

Fort Hare Papers

Volume 18, 2011

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Fort Hare Papers, Volume 18

ISSN no. 0015-8054

First published in 1945

This volume published in October 2011

Publisher

Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre

University of Fort Hare

Private Bag X1314

Alice 5700

Subscriptions

Subscriptions, orders and enquiries should be sent to:

The Editor: Fort Hare Papers

c/o Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre

University of Fort Hare

Private Bag X1314

Alice 5700

Phone & fax: 040 602 2319

Email: rflanegan@ufh.ac.za

Fort Hare Papers, Volume 18 (2011)

CONTENTS	PAGE
Editorial committee	4
Exploring evidence of indigenous knowledge systems driving care-giving of people living with HIV/AIDS in Botswana care programmes. An empirical case perspective	5
<i>SM Kang'ethe</i>	
Nigerian former guerrilla journalists ten years into democracy: Reformists and revolutionaries	19
<i>Ayobami Ojebode</i>	
Is Physical Education a form of exclusionary closure to children with disabilities?	41
<i>Chiome Chrispen, Chadamoyo Patrick, Mudyahoto Tapiwa</i>	
Relevance of Ordinary 'O' and Advanced 'A' levels Agriculture syllabi in addressing food shortages in Chivi District of Zimbabwe	65
<i>Jephias Matunhu, Alfred Henry Makura, Viola Matunhu</i>	
Harnessing tradotronic media potentials for conflict resolution in Nigeria's Niger Delta	80
<i>Dede EJ Konkwo</i>	
Peace journalism: Youths' evaluation of Radio Jeremi Peace Broadcast in the Niger Delta, Nigeria	103
<i>Majority Oji</i>	

Nigerian former guerrilla journalists ten years into democracy: reformists and revolutionaries

Ayobami Ojebode¹

Abstract

The question of what happens to activists and resisters after their battle has been lost or won has been asked in many different contexts but answered in a few. In the context of the guerrilla journalists in Nigeria who confronted the military and endured severe brutality in their fight for democracy, that question has not been answered. Ten years after Nigeria returned to democracy, this paper sought to answer that question. Through interviews with nine former guerrilla journalists and an examination of some of their contemporary writings, the paper discovered that the journalists in question were disappointed with the practice of democracy in Nigeria. Their disappointment emanates from their perception that the evils which they fought against during the military era still persist, and that some of the enemies of democracy who allied with the military are the ones paraded as heroes of democracy today while guerrilla journalists pale into oblivion. The disappointment is not helped by the financial and other difficulties facing some of these journalists. They have thus retained some of the old adversarial journalism methods. While some hoped that the Nigerian democracy would stabilise, others thought the solution to the Nigerian problem lay in some drastic events such as a revolution. The paper discusses the implications of this for the practice and study of the media and democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Guerrilla Journalists, Nigerian Democracy, Democratic Discontent, Democracy in Africa

¹University of Ibadan, Nigeria

In Nigeria as well as in many African democracies, the journey to democracy was a difficult one. It was a battle between a deeply entrenched totalitarian group that wielded power with near absoluteness on one side and the civil society and pro-democracy activists that were disadvantaged in terms of physical combative power on the other side. In Nigeria, the ranks of the latter side was boosted and given expression by a strong section of the Nigerian press. In the battles that ensued, ruthless force was visited on the pro-democracy groups and on the militant section of the press. The outcome was various forms and degrees of losses and casualties on the side of pro-democracy groups and the press that supported them. In response, a section of the militant press went underground and, for the first time in Nigeria, guerrilla journalism began (Dare, 2007).

Scholarly and biographical accounts of the journey to democracy in Nigeria have documented the sufferings of militant pressmen and -women as they fought for the installation of democracy (Olorunyomi, 1998; Malaolu, 2005; Olukotun, 2005; Dare, 2007; Osa, 2007; Adebani, 2008). Commendable care has been taken to document accounts of ruthless persecutions in the forms of physical attacks, arrests and detention, and secret assassinations of pressmen and women by government and its agents when the military ruled the country. Records of guerrilla journalism adopted during this difficult period also exist (Olorunyomi, 1998; Olukotun, 2005; Dare, 2007; Adebani, 2008). Indeed, the important contributions of the press to the evolution of democracy in Nigeria have been quite boldly engraved in the records of Nigeria's recent politics and thus cannot be unnoticed. What has not received attention is these journalists' situation, perception of and attitude to the existing democratic arrangements after their battle seemed to have been won. In spite of the asymmetry in the distribution of the combative powers between the journalists and the military whom they opposed, it seemed, at least on the surface, that the journalists and the pro-democracy groups won the battle given the fact that democracy for which they fought has been installed in Nigeria. Ten years on, it is desirable to ask what these veterans think about the existing political dispensation.

Media scholars and political scientists, especially those with interest in resistance and insurgent movements, have underscored the need to evaluate what happens to guerrillas, activists and political actors in Africa after their projects have ended in success or failure. Citing instances of members of resistance groups who have assumed power but then turned against former comrades with brutal force – such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Zambia's Frederick Chiluba – they have cautioned against the assumption that all would be well for members of a resistance group once the contention is resolved in their collective favour (Weigert, 1996; Clapham, 1998; Van Walraven &

Abbink, 2003; Olorunnisola, 2006; Olorunnisola, 2009) and have called for critical examinations of post-conflict circumstances of ex-resisters. This paper is a response to that call. It examines the conditions of the former guerrilla journalists that featured in the struggle for democracy in Nigeria. Through a methodology that allows them to speak for themselves, it seeks to understand what the journalists thought about the current dispensation as compared with what they had envisaged would be the product of their struggles for democracy.

