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Political Conflicts in Nigeria's Defunct Republics: The Nigerian Press as the Fourth Estate of Realm or Wreck?

By

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² Solomon Ntukekpo

Abstract

This work traced the contributions of the Nigerian press, particularly the newspaper press to the political pitfalls of the Nigerian nation in the defunct Republics that the nation has had. In this study, historiography was used to chronicle the bitter power struggles that culminated in the various political conflicts that plagued Nigeria right from pre-independence to the aborted First and Second Republics. In these conflicts, it was discovered that the local press engaged in intrigues, political back-stabbing and unprofessional conducts which contributed to the massive killings and destructions that followed the conflicts, particularly in some states in the old Western region of Nigeria, accounting for the intervention of the Military into Nigerian politics in 1966 and 1983. Many of the newspapers whose contents were analyzed favoured one or the other of the existing political parties, and published inciting and incriminating reports that set repressive and negative agenda for the public; a discovery that runs contrary

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to the tenets of a socially responsible press on one hand, and the principles of the press as Fourth Estate of Realm on the other hand.

Introduction

Intellectual and scholarly works seem not to be in small quantity regarding the role the media in Nigeria played in politically conflicting situations even before Nigeria became an independent nation. Earliest studies, theoretical constructs and historical accounts in respect of media and political reporting, appear to have been devoted to how the print media or newspapers in Nigeria fair with respect to political communication, as conditioned by the political, social and economic milieu in which they operate. Consequently, historical works that set the pace for other discussions in respect of the media and political conflict reporting in Nigeria have been credited to Omu (1965; 1974; 1978; 2002 and 2009); and Duyile (1987). It is pertinent to discuss such works in sequence of Republics in which Nigeria had been.

Political Conflicts in the Defunct First Republic: The Role of the Press

Highlighting the reportage of political issues by the press in Nigeria and the role the press played in political contestations that characterized the first republic, Omu (1978; 1996), Babatope (1984), Duyile (1987), Labode (1988) record that by independence, the unified struggle for nationalism and advocacy for Nigeria's common interest was fast receding in the press, giving way to sectional affinity. According to these political communication scholars, except for some newspapers and magazines which 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 Express*, and *Sunday Express* 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.

Omu (1978: 1996) and Duyile (1987) document that from 1960 to the expiration of the First Republic, the newspaper press was very active in the political conflicts that characterized the dispensation. Partisan newspapers had taken root in the national terrain at that time. Except for the *Daily Times* which exhibited some forms of neutrality and objectivity in its coverage of political issues because of its commercial orientation, other

newspapers that circulated in the Western Region were blatantly involved in the political struggle of their proprietors and they never hid where their loyalty lay.

The Pilot was pro- National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) and later extended its support to United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). *Morning Post*, funded by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) that controlled the federal government, was described as an antithesis of what a newspaper should be in a democracy for the role it played during the 1964 and the 1965 elections when it was questionably used to announce falsified results. The AG-controlled *Nigerian Tribune*, *Irohin Yoruba* and *Daily Express* were very active in supporting AG and UPGA. They commanded large readership in the Western Region because of the ingrained sympathy for AG in the region. These papers amazingly survived many intimidations during this period, but they also stimulated the opposition of the AG to venture into newspaper publishing to counter their influence. *Irohin Yoruba* was particularly so popular at the grassroots that by the time the personality-induced political conflict started between Awolowo and Akintola, the latter saw the need for establishing his own medium to counter the support that *Irohin Yoruba* was giving to the Awolowo faction in the AG, which incidentally were in the majority. He therefore, established *Imole Owuro* which he strengthened to counter the influence of *Irohin Yoruba*. Chief Akintola, himself a veteran journalist, used to write columns and editorials for *Imole Owuro*; though under a pseudonym. The paper was said to be circulating among the Yoruba speaking people throughout Nigeria and was even sold in West African capital cities, such as Abidjan, Accra, Lome, Cotonou and Porto Novo.

