

The Role of the Press in the Democratic Process: The Example of Nigeria's First Republic, 1960-1966

Emmanuel Nwafor Mordi

Department of History & International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The role of the media in the democratic process was studied in the context of Nigeria's First Republic, 1960-1966, which was a society in transition from colonial dictatorship to a fledgling democracy. The article deploys the historical method of studying its subject matter in time perspective, and thus takes a longer historical view that is often absent from contemporary analyses. It posits that the role of the media in democracy need not be generalized and patterned structurally on Western oriented media theories. Rather the processional approach should be emphasized since it establishes the trends and patterns of press performance, upon which theories should be built. This is particularly the case when taken in the peculiar context and experience of African nations in transition, as illustrated with the Nigerian example.

Keywords: Colonial impact, democratic politics, media and democracy, media history, Nigeria, Nigerian press

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the role of the media in the democratic process, with the case study of Nigeria, from its attainment of independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960 to January 15, 1966, when

the Nigerian military seized power. There is a growing body of literature on the theories of media and democracy which are often pious, oblivious of empirical and theoretical analyses from other disciplines and out of touch with the workings of contemporary democracy (Karppinen, 2013). The theories are thus built on conflicting and diverse analytical tools and theoretical frameworks. They therefore tend to draw largely on the constructs derived from a fossilized notion of Western democracies with established mass media traditions. A false picture can only be the result of such an attempt to explain

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E-mail address:

emmanumordi@gmail.com

media roles in African states in transition with theories and analytical tools drawn from the experience of older democracies (Nordenstreng, 1997) Hanitzsch and Vos (2018, p.146) note that the theories which derive from studies conducted “within a Western framework oriented toward the media’s contribution to democracy” fail to take into account the peculiar realities of “non-democratic and non-Western contexts.” Scholars, like Mwangi (2010) (citing O’Neil) thus emphasize the need for scholars in the new democracies not to continue to adopt Western theoretical frameworks to explain the role of the media in their development efforts. Instead, they ought “to begin to write from their own perspectives, explanations of the role that media are playing” in democratic transition in Africa (p.1).

Against this background, this paper examines the role of the press in the democratic process. It is illustrated with the case study of Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country of over 170 million people, during the first quinquennium of its post- colonial history. At independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria in transition from colonial dictatorship to nascent democracy as a new , sovereign state, was portrayed as having bright prospects as “a stronghold of democracy in Africa,” due to its “promising start” (Meredith, 2006, pp. 193-94). Little did it matter that democracy, an ambiguous term, has no fixed form, definition, or meaning, in terms of free, competitive elections and diverse forms of participation in governance. Indeed, democracy is

constantly in evolution and reflective of cultural dynamics and historical peculiarities of every given society (Karppinen, 2013). Thus the euphoria about the bright prospects of democracy in Nigeria was misplaced and short-lived, giving way to gloom on January 15, 1966, when Nigeria was brought under military dictatorship. As with the changing perspectives of democracy, so the changing interpretation and theorizing of the role of the media in transition to democracy and democratic consolidation in new nations. In fact, it has been observed that there is much incoherence and incomparability in the different theoretical approaches, even more so in the study of mass media in the established democracies of the West vis-à-vis the new, transition countries. This is more acute with respect to the state of research “which explore how exactly the media fulfill their normatively ascribed role and contribute to democratic institution-building process ...” (Jebril, Stetka and Loveless, 2013, pp. 2-4). This paper thus studies the media and democracy in Nigeria’s First Republic, taking a longer historical view that is often absent from contemporary analyses. The focus on the First Republic derives from the fact that the nature and character of political contest of that period had subsequently shaped and influenced future political calculations and alignments, as well as the attendant problems and efforts to resolve them in Nigeria (Osaghae, 2011, p. 31).

The literature on Nigeria’s failed first democratic experiment explains the travails of democracy (Mordi, 1999), by 1966, in the

context of colonial impact, which is said to have made political instability inevitable (O'Connell, 1967, pp.181-91). British colonialism had given Nigerians a common national identity and government for the first time in their history, but left them to contend with the British promoted paradox, common to former British African colonies, of coexisting with the consciousness of their mutual ethnic differences and separateness. Thus during the first-quarter century of its independence, Nigeria, like the rest of Africa, was written off as a basket-case (Crowder, 1987, pp. 7-24), having failed to manage natural and manmade problems, particularly that of welding into a nation a "variety of different peoples" (Meredith, 2006, pp. 150-161). Nigeria's immediate post-independence leaders, driven by the "doctrine of regional security" (Sklar, 1955, pp. 201-204; Dudley, 1982, pp. 52-57), or absolute control of power in their regional enclaves, manipulated ethnic sentiments. Nigeria thus became a "one-party dominant system with built-in criticism within each region" (Mackintosh, 1961, pp.63: 194-210). The attendant strains led to the military seizure of power, marked by "scenes of wild rejoicing" (Meredith, 2006, p. 199), at least in southern Nigeria.

Indeed, scholars have tended to adopt the position foreshadowed by the press that politicians should be held solely responsible for the failure of democratic governance during the period (Osaghae, 2011). For instance, the *Daily Times* of January 18, 1966, welcomed the military coup d'état of January 15, 1966 as "a surgical operation

which must be performed or the patient dies." It blamed the putsch on politicians, who had performed "seven days wonders as if the art of government was some circus show". Agbaje (1992) explained that politicians had cast virtually every national institution, including the media "in the role of instruments for the continuation of political warfare". In his view, the political class had sought to influence opinions and perspectives of events through the medium of newspapers, which with the exception of the *Daily Times* (pp. 66, 154), they funded, owned, or established. Omu (1978), without adducing any evidence from the newspapers, however, claimed that the latter regretted their connivance with politicians in the corruption and mismanagement that characterized public affairs.

Some scholars, on the contrary, single out the Nigerian press for adulation, given the apparent variety of its political contents and its relative vibrancy, unlike other African countries, with muzzled press, or mere government sheets (Schwarz, 1968, p. 53). Hachten (1971), in fact, viewed the Nigerian press of the period as "a unique phenomenon in black Africa: diverse, outspoken, competitive and irreverent", even "almost unfettered" (p. 165). On his part, Olukotun (2002) agreed with Diamond who had written in 1988 that the Nigerian press kept alive its tradition of "hard hitting, fearless and independent journalism", which dated to the colonial period (p. 384). This feature of the press is said to have made it a most potent instrument for supporting democratic governance. Thus, the Nigerian

press is clothed in the Western model of media role in democracy. The latter is “exported to the developing world”, and erroneously presents journalism as another name for democracy. Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) noted that the Western model of journalism casts the news media in the mold of an institution that was “relatively autonomous from the state”. It also viewed journalists as “independent agents engaged in an antagonistic relationship to power while representing the people” (p. 150).