The press and the struggle for democracy in Nigeria

As mentioned earlier, the body of literature on the contributions of the press to the emergence of democracy in Nigeria is robust. Here, I attempt just a summary of that subject not only to provide a background to the study, but also to foreground the important and peculiar position of the concerned journalists in the recent political history of Nigeria. This is to justify why they deserve this kind of attention ten years after their struggles ended.

The events that led to the upswing of guerrilla journalism began in the early 1990s when it became clear that the military government of Ibrahim Babangida would not hand over power to civilians in 1990 as earlier promised. The media gave expression to the brewing discontent in the citizenry to the chagrin of government. But persecution was not the first tool applied by Babangida: it was buying over and incorporation of opposition members and press into government. He established numerous government agencies and appointed as heads of such agencies members of the opposition including members of the editorial boards of the opposition press. Examples of these include People's Bank which he created and to whose headship he appointed Dr Tai Solarin, an unbending government critic and social crusader, and the renewed Federal Road Safety Commission headed by another unwavering critic, Professor Wole Soyinka. When General Babangida's critics declined his offer, they were labelled as mere armchair critics who were unwilling to serve the masses. This style led to some cleavage in the ranks of the opposition. Simultaneously, Babangida was purging state-owned media removing non-compliant managers and installing those who would do his bidding.

But all these subtle moves did not assuage citizens' demand for democracy. The civil society began to mobilise for an onslaught against the military. It was about this time, in the late 1980s that a new generation of radical human rights and pro-democracy groups emerged. Among these were the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO); Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR); Movement for National Liberation (MNL); Constitutional Rights Project (CRP); National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL); National Association of Democratic Journalists (NADJ); Gani Fawehinmi Solidarity Association

(GFSA), and Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). This period also coincided with the influx of university graduates into journalism. These came from a background of articulate student unionism with the analytical tools for engaging journalism in an ideologically coherent manner and were ready to make significant sacrifice for fatherland (Olorunyomi, 1998).

When covert cooptation failed, Babangida resorted to overt coercion. In 1990, he arrested and detained about 20 journalists – some for days, some for months, and some in a dehumanising way (Olukotun 2005, Adebani 2008). He also arrested several human rights activists and members of the pro-democracy group. In the same year, he shut down several newspapers including *Vanguard*, *Punch*, *Lagos News* and *Newbreed* for their coverage of the coup attempt by some officers in April that year. In 1991, his government closed down all the five titles on the Guardian Newspapers' stable and sealed up the premises of the newspaper. It also deported William Keeling of *Financial Times* from Nigeria. Keeling had written an article criticising the mismanagement of oil windfalls by the Babangida administration (Olukotun, 2005). But these persecutions only seemed to strengthen the anti-military movement. In fact, to harmonise their efforts, consolidate their gains and strategise their moves, eight pro-democracy groups (CDHR, NADL, CLO, NANS, GFSA, National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and National Consultative Forum (NCF)) formed a broad coalition on November 11, 1991 known as Campaign for Democracy (CD) (Olayode, 2007). In 1992, the government proscribed all the thirteen titles on the stable of Concord Newspapers Limited and promulgated five decrees all aimed at silencing the opposition and the press. Notable among these were Decree 29 which proscribed death for anyone who spoke or wrote anything capable of disrupting the society, and Decree 48 which proscribed 17 publications owned by five anti-military newspaper organisations. Government-owned media that were lackadaisical about promoting government propaganda were also shut down or their leaders were removed. Others were Decree 23 which proscribed *The Reporter*; Decree 35 which conferred on the president the power to confiscate or ban any publication, and Decree 43 which set up regulations for registration of newspapers. But the groundswell of opposition only swelled with every step the government took to silence the media and the pro-democracy group (Olukotun, 2005).

In 1993, the government annulled the presidential elections believed to have been the freest and fairest in the history of the nation: no reason was given for the annulment. Civic anger rose sharply and the media became a vent for the anger. The government responded with increasing ruthlessness. For instance, in May 1993, 70,000 copies of *Tell* magazine were seized by security agents at the point of print, and its premises were shut. At this point, *Tell* went underground

and began guerrilla journalism. Thousands of copies of *The Sunday Magazine* (TSM) were also seized same year. In 1993, security agents seized 50 000 copies of the maiden edition of *The News* at the point of print. Four months later, Babangida also proscribed the magazine and declared all its editors wanted. The editors went underground, flouted the proscription order and commenced guerrilla publishing. Soon after, they founded *Tempo*, also underground. But *Tempo* suffered as well: 50 000 copies of the magazine were seized. By the time Babangida was forced to step aside in August 1993, four senior editors of *Tell* were in detention: Nosa Igiebor; Ayo Akinkuotu; Kola Ilori and Onome Osifo-Whiskey. Yet the magazines marched on underground (Olorunyomi, 1998; Olukotun, 2005; Adebani, 2008).

At *Tell* and *The News/Tempo*, guerrilla operations involved clandestine editorial meetings, printing at secret places and distributing copies secretly. The guerrilla journalists acknowledged tacit support and timely intelligence information from some of the agents of government. Yet the exercise involved severe pain and injury, especially in the days of Sani Abacha.

Sani Abacha visited the worst terror on the militant press and its sympathisers and supporters. The formation on May 15, 1994 of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) by politicians, some retired military officers and prominent pro-democracy leaders significantly lengthened Abacha's list of worries and deepened his paranoia. His Libya-trained security guards responded with utmost ruthlessness. There were cases of arrest, detention and trial of even vendors who sold copies of guerrilla papers (Olukotun, 2005). Ninety-four journalists were attacked in 1997 (Adebani, 2008). Godwin Agbroko (*Week*) and Dapo Olorunyomi (*The News*) were detained and beaten with rods and electric batons. Nosa Igiebor and Onome Osifo-Whiskey (both of *Tell*) spent six months in detention. Babafemi Ojudu (*The News*) was detained for eight months without being allowed a change of clothes. Ben Charles-Obi of *Weekend Classique*; George Mbah of *Tell*; Kunle Ajibade of *The News*; Niran Malaolu of *Diet*; and Chris Anyanwu of *TSM* were jailed having been framed up in a phantom coup plot (Malaolu, 2005). Some of these were given life sentences by the military tribunals. Ben Charles-Obi, George Mbah, Kunle Ajibade and Ms Chris Anyanwu spent over three years (1995-1998) in prison. Niran Malaolu, framed up in another phantom coup spent 15 months in prison. The offence of these journalists was either that they reported the coup as a frame-up designed to punish those military officers and civilians with whom the military was not pleased, or that they had a foreknowledge of the coup. Among those so framed and jailed was General Olusegun Obasanjo. They were all released by the government of General Abdulsalami who succeeded Abacha.