Shortly before the 1964 federal election, Chief Akintola sought to establish another medium to counter *Nigerian Tribune* and *Daily*

Express. He established the *Daily Sketch* from the funds of the Western Region. This move was however, described as a tactical error by Chief Richard Akinjide who offered his opinion on the establishment of the *Daily Sketch*, as captured by Onabamiro (1980) and Babarinsa (2003) in Isola (2008:110):

He (Akintola) shouldn't have established *Sketch* as a government newspaper. He should have established it as private paper, counterpoise to *Tribune* just as he established *Imole Owuro*, which was to counter *Irohin Yoruba*. There would have been no need for us to establish *Sunday Star* to counter *Tribune*. Akintola made an error of judgment there.

Later, Akintola and his associates had to establish *Sunday Star*, as a private venture to counter *Nigeria Tribune* when it was certain that the *Sketch* might not be a ready tool to counter the offensives of Awolowo's *Tribune* on Chief Akintola's government. Because *Daily Sketch* was a government-funded newspaper, Chief Akintola did not have full confidence in its management, who did not pander completely to his political demands. Isola (2008:123) records Chief Akinjide's comment on *Sunday Star*:

I was one of the people who established the *Sunday Star* and I can reveal to you that about 80 to 90 per cent of the editorials of the *Sunday Star* were being written by Chief D.O. Akinloye and me. Our intention was to balance up with the biased contents of the *Nigerian Tribune*.

Sunday Star was very dogged in its support for Chief Akintola's government in the political battle that accompanied the 1965 elections, though it could not match the already entrenched influence of *Nigerian Tribune*. Even after Chief Akintola's assassination during the first military coup, *Imole Owuro* and

Sunday Star continued to be vibrant and malicious in their contents. The papers, however, shifted their attentions to attacking the military government that succeeded Akintola's government. General Adeyinka Adebayo, the then military Governor of Western Region, had to proscribe them because of the papers' growing influence and caustic attack on his military administration.

The literature regarding how the media reported the political crises that happened in Nigeria in the First Republic is rich in the outcome of an empirical study conducted by Isola (2008:259-275), drawing inspirations from the works of Oyeleye (1981), Babarinsa (2003) and Ayinla (2005) on the reportage of the political conflicts and violence that accompanied the 1965 and the 1983 general elections in south-western Nigeria. Isola discovered that ever before the 1965 and the 1983 elections were held, there had been massive demonization of rival political parties and individual politicians in the press, depending on who owned a newspaper organization. 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 glaring polarization 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 among the press certainly provided an attitudinal and behavioral structure within which the audience could react in any conflict that would accompany 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 among others, the press projected the ruling party in a negative mode when

accusations of election rigging were very rife. It would be recalled that the public in the South-West 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 peoples, the press continued in its partisan activities even more intensively 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 South-West Nigeria was undoubtedly strong. According to Isola, ownership influence and ownership pattern greatly influenced the performance of the newspapers in the two election conflicts studied. 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. The allegiance of the newspapers was glaringly to their owners and financiers. During the First Republic, only 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 the *Nigerian Tribune* owned by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief 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 the *Nigerian Tribune* would criticize Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the UPN during the Second Republic. The same goes for *Daily Times* and President Shagari's government. *Sketch*, which was jointly owned by all the states in

the South-West, had special pages for information and releases from each of its owner-state government, during the period analyzed. 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 evidences provided by the newspaper content analyses, 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. As reported by Babarinsa (2003), by the time the election was over, the entire Western Region of Nigeria had been engulfed in violence, the chaos of which had never before been witnessed. 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. Before 1959, the only radio station in Nigeria, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), was owned by the federal government. 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 been previously owned by private individuals with or without political interests. 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. Omu(1996:216) comments that 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. 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.

