, thus bringing quick relief into the environment. In addition, by spotlighting other environments where similar conflictual issues have been resolved, journalists can help direct attention to best practices and methods which have helped in the quick resolution of similar conflicts elsewhere.⁵

5. Some of these suggestions are adapted from M. Baumann and H. Siebert (2001) "Journalists As Mediators", in Luc Reyler and Thania Paffenholz (eds.) *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 319-21.

A LAST NOTE

This book set out to investigate the roles played by the Nigerian print media in the political conflicts that culminated into election violence witnessed during the 1965 parliamentary and 1983 general elections in Southwest Nigeria. Political conflicts and election violence has been the albatross to the democratic progress of Nigeria since independence. Most of the military coups that occurred in Nigeria justified their credibility on failed democratic transitions occasioned by failed election, which mostly led to massive violence and destruction because the political class could not resolve their conflicts and organise credible elections devoid of violence and destruction.

Being a key institution in the democratic process, the mass media, in general, and the print media, in particular, play important roles in providing platforms for political contestations and, more importantly, get co-opted into political conflicts due to several reasons. Some of the factors that define press coverage and reporting of political conflicts include:

- (1) unwillingness to abide strictly by ethical standards and the constitutional role of being an unbiased umpire in the political process;
- (2) pervasive influence of owners of the newspaper press;
- (3) traditional demands and definition of news, which celebrate conflicts and clashes; and,
- (4) commercial orientation that necessitates competition instead of cooperation among journalists in the coverage of public and political affairs.

The print media is observed to have made substantial contributions to the failure of elections and to the election violence that were the subjects of this book. In order to understand the extent of these contributions, the book explored the content of newspapers and the contributions of the selected newspapers to the political conflicts and election crises that culminated in the failure of the two democratic dispensations within which the elections took place, using southwest Nigeria as a case study. This was with a view to making recommendations on ways by which the pitfalls encountered during the two

democratic dispensations could be avoided by the press, the political class and the civil populace in future elections.

It was also found in the book that the press never attempted to mitigate the numerous conflicts that attended the elections that were examined. Furthermore, the press did not make any serious attempt to reconcile the various factions on the political divides which could have saved the civil democratic institutions and advance Nigerian democratic processes during the two democratic dispensations studied.

It is concluded that in order to have peaceful elections and advance civil democracy, the press need to cultivate the practice of protecting the interests of the society and undertake to reconcile political actors by practising conflict-sensitive reporting. This can only be done if the press embraces the ideals of peace journalism which is the hallmark of development into a peaceful society.

As an important institution in contemporary democratic governance in Nigeria, the press needs to examine carefully its agenda-setting functions in order to bring up and highlight issues that can advance the interests of the society during elections instead of focusing on the interests of political groups. The press should commit itself to giving regular and free coverage to voter education campaigns to mobilise citizens to conduct themselves peacefully during elections. In addition, such voters' education should include issues such as conduct of election campaigns devoid of violence among political parties, procedures for voting and how to obtain adequate information about political parties and candidates running for elections. In order to perform these functions effectively, the media must be non-partisan and should maintain an attitude of impartiality towards all the political parties. It is strongly recommended that during political crises, the press should focus more on areas of common interests among politicians, instead of emphasising the differences among parties in political disputes.

Because of the liberal ownership structure of the media, the journalist must strike a balance between professional responsibilities and the political interests of media owners. Ultimately, societal interests must override ownership consideration during the coverage of political contestations and elections because societal interest is superior to individual and group interests. The prosperity of the media is often

linked to the credibility, trust and goodwill it is able to generate in the society. Ultimately, the prosperity of the society goes a long way in determining the survival of the media and the destruction of societal values could translate into the termination of the activities of the press.

Although the media will inevitably come under pressure from politicians and powerful interests seeking to manipulate them to gain political advantages, the media must resist pressures from all quarters. The media and journalists should exemplify independence in their actions. They must examine their status-conferral functions by focusing more on credible individuals who are more peace-oriented and peace-loving in the political process, rather than violence patrons and questionable characters who take politics as a zero-sum game. Such individuals who exhibit the tendency of capturing power by all means must be exposed and discouraged from capturing power in the interest of the society and for the survival of democracy. The media should empower the citizens to exercise their right of asking questions about the credentials and antecedents of those aspiring to govern them and how such individuals propose to govern them. This involves providing citizens and civil society groups adequate access to articulate their views and opinions, especially during preparations for elections.