Alex Ibru, publisher of the *Guardian* was shot but escaped with gun injuries. Bagauda Kaltho (*The News*) was abducted and killed, and Tunde Oladepo (*The Guardian*) was killed in his house (Malaolu, 2005). Pa Alfred Rewanewho generously supported the militant journalists (Olukotun, 2005) was shot and killed. Revelations and confessions at the truth and reconciliation panel, the Oputa Panel, set up by the civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo confirmed earlier suspicion that those who shot Ibru and killed Rewane and Kudirat Abiola were agents of the Abacha government acting on orders. The office of *The News* was burnt by arsonists suspected to be government security agents. Yet, with all of these, the press pressed on. A new crop of young thoroughbreds kept up the *Tempo* surviving their maximum terror, Abacha, who died in 1998.

The militant press did not wallow in the relief brought by Abacha's sudden death. His successor was quick to announce a timetable for multiparty elections. The press kept that timetable in public domain and warned against distractions thus keeping the government on its toes. The outcome was the multiparty election that brought Olusegun Obasanjo to power in 1999. To say that without the militant press, Nigeria would not have returned to democracy when it did is to state the obvious. What is not so obvious is what happens to the guerrilla journalists after all the sacrifice they offered. This is the focus of this article.

The study

The study adopted a qualitative approach. The flexibility of this approach was considered invaluable given the nature of the subject. I conducted interviews with nine of these former guerrilla pressmen and examined some of their recent writings on contemporary Nigeria.

My selection was purposive as I focused on only those journalists in the militant press who went underground. I spread the selection across journalists from the two leading guerrilla publications of the time: *Tell* and *The News/Tempo*. The selection also included former staff of *Tell* now at *The Insider Weekly*. From those who had worked with *Tell*, I interviewed editor and co-founder, Dare Babarinsa; former assistant editor, George Mbah; former Kaduna Bureau chief, Danlami Nmodi, and former Kano correspondent, Osa Director. From those who had worked with *The News/Tempo*, I interviewed Sunday Dare, associate editor of *Tempo*; Dapo Olorunyomi, founding editor of *The News* and Goodluck Ebelo, one of those younger reporters who stuck around and kept *Tempo* going when nearly all the founders were in either jail or in exile. I also interviewed Niran Malaolu and Lanre Arogundade. Malaolu was founding editor of *This Day* and was editor of *Diet* when he was jailed for complicity in a coup; Arogundade led the Nigerian Union of Journalists (Lagos Chapel) in the days

when General Sani Abacha ruled. My selection included those who, since 1999, have picked up government appointments or gone into politics and those who have not.

On the average, the interview took about 50 minutes. Questions asked during the interviews were about what and how the former militant journalists were doing, that is, their current preoccupations; and what they thought of democracy in Nigeria. Interviewees narrated their experiences and they also narrated the experiences of some of their former comrades.

In examining the writings of the ex-guerrilla journalists, I adopted a descriptive rather than a quantitative approach. As I read through the contemporary writings of the ex-guerrilla, I attempted to identify their attitude to and opinions about the Nigerian democracy. I selected quotes that were illustrative and representative of their opinion and attitudes. Selection of such quotes from media contents for discursive analysis has been the practice of media researchers. (See, for instance, Olukotun, 2005; Salawu, 2006; Adebani, 2008.)

In presenting my findings, I harmonised these two data sources – interviews and contemporary writings of ex-activists. The presentation was therefore driven by emerging themes from the interviews and from relevant texts.

Current preoccupations of former militant journalists

Following the end of their crusade, the pressmen headed in three directions, but most of them have experienced less than full satisfaction in their various engagements. First is the group of those who picked up political appointments. For instance, Sunday Dare was assistant to Minister of Information and Communication, Ms Dora Akunyili. Dapo Olorunyomi was Chief of Staff at the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Ebelo Goodluck also did some work for the chairman of the same body, Nuhu Ribadu. Niran Malaolu was Commissioner for Information in Ogun State. But all of these ex-guerrilla journalists resigned from their political positions after a short period. In the case of Olorunyomi and Goodluck, they left when Nuhu Ribadu was removed from his position as EFCC chairman.

Reasons cited for their resignation had to do with conflict between the demands of their new positions and their personal or ideological convictions. Some found the demands of their new positions irreconcilable with their ideals and were “unwilling to compromise [my] personal principles of transparency and selfless service to my people”. Others pointed out that ex-activists who were appointed were put in redundant or ineffectual positions. As Danlami Nmodu put it, “they

are appointed to positions but the power of that position is taken away from them and given someone else”.

Another cause of frustration of political appointees that were ex-activists was stressed by Dapo Olorunyomi, one of such appointees. Activists expected too much too soon:

Having tarried at the barricade for many years, battle-wearied activists now in government want a better Nigeria now. And that’s understandable. We want to totally flush out corruption in one week – and that’s understandable. We want to see change; we want to see the country we suffered for on a steady path to equality, justice and true democracy. And we want it now.

When things did not move as fast, activists wondered if they were in the right place.