Implicit in the Western-model characterization of the Nigerian press is the normative media theory espoused by McQuail (2010). The theory, which became dominant following Siebert et al’s publication of the *Four Theories of the Press, with emphasis on the Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the media of mass communication should be and do*, has since undergone several revisions. With the institutionalization of both the media and democracy, the new focus of Habermas on the public sphere has emphasized the role of the media as a watch-dog (Nordenstreng, 1997). The theory encapsulates general expectations in a democracy that the press support the democratic process. In this regard, the press is expected to disseminate a plurality of information and viewpoints, give space to divergent voices and provide avenues for debates. The theory abhors government ownership of, or interference with the media, which at the same time exercises

the freedom to choose the manner and in whose interest it plays its role, insofar as it does not harm the polity, or public interest. In effect, this theoretical construct rests on the central role, indeed political power of the press in the conduct of liberal, democratic politics. In this context, the press functions as the Fourth Estate, as it facilitates “the flow of information about public events to all citizens and the exposure of politicians and governments to the public gaze and critique”. It thereby engages in guardianship role as a check on the abuse of power, while acting as an agent of mobilization. The theory is, however, limited by the difficulty of defining what constitutes public interest, given that the media is often driven by the profit motive or commercial considerations. Thus it loses the capacity to function as “a vehicle for advancing freedom and democracy and, instead, becomes “... more and more a means of making money and propaganda for the new and powerful ... ‘press barons’” (McQuail, 2010, pp. 151, 162-172). This situation gives rise to the tendency for a few voices to dominate the channels through which the press performs such roles (Seymour-Ure, 1974, p. 53).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) aptly cautioned against the uncritical application of the Western-derived generalized media theory to the study and explanation of media roles in democracies in “non-Western contexts”, where the stark realities of “overwhelming evidence for alternative roles exercised by journalists” abound (pp.146-149). Nonetheless, the normative

theory remains appropriate for this paper, insofar as the objective is to focus on its shortcomings in the context of a non-Western society. Of importance is the press's capabilities that are highly compatible with the functions of political parties, because, like politics, its concern is with verbal activities. It therefore serves as an effective medium through which political parties and politicians appeal and explain their programs to the electorate.

Against the foregoing background, this paper critically examines the contributions of the press to democratic practice in Nigeria's First Republic, 1960 – 1966, which had hitherto been neglected. Till date, there is no scholarly, historical investigation of the role of the press in the abrupt end of Nigeria's first democratic experiment. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate how much plurality, diversity and editorial independence existed in the Nigerian press, as pundits have postulated. It further seeks to establish to what extent, if any, the press succeeded in monitoring the public space, exposing constraints to free exercise of democratic opposition, providing good material for debate, and enabling Nigerians to assess the government and form individual opinions on the issues examined in this paper. Such a study is useful to test the validity of Western media theories related to democracy (Wasserman, 2011, pp. 2-3), in the African context and experience (Nyamnjoh, 2011). It is hoped that this study will make a modest contribution in this regard, and thereby mediate the influence of theory in explaining historical

phenomena, especially in the context of new nations. It concludes that in assessing the media in democratic governance, theories need not be generalized to overshadow the processional, or historical approach which clearly establishes the trends and patterns of press performance, upon which theories should be built.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials consulted for this paper consisted mainly of primary sources, conveying contemporary, eyewitness accounts and information, namely newspapers (Barton, 2005; Lucas, 1981; Jones, nd) which were supplemented with secondary sources. At least, by 1964, Nigeria hosted 23 dailies, 20 of which accounted for a daily circulation of 289,000 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1964, p. 102). Grant (1971) classified them into four types, namely overseas commercial, represented by the *Daily Times*; political party, made up of the *West African Pilot* and the *Nigerian Tribune*; government, consisting of the *Nigerian Morning Post*, (Northern) *Nigerian Citizen*, (Eastern) *Nigerian Outlook*, and (Western Nigerian) *Daily Sketch*, and overseas commercial/ political party, which was typified by the *Daily Express*. The overseas commercial newspaper type had a distinct feature of foreign ownership (*Daily Times*, was purchased from a subsidiary of the International Publishing Company by the London *Daily Mirror* Group in 1947). The pro-establishment newspaper, with a vast outlay of financial resources

and modern equipment, emphasized profit and sound business management, and was, therefore, national in coverage, circulation and readership. The political party newspaper type, typified by the *West African Pilot*, published by Azikiwe in 1937, viewed and reported all the events of the period from the viewpoints of the NCNC. It had a partisan editorial policy on political matters, but it was outspoken and enjoyed a relatively national readership due largely to its past anti-colonial record. Similarly, the government newspaper typified at the national level by the *Nigerian Morning Post*, was loyal to its paymaster, and had a pro-government and partisan editorial policy. The last newspaper type, overseas commercial/political party represented by the *Daily Express* was a hybrid. The *Daily Express* was controlled by Roy Thomson of Canada and Britain, and the National Investment and Properties Corporation for the Action Group, with mutually conflicting interests. The one aimed at modern, rational business management and profit maximization, while the other emphasized political loyalty and partisanship in staff and editorial policies. Most of the newspapers had a limited, regional readership, and undisguised partisan editorial policies as reflected in three newspaper distribution centers of Lagos and Midwest; Midwest and the East, and the North (pp. 95 – 100), by 1964. Consequently, by 1966, only four newspapers, namely the *Daily Times*, the *West African Pilot*, the *Morning Post*, and the *Daily Express* were somewhat national in circulation and readership, and were

consulted for this study (Table I). Their choice for the study was guided by their reportage, including editorials, headlines, and opinionated pieces on the issues that impacted on democratic governance during the period, as well as their circulation coverage and readership. These were consulted at the National Archives, Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan Library, and complemented with evidence obtained from the works of leading journalists of the period, to produce this paper.

The materials provided by the newspapers were interrogated through the application of the critical-analytic methods of contemporary history. Central to the methods is the critical analysis of sundry data, guided by the interdisciplinary approach which enables the historian to sharpen his interpretation of data and explanation of phenomena. In this context, insights are drawn from the theoretical constructs of the social sciences, mindful of the failure of the latter to appreciate that the study of man in society entails a historical study as the laboratory to “test and consolidate its knowledge about the social world”. This is significant, given the variegated, and in some cases doubtful contemporary, internet sources, instead of the traditional archival sources usually consulted by the historian. Thus sources are consulted, not used, and scrutinized for credibility, validity, integrity and relevance to the subject of enquiry. They form the building blocks for facilitating the construction of phenomenon “in process through time” or “within the framework of historical analysis”. Emphasis is thus

on writing a history that is less descriptive, while recognizing the importance of trends and patterns of the events that form the focus of the research (Ake, 1991, pp. 19-20; Abasiattai, 1999, pp. 5-16.).