The Nigerian Press and Political Conflicts in the Defunct Second Republic

Maduka (1989), in Isola (2008:114) writes that between January 1966 and October 1979, four military governments ruled in Nigeria. A civil war was fought and several events happened in the political and media scenes. There were many dramatic incidents of press repression by the various military administrations, but the most remarkable event in the media scene at that period was the proliferation of radio and television stations in Nigeria. Some of the newspapers that were operating during the First Republic were rested, but other titles were added to the newspaper press. *The Morning Post*, *West African Pilot*, *Daily Express*, *Imole Owuro*, *Sunday Star*, among others did not survive up to 1979 due to several factors, some of which included unstable economic and political environment, government repression and inability of publishers to continue with their publications.

Many other newspapers were established especially by the numerous state governments that had emerged out of the balkanization of Nigeria into smaller states by the various military governments. The country was first divided into 12 states

in 1967 by the administration of General Yakubu Gowon, and later into 19 states in 1975 by the administration of General Murtala Mohammed. Even though other private initiatives were recorded, the most successful of all the attempts at establishing newspapers in Nigeria during this military interregnum was the establishment of *Punch* in Lagos by Chief Olu Aboderin, a businessman. Other newspapers that survived after the First Republic included *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Times*. During the military interregnum, newspapers put aside their political differences to devote attention to national interests and national integration especially during and after the Nigerian Civil War. Also, the papers contributed to the revival of democracy by putting pressure on the military government for the return of democratic structures dismantled after the coup of 1966.

Babarinsa's work (2003) in respect of crises in the south western part of Nigeria and the involvement of the media offers a rich scholarly insight into this discussion. According to him, some of the key politicians who were sent packing in 1966 maintained their old alliances in many guises. Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was released from prison by Colonel Gowon in 1966 became the rallying point for the old 'Action Groupers'. An association called- 'Committee of Friends', consisting of the old members of the Action Group, was formed. In view of the military ban on political gatherings which was in effect during most of the military interregnums, the annual birthday celebration of Chief Awolowo provided a cast iron alibi for members of this committee to deliberate on their political future. This alliance was strengthened and maintained until the 1978 constitutional conference when the presidential system of government was adopted for the Second Republic, before the ban on political activities was lifted, sequel to the 1979 general elections.

Also tracing the historical antecedents to political conflicts that

took place and how the media, particularly newspapers reported such conflicts during this period, Isola (2008:118), drawing inspirations from Babarinsa (2003), notes that the 1979 constitutional conference also provided an opportunity for the revival of the defunct Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), consisting mainly of members of old NPC, NNDP and a splinter group of NCNC, which constituted the last federal government before the military struck in 1966. Thus, by the time the ban on political activities was lifted in 1979, most of the political parties that were formed were only a revival of the old political alliances of the First Republic under new guises and in form of five political parties that were registered for the adopted presidential system for the Second Republic. The parties included: the Unity

Party of Nigeria (UPN), headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo; the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), headed by Chief Adisa Akinloye; the People's Redemption Party (PRP), headed by Alhaji Aminu Kano; the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), headed by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe; and the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), headed by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. The manifestos of all the political parties reflected ideological orientations which ranged from extreme left to extreme right. The 1979 election result reflected the ethnic and sectional leanings of the political parties. While the NPN was situated on the extreme right and it derived the core of its members and supporters from the core north-west Hausa-Fulani states and from some minority areas across the country, the PRP, situated on the extreme left and professing socialist ideology, had its stronghold among the Northern poor, especially in Kano state. The UPN professed moderate democratic socialism and had its core supporters in the Yoruba south-west. The NPP, with a foggy ideology, nevertheless, had the core of its supporters from the Igbo Southeast while the GNPP, which professed liberal capitalism, had its own supports from the mostly Kanuri North-Eastern part

of Nigeria.

The UPN was undoubtedly rooted in the South-western states as revealed by the result of the 1979 presidential election. All the states of this region, including Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Ogun and Bendel, were won by the party. Even though there were allegations of irregularities. The 1979 elections were relatively violence-free, probably because they were conducted by a military administration. However, part of the conflicts that engulfed and consumed the Second Republic was rooted in the very success of the UPN in the South-Western states. Consequently, a big chunk of literature in respect of media reportage of the political crises during this period of Nigeria's political development is devoted to the political crises in the old Oyo and the Ondo States of South-Western Nigeria.

Babarinsa (2003:134) documents that most propaganda war that accompanied the 1983 elections was fought both in the newspaper press and on the electronic media. In 1977, the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo appropriated to the federal government, the television service of Western Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC), which was inherited by Oyo State from the old Western State. At the inception of the civilian administration in 1979, most of the electronic media belonged to the federal government, especially the Nigerian Television Service in Ibadan and the Radio Nigeria owned by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). Therefore, at the inception of Governor Ige's administration in 1979, top on his priority list was the establishment of a broadcasting corporation to embrace radio and television services. By 1980, Radio O-Y-O was in place and the Television Service of Oyo State (T.S.O.S) followed in 1982. Governor Ige carefully and deliberately selected the management and key staff of the broadcasting houses to ensure that the corporation was

managed by the loyalists of the ruling UPN, even among civil servants in the state. This step was taken after that of the NPN at the federal level which did the same with the national broadcasting organizations namely: the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA). Both stations were put under the control of the Federal Ministry of Information with a board consisting of NPN party loyalists. In both the state and federal broadcasting organizations, broadcasters wielding stinging tongues and a gift for uncouth language were positioned on the airwaves to engage in free-for-all propaganda war, on behalf of the various political parties, before the 1983 general elections. Utterances emanating from the broadcasting stations ranged from those that were calling for massive participation in the election to dislodge the opposition to outright incitement to violent actions against those who were perceived to be planning to rig elections.

In order to ensure the victory of the NPN in Oyo State in the general election, the National Chairman of the party, Chief Adisa Akinloye, floated a weekly newspaper, the *Advocate*, in 1983. The paper was published on behalf of Chief Akinloye by Chief Gani Kola Balogun. The content of the paper was fiercely pro-NPN and anti-UPN during its short life span. It was meant to offer opposition to the UPN-controlled *Nigerian Tribune* and *Sketch*, in Oyo state. The *Nigerian Tribune* was privately owned by the national leader of UPN, Chief Awolowo, and *Sketch* was jointly owned by the governments of Oyo, Ogun and Ondo states. Most of the other newspapers with a pervasive influence in Oyo State, except *National Concord*, were used in support of the political interests of their owners. The *Daily Times*, which was acquired in 1975 by the federal military government from its private owners, became fiercely pro-NPN by 1983 due to a shuffling of its management. The privately owned *Punch*, probably due to business expediency, identified with its circulating political

environment by supporting the UPN, which dominated the government in all of the states in the Southwest, where it was most popular. The *National Concord* which had hitherto come out supporting NPN, the initial party of its publisher, Chief M.K.O Abiola, retrieved its support for the NPN due to the hostility exhibited by the party to its publisher's presidential ambition. Thus, it became about the only neutral newspaper with some influence on the politics of the Southwest.

There were strong evidences that newspapers circulating in Oyo State carried prominently inflammatory and inciting contents in the build-up to the 1983 election violence, which could have aggravated the violence. Babarinsa (2003:71) captures a few of the published conflict and violence fuelling statements attributed to some participants in the 1983 elections:

Governor Ige of Oyo State:

Be battle ready; be prepared to deal with anyone who might attempt to steal your votes during the forth-coming elections. Be prepared to do what you did in 1965 if the NPN steals your votes. For anyone who attempts to rig election in Oyo State this year, only his orphans and widows will hear the result. (*National Concord*, April 13, 1983, front page)

Chief Awolowo, while warning the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and the NPN against rigging 1983 election, said:

If that happened (that is, if election is rigged through any of the electronic media), we shall destroy any radio station that report such false figures and we shall take law into our hands and do what is right. (*Nigerian Tribune*, April 8, 1983, front page)

Chief Awolowo paid an official visit to President Shagari, to warn of consequences of election rigging, he said:

If elections are rigged this time, I will just go back to Ikenne. I won't even go near the courts. That does not mean that the masses might not revolt on their own volition.... (*National Concord*, May 14, 1983, back page)

Responding to these threats, Dr Chuba Okadigbo, President Shagari's Special Adviser on Politics, retorted:

They (the opposition threatening violence) should not forget the dictum that he who rides on a tiger's back sooner or later find himself in the tiger's stomach. (*National Concord*, April 13, 1983, front page)

The state-owned Ondo State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) engaged in political propaganda war on the airwaves in support of the physical violence between the supporters of Governor Ajasin and Chief Omoboriowo which ensued after the announcements of the controversial August governorship election results. Popoola (2003:8) describes the role of the two radio stations thus:

While the FRSC overtly drummed support for the NPN gubernatorial candidate, Chief Akin Omoboriowo, who was initially declared winner of the governorship poll by the defunct Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), to the extent of intermittently playing a popular record of pop singer, Christy Essien titled 'Give Peace a Chance', the Ondo State Radio at the same time was supporting the UPN candidate, late Chief

Micheal Adekunle Ajasin, then incumbent governor of the state. The station was simultaneously playing the record of late Bob Marley entitled 'Get up stand up, stand up for your right.....'

On the heat of the riot and massive violence which followed the announcements of the election result, Babarinsa (2003:7-8) also writes:

After Alibaloye's (election result) announcement of 7a.m. on Radio Nigeria (FRCN, Akure), the radio went off the airwaves, which were now totally dominated by OSBC. It was a gory commentary coming from Ondo Radio which enjoined the rioters to track down the 'thieves and traitors'. It reported that Omoboriowo, unsure of his safety at the police headquarters, had now escaped and was on his way to Lagos. It announced that he was taking the Akure-Ilesa road and that he would pass through Ile-Ife to Lagos. The commentator said the governor-elect was in a grey Peugeot 505 with Akure registration number. Though Ondo Radio did not say it in many words, the inference was clear . you would be doing a public duty if you find and assassinate Omoboriowo and the radio was going to help you locate him. This inflammatory fire raging all over the state. In Ado Ekiti, heartland of the Ekiti people, vengeful band of rioters, many of them wielding axes with their faces painted in devilish patterns, roamed the city, burning houses of perceived Omoboriowo supporters

Apart from the UPN controlled *Nigerian Tribune*, *Iroyin Yoruba* and government-controlled *Sketch* and *GbohunGhoun* newspapers which were prominent at the grassroots in Ondo State during the 1983 political conflict, two other newspapers, the *Peoples News* and *Premier*, also played important roles in the crises leading to the 1983 election conflicts in the state. The *Peoples News*, owned by a veteran journalist, Chief Niyi Oniroro, came out initially to attack Governor Ajasin's policies, the removal of the first speaker of Ondo State House of Assembly, and a staunch supporter of Governor Ajasin, a Mr Akingbade, whom his colleagues accused of working against their interests by supporting the governor and his cabinet. However, at a point, the *Peoples News* swung allegiance to the side of the governor for unclear reasons. It was speculated that this occurred when the paper began to receive advertisement patronage from the state government. The paper turned around to attack the governor's opponents, especially the deputy governor, Chief Omoboriowo, with the same venom with which it was attacking the state government. Of this newspaper, Babarinsa (2003:98) says:

Scurrilous, sensational and scathing, the Peoples News (now defunct), was a classic example of what a newspaper should not be. It violated all the known canons of journalism, flirting openly with libel and rightly earned the sobriquet of a scandal sheet. As befits a man of Oniroro's reputation, his intervention in the struggle in Ondo State was shrouded in controversies In acidic essays, scandalous exposes and biting cartoons, the *Peoples News* portrayed Omoboriowo as a reckless philanderer, leading a gang of buccaneering carpet baggers

As a result of the numerous ceaseless attacks of the *Peoples News* on Chief Omoboriowo's political faction, Chief Omoboriowo concluded that the newspaper was being used against him by Governor Ajasin in their political battle. He instituted several libel suits against the newspaper and on one of the suits, Chief Awolowo actually came to testify on the side of Chief Omoboriowo. Babarinsa (2003:155) gives an account of Chief Awolowo's appearance in the court:

In his testimony before Justice Tosun, Chief Awolowo described Omoboriowo as one of his leading and faithful lieutenants. Chief Awolowo however had harsh words for Oniroro. 'I believe in freedom of the press and the legitimate interest of others' he told the court. 'But some time ago, I began to have my doubts as to your (Oniroro's) journalistic intelligence. I believe you wished me well in my political career, but your actions in publishing your newspaper in Ondo State suggested otherwise. Your vicious attacks on the former Deputy Governor of Ondo State was not the right thing for UPN.