The second group of ex-guerrilla journalists is made up of those who have attempted to contest for political posts. Even these have not done better either. For instance, Dare Babarinsa contested for the governorship of Ekiti State, but he did not win even the primaries. He was not the anointed candidate of the leaders of his party, the Alliance for Democracy, which claims to be a progressive party.

Lanre Arogundade summarised why former guerrilla journalists who ventured into politics were frustrated:

Many of these fighters cannot submit to the dirtiness of the game of politics in today’s Nigeria. They do not belong there. Politics has been hijacked by very desperate people and I do not see decent journalists who risked their lives for this country being in the same parties with these people.

Ex-activists in politics were described as ‘lonely and left alone without a party of their own whose ideology reflect the left-leaning positions of most comrades’. This was because, according to Babarinsa, activists were unprepared to be engaged in politics with a party of their own at the return of democracy. They had to ‘squat with’ the party closest to what was their ideal.

The third group of ex-guerrilla journalists was made up of those who remained in active journalism. But these too were unhappy. Their dissatisfaction stemmed largely from their perception that the conditions which they fought against during the military did not remarkably improve since transition to democracy. They believed that citizens’ will was still being subverted especially in rigged

elections, and by the imposition of candidates by political godfathers. They opined that corruption was getting worse; and political leaders were becoming more unaccountable – like their military predecessors. The press was not essentially free especially with the refusal of Olusegun Obasanjo to sign the Freedom of Information bill into law, and the unwillingness of the legislature to pass the bill as amended. Worse still, they noted, many key positions in the country were being held by ex-military men and those who opposed democracy. Reflecting on the general Nigerian situation, Babarinsa wrote:

Nigeria is free from military rule but not from the governance of military men in *agbada*. Nigeria is enjoying a civil rule under President Olusegun Obasanjo, but not a totally democratic government...Nigerians are getting poorer. (Babarinsa, 2005a: 5)

Most of the ex-guerrilla journalists therefore stuck to the old adversarial methods. A few weeks into the current democratic dispensation, *The News* attacked the speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Salisu Buhari, accusing him of certificate forgery and declaration of false age (*The News*, 1999a). *The News* kept the heat on him until his colleagues removed him (*The News*, 1999b). He was arrested, tried and jailed with an option of fine. Shortly after, *Tell* attacked the President of the Senate, Evan(s) Enwerem, over false declaration of age and name. While occasionally praising President Obasanjo's anticorruption crusade (see, for instance, Babarinsa, 2005b), the magazines kept accusing him of shielding some corrupt members of his party and family (Semenitari, 2005; Adebani, 2008). They criticised his seemingly unending international tours; his alleged bid to twist the constitution so that he could get a third term in office (*The News*, 2006a; 2006b); his disrespect for court rulings (see, for instance, Babarinsa, 2005c), and the absoluteness with which he generally wielded powers.

The magazines continued their adversarial journalism under President Yar'Adua, who assumed power in May 2007. His replacement of Nuhu Ribadu, the fiery chairman of the government's anticorruption body, with a woman described by the newspapers as "a businesswoman and card-carrying member of the ruling party" (*Tell*, 2008a:20) was seen as an indication of his unwillingness to wage a serious war on corruption. His deliberately slow pace of decision making (*Tell*, 2008b) and the general collapse of infrastructure especially electricity supply also attracted fairly caustic reports. (See, for instance, *Broadstreet Journal*, 2009, published by owners of *Tell*.) Even his amnesty programme aimed at pacifying the aggrieved and violent militants in the Niger Delta came under attack (See, for instance, *Tell*, 2009a). Not only was the amnesty programme predicted to be 'heading for a brick wall' (*Tell*, 2009b:18), it was also interpreted as the president's method of recruiting thugs from the

experienced militants for his future electoral engagements (*The Insider Weekly*, 2009a). Under Yar'Adua, *The Insider Weekly* declared that 'Nigeria is collapsing' (*The Insider Weekly*, 2009b) and *Tell* declared Nigeria a failed state (*Tell*, 2009c). The failing health of the president attracted widespread attention of the magazines which blamed it for nearly every woe the country was going through and called on the president to either resign or empower the vice-president to act for him with full powers (*The News*, 2010; *Tell*, 2009d; *Tell*, 2009e).

Dapo Olorunyomi said that at the beginning of the current democratic dispensation, the editorial team of *The News* felt it was time to adopt a new course in their practice of journalism by essentially abandoning adversarial reporting in favour of pro-development and pro-government reporting. He said:

After a prolonged cynical engagement with the military, it was thought fit to change gear so that our relevance does not come to question. We were essentially leaving the trenches and coming to the mainstream. But this did not last; it could not.

In general, *The News*, *Tell*, and *The Insider Weekly*, founded by former staff of *Tell*, have kept on the heat. The old method of muckraking journalism is still very much in use in dealing with old problems.

Attitudes to Nigerian democracy: reformists and revolutionaries

Without exception, ex-guerrilla journalists were all disappointed with the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. They all pointed out that the difference between the democracy they fought for and the reality in Nigeria was wide. But that was only how far the agreement went. There was disagreement as to the way forward to a democracy that reflected their ideal.

Among the ex-guerrilla journalists were reformists who, though dissatisfied with the current dispensation, believed that the system would 'clean itself as time goes on'. These journalists were disappointed with the people in government. They called them names such as hawks, rent seekers, shylocks and money class. However, they believed that with repeated elections, the right people would someday get into government. Niran Malaolu's words best articulate the views of those in this category:

Evil people in Nigeria are just about 10% of the entire population. Today, that evil 10% are the ones in government. But I believe in democracy, this democracy. I was jailed for life; I was beaten every day. For 147 days I was not allowed to have a bath...all because I stood for democracy and justice. I prefer the worst of democracies to the best of military rule. If the soldiers

had left us alone since the time of Shagari [the elected president overthrown in 1983], we would have corrected most of the errors in the system. Now, let them leave us alone forever; we would learn and someday, the right people will be in power.