Table 1
Nigerian newspaper types

Newspaper Types	Owner/ Publisher	Editorial Policy	
Government			
I. (Northern) <i>Nigerian Citizen</i>	Gaskiya Corporation	Partisan: Pro-NPC/ Northern Regional Government	Regional
II. <i>Nigerian Morning Post</i>	Federal Government of Nigeria	Partisan: Pro-NPC/ Federal Government	National
III. (Eastern) <i>Nigerian Outlook</i>	Government of Eastern Region	Partisan: Pro-NCNC/ Eastern Regional Government	Regional
IV. (Western Nigerian) <i>Daily Sketch</i>	Government of Western Region	Partisan: Pro-NNDP/ Western Regional Government	Regional
Overseas Commercial/Political Party			
I. <i>Daily Express</i>	Thomson International/ National Investments and Properties Corporation for the Action Group	Pro-Action Group/ Western Regional Government to 1962; Pro-NNDP /Western Regional Government , 1963-1965	National
Political Party			
I. <i>West African Pilot (Lagos)</i>	Zik Group of Newspapers	Pro-NCNC	National
II. <i>Nigerian Tribune (Ibadan)</i>	Allied Newspapers for the Action Group		Regional
III. COR Advocate (Uyo)			
IV. The Northern Star (Kano)			
V. The Eastern Observer (Onitsha)			
VI. The Middle Belt Herald (Jos)			
VII. The Borno People (Jos)			
VIII. Daily Mail (Kano)	Northern People's Congress/ Northern Regional Govt.	Pro-NPC/Northern Regional Government	Regional
Overseas Commercial			
I. <i>Daily Times</i>	London Daily Mirror	Pro-Profit/establishment	National

Source: Adapted from Grant, (1971)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indeed, it is widely accepted that, generally, the press does not operate in a vacuum, but mirrors both the economic and political structures of a nation. These, in turn, determine both media content and audience (Wells, 1974). In the same vein, scholars agree that “It is the content of newspapers that determines their political roles”, even as the style and content of such newspapers “are a product and compromise of frequently competing forces” (Potter, 1975, p.11). Among these could be mentioned the political system and social contexts within which the press functions and an integral part of which it is. In multi-ethnic societies, like Nigeria, these determine the nature and extent of the political role of the press. Hopkins (1970) thus posited that “Cultural differences might weaken mass media effectiveness by reducing their audience” (pp. 26-27).

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country of over 170 million people, is very vast, with an area of 923,768 square kilometers. It is dominated by three ethno- linguistic majorities of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani, who occupy the South and the Nigerian Sudan, respectively. However, it is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country of over 250 ethnic groups, who speak at least five hundred languages (Elugbe, 1990; Ayeomoni, 2012). A remarkable feature of these ethno- linguistic groups is that most of them individually constitute an ethnic nation in their own right, with distinct customs, traditions and usages, borne of centuries of practice and experience, a

common language, dialects, and occupying a distinct and contiguous territory. Thus, the “ geographical cohesiveness and exclusiveness of Nigeria’s ethnic groups” is such that not only do they occupy their respective ancestral ethnic homelands, but also they are not geographically intermixed (Schwarz, 1965, p. 3).

The evidence suggests that the press in Nigeria’s First Republic, including the *Daily Times* did not operate or function in isolation from the ethno-political contexts which subjected it to diverse constraints. Its performance during the period was thus a far cry from the theories propounded by media experts. In fact, the question has appropriately been asked, whether the media are better classified as agents of democratic change or as an institution that leads or follows change for democracy. What seems to be clear is that the much touted role of the media as an instrument for “enforcing political accountability through watchdog journalism” is exaggerated (Jebri, Stetka, & Loveless, 2013, p.3). In fulfilling its role the press was constrained by the political milieu of which it was a part and within which it functioned. It is therefore germane to understand the ethno-regional political context and nature of press and democratic politics during the period covered by this study.

The Ethno-Regional Political Context

A major constraining influence upon media performance was the colonial and ethnic backgrounds of the media and its practitioners as well as the political class

of Nigeria's First Republic. For instance, a coalition government of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) that ushered Nigeria to independence in 1960 were rooted in Nigeria's colonial past, and ethno regional in character. The NCNC, formed in 1944, was Nigeria's foremost heterogeneous, nationalist party, (Sklar, 1983, pp.129-149). It was a 'mass party', characterized by a pragmatic ideological inclination. It ruled the Eastern region and enjoyed some considerable following across Nigeria, including Western Nigeria where it was the opposition party. This was due to its chameleonic character which enabled it to expand its electoral base of support by becoming "different things to different groups" (Dudley, 1982, p.46). On the other hand, the conservative, ethno-regional Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) had metamorphosed into a political party from the socio-cultural association *Jam'iyaar Mutanen Arewa* which preceded it in 1948 (Sklar, 1983, pp. 91-96). True to its motto "One North, One people, irrespective of Religion, Rank or Tribe", it had restricted its membership to people of northern Nigerian descent. The Action Group (AG), the opposition party in Nigeria's First Republic, an offshoot of the pan-Yoruba *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, was unveiled in 1951, as a "Western Regional Political Organization". It was committed to stemming Azikiwe's rising influence in Lagos and the Western region, wielded through the NCNC, by seizing power through the election foreshadowed by the

Macpherson Constitution in 1951 (Sklar, 1983, pp. 101-106). The latter goal was achieved by buying "its way into forming the government of the Western region in 1951..." In the aftermath of its defeat in the 1959 federal elections which ushered Nigeria to independence, the party sought to transform itself into a national, mass-based party with a new ideology of "democratic socialism" (Dudley, 1982, pp. 42, 47-48).

This decision triggered an intra-AG crisis in 1962, which fuelled the events that culminated in the abrupt end of Nigeria's first democratic experiment. No single party won a majority in the 1959 elections. However, James Robertson, outgoing colonial governor-general pre-empted Nigeria's first independence government by appointing Tafawa Balewa, NPC's deputy leader, as prime minister before the full results were declared. The AG's separate offers to the NPC and NCNC to form the coalition government having failed, the NPC/NCNC coalition constituted the federal government of Nigeria's First Republic, 1960-66, while the AG became the opposition party. However, the NPC at the end of 1960 already had a working majority in the federal parliament. Thus NCNC membership of the coalition government was superfluous (Dudley, 1982, pp. 61-62). The NCNC therefore sought to expand its power base in Western Nigeria. In 1964, it formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) with a weakened AG to contest the 1964 federal and 1965 west regional elections. On the other hand, the NPC went into an alliance with the Nigerian

National Democratic Party (NNDP) of Samuel Ladoke Akintola, West regional premier under the banner of the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), for the same purpose.