When it was clear that virtually all the newspapers circulating in Ondo State were hostile to his cause, Chief Omoboriowo decided to establish a newspaper to serve as his own voice. He thus established the *Premier* and deployed a prominent journalist and one of his followers, Mr. Idowu Odeyemi, to edit the paper. The *Premier* proved its mettle by standing up to the attacks of Chief Omoboriowo by rival newspapers, especially the vitriolic *Peoples News*, which was already popular in the state. Both papers deployed strong language in their contents which contributed to the inflammation of political tensions in the state in the build-up to the August 1983 election conflagration. The

following are some examples of the contents and exchanges of the two newspapers:

The hot ambition of Chief Akin Omoboriowo to become a governor of Ondo State has now become a terrible absurdity as he was said to have fainted twice within the last five days for lack of sleep Chief Omoboriowo has lost weight and we are told that he is feeling more and more empty in his heart and more and more hopeless in his future. The man's heart has been in turmoil, and his head has been aching violently... (*People's News*, September 1, 1983. Quoted in Babarinsa 2003: 17-18)

Premier, responding to Omoboriowo's critics after the 1983 election says:

Let them swallow this bitter pill. Whether they like him or not, whether they want him or not Chief Akin Omoboriowo will be sworn-in on October 1, 1983 as the next Ondo State executive governor for four years. There is nothing anybody can do about that. They can go on rioting for the next four years ... (Quoted in Babarinsa 2003:18)

Saturday's battle is not a battle between NPN and UPN as such; it is a battle between Chief Akin Omoboriowo and Chief Adegunle Ajasin ... It is going to be a total war against UPN; we shall prevent them from rigging this time, even if by force (*Premier*, quoted in Babarinsa 2003:18).

In the midst of the violence that erupted from the aftermath of the 1983 general elections, the newspapers, in circulation at this turbulent time in the South-western part of the country published perilous headlines and conflict-fuelling and political backstabbing stories as megaphones and amplifiers of the voices of their owners who were players on the political scene. Here are some examples of the catastrophic contents of the newspapers:

AKURE BURNS

Hundred of people in Akure yesterday trooped 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 an anomaly 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 on to the streets to fight the injustice meted out on them through 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 cunnuch 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, no matter the temporary advantage of the power of coercion the minority has. The flagrant rape of constitutionally and legality that has been 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!!! (DS, Wednesday, August 17 1983, Front Page Editorial)

Several days after the above editorial, *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)

The *Nigerian Tribune* also wrote an editorial in the same vein during the crisis, which could only contribute to the aggravation of 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 that have been cheated 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. (NT, Tuesday, August 23 1983, Front Page Editorial.

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.....Chief Soluade said the people had been robbed and denied their choice of governors and has 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 he wants to throw the Nigerian electoral law of the dogs...." (NT, Friday, August 26, 1983, front page)

Consequently, violence erupted in the south-western part of Nigeria even before the elections. The violence culminated into colossal destruction of lives and property after the elections until the military struck in December 1983, putting an end to Nigeria's Second Republic.

The Third Republic

The military took over the reins of government from the civilians and "immature politicians", as described by the military, on December 31, 1983, owing to a number of factors adduced by the military junta. The military made references to the destruction and insecurity of lives and properties and widespread violence which were rooted in political conflicts to which the press contributed. The *coup de tat* which ushered in the military government of General Mohammadu Buhari (retired) was the second intervention of the military into the Nigerian politics in the history of the political development of Nigeria. The first intervention was on the 15th of January, 1966, owing to the 1964 general elections and their attendant crises and violence which claimed many lives and led to the ruin of public and private belongings, especially in the then Western Region of Nigeria. Ever since the administration of Buhari, there had been successive military governments, occasioned by military coups, until 1999, when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, a situation, this marked the birth of the Fourth Republic. Meanwhile, sandwiched in-between the collapse of the Second Republic in 1979 and the successive military administrations on the one hand, and the fourth republic on the other, is a Third Republic which appeared to have started in 1992 but which never lasted for two years. The then military Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (retired) as a step towards returning political power to the civilians, introduced diarchy into the Nigerian political scene, a combination of the military and civilian governments. Consequently, after other political experiments that did not materialize, two political parties emerged- the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) henceforth. Governorship, National and State Assembly elections were held in 1992 and victorious gubernatorial candidates were sworn in respectively

and National and State Houses of Assembly were inaugurated and constituted by candidates who were successful at the polls. Thus, there was a combination of civilian governments at the state level and the military government at the federal level.

An important corollary of this period in the political development of Nigeria is that, perhaps, because of the military administration and the thinkable military apparatus for ensuring peace and tranquility, there were no instances of political conflicts that led to any crises and violence in any part of the country. Conceivably, if any conflicts occurred as a result of political contestations in this period, such conflicts must have operated at a pseudo level. Throughout the military period of governance in Nigeria, the media operated with little or no freedom. Invariably, the press was gagged. Possibly, the press could not have engaged in any reportage of the political activities in the period that were capable of erupting and escalating political crises and violence.

Unfortunately, the first major incident that made the Third Republic unrealistic was the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections, believed to have been won by late Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, on the platform of the SDP. The elections had been rated by political observers and analysts as the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria. Consequently, the aftermath of the annulment, which was evident in protests and condemnations, both locally and internationally prompted Babangida to step aside and hand over to an Interim National Government(ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The government was overthrown, shortly after its constitution, in a military coup by General Sani Abacha. Abacha died in June 1998 and General Abdulsalam Abubakkar succeeded him. On assumption of office, Abubakar started an honest and sincere process of returning the country to democratic rule. He lifted embargo on politics and promised to hand over political power to

a democratically- elected government. Thus, political parties were formed; politicians were allowed to put in place political structures, while a peaceful atmosphere was created for the electoral process to run. Elections were held into various public offices and victorious candidates emerged as winners.

The Fourth Republic started on May 29, 1999, when Abubakar handed over political power to Olusegun Obasanjo, as a democratically elected president of the Federal Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, having won the presidential election on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). However, as noted by Popoola, (2009; 2012; 2012) and evident in the works of Joseph (1987), Adeoye (2005), Ladepo (2005), Okereke (2005), Okoli (2007), Nwangwu (2007) and Olarinmoye (2008), no sooner had the Fourth Republic began than the Nigerian political scene became heated up and enchanted with political conflicts that were embedded in prebendalism and political godfatherism. This paper hereby calls for further studies on how the Nigerian press has been reporting these conflicts in the current Nigeria's Fourth Republic; such empirical investigations should be conducted with a view to discovering the role being played by the press in upholding or distorting the Fourth Republic through the reportage of the said conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Consequently, literature in respect of reportage of the political conflicts by the press in Nigeria, especially newspapers, in the Third Republic appears insufficient. Perhaps this situation had been consequent upon the diarchy which Nigeria practised in this period of the political development of the nation. Likely circumstances and possible variables that brought about this condition have been exposed. Meanwhile, as evident in the

activities of the press in the political conflicts that characterized the defunct first and second Republics, the Nigerian press churned out contents and reports that fuelled the conflicts to situations of violence and political unrest particularly in the old Western Region of Nigeria. Although, this finding reinforces 'conflict' as a news determinant, but leaves much to be desired in respect of the role the press is expected to play, particularly as a socially responsible press, and largely as the Fourth Estate of the Realm in a democracy. The Nigerian press, most especially the newspaper press, through reportage of political conflicts, contributed to the collapse and the wreckage of the previous Republics in Nigeria.

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