The problem was thus not with the idea of democracy as a system, but with the actors in the current dispensation. The structural imperfections in the system would be removed through legally approved means such as repeated elections, protests and crusade journalism.

A second group is made up of those I refer to as revolutionaries. These are disappointed with not just the people in power, but with the entire political setup. According to these, the solution to Nigeria's problems is not in repeated multiparty elections but some landslide changes such as a revolution, or what an interviewee calls the 'Rawlings solution' in apparent reference to Jerry Rawlings' killing of government officials on his assumption of office as Ghanaian military ruler. Some of my interviewees believed that the system had not only been hijacked by anti-democratic moneybags, but it had also been made change-proof. They claimed that the door to power was shut forever against activists and those who might want to initiate change. One said:

The real enemies of democracy, those people who truly supported the military, are the money-class and they are now in power. They bought the offices with money and robbed people with violence. Now they have ensured that the rule of the game is such that permits only their kind to enter politics and win. They price everything including nomination forms [for contestants] above the reach of honest people.

In the views of these interviewees, the current setup not only falls short of democracy, but it is also irredeemably trapped. When reminded that after Rawlings' purge, Ghana still had to contend with his undemocratic self-succession bid, our interviewee insisted that that was a shorter way to true democracy than what could be obtained through repeated elections in the contemporary Nigerian context.

The question of reward for activism

I asked my interviewees if they thought they had been duly recognised by the nation for their sacrifice for democracy. Without exception, they all thought they had not been recognised by the country, that is, the governments. "How many ex-militant journalists have been awarded national honours?" Babarinsa asked rhetorically. Though they said that their activism and sacrifice was not motivated by the hope for national awards, they were deeply unhappy for two

reasons. First, ten years after the struggle, the federal government had not done anything to put on record that it appreciated the militant press and its central role in ushering in democracy. “Not even a mention of the press in his inaugural speech as president,” Danlami Nmodu said.

Second, they claimed that the people being given national awards for meritorious services to the nation included the staunchest enemies of democracy. Danlami Nmodu:

Those who stood firmly against democracy such as Zakari Bui, the torture expert [one of the most ruthless security agents of Sani Abacha days. He was actually conferred with national honours by Abdusalami Abubakar – not by Obasanjo] have been conferred with honours by the same Obasanjo whom they jailed while those who fought for his release he doesn't even want to see. It's like, for Obasanjo, the press is his sworn lifetime enemy.

They could not understand how the same people who worked hard to frustrate the return to democracy were the ones decorated as heroes today. According to the ex-guerrilla journalists, the message they were getting from the government was that “our struggle was unknown, unseen and irrelevant”.

When asked the kind of honour or recognition they would have loved to receive, ex-guerrilla journalists were quite uniform in their responses. They did not want monetary or material rewards. If offered political appointments, some of them would accept them but they talked of reward at a nobler level such as a proper mention by government or a statute of honour dedicated to ex-militant journalists. Osa Director said “a simple interactive session where the government says ‘gentlemen, we appreciate your role in getting us to where we are’” would have been enough reward.

Money, frustration and survival tactics

Money plays a crucial role in the current situation of ex-guerrilla journalists in Nigeria. The Nigerian print media houses are run as businesses even if with a social crusade approach. They survive largely on funds from advertisements and sale of their copies. But little comes from sale of copies: the literacy rate in Nigeria is only about 60% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005), therefore, a substantial percentage of the population do not read papers; the poverty rate is high and reading culture poor.

More than all these, some of my interviewees claimed, politicians in power deliberately frustrated the press organisations that are critical of them. From the interviews, I identified three ways by which this is done. One of these is

deliberate de-subscription. Government offices remain the largest buyers of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria. The cost of newspapers and magazines are sometimes built into the budget of government departments. When a magazine or newspaper is unrepentantly critical of politicians or officials, my interviewees insisted, government offices sympathetic to or controlled by such officials, politicians and their network, stop buying such a magazine or newspaper.

The second method has to do with advertisements. Nigerian politicians spend tremendous amounts of money on advertisements. Politicians advertise not just their manifestoes during campaigns but also their achievements while in office. The latter they do regularly starting with the celebration of their first 100 days in office. These publicities are placed in numerous newspapers and magazines, all colour and gloss. Then groups and associations sympathetic to or funded by the official in power advertise their solidarity and congratulatory messages. In states where there are contentions about how government money is spent or how power is exercised, the opposition places sponsored announcements accusing the state government of mismanagement. Then the governor responds using the same medium. Groups normally spring up in favour of and against the governor – all using the same medium of magazines and newspapers to publicise their views. It is speculated that most soft-treading magazines – those who are in ‘the good books’ of politicians – derive about 75% of their income through political advertising of this nature (Oladepo, 2007). When a newspaper or magazine does not please the politicians in power, this major financial pathway is blocked.

A more vicious method which also concerned advertising was mentioned by some of my interviewees. Politicians, they claimed, not only withheld political advertisements from them, but also discouraged companies from giving them commercial advertisements. This is possible especially in companies where the politicians hold controlling shares, and such companies are in the majority in Nigeria. George Mbah told me:

They count us as enemies and Nigeria is the battlefield. They employ all methods to cut off your lifeline. We have reliable information from organisations that used to advertise with us that their patrons asked them to stop. These patrons are the politicians whose evil deeds we have exposed. They’re saying you either praise us or we squeeze life out of you.