These ethno-regional parties mobilized the newspapers they published or funded and controlled, to strengthen their advantages in the critical issues of the period, namely the 1962 AG crisis, and the concomitant 1965 Western Region parliamentary elections. The latter was massively rigged, to stop power from passing on to the UPGA which had characterized it as “operation do or die” (Schwarz, 1968, p.176). How the press performed its role in Nigeria’s first democratic process, based on its reportage, comments and presentation of these issues are examined in the remaining sections of this paper.

The results reflect the discussion which is built on the historian’s characteristic evocative prose, to unravel the nature and dynamics of media role in Nigeria’s democratic process. This study being historical, the data which forms the basis of the ensuing discussion is presented in line with the canons of the discipline. It is designed “to enhance the field of history” rather than “turn history into a new species of academic inquiry” (Abasiattai, 1999, p.6).

Assessing the Role of the Press in Nigeria’s Democracy, 1960-1966

The Action Group Crisis. Premier Akintola had opposed his party leader’s move to implement mass-oriented programs that

would widen AG’s electoral support base across Nigeria. Middle class, ‘old guard’ faction of the party (Africa Report, 1963, p.33), and the traditional elite supported Akintola’s rejection of the role of opposition for fear it could shut out Western Nigeria from the system of rewards. He therefore sought to strengthen his position by replacing Awolowo’s loyalists in government boards with his own (Osaghae, 2011, p. 39).

A stalemated attempt by the party to replace the premier through a vote of no confidence in the regional parliament culminated in fighting among the legislators which caused the police to lock up the regional House of Assembly in Ibadan. The federal government probably orchestrated the crisis in a bid to destroy the opposition party. This was done through the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western region, and consequent dissolution of all democratic structures, including the federal government take-over of the government of Western Nigeria, in May 1962. Obafemi Awolowo and his lieutenants were subsequently jailed for treasonable felony. At the end of the emergency, Akintola was reinstated as premier without going through election on the platform of his new United Peoples’ Party (UPP) which in league with the NCNC controlled the regional government. He later went into an alliance with the NPC under the banner of his new Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) during the 1964 federal parliamentary elections. The declaration of a state of emergency was thus a political maneuver, designed to stamp out

opposition. It culminated in the failure of democratic governance during the period (Akintunde, 1967; Mackintosh, 1966).

This internal leadership crisis which engulfed the ruling Action Group in Western Nigeria, in 1962 provided the first test of the press' fulfillment of its role in the normative tradition as the Fourth Estate in Nigeria's democratic process. But, the press played no distinct agenda-setting and gate-keeping roles, based on investigative journalism which would have provided a medium to elevate rational discussion in the public sphere, and thereby galvanize the people for effective participation in the democratic process. Instead, it acted as megaphones and instruments of the feuding politicians who had sought to deploy every imaginable undemocratic device to cling to power during the period. Thus, in the performance of its role during the Action Group crisis, the press was circumscribed by the narrow prisms of party political considerations, or business calculations. It thereby failed to check, as the normative tradition stipulates, the constraints on the opposition's fulfillment of its mandate, and to expose the government to the public gaze on the issues.

For instance, the *Daily Times*, despite its massive news gathering resources (UNESCO, 1964, p. 103), limited its reports to party and government press releases, or hands-out, in obvious deference to its organizational and economic interests, rather than the furtherance of the people's quest for information (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017). It thus refrained from editorial

comments during critical moments of the crisis. At the onset of the crisis the newspaper gave front-page prominence on May 10, 1962 to Awolowo's tour of the home constituency of Akintola, the premier who was reconstituting the board of the regional Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC) with his own supporters. The newspaper's attribution of the crisis to this action by the regional premier attracted an instant rebuttal from the government via a letter to the *Daily Times*. On May 11, the paper gave prominence to the regional government's letter that "Only Akintola has Power" to hire and fire members of statutory corporations. In fact, up to the declaration of a state of emergency in the region, the newspaper ran only one editorial on it. The front page comment of May 26, 1962, was personally signed by Babatunde Jose (1987), its editor. It condemned the fighting and recourse to violence by parliamentarians in the Western House of Assembly, and urged the federal government to deploy enough policemen to the region so as to forestall the breakdown of law and order. Jose explains that "as the Editor of the *Daily Times*", he "backed the Akintola group ...when the Action Group crisis started in May 1962" , and personally signed the editorial, to ensure that he and not the company bore responsibility for it (pp.108, 146).

The editorial was reinforced in a banner headline of May 26, 1962, "Obas Beg Balewa", not to declare a state of emergency. The report focused on the premier's refusal to vacate his office after his dismissal by the governor, and the

deployment of the police to secure public safety and maintain public order in the region. Indeed, the newspaper took the position that the internal party crisis did not warrant Akintola's removal from office. The attempt by Western region's traditional rulers to prevail on Nigeria's prime minister not to declare a state of emergency thus received the paper's front page attention. When, therefore, Prime Minister Balewa declared a state of emergency on May 29, 1962, the paper's headline, "Emergency declared/ Balewa takes over Western Government" amounted to an expression of surprise and disappointment. Yet, it was not until November 30, 1962 that the newspaper editorialized on "Democracy in Western Nigeria", to recommend the widening of the political space through democratic elections at the expiration of the emergency period, in tune with the pledge of the federal government to guarantee liberal democracy in Nigeria. The paper's editorial of December 1, 1962, "The Electoral Law", advocated a new legislation against cross-carpeting by legislators. The editorial thus targeted Action Group legislators who had switched their earlier support of the premier's removal for the federal parliament's passage of the emergency regulations.

However, the *Daily Times* maintained an undignified silence when Akintola, contrary to the newspaper's editorial of November 30, 1962, was reinstated in January 1963, without revalidating his tenure in fresh elections, even as Awolowo and his close associates languished in prison. Jose (1987)

attributed the *Daily Times'* silence to the fact that its journalists were so divided and in cohort with the feuding politicians that the newspaper could not creditably perform its role as an information, education and debating medium in furtherance of Nigeria's toddling democracy during the crisis. The editor had "supported Akintola's fundamental stand that the interest of the Yoruba was best served by participating in the Federal Government." This may have influenced his "editorial policy direction of the *Daily Times*" (p. 146), towards abstaining from editorials and reports on the reinstatement of Akintola without recourse to the democratic process of election in 1963. The *Daily Times* thus failed to exercise editorial independence, but supported or condoned the stifling of opposition. The foreign-owned newspaper may have played safe in its business interest, but it thereby failed to watchdog and gate-keep the realm to facilitate the deepening of democratic culture and sustenance of opposition politics in Nigeria.

Nor did the *West African Pilot* fare better; it played a deeply partisan role which in no way furthered the deepening of democratic politics in which the opposition was cast in the role of a credible alternative to the government in power. In doing this, it deployed screaming headlines in furtherance of sensationalism, thereby befuddling the issues in the crisis, as it was blown in all directions by the political gymnastics of the NCNC. In fact, it had presented the Action Group crisis as a war of supremacy between Awolowo and his main challenger,

Akintola in which the latter was bound to suffer a hopeless defeat. On May 11, 1962, its headline, "Awo to Fight to Bitterest End/ AG 'War' No 2" was authoritative that Awolowo was resolute about enforcing party supremacy on the government and its functionaries who were elected on Action Group platform. The report accurately predicted the breakup of the party, with the support of the NPC by Akintola and his supporters, who it categorically reported on May 12, 1962, would be expelled from the AG. The paper's report at the early stage of the crisis thus reflected NCNC's loathe of party indiscipline which it had epitomized for much of its existence since the 1940s. Therefore, Akintola's dismissal as AG deputy leader and premier, actions which he successfully resisted, attracted the *Pilot's* front page report on May 21, 1962. The report was to the effect that Akintola had been worsted in his political duel with his party leader.

However, when the NCNC abandoned its support for party supremacy and sought to capitalize on the crisis to form the regional government (Mackintosh, 1966, p. 448), the *Pilot* gave prominence to this new reality in its headline on May 22, 1962: "Crisis: Zik flying in/ NCNC wades into crisis/ west is no exclusive property of Action Group". This report emphasized NCNC's demand for the dissolution of the Western House of Assembly, based on its assumption that it would form the subsequent government of the region. This report was complemented with an editorial, echoing NCNC's position that "Western Nigeria does not belong to

the Action Group alone", and given that the regional government was no longer stable, "we must all go to the polls and purify ourselves before the voters". Thus, on May 26, 1962 the *Pilot's* report of the May 25, 1962 fighting in the Western Nigeria legislature emphasized the NCNC's desire, according to the Eastern regional Premier, Michael Okpara, to "Take over West".

Thus the *Pilot* supported the emergency regulations in its editorial of May 31, 1962 when the federal government took over the regional government, ostensibly to ensure "peace, order and good government", given "the absence of a duly constituted Government in Western Nigeria" (The Federal Ministry of Information, 1963, p. 2167). But it did a volte-face in another editorial of September 10, 1962. In the latter, it noted that the prime minister declared the state of emergency due to violent disagreements among politicians and not as a result of any break down of law and order in Western Nigeria. Indeed, the political party newspaper type, the *Pilot*, even if not officially owned by the NCNC, sacrificed professional standards and ethics for blind support of partisan political goals. Thus, contrary to the dictates of the normative theory, it failed to properly inform, enlighten and educate its readers on the crisis of far reaching significance that cast a dark shadow on the prospects of democracy in Nigeria. The *Pilot*, in fact, bears out King's (1967) assertion that partisan newspapers, even in Britain up to 1965, were sycophantic (p. 91); they also did the work of parties for them, including

challenging the arguments of the opposition (Seymour-Ure, 1974, p. 230).

The government-owned *Nigerian Morning Post* lacked the autonomy to carve a niche for itself by challenging the pervasive undemocratic norms characteristic of the politics of the period. Thus it played a sycophantic role in defense of Nigeria's prime minister and the dominant, NPC faction of the coalition federal government of Nigeria. It thus made no contributions to the advancement of democracy. In fact, it presented narrow and bland perspectives of the issues in a way that tended to ridicule the opposition, and thereby failed to empower and facilitate an all-inclusive participation in the democratic governance of the period, through dialogue. In fact, like the political party newspaper type, the government-owned *Nigerian Morning Post* made effective use of its attachment to politicians. It viewed the Action Group crisis from the perspective of the federal coalition government in a way that, contrary to government's publicized claims, it failed "to produce adequate coverage of differing views" (The Federal Ministry of Information, 1963, p. 1469). The *Nigerian Morning Post* front-page report of May 11, 1962 presented the crisis as 'a dispute' exacerbated by Awolowo's dictatorial tendencies over the control of the party and the Western Nigeria Government. It relied on Akintola and his supporters for its authoritative reports and pronouncements on the crisis. It, therefore, provided its readers with the insider information that the two feuding groups were irreconcilable and that

the crisis would run its course. It disclosed in its report of May 12, 1962, that Akintola was ready to go the whole hog, with NPC's support to triumph over Awolowo, in the event of any attempt either to dissolve the regional legislature or expel him from the party. This report provided an insight into the dynamics that ignited and sustained the crisis, namely an inchoate rapprochement between the Akintola-led faction of the AG and the NPC faction of the federal coalition government, which would materialize in the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) in 1964. Obviously utilizing its connections to the two parties in the coalition government, the paper, like the *Pilot*, insightfully brought to the benefit of its readers NCNC's schemes, being the opposition party, to exploit the intra party crisis to position itself to form the new government of the region. However, the paper betrayed its partisanship on June 1, 1962, when its back page report of the arrival of a sole administrator in Ibadan to commence the six-month period of emergency, was captioned "Day of joy".

The anti-Awolowo stance of the *Morning Post* was palpably advertised in a column "Giants in Chains", introduced on May 23, 1962 and written by its editor, Abiodun Aloba. In what foreshadowed the imprisonment of the Action Group Giants of Awolowo and his lieutenants the columnist ridiculed Awolowo and his new ideology of democratic socialism. This was complemented with uncomplimentary editorials which not only justified the declaration of a state of emergency, but regretted, on May 26, 1962, that the

dissolution of the democratic institutions of Western Nigeria was delayed by constitutional niceties. Thus, its editorial of May 29, 1962 enjoined parliamentarians attending the emergency session of Nigeria's House of Representatives to admit "The Solemn Truth" that law and order had broken down in the region, and authorize a state of emergency and drastic measures which might be viewed as making sacrificial lambs of the people of Western Nigeria. On June 2, 1962, the newspaper capped its partisanship with an editorial, "Let's count our blessings" in which it celebrated "The misfortunes of the Action Group," due to the imposition of a state of emergency on Western Nigeria.

The newspaper's poor performance was a sad reflection on the journalism profession in Nigeria, given that at inception the *Morning Post* paraded among its board of directors some of the finest journalists in Nigeria. Notable among these were its chairman, board of directors H. O. Davies, who was former general secretary of the defunct pioneer, nationalist Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), as well as foundation business manager and columnist of the *Daily Service*, NYM's organ; M. C. K. Ajuluchukwu, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Sunday Post*, who had earlier edited the *West African Pilot* during the period 1951-54; Increase Coker, former editor, *West African Pilot* who had also served as publicity officer in the colonial public relations office by 1950, and Abiodun Aloba, ex-Zikist (Mordi, 2011, p. 205), foundation editor-in-chief, *Morning Post*. The

federal government had published the *Post* newspaper to publicize Nigeria to the world and counter severe criticisms of its policies by the local press which the government claimed had deployed "every journalistic artifice to make a laughing stock" of it in the eyes of Nigerians (Coker, 1968, p. 62). No doubt, the newspaper reflected and purveyed the intentions of the federal government of Nigeria to clamp down on the opposition so early in Nigeria's democratic experience, but with a zealotry that was outside the bounds of journalistic practice.

On its part, the pro-AG *Daily Express* played an undistinguished partisan role that was not geared towards strengthening consensus and participatory democracy in the tension-packed, divisive and highly volatile politics of Western Nigeria. Instead, it sought to garner support and sympathy for Awolowo, and slanted its reports and editorials in those directions. Its report on May 15, 1962 of the dismissal of Awolowo's loyalists from the board of the WNDC was thus presented as an affront on party supremacy, which the paper pilloried in its editorial as constituting an act against Yoruba solidarity. Its headlines of May 12-18, 1962 thus gave prominence to support for party supremacy by sundry groups. Its editorial of May 17, 1962 therefore summed the issues in the crisis as a "Matter of discipline" and recommended disciplinary actions against the Western region premier. Olabisi Onabanjo, Awolowo-loyalist member of the regional legislature who was a seasoned journalist writing as *Aiyekoto* (the parrot), complemented the editorial

with a chastisement of the premier. In subsequent editorials of May 19-21, 1962, the *Daily Express* consolidated its judgment that Akintola was guilty of indiscipline for challenging party supremacy, and, so, deserved the severest disciplinary action. In the same vein, on May 23, 1962, the paper gave prominence to the Eastern region Premier Okpara's condemnation of Akintola for defying his purported sack by the governor of the Western region. Conversely, support of Akintola by the Northern region Premier Ahmadu Bello was deprecated by the newspaper, on May 21, 1962, as "Sardauna's evidence", which it asserted was motivated by narrow considerations of political gains, instead of the unity and stability of Nigeria. Accordingly, its report of May 26, 1962 gave prominence to the "fighting in West House of Assembly". It focused on the role of the opposition NCNC members in frustrating the sitting of the regional parliament, and the Eastern region premier's call for the takeover of the Government of Western Nigeria. It editorialized that the "Dangerous precedent" presaged "the beginning of the end of parliamentary democracy in the country". "A Hush Hush Parliament/federal Government emergency shock order" headline of May 29, 1962 which it characterized the emergency session of the federal parliament to approve emergency regulations on Western Nigeria was thus meant to complement its position in its editorial for the day that it was a wrong step. The right step to take, it admonished, was for any party seeking power to actualize its ambition through the ballot. Balewa

had hinted about the declaration of a state of emergency in Western Nigeria in his broadcast to the nation, which the *Daily Express* in its headline of May 28, 1962 had characterized, using AG's phrase, as "The great conspiracy." But a prominent AG lawyer in answer to a question "Can Balewa sack Western cabinet?" had written in the *Daily Express* of May 28, 1962 that no emergency situation existed to warrant such measure, except the NCNC which was scheming to assume temporary power. This latter position was complemented by the newspaper's editorial, "Democracy on Trial" to canvass the fair argument that law and order did not break down in Western Nigeria. Rather the Western House incident was premeditated by Akintola and his supporters, with the active connivance of the NCNC and the prime minister, to impose Akintola, and brought chaos upon Western Nigeria. Its editorial of May 31, 1962 thus surmised that the imposition of a state of emergency on Western Nigeria was premeditated, unwarranted and a great misuse of power.

The *Daily Express's* partisan role in the AG crisis derived from its close attachment to the person of Awolowo and the Action Group, whose members controlled the newspaper's editorial policy. For instance, Amalgamated Press which in August 1960 partnered with Roy Thomson to publish the *Express* had as its Editorial Director, Victor Olabisi Onabanjo, a professional journalist who had trained on government scholarship at the Regent Street Polytechnic, London, 1950-51. He had returned to Nigeria in

1952 to work briefly with the Gaskiya Corporation, publishers of the colonial government-owned weekly *Citizen* (Mordi, 2011, p. 205). As from 1954, he had worked for the Action Group mouthpiece, *Daily Service* where his *Aiyekoto* column brought him to limelight. Grant (1971) noted that the relationship of journalists working for pro- AG newspapers to the party, citing the examples of Onabanjo and Lateef Jakande, was "one of extreme loyalty to the party" (p. 126). They were, like Onabanjo who during the period was an Action Group member of the Western House of Assembly, active in politics, even though committed to journalism. The partisan involvement of the newspaper, however, colored its perspectives and reportage of the crisis and partly exposed its leading lights to political persecution in the post- emergency years.

The West Regional Elections. The only direct beneficiary of the Action Group crisis was Akintola who was reinstated to his position as premier, six months after the declaration of a state of emergency over Western Nigeria. The opportunity for Premier Akintola to validate his claim to the leadership of the Western region through the democratic process was, however, provided in 1965. The opposition had expected too that the West regional parliamentary election of October 11, 1965 offered them an opportunity to wrest power from him. It is noteworthy that the press still functioned as instruments of the political class rather than the Fourth Estate. The press thus failed to play any role in furtherance of the interests

of the governed, as mediators of Nigeria's fragile democratic process

For instance, the *Daily Times* failed to broaden and diversify its editorial policy, which in its economic interest, would have widened its audience, and readership base. Rather it maintained its policy of editorial abstinence, in spite of the regional government's ban on all public processions and meetings, except those of a religious nature, during the period of campaigns for the election. It was left for Peter Enahoro, the newspaper's editor-in-chief to criticize in his customized Peter Pan column the ban on procession and acts of gerrymandering. Of note was his November 3, 1965 lamentation that "recent maddening events in Western Nigeria" constituted a "tragedy that has befallen Africa's lone glimmer of hope for democracy". He had warned that "if you destroy the ballot box you leave the field clear to the people to seek other means of restitution". This was his reaction both to the violence that had greeted the electoral outcome and NNDP's anti-Igbo pamphleteering which he believed was aimed to reduce Nigeria to "warring confederate states".