Finally, there is the need for media operators to establish specific codes of conduct for political and election coverage and reporting in a manner that will encourage their sensitivity to emerging conflicts. Such a code should discourage violence and portray politics as a means to serve, rather than a means for self-aggrandizement. In addition, media practitioners should be guided by the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists as well as the legal framework for media coverage of elections in Nigeria, which is currently contained in s. 29 of Electoral Act 2002, as amended in 2006. The ultimate, then, is for the journalist to be alive to his societal responsibilities and be guided by his conscience always.

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List of Interviewees

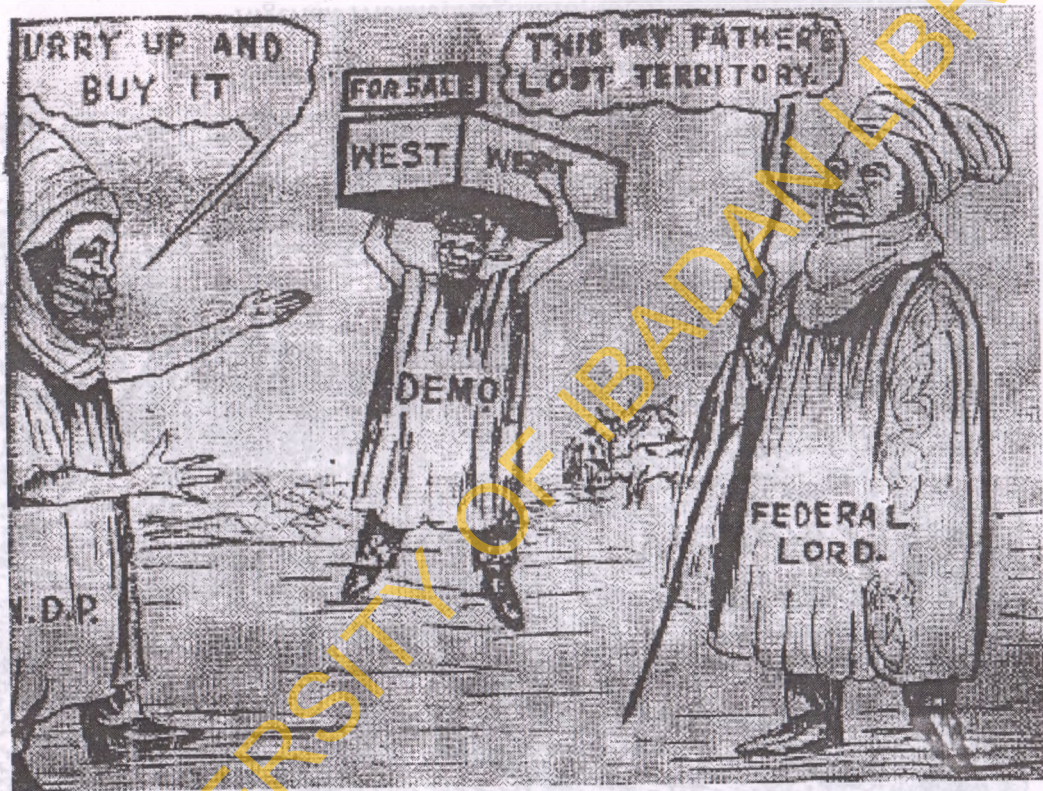
- Alhaji Lateef Jakande. Veteran journalist, politician and former Governor of Lagos State.
- Chief Richard Akinjide. Former Minister in the first republic; Attorney-General and Minister for Justice in the Second Republic and a close associate of late Chief S.L. Akintola.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 113

- Dr Omololu Olunloyo. Politician and former Governor of Oyo State, 1983.
- Pa Emmanuel Alayande. Politician and former Chaplain of the defunct Action Group. He was a close associate of late Chief Obafemi Awolowo.
- Chief Reuben Fashoranti. Politician, former State Commissioner in Ondo State. He was a close associate of late Chief Adekunle Ajasin.
- Chief Wumi Adegbonmire. Politician and former Secretary to Ondo State government. He was also a close associate of late Chief Adekunle Ajasin.
- Chief Segun Olusola. Veteran Journalist, former ambassador and peace advocate.
- Mr Dare Babarinsa. Journalist and Editor. He was Ondo State Correspondent of *National Concord* during the 1983 election crisis.
- Mr Odia Ofeimun. Journalist, poet and former Private Secretary to late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. He was also a close associate of late Chief Bola Ige, former Governor of Oyo State, 1979-1983.
- Chief Samuel Obe. Politician. He was a close associate of late Chief Olaiya Fagbamigbe, a prominent politician who was killed in the 1983 election violence in Ondo State.
- Chief Ireoluwa Olubodun Fayehun. Politician and former close associate of Chief Akin Omoboriowo, the former Deputy Governor of Ondo State and gubernatorial aspirant in the state in 1983.
- Pa Tajudeen Ayangbenle, traditional drummer and oral historian of some Yoruba warfare.



Nigerian Tribune, Wednesday, September 29, 1965



Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, September 30, 1965



'Especially those who have jets!

Nigerian Tribune, August 18, 1983



**What has this man done? Stolen only one naira.
What of those who stole your votes?**

Nigerian Tribune, Monday, September 26, 1983

5

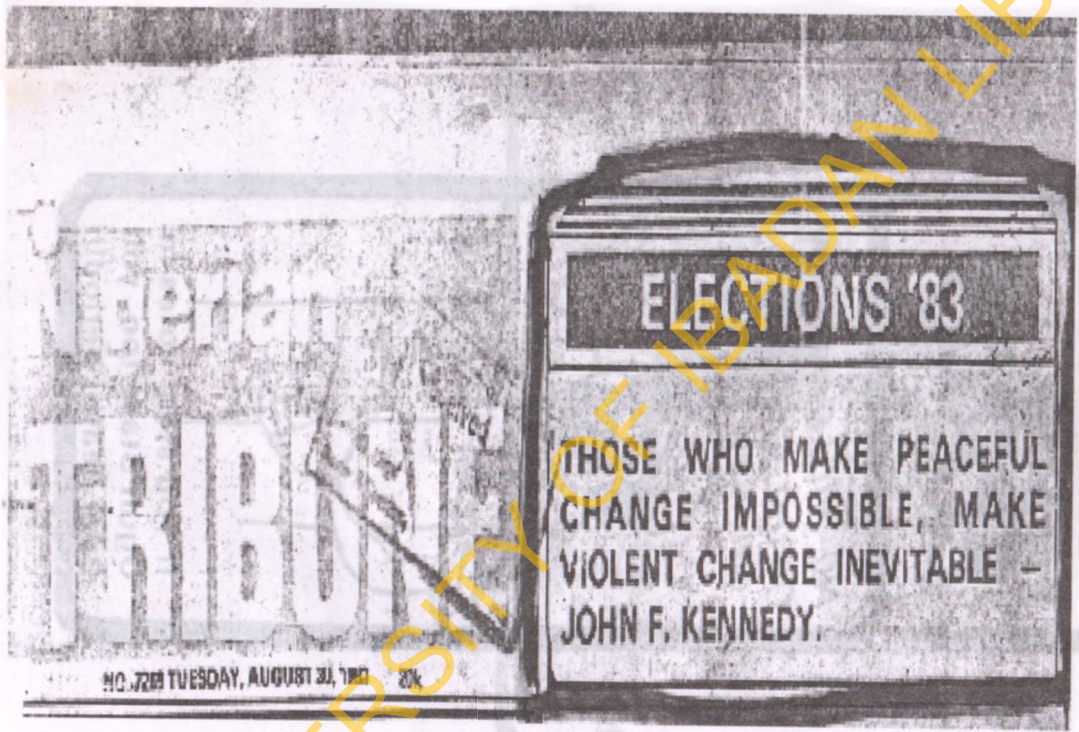


"Stand up for your rights"

Sketch, September 5, 1983, page 2

6





Nigerian Tribune, Tuesday, August 30, 1983

Mass Media and Election Violence . . . chronicles some of the activities of the print media in past elections in Nigeria. It exposes definite negative impacts the newspaper press had on election crises and how it aggravated such crises through irresponsible reporting and lack of conflict-sensitivity in the reportorial process. The book makes suggestions on how the mass media can be transformed in Nigeria to make useful contributions to sustenance of democracy and evolution of good governance.


Dr Olusola O. Isola obtained his first degree in Mass Communication from University of Lagos, Nigeria in 1987, and an M.A in Communication Arts and Ph.D in Peace and Conflict Studies from University of Ibadan, Ibadan. He specialises in Media and Conflict.

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