A random perusal of *The Insider Weekly* showed that the magazine was indeed starved of advertisements. Whereas most magazines carry at least one political advertisement per week, *The Insider Weekly* has about one in two months

(Oladepo, 2007). Commercial advertisements in *The Insider Weekly* are also few. Most of them are quarter of a page, top and bottom strips. As a result, the magazine is gasping under the stranglehold of financial stress. I asked if *The Insider Weekly's* plight had not to do with the quality of print or circulation figures. According to its editors, *The Insider Weekly* sold more copies than even those magazines printed in full colours. They believed that their unbending criticism of politicians was responsible for their plight.

Times have been hard for many of the ex-guerrilla journalists. As Adebani (2008) points out, *The News* had to downsize its staff and some of those affected were former underground journalists. One of such journalists was Seidu Mulero. He was the one who, in the days of Sani Abacha, shepherded hordes of fleeing pro-democracy activists into safety through the NADECO route, a dangerous bush path that led to the Republic of Benin. After the struggle, Mulero lost his job with *The News* and shortly after, died from a minor illness, unable to pay hospital bills (Dare, 2007; Adebani, 2008).

As part of their survival strategies, some of the news magazines subscribed to the financial market. *The News*, for instance, had shares worth N50 million (about US\$345,000) as at 2007 (Adebani, 2008). *Tell* and *The News* seem to have found ways of practising critical journalism and yet maintaining a hold in the market of commercial and political advertising. *Tell* began and has continued with what it termed *advertorials* - a linguistic contraction of 'advertisements' and 'editorials'. Advertorials are packaged public relations services for politicians in power presented as editorials. Initially, *Tell* would insert a caveat to alert readers that the portion being read was paid for but soon, that caveat disappeared altogether.

The subject of advertorials is typically the achievement of state governors, heads of federal agencies, state commissioners and local government chairmen. Advertorials, no doubt, fetch *Tell* substantial revenue from the political class. *Tell* also publishes occasional wrap-arounds from commercial organisations. In addition to this, *Tell*, on a monthly basis, publishes revenue allocation information from the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation and a deluge of political advertisements. These suggest that *Tell's* new brand of critical journalism is different from what it was in the days of the military. Some have described as fishy *Tell's* ability to 'have its cake and eat it' wondering if *Tell* is still "the People's Parliament" (Oladepo, 2007) and accusing it of "frolicking and hobnobbing with Nigeria's fledgling dictatorship" (Ejikeonye, 2003).

Observations and discussion

It appeared that the entire pro-democracy group in Nigeria, including the press that supported it, was caught unawares by the sudden deaths of Abacha and Abiola, and the transition timetable of Abdusalami Abubakar. As a result, they were not able to have a unified response to the transition process, unlike most of the 'career' politicians, some of whom had served in the military governments. And though the press kept the timetable on the burner, activists were divided on what to do. While some activists, including some in the press, took part in the elections, others watched from a distance demanding a sovereign constitutional conference to straighten structural imbalances in the polity so that democracy would take off on a smooth plane. It is also plausible that the unpreparedness of the pro-democracy groups was a reflection of an ideological vacuity on the part of that group. An example can be borrowed from South Africa to illustrate this. Though members of the African National Congress (ANC), then an exiled group, were taken by surprise by the sudden turn of events on 2 February 1992 when the apartheid government of FW de Klerk lifted a thirty-year ban on them, the presence of an ideological guide on just about every aspect of society helped them to quickly recover from the shock and transform into a contestant and later ruling party. The presence of a coherent ideology has been shown to be a necessary, even if not sufficient, requirement for the success of resistance movements during and after their battles (Weigert, 1996).

Ideological vacuity was complemented or produced by a leadership crisis in the pro-democracy group. The different groups that formed the pro-democracy group and boldly opposed the military worked together only as long as there was a common enemy. When the enemy, the military, was pulled down, it was the turn of the leadership to chart a new direction for the group. This did not happen. Rather, each group began to demonstrate allegiance to its leaders; some groups splintered into sub-groups.

The foregoing is linked to the guerrilla journalists' interpretation of their roles in the current dispensation. While some of them lamented their inability to be in government as activists, others thought that that was not the right route to take – at least not now. Questions have been raised about the roles of ex-guerrillas and civil society in a democratic dispensation (Olorunnisola, 2006; Olorunnisola, 2009). What should ex-guerrillas do in a democracy? Should they be watchdogs, advocates or people in government? This is important against the realisation that ex-activists and ex-resisters in power (for instance, Robert Mugabe and Fred Chiluba) have not provided sufficient evidence to suggest that activists who fought for democracy will continue to submit to democratic principles once they get to power. In Nigeria, opinions seem to be that ex-activists who managed to get to power (for instance, Governors Bola Tinubu

and Segun Osoba, former activists who became governors of Lagos and Ogun States respectively), though they performed creditably, did not abide by the principles of democracy in the discharge of their duties. Some even insisted on selecting their own successor. In fact, questions may be asked about whether or not it is realistic to expect activists in government to abide by the principles of democracy given that their traditional organisations – especially where armed combats are involved – were run on anything but democratic principles.

Implicit in the assumptions of some of the ex-guerrilla journalists about democracy is that democracy is a perfect arrangement. It seems that the dynamo that sustained the long and difficult crusade for democracy was the assumption that with democracy all problems of injustice, inequality, human rights abuse, corruption and power abuse would come an end. The growing discontent with democracy even in advanced democracy such as the United States (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Hiley, 2006) manifested in low voter turnout and other forms of civic disengagement, suggests that at best, democracy is work-in-progress. Viewed a little negatively, democracy may be described as a system that promises much and delivers little. To stick to a romantic view of democracy as a solve-all system is an open invitation to frustration.