The masses of the region, including AG supporters who were convinced that Akintola had rigged himself back to office, had embarked on an orgy of violence against the premier's supporters. The newspaper's editorial of October 25, 1965 urging all to tread the "Path of Peace", was of no effect. Thus the *Daily Times'* editorials of December 4, and 16, 1965, expressed alarm at the "violence, arson and murder" which

had erupted in Western Nigeria on a “scale never before known in Nigeria”. It had recommended an “All Party Government” as a stopgap measure till new elections were held “in obvious fairness”, preceded by the prime minister’s intervention to end lawlessness and violence in the region. This was a circuitous way of recommending the imposition of a state of emergency in the region. It is instructive, however, that the newspaper tucked in its inside pages news of widespread arson, violence, killings, including dousing of victims with petrol and setting them ablaze (operation *wet -ie*) as well as demolition of houses of Akintola’s supporters which continued up to the eve of the military seizure of power on January 15, 1966. This may be explained by the need not to present the true but embarrassing picture of an unstable polity to visiting Commonwealth leaders who were expected in Nigeria at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in January 1966. Yet, the evidence is overwhelming that it was the partisan involvements of the “editorial staff, reporters and sub-editors” of the newspaper which so compromised and eroded its independence that “political party functionaries had advance knowledge of the contents” of *Daily Times* of Nigeria publications (Jose, 1987, p. 194). In fact, amidst rumors of an impending military coup d’état the *Daily Times* of December 4, 1965 had editorialized on the “Army and Politics”. The editorial had justified military intervention if politicians upset the balance and gave the military an opportunity “to assume the role of politicians...” The

newspaper’s editorial of January 18, 1966, welcoming the military seizure of power on account of politicians’ excesses which had constrained the flourishing of parliamentary democracy in Nigeria can, therefore, only be appreciated in the context of “a newspaper which was foreign-owned and somehow always found reason for supporting the Establishment” (Enahoro, 1968, pp. 29-30).

On its part, the *Pilot* intensified and made even more brazen its partisan role during the 1965 Western Nigeria parliamentary elections and its aftermath. It failed to deploy the weapon of objectivity to serve the public good, choosing, instead, to promote the journalism of bias which robbed it of much credibility. McQuail (2013) as well as Schudson and Anderson (2008) note that media objectivity enhances public support for the media of mass communication by increasing their credibility, reliability and capacity to promote trust between the governors and the governed. Credibility gap between the media and its variegated readerships robs it of the legitimacy so essential to facilitate its role in the advancement of the democratic process.

A perusal of the pages of the *West African Pilot*, including editorials conveyed the erroneous impression that the 1965 parliamentary election in Western Nigeria was intraparty, UPGA affair. It retained its characteristic sensational, screamer headlines in which it created tension, even before the post-election violence erupted in the region, while in reporting the violence it painted the picture of a civil war. Not only did it deprecate the NNDP in its editorials,

but in its letter to the editor column it was obsessed with why UPGA must win. Thus its October 11, 1965, election -day front-page report on "West goes to the polls today, decision day for Westerners" was its appeal to the electorate to "Vote the UPGA". The report was complemented with a list of UPGA candidates in which it literally announced the election results in favor of UPGA. The day's editorial was the *Pilot's* "plaintive summons", on all eligible voters to "vote for UPGA". Its lead story of October 13, 1965, "UPGA forms West Govt/ Sequel to 68-25 seats victory over NNDP" was to report that Dauda Adegbenro, the UPGA candidate had constituted "an interim government of Western Nigeria", while describing the official result in favor of NNDP as false, and "No Victory". Above all, its editorials during the post-election violence were a singsong about the urgency and imperative of the declaration of a state of emergency in Western Nigeria. Its editorial of November 3, 1965 was characteristic, namely "emergency, emergency, and yet more stringent state of emergency is the only reasonable answer" to the "violence, arson, looting" and the general state of lawlessness in Western Nigeria.

Obviously, the *West African Pilot's* reports and editorials on the parliamentary elections and its aftermath drew attention to the enormity of the crisis. But this was done with the narrow objective of ensuring Akintola's loss of power willy-nilly either to the opposition, or to a sole administrator. When this failed it withdrew its editorials and focused its headlines on sensationalizing

the continuing violent eruptions in parts of the region. Although it subsequently stopped reporting the crisis and began, like the *Daily Times*, to support Nigeria's preparations to host the Commonwealth Heads of Governments' Conference, it still gave prominence to NCNC and University of Lagos students' demonstrations against the timing of the conference. Thus the *Pilot* conveyed the depth of popular anger, mirrored by the widespread postelection violence and was not therefore complicit in the loss of life caused by the failure of government to adopt timely, remedial measures as previously generalized (Chick, 1971, p. 121).

On the other hand, the federal government -owned *Morning Post* perpetuated its role as government megaphone. It thereby failed to play any noteworthy role as a medium of debate, persuasion and consensus building demanded by the fractious ethno-regional politics of the period. Not concerned with profit margins, given that it was funded by the federal government, its partisan ties could not be weakened by market forces-induced independent journalism. Thus it sided with the West regional government of Akintola which also enjoyed federal government's support during the 1965 election and its aftermath, and failed to report the crisis. For instance, it had justified the pre-election ban on public meetings and processions, which it blamed on the electorate's previous acts of violence. Besides, unlike the *West African Pilot* which had canvassed support for the UPGA on election- day, the *Morning Post* articulated

“why the NNA must get in.” It also reported the killing of an electoral officer allegedly by UPGA supporters, as a further justification of the regional government’s outlawing of public processions, and a strong basis for government to stamp out such acts of brigandage by all means, including reimposing Akintola on his people. Its report of October 20, 1965 emphasized Balewa’s assertion that the post-election violence, which in any case it claimed had been stamped out, was incited from the Eastern region. Therefore, it gave prominence in its report of November 3, 1965 to messages of solidarity by emirs and chiefs of the Northern region for the prime minister.

The newspaper’s attitude was guided by its stand that the election, against all known evidence, was free, fair and won by the NNDP. The evidence shows that the election was characterized by massive rigging and other forms of irregularities, including the deliberate refusal to count the votes and declare results. A notable case was that of the Egba South 1 Constituency where the votes of the UPGA candidate, Dauda Adegbenro, were not counted by November 4, 1965, over three weeks after the election. There was also the arbitrary return of 16 NNDP candidates as unopposed, even where the opposition fielded or was obstructed from fielding candidates. The NNDP had proceeded to singlehandedly form the government of the region amidst widespread killings and destruction of lives and property, during which the police and the federal government lost the nerves to maintain law and order.

The government of Western Nigeria had, in the circumstance, imposed curfews in five districts of the region on November 5, 1965 (Ojigbo, 1979, pp. 87-90). Yet, the prime minister told the *Daily Times* of November 17, 1965 that:

even if the situation in any part of the country was such that there were killings, it would still have to be established that there was fear of two Premiers exercising governmental powers in the region concerned before the Federal Government could step in to declare a state of emergency... there is a sharp contrast between the events in 1962 and the present political situation in the region. In 1962, it was a case of two rival Premiers and two governors, and the Federal Government had no alternative than to declare a state of emergency. With the present situation there is a legally constituted Government in the region even though there might be political disagreement.

So discredited was the election, with its attendant bloodshed that the chairman of the electoral body, Eyo Esua, publicly questioned its outcome. For his action, the *Morning Post* in various editorials, November 21-28, 1965 embarked on “Eyo Esua Must Go” campaign. Esua’s subsequent resignation thus came as a welcome relief to the newspaper which continued to propagate the false impression that there was peace in the region. Such was the level of its self-delusion into which the

regional premier and the prime minister were sucked that the military coup d'état of January 15, 1966 caught the newspaper napping. Thus the newspaper had reported in its first edition of January 17, 1966 that "2 Days after Mutiny/ Federal Troops in Full Control". Its second edition reflected the reality that "Army Takes Charge," but the *Morning Post* maintained its editorial support for the NPC faction of the coalition government until it reported on January 19, 1966 that "NPC give support to Ironsi." It is instructive that the *Morning Post's* editorial of January 18, 1966 blamed the military intervention on politicians who had shown "contempt for public life" and behaved "like spoilt, naughty children." It particularly castigated the "former regime" for overlooking a groundswell of discontent from the few who had dared to speak truth to power. It found the ousted regime guilty of "corruption, graft, nepotism, tribalism", and concluded that Nigerians were "glad and grateful" about the new dawn in their country. It is apt to add that the *Morning Post* was characterized by a blind and fawning support, defense and justification of all the failings which it had blamed solely on the political class. Obviously, the editor of the newspaper failed to exercise his discretion as a professional journalist in the discharge of his duty. Indeed, the *Nigerian Morning Post* was characterized by much partisanship and sycophancy in its editorial policy towards the federal government vis-à-vis the opposition, to the detriment of the journalism profession in Nigeria (Echeruo, 1974, p. 52).

Like the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Express* failed to serve as an arena for public debate and persuasion as well as an instrument to foster a pluralist democratic ideal in furtherance of its expected function as the guardian of the people's liberty. Rather it fully supported Akintola during the elections and the post-election crisis. In fact, the two newspapers adopted the same position that the ban on public procession was designed to deter political violence, and therefore welcome. However, unlike the *Morning Post*, it gave space to the preparations of both alliances of parties for the election as well as UPGA's condemnation of "West bill on nomination" and "Security law for Unopposed", in its reports of September 17-18, 1965. But its editorial of September 18, 1965 calling for peace in the region insisted that no law was too harsh to disarm political thugs. It similarly defended the law on unopposed candidates, which it viewed as undemocratic but welcome measure to deter political killings. Unlike the *Morning Post*, it also gave equal front page coverage to the manifestoes of the parties, which it reprinted side-by-side in its inside pages on October 7, 1965. Its report on Election Day of the killing of an electoral officer, which incident it viewed, like the *Morning Post*, as a justification for the ban on public meetings formed the subject of its editorial, "Western Nigeria first". The editorial had urged politicians to eschew open violence and to accept the verdict of the electorate at the polls.

This inclination of the *Daily Express* towards editorial independence, however, gave way to unbridled support of government in the election aftermath. For instance, it upheld Akintola's victory at the polls despite massive electoral irregularities, and reminded all, in the face of the post-election violence, that government had a duty to maintain "Law and order in the West." It therefore urged the government to employ every means at its disposal to hunt down the sponsors of the "political disorders". This was its endorsement of the prime minister's claim that the violence was instigated from outside the Western region. Against this background, its report of November 19, 1965 gave prominence to the prime minister's assertion that there was "No case for Emergency in the West." It also, like the *Morning Post*, chastised Eyo Esua, in its editorial of November 22, 1965 for his letter to the West regional governor in which he complained about impediments to his electoral body's credible and efficient performance of its duties. Yet, the *Daily Express* of November 1, 1965 had declared itself an "independent newspaper" while it rebuffed NCNC accusation of partiality in its reports and comments on the crisis as "political blackmail."

The evidence shows that the *Daily Express* had become apprehensive about its future profitability and viability, on account of its stance on the post-election crisis. It was caught between the political machinations of the parties contending for power in the region and had attempted to steer a via media, as reflected in its reports before and

after the election. Such a course had exposed the *Express* publications to pressures from both sides without necessarily adversely affecting its circulation and financial position (Grant, 1971, p. 100), partly causing Thomson to cease the publication of the *Express* newspapers on November 23, 1965 (Agbaje, 1992, pp. 171, 174). Barton (1979) provided further evidence that Nigeria's prime minister's pressures were ultimately responsible for the character and sudden closure of the *Express* newspapers in 1965. In collaboration with Anthony Head, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria he had concluded arrangements to acquire the *Express* and merge it with the *Post* to produce the *Post Express*. *The merger was conceived* as a way to counter the hostile disposition of Action Group newspapers, as well as the *Daily Times* Group which he could not easily manipulate (pp.39-42). The assassination of Balewa in the January 1966 coup d'état, however, aborted the project.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian press, contrary to conventional wisdom on the subject, did not watchdog or gate-keep the realm. It, therefore, contributed little to deepen democratic ethos during the first quinquennium of Nigeria's independence. The press arena paraded Nigeria's seasoned journalists who had cut their wisdom teeth in journalism practice under colonial rule. But the experience which they had accumulated under colonial rule for which the Nigerian press gained a reputation for its competitiveness, irreverence, vibrancy, variety of political

content, pungency of views, independent journalism and editorial independence was not brought to bear in the performance of their roles during the period covered by this study. Instead, the press generally acted as megaphones or repeater stations of Nigeria's feuding politicians. They were too attached to members of the political class or had been too co-opted into that class to perform any role which would cast them in the mold of guardians of the realm who exposed the governments and politicians to the public gaze and independent, non-partisan criticisms. In the circumstance, they failed to facilitate information flow between the governors and the governed, and could therefore not provide a medium of debate of government policies. Nor could they serve as credible communication channels through which politicians could solicit for votes by offering their programs to and providing the people with a platform to make informed choices. Rather, they danced where politicians led them in their reportage and comments on the issues that dominated the political arena. This tendency was clearly illustrated by the Action Group crisis and its aftermath as well as the undemocratic manifestations that characterized the 1965 parliamentary elections in Western Nigeria. Indeed, the press served as the propaganda instrument, in varying degrees, of the feuding, power hungry, ethno-regionally oriented politicians of the day. It did not represent or give expressions to the voices of the governed, or advance the cause and interest of the marginalized, and thus

negated the normative media theory. This study thus validates Bretton (1962)'s assertion that the competition which existed in the Nigerian press was not professional, but related, instead, to "political party propaganda function and thus not designed to inform, enlighten or educate" (p. 107). The evidence shows that the media was neither democratized nor contributed to the achievement of democracy during the period, but was dependent on society which it also mirrored. Western media theories related to democracy, including McQuail's normative theory as opposed to the professional or historical approach borne out of the African experience, are, therefore, inadequate to fully comprehend and authoritatively establish the trends and patterns of press' contribution to the democratic process. This study of Nigeria's First Republic has hopefully illustrated the point.

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