In spite of the foregoing, there is a fundamental minimum that a nation must possess before it can be called a democracy (Ojebode and Akingbulu, 2009). Such fundamental minimum is explained by ex-guerrilla journalists to include freedom of speech, free elections, a level playing ground for everyone who wants to contest, progress with human rights, and freedom of the press. Ex-guerrillas' frustration arose from their perception that even the fundamental minimum was not clearly observable in Nigeria. It is necessary to point out that even during the current democratic dispensation, the offices of *The Insider Weekly* has been raided twice by government security operatives – on November 26, 2003 and September 4, 2004. Staff members were manhandled, arrested and detained. Copies of the publication were seized and destroyed (Human Rights Watch, 2004). A statement credited to the office of the State Security Services (SSS) explained that the magazine was attacked because it was “attacking, disparaging and humiliating the person and office of the president and commander-in-chief as well as some notable people in government” (Committee for Protection of Journalists, 2005). With so much impunity still on bold display, instead of respect for rule of law and due process, it is not shocking that some ex-activists thought Nigeria was not yet on the journey called democracy. The deployment of authoritarian and oppressive tactics by elected leaders is not peculiar to Nigeria. Citing as examples countries like Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Uganda and Kenya, scholars of democracy in Africa have returned the verdict that much of what obtained in Africa is a

legitimisation of oppressive regimes through heavily rigged elections, and that returned dictatorial leaders have continued to deploy the old oppressive methods they knew (Adejumobi, 2000; Brown, 2001; Marcus *et al*, 2001; Olorunnisola, 2006; Olorunnisola, 2009; Ojebode and Akingbulu, 2009).

The question of rewards for activism and resistance in Africa has received scholarly attention from political scientists who study African resistance movements. In most cases, awards and honours have been politicised. In Zimbabwe, for instance, ‘thousands of ex-combatants are living lives of poverty and marginalisation’ (Nyati, 2004:63) while those who have served the narrow interests of Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF are “assured of a space in Heroes’ Acres, regardless of whether they have tortured or killed, and with little regard for their actual war credentials” (Nyati, 2004:66). This trend cuts across many different climes and times. In his analysis of several insurgencies and resistance movements including the Malagache rebellion of 1947, the Mau Mau movement, and the war in the Kwilu Province in Zaire, and the Unions Populaires de Cameroun (UPC) revolt in Cameroon, Weigert (1996) reported a similar trend of politicising honours and awards coupled with the neglect or persecution of ex-militants who are unwilling to be used by the new rulers. It seems that as it was with armed combatants in resistance movement so it has been with the ex-guerrilla press in Nigeria. But why does the table turn so quickly? Different contexts will provide different answers.

In Nigeria, the refusal of the Obasanjo government to accord the press any commendation may be explained in terms of his running battle with the press dating from his first regime as military ruler. After his first retirement, he had posted a sign on his residence: “Dogs and journalists not allowed”, declaring his disdain for journalists. After his second retirement, he had complained that ‘they write nonsense ... [and are] always abusing me’ (Abati, 2007:42; Andrews, 2007). In regimes where the power to decide who is honoured and who is not resides predominantly in the hands of an individual, activists who do not please such an individual are not likely to be recognised. Excessive concentration of powers in the hands of one person is injurious to democracy and indicates that the Nigerian democracy is still infantile.

Conclusion

Although the expression ‘guerrilla journalists’ is an expanded metaphor, the referents seem to share more in common with arms-bearing guerrillas than is initially apparent. Among others parallels, it is clear that the chosen instrument of resistance has little to do with post-resistance integration. Whether armed or unarmed, guerrillas cannot expect a smooth and automatic integration into mainstream politics after their battle has been lost (or won) and their movement

has atrophied. Not only this, to varying degrees, the “decay of ideology” (Bøås and Dunn, 2007; Clapham, 2007) cuts across both armed and unarmed modern insurgencies. These parallels call to attention the need to widen the scope of resistance studies to include the activities of socio-cultural agents such as journalists.

The plight of some of the ex-guerrilla journalists in democratic Nigeria – their dissatisfaction, disillusionment and even death – further illustrates the complexities that characterise post-resistance societies, especially in Africa. Where acknowledged at all, such complexities are usually a footnote in the scripts of international organisations and western countries that drive or support the struggle for democratisation in Africa. Having reduced democracy to multiparty elections, at least in practice, these organisations and nations display a sense of *fait accompli* once an elected government is in position, leaving pro-democracy groups to sort things out with the government. The losers, in the final analysis, are the pro-democracy activists. There is a need for pro-democracy nations and organisations to insist that democracy should go beyond voting into a deliberate programme and philosophy of not just non-exclusion, but active integration of everyone especially those who facilitated the coming of democracy.

The study shows that for the concerned journalists, resistance continues. The current resistance may be tougher than the anti-military resistance in that some of the methods of state that are allegedly employed – such as straining the financial lifelines of some magazines – are not visible and would not attract the kind of international outcry and compassion that the more overt physical attacks by the military attracted. And so, affected journalists may for a long while have to contend alone with these political forces. This has obvious implications for the health of the Nigerian democracy.

References

- Abati, R (2007). 'Journalists and Obasanjo's contempt' *The Guardian*; August 24, 2007; page 42
- Adebanwi, W (2008). *Trials and Triumphs: the Story of the News*. Lagos: West African Book Publishers.
- Adejumobi, S (2000). Elections in Africa: a Fading Shadow of Democracy? *International Political Science Review*, 21(1), 59–73
- Andrews, J (2007). "I don't read Nigerian newspapers", says Obasanjo' *This Day* online; August 21, 2007. <http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=86923> Accessed on August 23, 2007
- Babarinsa, D (2005a). 'Free, but still behind Bars' *Tell*, March 14, 2005; page 5.
- Babarinsa, D (2005b). 'Fall of the Mighty' *Tell* April 18, 2005; page 5
- Babarinsa, D (2005c). 'Supreme Contempt' *Tell*, June 6, 2005, pg 5
- Bøås, M and Dunn, KC (2007). 'African Guerrilla Politics: Raging against the Machine?', pp. 9-38 in M. Bøås and K. C. Dunn (eds) *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers
- Broadstreet Journal* (2009). '49 Years on, Darkness Reigns Supreme', October 5.
- Brown, S (2001). 'Authoritarian Leaders and Multiparty Elections in Africa: How Foreign Donors Help to Keep Kenya's Daniel Arap Moi in Power. *Third World Quarterly*, 22(5), 725-739
- Cappella, JN and Jamieson, KH (1996). 'News Frames, Political Cynicism and Media Cynicism' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 546:71-84
- Clapham, C (1998). 'Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies', pp.1-18 in C. Clapham (ed) *African Guerrillas*. Oxford: James Currey
- Clapham, C (2007). 'African guerrillas revisited', pp. 221-234 in M. Bøås and K. C. Dunn (eds) *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Committee for Protection of Journalists, (2005). 'Attacks on the Press in 2004 – Nigeria'. www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47c566e823.html. Accessed 4 February, 2010
- Dare, S (2007). *Guerrilla Journalism: Dispatches from the Underground*. Ibadan: Kraftbooks Ltd.

- Ejikeonye, U (2003). 'Tell: a Magazine and its Twisted Tale' www.nigerdeltacongress.com/articles/tell_a_magazine_and_its_twisted.htm. Accessed December 15, 2009
- Hiley, DR (2006). *Doubt and the Demands of Democratic Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Human Rights Watch (2004). 'Letter to Nigerian President Obasanjo Regarding Intelligence Services' Raid of Independent Magazine'. www.hrw.org/en/news/2004/09/06/letter-nigerian-president-obasanjo-regarding-intelligence-services-raid-independent- Accessed January 30, 2010
- Malaolu, O (2005). 'The Effects of Militant Press on Nigeria's Democratic Evolution'. An Unpublished MA thesis, Department of Mass Communications, University of South Florida
- Marcus, RR, Mease, K, & Ottemoeller, F (2001). 'Popular Definitions of Democracy from Uganda, Madagascar, and Florida, U.S.A'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 36:113-132
- National Bureau of Statistics (2005). *Social Statistics in Nigeria*. http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/nbsapps/social_statistics/SSD%20final.pdf Accessed January 30, 2010
- Nyati, P (2004). 'Reintegration of ex-Combatants into Zimbabwean Society: A Lost Opportunity', pp. 63-78 in R. Brian and T. Savage (eds) *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*. Cape Town: Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
- Ojebode, A and Akingbulu, A (2009). 'Community Radio Advocacy in Democratic Nigeria: Lessons for Theory and Practice' *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 30(2): 204-218
- Oladepo, S (2007). 'Political Advertising: the New Cash Cow in Nigeria'. A seminar paper presented at the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria
- Olayode, K (2007). 'Pro-Democracy Movements, Democratisation and Conflicts in Africa: Nigeria, 1990-1999' *African Journal of International Affairs* 10(1 & 2): 127-146
- Olorunnisola, AA (2006). 'Understanding Media in African Transitional Societies', pp. 1-36 in A. A. Olorunnisola (ed) *Media in South Africa after Apartheid: A Cross Media Assessment*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Olorunnisola, AA (2009). 'Democratization, Mass Media, and Civil Society in Africa: A Discourse of Interlocking Paradoxes' *Journal of Communication and Language Arts* 3(1):79-104

- Olorunyomi, D (1998). 'Defiant Publishing in Nigeria', pp. 57-63 in N. J. Woodhull and R. W. Snyder (eds) *Journalists in Peril*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers
- Olukotun, A (2005). *Repressive State and Resurgent Media under Nigeria's Military Dictatorship, 1988-98*. Ibadan: College Press and Publishers
- Osa, D (2007). *Suicide Journalism*. Ibadan: Bookcraft
- Salawu, A (2006). 'Sex in Yoruba Newspapers' in Abiodun Salawu (ed) *Indigenous Language Media in Africa*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation. Pages 141-174
- Semenitari, I. (2005). 'This President can Throw Stones' *Tell* April 18; pages 20-27
- Tell* (2008a). 'EFCC, Rest in Pieces' June 2; pages 20-23
- Tell* (2008b). 'One Year of Booming Silence'. June 2; pages 24-27
- Tell* (2009a). 'Niger Delta: Why the War may never End' June 22; Pages 22-28
- Tell* (2009b). 'Yar'Adua's Amnesty Heads for Brick Wall' August 31; page 18
- Tell* (2009c). 'Nigeria: The Making of a Failed State' October 5; pages 16-23
- Tell* (2009d). 'The Politics of Yar'Adua's Illness' December 14
- Tell* (2009e). 'Why Yar'Adua may not Return Soon' December 21
- The Insider Weekly* (2009a). 'Amnesty for Militants: Jonathan's Coup' August 24
- The Insider Weekly* (2009b). 'Nigeria is Collapsing' August 17
- The News* (1999a). 'The Crook in the House' July 12
- The News* (1999b). 'Buhari Gate – an Inside story' July 26
- The News* (2006a). 'No to Third Term: Ex-Heads of State Unite against OBJ' May 1
- The News* (2006b). 'Third Term: How to Stop Obasanjo', March 27
- The News* (2010). 'The Plot to Keep Yar'Adua in Office' February 8
- Van Walraven, K and Abbink, J (2003). 'Rethinking Resistance in African History: an Introduction' pp. 1-40 in J. Abbink; M. De Bruijn and K. Van Walraven (eds) *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*. Leiden: Brill
- Weigert, S (1996). *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*. London: Macmillan

Acknowledgments

The author wants to thank Professors Jon Abbink, Ineke van Kessel and Stephen Ellis (African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands), Anthony Olorunnisola and Levi Obijiofor for their suggestions which greatly improved this paper. The author is grateful to the African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, the Netherlands, for awarding him the visiting fellowship during which this paper was completed.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY