The Radical Press and Security Agencies in Nigeria: Beyond Hegemonic Polarities

Wale Adebanwi

Abstract: The dominant trend in the literature on civil society in Africa, particularly in the context of undemocratic regimes, assumes that civil society activists (including progressive, radical, or guerrilla journalists) are committed only to counteracting the preeminence of a repressive state. Within such a paradigm, evidence of collaborations between agents of the state and elements within civil society—particularly in the interest of advancing political liberation, democracy, justice, and equity—tend to be understated, if not erased altogether. Based on ethnographic details of secret collaborations between the Nigerian security agencies and radical journalists in the fight against military fascism, this article argues that the commonly assumed division between the state and the media is in fact breached regularly in practice. Such evidence should draw scholarly attention to a largely neglected area of research on state–media relations in Africa: the penetration of the apparatuses of power and repression by their targets and victims.

Résumé: La tendance dominante dans la littérature existante sur la société civile en Afrique, particulièrement dans le contexte des régimes non démocratiques, suppose que les activistes civils (y compris les journalistes progressistes, radicaux, ou de la guérilla) sont engagés seulement dans la lutte contre l'état et ses actes de répression. Dans un tel paradigme, l'évidence de collaboration entre des agents de l'état et des civils—en particulier pour faire progresser la libération politique, la démocratie, la justice et l'égalité—a tendance à être minimisée, voire passée sous

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African Studies Review, Volume 54, Number 3 (December 2011), pp. 45–69

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https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2011.0056 Published online by Cambridge University Press

silence. Après examen de rapports détaillés sur des collaborations secrètes entre des membres de la sécurité nigérienne et des journalistes radicaux dans la lutte contre le fascisme militaire, cet article soutient que la division présumée entre l'état et les médias est en fait rompue régulièrement dans la pratique. Une telle évidence devrait attirer l'attention des érudits vers un sujet de recherche largement négligé sur les relations entre l'état et les médias en Afrique: la pénétration des appareils du pouvoir et la répression perpétuée par leurs cibles et victimes.

In the literature on the media and democracy in Africa, there is a great deal of evidence, and even praise, for the role of the media (including progressive, radical, and guerrilla journalists) in breaking what Kasoma (1995:543) called "the myth" that dictatorial regimes in Africa are "invincible and could not be criticised" and for creating a forum for promoting dissent against the established order. Examples of countries where this has been evident include Nigeria, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana.[1]

However, in the analyses on the adversarial relationship between the state and the media, few scholars have focused directly on the security/intelligence network. Even though the secret world of security agents is often a prominent subject of interest in studies of state-sponsored repression, it is often subsumed under the rubric of "government" or the "state" in studies of state–media relations and in the larger scholarship on democracy or personal rule in Africa. And some of the works on Africa that refer to the security/intelligence network in the context of democracy and state–civil society relations, as well as the specific literature on state–media relations, also tend to concentrate on the roles these agencies play in suppressing democratization.[2]

At the same time, while the scholarly literature continues to expand the focus on the role of the media in Africa's democratic struggle, and the literature on civil society also has had a lot to say about the media in Africa in the last two decades, the dominant strand assumes that civil society—in the dominant associational sense in which it is often expressed in the literature (see Obadare 2005)—exists basically to counteract the preeminence of the state.[3] Within such a paradigm, and in the resulting accounts, *collaboration* between agents of a repressive state and elements within a combative civil society, represented by the progressive, radical, and guerrilla media and journalists—particularly in matters relating to political liberation, democracy, justice, and equity—are understated, if not completely erased. In this sense, what is often overlooked is the sometimes subversive collaboration between the subaltern victims of governmentality and the elements that constitute part of the very instrumentalities of oppressive governmentality.

In this article, I suggest that this oversight in the literature is a consequence of the failure of scholarship, for the most part, to come to terms with the theoretical problematic of the state itself (see Brown 1992:12), the

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2011.0056 Published online by Cambridge University Press

implications of this failure for a *relational* understanding of the postcolonial state, and the resulting habituation to conventional polarities in the understanding of African social realities. There is an assumption in the literature on state–civil society interface, in general, and state–media relations, in particular, that the state in Africa is a solid and unitary power structure. On the contrary, as I try to illustrate here with the example of the complex relationship between security agencies and officials and journalists, what we call the state, in Africa and elsewhere, is, as Brown (1992:12) says, "an incoherent, multifaceted ensemble of power relations." Even though the state remains the strongest "apparent vehicle . . . of massive domination," it is in reality "a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques, an ensemble of discourses, rules, and practices, cohabiting in limited, tension-ridden, often contradictory relation with one another." As Jonathan Spencer (2007:101) captures it, "the [state's] appearance of order or unity is never more than situational and ephemeral." Therefore, even within hegemonic regimes, we must recognize different *complexes* of power which (re)produce and provoke different kinds of relationships with counterhegemonic structures, processes, and agents. The significance of this recognition for comparative research in the field of state–media relations should not be understated.

However, because such nuanced and complex relationships are often simplified or overlooked, the narratives of the media in the context of civil and democratic struggles in Africa hardly go beyond cataloguing, explaining, and condemning the repression carried out by the security apparatuses of the state and undemocratic and oppressive regimes.[4] Thus the literature has had little or nothing to say about secret collaborations—direct and indirect—for the advancement of democracy and human liberty between institutions and elements within civil society such as the media and one of the most critical agencies of the state in the latter's hegemonic and repressive projects, that is, the intelligence/security network—including the secret service, the police, and the army. This seems to reflect a limited recognition, within studies of state–media relations in the postcolony, of what Sherry B. Ortner (2006:7) describes as "ways in which domination itself [is] always riven with ambiguities, contradictions, and lacunae," including its vulnerability "to the pressures and instabilities inherent in any situation of unequal power."

The reluctance to explicitly recognize this fact, though, is not altogether unconnected with the reluctance, if not refusal, of most journalists or civil society activists to disclose the existence, let alone the details, of secret collaborations with or assistance received from, elements within the state. This is understandable because, apart from the fact that some of the details may still endanger those security agents in the not yet fully democratized states of Africa, the very nature of the interactions has meant that such confidentiality still needs to be maintained and protected, even beyond the era of vicious dictatorship.

Perhaps, this lacuna in the literature is also a function of the limited anthropological research on state–media relations in Africa.[5] Anthropo-

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2011.0056 Published online by Cambridge University Press

logical accounts of media–social relations, in general, and media–state relations, in particular, can be quite revealing beyond the hackneyed terms of "free press," "respect for the rule of law," and so on, which are often employed in writing on this relationship in Africa and the postcolony in general, by scholars who are not anthropologists. Ethnographic studies of the media by anthropologists in Africa, such as Jennifer Hasty, provide more complicated representations of the reality of state–media relations beyond the received clichés. This is an important point, given the long-drawn-out controversy within the discipline of anthropology on the propriety of the specific study of the mass media by anthropologists—and, among other issues, the implications of such a study for anthropology's methodological "fundamentalism," that is, ethnographic "thick description" (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005:1–2). However, the mass media have since moved from being a "taboo topic for anthropology" (Ginsburg 2005:17) into a new era in which some of the most robust scholarly debates about the media are led by anthropologists.[6] Thus anthropology now provides media studies with the opportunity of harnessing the "potentially infinite contextualism" that ethnography provides (Hobart 2005:26, following Ang 1996). However, while much has been written on how the media, particularly the progressive, guerrilla, and prodemocracy press, faced down particular autocratic governments despite proscription, experiences of detention and imprisonment, and even assassinations, and how journalists pushed the frontiers of democracy and freedom in Africa,[7] little has been said about the "positive" collusions between elements in the media and the state that facilitated the exposés, exclusives, and revelations in the press—relationships which were not only critical to unveiling the particular cases of corruption and violence that were integral to the structures of postcolonial authoritarianism, but also defined the processes of mobilization for the demolition of the credibility and legitimacy of authoritarian regimes and states in Africa.

I seek to uncover particular instances of this pattern of confidential state–media relationships and to point to what such collaborative relationships in the struggle for democracy signify for our understanding of the meshing of, or contradictions in, hegemony and counterhegemony in the postcolony. I argue that in a specific context in which the "counter" is already inscribed within hegemony, we are confronted with a critical trespass that does not lend itself to traditional polarities in the understanding of social formations and social forces in the postcolony. The questions this raises are: Beyond external pressures and the manifest public activities of existing civil society, what forms of secret collaborations and connections between the agents of the state and the media in Africa make the resilience and eventual triumph of the prodemocracy forces over state repression and autocracy possible? What are the means by which African journalists in the more critical wings of the press protect themselves from the onslaught of the state and create the capacity to be, at critical times, a step ahead of the state's repressive measures and plans?

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Nigeria is a good laboratory for examining these questions for many reasons. The country hosts a dynamic and vibrant press that serves the highest concentration of black people in the world. Nigeria also has had the most successful radical press in the democratization struggle in Africa, and perhaps the most resilient. Since the inception of the Nigerian press in 1859, Nigerian journalists have persisted even in the context of poor training, poor pay, poor sales, political corruption, proscriptions, and even assassinations and media house bombings. None of these crushing challenges has been sufficiently devastating to deter Nigeria's crusading journalists from confronting the state and its agents, particularly during the many years of the struggle for independence and later the struggle for democratic rule under the military.

This latter struggle, described by some as "the second liberation," was a struggle against the ambitious soldiers (a class described by Ali Mazrui [1973] as the "lumpen-militariat") who hijacked power from the mid-1980s onward, and it redefined Nigeria in many ways. The aggressively upwardly-mobile members of the military of the 1980s and 1990s Nigeria were the worst specimens of the phenomenon.[8] As symbolized by General Sani Abacha (1993–98), the crass, semiliterate, reclusive, and murderous general—described by one newsmagazine as a "Vagabond in Power (VIP)" (*TELL*, August 10, 1998)—who seized power in November 1993 and installed the most brutal regime in Nigeria's already brutal political history, the late twentieth-century Nigerian military was not only a threat to the political class and the opposition elements, but also to the continued corporate existence of Nigeria itself. General Abacha had succeeded the slightly less directly brutal, but far more cunning, General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–93).

The struggle against the military, therefore, also redefined the newspaper and newsmagazine press in Nigeria. More than at any other time in the country's history, prodemocracy journalists and their newspapers and newsmagazines became the strongest opposition force to the military regimes, and indeed, they became the pivot on which the larger opposition to military rule and the emergent civil society rotated.[9] For liberal theorists of the media, this centrality and the deep involvement of the press and journalists in the struggle against military rule might constitute actions and activities beyond the normative call of duty. However, for the prodemocracy press and the journalists on the staff of the concerned newspapers, journalistic canons of objectivity and impartiality were sacrificed in what was seen as a struggle to "reclaim" Nigeria from the military marauders who were intent on destroying the country.

Most of the claims in this article are based on my personal experiences as a public affairs (and briefly, guerrilla) journalist for many years in Nigeria as well as the experiences of other journalists and media managers whom I interviewed in the course of fieldwork in Nigeria between 2005 and 2008. I also interviewed a number of intelligence agents on the subject of secret collaborations between journalists and representatives of the security agen-

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2011.0056 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cies. I argue that the data in this article and the theoretical issues that are raised bring a fresh perspective to the subject of state–civil society relations and a fresh analysis of the interactions between the radical press and repressive regimes in Africa.

The Media and (Counter-)Hegemony

> Hegemonies are never total . . . because people always have at least some degrees of "penetration" into the conditions of their domination.
>
> Sherry B.Ortner

While the constructed polarity in the lay and academic literature on state–media relations in Africa—in the context of authoritarian rule—might explain some aspects of the social totality, like all binaries, it overlooks gray areas and complex processes that defy mutually exclusive categorization. The specific Nigerian context is a particular social formation where the state is faced with a formidable opposition media which, despite the powers and violence wielded by the state and its actors, refuses to capitulate—and eventually triumphs—while tapping into the repressive resources of the state for survival.

This article focuses on areas of secret collaboration and functional partnerships that were forged between progressive and radical journalists in the guerrilla press and agents of the Leviathan under a typical African dictatorship. These secret collaborations point to the fragmentation of the hegemonic order and also contest the assumptions of the coherence and solidity of the state. Here I use the experiences of some guerrilla journalists under Nigeria's most vicious dictatorships to illustrate the empirical limits of the theoretical oversimplification of hegemony and counterhegemony in state–civil society relations in the postcolony. I also use the empirical narratives to draw attention to the often unpublicized roles of elements within the postcolonial security and intelligence networks—in a sense, "state's men" (Obadare & Adebanwi 2010:3)—in the internal subversion of dictatorships and the eventual triumph of prodemocracy elements.

While it is possible for the state—given its resources—to patrol the social environment with gargantuan instrumentalities of both repression and enticement, and thus ensure the control of news outlets and the initiation and circulation of information, social forces and institutions also have capacities of inversion and extraversion—for various reasons and through various (dis)guises—to subvert the state, particularly through the state's agencies and personnel. Thus, social forces have the capacity to construct an information-sharing partnership with specific official agents of the state—those upon whom the state also depends for its domination of society and its repression and absorption of contrarian voices and groups.

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2011.0056 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The centrality of communication in the process of hegemony and social domination has already been well articulated in the literature of hegemony, much of which has been dominated by Foucaultian and Gramscian perspectives.[10] Foucault and Gramsci's notions of hegemonic struggle present communication as the outcome of human practices that are struggled over (see Louw 2001:11). While the hegemonic project of the state rests in part on its capacity to control information and communication and impose the state's preferred picture of the world on the public space, counterhegemonic forces contest the space of information and communication in order to project their own picture of the world. Importantly, as Gramsci (1971) instructs, hegemony is, at the core, an "unstable equilibrium," which any ruling class is able to achieve and sustain at particular moments of history. The instability and irregularity of hegemony inscribes in it a dialectical process in which conflict and contradictions exist within, and are (ir)resolvable through the struggle of, opposing forces. While these opposing forces are often understood in the narratives of media–state relations in Africa as mutually exclusive, in particular conjectures of the struggle for democracy they both have their inherent crevices that allow elements within mutually antagonistic institutions to cooperate. This article represents an attempt to highlight such confidential collaborations that limit, yet straddle, the hegemony and counterhegemony dichotomy.

"Sharing" Intelligence: Radical Journalists and Security Agents

As a journalist, I had personal experiences with official and unofficial spies who leaked official secrets to me and my colleagues. Such leakages were symptomatic of the subversion within hegemony and the strategic alliances that journalists can forge with agents of the state. I wish, however, to illustrate these strategic alliances with the experiences of the editors of *TheNEWS* and *TEMPO* magazines, which were far more significant than my own experiences. *TheNEWS* editors had very good and regular access to official intelligence through highly placed elements within the state security agencies. I collected data in Nigeria on the secret collaborations between the editors of the radical—and at a time, underground—magazines and elements within the state apparatuses between 2007 and 2008.

TheNEWS was established in 1993 by five journalists, an accountant, and an ex-student union leader turned businessman. The five journalists—Bayo Onanuga, Dapo Olorunyomi, Femi Ojudu, Kunle Ajibade, and Seye Kehinde—had been at the weekly magazine *African Concord*, owned by a hitherto conservative billionaire publisher, Chief Moshood Abiola. However, these journalists had thoroughly radicalized the magazine and took on Abiola's friend and then military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida. The last straw for the Babangida regime was a damning cover story by Olorunyomi entitled "Has Babangida Given Up?" (*African Concord*, April 13, 1992). The story concluded that the solution Nigerians craved was that

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Babangida step aside for a national conference or a new leadership, asking, "Must Nigeria know a revolution before it knows an ethical order?" The article also asked, "Will the man [Babangida] who has pulverised the civil society and noble institutions [survive]?"

The regime reacted by shutting down the magazine and all other media outlets owned by Abiola. In the attempt to resolve the dispute with his friend, Abiola asked the editors to apologize to the military president, but they refused to do so and resigned. They later founded *TheNEWS* magazine—and then *TEMPO*, when *TheNEWS* was proscribed by the military regime in 1993.

From its inception, the *TheNEWS* was regarded by both its founders and the public as a radical forum for confronting the military regime. This was particularly so because by February 1993, when the magazine debuted, the Babangida regime had become thoroughly discredited since it had, once again, changed its self-appointed terminal date for handing over power to civilians. Also, the regime had been accused in 1986 of assassinating a leading journalist and the editor-in-chief of *Newswatch*, Dele Giwa. Therefore, the relationship between the regime and the press in general, and the radical press in particular, was at best awkward.

Given their pedigree, however, *TheNEWS* editors were not only highly prominent journalists, but also highly respected voices within a nascent civil society that was struggling to build a powerful coalition to end military rule. Announcing the magazine's libertarian commitments in his inaugural editorial (February 15, 1993), the editor-in-chief, Bayo Onanuga, committed it to mounting a creative response to the challenges of the ascendant neofascist military regime and to promoting an ideological vision to oppose the ascendant order (see Adebanwi 2008:20–22). The mobilizational role that the magazine assigned for itself was therefore evident from the beginning. Some of the editors themselves, as they revealed to me during interviews in 2007 and 2008, also had contacts in various civil groups, some of them semi-clandestine, which were fully engaged with challenging the military (interviews with Dapo Olorunyomi, Femi Ojudu, and Idowu Obasa, Lagos, 2007–8). Through these groups, they were also able to gain access to some of the elements within the intelligence community who were supportive of the democratic aspirations of human rights groups. For instance, Olorunyomi and Ojudu were very close to leading human rights activists such as Chief Gani Fawehinmi, the Lagos lawyer and social crusader, Beko Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor and the head of the Campaign for Democracy, and Femi Falana, a lawyer and rights activist.

Barely three months after *TheNEWS* hit the streets, an entire edition of the magazine entitled "Help, Nigeria Is Dying" (May 17, 1993) was seized from the press by the security agencies. The following edition, entitled, "Babangida: Method and Tactics" (May 24, 1993), was even more devastating. In it, the magazine noted:

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> Before [General Babangida] seized power... the conventional wisdom was that Nigeria was too large and complex a country for one man, a soldier or a politician, to dominate completely and put under his thumb.... General Babangida has exploded all such assumptions.... He has gone ahead to amass so much power for himself that he can confidently say, like the invisible French King Louis XVI, "I am the State." His method for domination has come by way of a panoply of stratagems....

In response, security men invaded not only the press, where they impounded more than fifty thousand copies of the magazine, but also the magazine's headquarters, and shut it down. According to Onanuga, "Since inception, *TheNEWS* has been a victim of harassment by all sections of the State Security machinery. The state, it seems, had determined long before our inception that we shall not be allowed to survive—whatever we write. We had been marked down..." (*TheNEWS*, June 1, 1993).

A very significant thing happened, however. The seized copies of the magazine—as well as copies of another radical magazine, *TELL*—found their way to the magazine distributors and vendors, and the copies were sold to the public.[11] As a journalist at this point, I was surprised by Onanuga's claim that every copy of the magazine has been impounded, because I was able to purchase a copy where I lived in Ibadan. While the editors of the magazine claimed that "the security agents have started reaping where they did not sow" (*TheNEWS*, June 1, 1993), it was later revealed that elements within the security services supportive of the democratic aspirations of Nigerians had clandestinely ensured that many of the seized copies of the magazine were delivered to the distributors and vendors.

The most frightening dimension of the harassment and intimidation of the radical press was the promulgation of the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree No. 43 (1993), which criminalized the actions of the radical press and journalists and characterized those activities as a "source of incitement to civil war and physical disintegration" of Nigeria. What this meant was that the radical journalists had to become even more resourceful and also had to be especially wary of the plans and schemes of the dictatorship. When *TheNEWS* was proscribed by the military regime in mid-1993, the magazine editors went underground "in a courageous act of dissent" (Olorunyomi 1996:62), and then immediately produced another weekly, called *Tempo*. *Tempo* marked the beginning of the era of guerrilla or underground journalism in late twentieth-century Nigeria. The magazine's contributing editor, Adebayo Williams, a literary theorist who was teaching at the Obefami Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, described *Tempo* as representing "a defining moment in Nigerian journalism, nay history. It was a moment of courage, high patriotism and selfless nobility" (*Tempo*, Dec. 23, 1993).

For Campbell (2003:32) "guerrilla journalism" generally represents "a dramatic, if unorthodox, example of the activist, even militant role that often has defined newspapers, both clandestine and above ground, in

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Africa." In the specific case of *Tempo*, as Olorunyomi (1996:62) commented,

> So electrifying and dazzling was this experience that [the magazine] rendered the security institutions dumb and helpless. For the civil society, it vividly illustrated the power of information in the assault against a decadent dictatorship. So paranoid was the regime that it started arresting people caught reading either *TheNews* or *Tempo*.

What Olorunyomi failed to add in this piece, which he and his colleagues later disclosed to me during fieldwork, was that rendering security institutions "dumb and helpless" was not accomplished without the assistance of elements within the security institutions themselves. Even as Babangida was fuming in a national broadcast about "the highly provocative, divisive and potentially destabilising designs of the so-called 'custodians' of democracy, good governance and human rights," and the agitators who were promoting "their private ... and self-serving agenda on the streets and pages of newspapers, taking with them the innocent and the gullible" (quoted in Iyare 1993), these elements were providing strategic assistance, tactical support, and critical information to the radical press in many ways.

Some of the ways in which the security people provided support or collaborated with the radical journalists included (1) providing confidential information through leakages of official papers, decisions, or plans; (2) providing specific information in regard to when and where security agents would arrest, harass, or even assassinate journalists and other prodemocracy activists; (3) releasing detained journalists when there were loopholes in the instructions from above or ignoring instructions to detain them even after they were arrested for specific (assumed) infractions; and (4) simply looking the other way and pretending not to notice or understand "infractions." I will illustrate some of these means and methods of strategic assistance, tactical support, and leakage of confidential information in the case of *TheNEWS* magazine.

During the period of the secret trial of suspected coup plotters in 1995, Dapo Olorunyomi, deputy editor in chief of *TheNEWS*, was arrested by a police officer at a checkpoint. Some security agents had passed on to Olorunyomi the handwritten letters of the key defendants, Colonel Lawan Gwadabe (who was accused of being the ringleader of the plotters) and others, which had been smuggled out of maximum detention. This was a secret trial, and many believed that General Abacha was planning to execute the officers; destroying the credibility of the trial process before the Nigerian and international community was therefore critical to saving the men and women involved.

Olorunyomi passed the leaked documents on to Beko Ransome-Kuti, the chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, so that the latter could distribute copies as part of a campaign for the termination of the trial and the release of the accused men—particularly in powerful countries such as the

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United States and Britain.[12] As Olorunyomi was returning to one of the magazine's hideouts to write the story, he was stopped at a police checkpoint by an officer, who read some of the documents and then demanded a bribe from Olorunyomi to let him go. The journalist, unfortunately, did not have an adequate amount of cash, so the officer announced to his immediate boss at the checkpoint that he was arresting a "suspected coup plotter." He then took the editor to the zonal headquarters of the police force. When he arrived there, news made the rounds that one of the "coup plotters on the run" had been arrested, and many police officers came out of their offices to see him. But when the arresting policeman handed Olorunyomi over to the most senior officer in charge, a high-ranking police chief, what happened shocked even the journalist—who was psychologically preparing to join his colleagues at the on-going treason trial. The police chief collected the "exhibits" from the junior officer. He then led the editor aside and said "The police and press are friends; we should be working together." Then he gave the documents back to Olorunyomi, warned him never to mention the incident to anyone or in the press, and told him to leave (interview with Dapo Olorunyomi, Sept. 26, 2007).

Another critical form of assistance rendered to the prodemocracy forces by the security apparatuses close to the Presidential Villa was to help gauge the mood in the Villa and even provide constant warnings about when a major move might be made against them. Some of these warnings could be general in nature, while others were specific. One of the specific warnings that *TheNEWS* editors received from top sources in the intelligence structure was that they should not "touch" either Maryam Abacha, the cruelly ambitious wife of the military head of state, and his all-powerful chief security officer, Hamza Al-Mustapha. The editors were warned that criticizing either one in their stories would be akin to a death wish—even worse than taking on the tyrant himself.

However, when the magazine editors got a closely guarded "juicy story" about Maryam Abacha's first marriage from highly placed military and intelligence sources, it was too good to resist. What they learned was that General Abacha's late first son, Ibrahim, was actually not his biological son: that Maryam was pregnant with another man's child before Abacha married her. The story was even more interesting because it was revealed that Maryam's earlier marriage was to a man close to the father of Major General Shehu Yar'Adua, the retired former deputy head of state (1976–79)—whom Abacha later allegedly killed in detention. The import of the assassination was that Abacha was avenging himself on Yar'Adua, whose father had tried to stop him from marrying Maryam—and had ensured that she was impregnated by another man. It was later revealed that Maryam's first husband was the father of Binta Yar'Adua—the wife of Major General Yar'Adua (*TELL*, July 3, 2000:14–17). Here was yet another story, the editors concluded, that would tarnish the image of the man who was holding the nation hostage. Beyond that, a human angle story about love, betrayal, paternity secrets,

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and public deception involving the rich and powerful was sure to sell any magazine. It was also another example of the secret collaborations between some elements within the regime's intelligence network and the radical journalists. Despite the danger, the editors ran a cover story entitled "Why Abacha Will Kill Yar'Adua: The Story of a General on a Vengeance Mission" (*TheNEWS*, Sept. 11, 1995:16–23). The editors paid dearly for it: first, the editor-in-chief, Bayo Onanuga, and later the managing editor, Femi Ojudu, were arrested by the State Security Service (SSS) and were kept in solitary confinement for several weeks.

In yet another example of secret collaboration, security men feigned ignorance about the location or activities of the radical press. When the secret operational bases set up by *TheNEWS/Tempo* had remained officially undiscovered for several months, the Babangida regime concluded that *Tempo* was being printed inside the American Embassy in Lagos! "The truth," as Dapo Olorunyomi reveals, "was that it was published in a private, non-descript office, a few blocks from Nigerian police headquarters" (personal interview, Dec. 5, 2007). Some of the police chiefs were obviously aware of this, but pretended to be totally ignorant. No doubt, the fact that the guerrilla journalists operated a highly decentralized structure which "redefined the newsroom idea" and allowed each department of the magazine to meet in groups of six or less "under a disguised framework" (Olorunyomi 1996:73)—in stadiums, theaters, gyms, food joints, beer parlors, and offices of prominent radical lawyers like Femi Falana—was primarily responsible for their ability to survive the dictatorship. (This was not the age of mobile phones and easily accessible Internet in Nigeria; therefore, there was no easy means of communication). However, the support and assistance of elements within the security agencies were also critical. A few officers of the security agencies who could have discovered these clandestine operational bases either pointedly ignored them or alerted the journalists before raids were carried out.

Regular policemen on the streets were sometimes even more deliberately "derelict" in their duties than intelligence officers in meeting the dictatorship's "security needs." Unlike the policeman who arrested Dapo Olorunyomi as a "coup plotter," most regular policemen, when not directly instructed to act against the journalists, pretended that there was nothing amiss when they ran into them at their operational bases or stopped the vehicles conveying the proscribed newspaper-magazines. While policemen on night-time patrol or at road checkpoints sometimes broke through the disguises of the vehicles that transported the guerrilla publications, most would only demand a few copies of the magazine and often urged the drivers to tell their editors to "continue the good work." The few policemen who would want to raise questions would be quickly restrained by their colleagues. The journalists remembered specific instances when the policemen said to their colleagues "leave these guys, *jare* [please]. These military boys are not good at all" (Interview with Idowu Obasa, Lagos, July 25, 2007).

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At one point, the managing editor of the *TheNEWS*, Femi Ojudu, and one of his reporters, Ebenezer Obadare, who were both more or less wanted by the security agencies, ran into a police roadblock on Lagos Island. They had some copies of the weekly in their possession, as well as some other documents that betrayed the fact that they were working with the underground magazine. When the policemen discovered that they were wanted guerrilla journalists, they said in pidgin English, "na una be de journalists wey dey hala dem, go on. Carry go!" ("You are the journalists who are given them [the military regime] hell; go on. Proceed!")

The headquarters of the Criminal Investigating Department (CID) of the Nigeria Police (the infamous "Alagbon" on Alagbon Close, Ikoyi, Lagos), was a most dreaded place under successive military regimes.[13] Interesting enough, while newspaper vendors were being harassed and detained all over the country for selling *TEMPO* and other opposition publications, when I went to visit a senior colleague, Dele Momodu, who was detained at Alagbon in 1993, I found that the vendors on the streets of Alagbon were selling *TEMPO* without any harassment! It was not unlikely that this was also due to the fact that the vendors had befriended the police officers in Alagbon. But it was particularly significant that the police allowed the vendors to sell this essentially "treasonous publication" on the dreaded Alagbon close.

Yet another example of the kind of assistance that some security agents offered to the guerrilla journalists was evident in the experience of Bayo Onanuga. After General Abacha seized power, on one occasion, officers from the State Security Service (SSS) came to *TheNEWS* office to invite Onanuga for "a chat" in their infamous offices at Shangisha and Awolowo Road in Lagos (interview with Bayo Onanuga, Lagos, Sept. 26, 2007). While he was there, a ranking officer—who would later be one of the three officers carrying out the interrogation—came into his cell to secretly coach him on how to answer the questions. Later, during the interrogation itself, this officer pretended to be the angriest of the three. Onanuga was later released, since he had said the "right" things.

Two more examples should suffice to emphasize the critical nature of the support and assistance that the opposition journalists—like other elements in the prodemocracy civil society—received from elements within the security agencies.

The first concerned the coup trial in which *TheNEWS* executive editor, Kunle Ajibade, was involved. Although Ajibade had moved to the daily paper *A.M. News*, which *TheNEWS* had just started, his name was still on the masthead of the magazine as the editor. Therefore, when the magazine published a cover story (one of many such stories) on the phantom coup of 1995 (entitled "Not Guilty—Army Panel Clears Coup Suspects" [*TheNEWS*, May 29, 1995]), which revealed that the preliminary report submitted by Abacha's special investigative panel had cleared the suspects of any wrong-doing, the SSS arrested Ajibade.[14] During his interrogation, Ajibade claimed (truthfully) that he was not the editor of the magazine,

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although this was not a particularly persuasive defense; nevertheless, he was released and directed to report back the next day. Unfortunately, Ajibade and his colleagues did not interpret the curious decision to release him correctly; this was in part because the agent who ordered the release—perhaps, someone who was secretly supportive of the democratic struggle represented by the magazine—had not been one of the actual interrogators, and so Ajibade was unable to divine his real intentions.

Later Ajibade and his colleagues came to the conclusion that whoever had ordered his release had expected him not to honor the request and to go underground; this suspicion was confirmed when Dapo Olorunyomi was again in detention shortly afterward and one of his jailers came to the door of his cell and said, "they gave your colleague the opportunity to run away, but he never picked it up" (personal interview, Sept. 26, 2007). The official who had released Ajibade obviously knew that the SSS was supposed to hand over the editor to the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI)—which was investigating the coup plot—so that he could be brought before the military Court Marshall and tried for "accessory after the fact of treason." And unfortunately Ajibade, as we know, did honor the request—and he did not return home for another three years. He was subsequently handed over to the DMI, tried, and sentenced to life—alongside three other journalists: Chris Anyawun of *The Sunday Magazine* (TSM), Ben Charles-Obi of *Weekend Classique*, and George Mba of *TELL*. Upon the intervention of the international community, his sentence was later commuted to twenty-five years, and he was released only after General Abacha died in 1998.

Perhaps the most dramatic of the experiences of guerrilla journalists with their "friends" in the security services was that of Dapo Olorunyomi during his last detention—before he fled into exile. As he was being held at the DMI, he noticed that the most hostile military intelligence officers were those of his own ethnic stock (Yoruba) and their fellow southerners (the Igbo). They would regularly take him out of solitary confinement to torture him—in what the Cameroonian social theorist, Achille Mbembe (1992:4), would describe as a "systematic application of pain." They beat him severely with various weapons and eventually broke his left arm. But Olorunyomi noticed that there was a particular Igbo officer who seemed to be making eye contact with him every time the man thrashed him severely. The DMI was a highly multicultural environment, so the editor wondered why only Yoruba and Igbo officers were involved in his torture. He also could not decipher what the Igbo officer who made regular eye contact wanted to communicate to him (personal interview, Sept, 26, 2007). He found that officers of his own ethnic group would drop by his cell to mutter words of encouragement and praise to him in his native tongue; but they would not dare help him, upon request, to buy pain-killing drugs. For that purpose, only Hausa-Fulani (northern) officers obliged. He was totally perplexed and could make no meaning out of all these multicultural signals.

But after his unexpected release, Olorunyomi was able to decode the

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signal from the Igbo officer and solve the puzzle in the attitude and actions of some of the DMI officers. He received a telephone call from an unidentified person, who said in a cold but credible tone, "In your own interest, you don't have to go home any longer" (personal interview, Sept. 26, 2007). Olorunyomi concluded that the message was most likely from one of the DMI officers who had beaten him in detention. He suspected that one of the officers assigned to beat him, particularly the one making eye contact with him during the beatings, must have been responsible for the tip. It also became obvious to him that the security agents from the south assigned to torture him treated him with less brutality than expected by their bosses. Olorunyomi realized that he had either been marked for elimination or for indefinite detention. He went underground for a while and eventually fled into exile in the United States.

The Limits of Hegemony

For the most part, both lay and scholarly literature on the media in Africa—particularly, the radical (including, guerrilla, critical, opposition) press—focus on repression of the media by the authoritarian state and its agents and the many reprisals that the press has endured from such encounters in the struggle for human liberty, democracy, and freedom of speech.[15] In what has become conventional wisdom, the radical, oppositional, democratic press and journalists, on the one hand, and the authoritarian state and its repressive apparatuses, on the other, are two opposite ends that do not meet, except in the context of official oppression, tyranny, or terror.

The literature has concentrated almost exclusively on the public, adversarial relationship between the press and journalists and the state and its agents in the postcolony. Examples around Africa include The Gambia, where President Yayha Jammeh insisted that the state should be "rid of" independent journalists and human rights activists (*Index of Censorship* 1996, No. 1); General Ibrahim Babangida's Nigeria, where the editor-in-chief of *Newswatch* magazine, Dele Giwa, was killed by a letter bomb—which he had reportedly assumed was an official letter "from the president"; Jerry Rawlings's Ghana, where radical journalists such as Kofi Koonsom of the *Ghanaian Chronicle* were considered among those intent on "injuring the reputation of the state" (*Index of Censorship* 1996, No. 2); Zambia under President Frederick Chiluba, where independent journalists were arrested, detained, and jailed for publishing "objectionable information" (*Index of Censorship* 1996, No. 2); and Zimbabwe under President Mugabe, with the latter's exceptional repression of the press (see Meldrum 2004; Kumbula 1997).

The conventional approach, therefore, often fits state–civil society relations into an exclusively adversarial mode, described by Jonathan Spencer (2007:113) as a permanent "Manichean divide between power and resistance." The former Kenyan Minister of Internal Security rendered

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this binary to the Kenyan parliament in classic African *securocratese:* "The country will be destroyed from the editorial boardrooms of the newspapers because that is the only place we have people who say what they want to say" (Imanyara 1992:21).

In these narratives of "sworn enmity" (Kasoma 1997:296), of radical journalists who demonstrate "unusual resilience in challenging the state . . . [and] defeat[ing] the state security [agencies]" (Olukotun 2002a:317, 337) and journalists who "refuse to be censored, as they write and speak the words of fire that antagonize those in power" (Collings 2001:1–2), the literature often overlooks the fact that some of the "words of fire" expressed in the oppositional press come, ironically, even if confidentially, from, or were aided by, those who "hold the fire" on behalf of the state. Consequently, in the African context, the literature is susceptible to overlooking the fact that the "porous and illusory" boundaries that exist between the state and civil society are not patrolled and infiltrated by the "all powerful" state alone; they are also patrolled and penetrated by institutions within civil society—such as the press.

An observer once noted that the press in Africa is capable of being "more effective than an opposition party in achieving change in an oppressive political system" (Ungar 1990, cited in Hyden & Okigbo 2003:29). Therefore, in focusing on the "contribution [that the] media have made to political reform" (Hyden & Okigbo 2003:29) in the return to, or reform of, multiparty democracy in Africa (see Tettey 2001), it is important to examine not only the public, but also some of the hidden, transactions that make the media's capacity to influence change possible.

In a sense, the scholarly account of the "standoff" that defines the relationship between the repressive state and the democratic press is based on an assumption in democratic theory, particularly as it relates to the developing countries. The assumption is this: that in every state that is either not fully democratic or one that is outright autocratic, the relationship between the state and its agents, on the one hand, and the opposition media and journalists, on the other, is absolutely and entirely irreconcilable and adversarial.

The provenance of this assumption is clear and understandable. Every state, even a democratic state, attempts to hide information from the public. This becomes more salient in the African postcolony where the state, even a "democratic" state, is neither accountable nor transparent. The democratic media's original role, in this context, has been to frustrate the logic and attitude of secrecy and the attendant practices of exclusivity and confidentiality about public matters, and to open up the public space to democratic politics and respect for human rights, the rule of law, and justice.[16]

Yet these assumptions make it difficult to fully explain the motivations of the elements within the security services who aided radical, crusading, and guerrilla journalists. Given the domination of power in Nigeria

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by an ethnoregional power group, the Hausa-Fulani, some of the agents who aided the media and journalists could have been motivated by their own ethnic and ethnoregional interests, constructed against the dominant interests within the Nigerian state. This would be a likely motivation of the Yoruba and a few other southern groups who were most offended by the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election by the military.

But the collusions described above could not have been universally ethnocentric or regionally motivated, because some Hausa-Fulani (northern) officers, who were assumed to be part of the hegemonic power structure, also provided confidential, strategic assistance or information to the radical journalists—even if such supports did not come as often as the support from southern officers and agents. Thus, many of the state's agents were obviously fired by higher motivations. Some of these could have included a commitment they shared with the journalists to the ideals of democracy and freedom. Or perhaps the internal subversion was driven by those who were dissatisfied with military rule in general, or the specific variant of military rule under Generals Babangida and Abacha. Other reasons could have been personal discontent within, and rivalries between, elements within the security services or even the psychological satisfaction (such as the joy, pleasure, and power) that some derive from access to information and the demonstration of their personal agency by means of the leakages.

However, whatever motivated the leaks and the strategic information and assistance that the security men gave to the radical and guerrilla journalists, the eventual collapse of the fascist military regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha was partly attributable to such strategic assistance, along with the deep commitment and efforts of journalists working in the independent and radical press in this era.

This article represents at least an initial attempt to fill a void in the study of state–media relations in the postcolony by drawing attention to one of the obscure areas of this complex relationship—the secret, confidential collaborations between security agents and journalists. Against this backdrop, there is the need to disaggregate the state, and particularly in undemocratic contexts, to see it not as a monolithic unit, but as what Spencer (2007:103) describes as "a collection of individual human beings connected to a complex set of relations." State hegemony is never complete, and much of what accounts for the complex reality of state–media relations may have been lost in the scholarly accounts because many who write on the media in Africa do not approach their subject through ethnographic research. Subsequent research on the media–state interface, therefore, might well make use of anthropological methods to further unearth such confidential collaborations, among other material. I have tried in this article to illustrate the limitations of assumptions about the wholeness and solidity of the state by providing specific narratives of nuanced and complex relationships between security agencies and their officials and the media and journalists that point to the paradoxical character of the state. The state, as Wendy

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Brown (1995:174) says, is "at once an incoherent, multifaceted ensemble of power relations and a vehicle of massive domination." The state is an "unbounded terrain of powers and techniques" within which contradictory, even conflictual, relationships exist—relationships that create avenues for unofficial and undocumented collaborations with contrarian elements within civil society for the promotion of human freedom and democracy. The examples I have provided here further illustrate the fact that different kinds of power, which produce and provoke different kinds of relationships with counterhegemonic structures, institutions, and processes, are enfolded within hegemonies.

Much attention has been placed on the emancipatory potential of civil society in Africa. As "domains of struggles, public spaces, and public process," civil society consists not only of spaces where "actions are generated for gaining a broad base outside of the state" (Cohen 1998:12); in Africa, civil society also constitutes new sources of specific forms of (de)legitimation, which force the state into different kinds of public accounting (see Bobbio 1989:25) critical for the (re)democratization struggles across the continent. In this context, the public role of the progressive, radical, and guerrilla journalism sometimes impels journalists to enter into confidential strategic relationships with agents of the repressive state to ensure the subversion of the logic, precepts, and practices of antidemocratic regimes. The cases examined here, within the context of a broader theoretical challenge to the assumed binaries in state–civil society relations, should encourage similar studies of confidential and secret relationships between opposing or oppositional sociopolitical institutions and agents in other contexts in the postcolony. Such studies might help to illuminate our understanding of the social dynamics that contradict the binaries that are assumed to be native to postcolonial politics.

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Notes

1. See Imayara (1992); Lardner (1993); Louw and Tomaselli (1994); Obadare (1999); Tettey (2001); Kasoma (1995); Olukotun (2002b). For contrary views, in the specific case of Nigeria, see Ette (2000) and Uko (2004).
2. On state–civil society relations, see Diamond (1991:63–64); Joseph (1998:4). On state–media relations, see Agbaje (1990); Ekpu (1990); Obadare (1999); Karoma (1995:538); Ogbondah (1997); Tettey (2001); Hyden and Leslie (2002); Hyden and Okigbo (2002); Ogbondah (2002); Blankson (2002); Ibelema (2003). On the role of state security agencies in supressing democracy, see Olukotun (2002a:317); Chabal (1998:292). See also Agbese (2006); Olorunyomi (1998a, 1998b).
3. On the role of the media in Africa's democratic struggles, see Karikari (1993); Takougang (1995); Dare (1997); Berger (1998); Diamond (1999); Joseph (1997); Ogbondah (1997); Bergen (1998); Olukotun and Omole (1999); Kasoma (1995); Tettey (2001:5); Hyden and Leslie (2002); Hyden et al. (2002); Berger (2002); Ojo (2003); Olukotun (2004); Nyamnjoh (2005); Agbese (2006). On civil society and the media in Africa, see Diamond (1991); Agbaje (1993); Nyamnjoh, Wete, and Fonshingong (1996); Olukotun (2002a, 2002b); Obadare (2005).
4. See Karoma (1997); Tettey (2001); Olorunyomi (1998a, 1998b); Dare (2007).
5. For important exceptions, see Hasty (2005a, 2005b, 2006).
6. See, e.g., Askew and Wilk (2002); Rothenbuhler and Coman (2005); Ginsburg (2005:17–19); Bird (2009:2). As Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005:2) argue, "To the study of media, ethnography brings an attention to cultural difference, a commitment to close observation and recording, the provision of "thick" descriptive detail designed to reveal the contexts that give actions meanings. . . . Media ethnography attempts to tease out layers of meaning through observa-

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tion of and engagement with the everyday situations in which the media are consumed. . . . " However, before now, because anthropology was long identified with the study of "tradition," "the local" and the "cultures" of non-Western societies, many anthropologists avoided the mass media as objects of study, considering them "too redolent of Western modernity and cultural imperialism' (Ginsburg 2005:17). Also, there has been a debate about "methodological purity" (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005: 2) within anthropology regarding the discipline's much-favored ethnographic method, with some raising questions about the possibility of doing ethnography in the classic sense on the subject of the mass media. But in recent years, anthropologists have recognized the presence and growing importance of the media, even in their hitherto "exotic" sites of ethnographic research, such as Africa. Thus, "media anthropology" has developed, both as a distinct area of study and also as a methodological means of expanding ethnography.

7. See Agbaje (1993); Ibelema (2003); Adebanwi (2000, 2002, 2004, 2008); Olukotun (2002a, 2002b); Obadare (2005); Agbese (2006).
8. Ordinarily, the term *militariat* refers to "the lower rung of the military hierarchy" as Jimmy D. Kandeh (1996:388) reminds us. However, this is a group that I often refer to as "bourgeoisified" to note the transformation of a certain segment of the military due to ethnoregional and other personal considerations and involved the rapid promotion, much of it underserved, of illiterate, semiliterate, and semi-crude soldiers in the lower rungs of the military hierarchy to the very top of the hierarchy. From "men" they become not only "officers," but "super officers"—without the professional discipline, accomplishments, and mental strength of that professional, social, economic, and political status.
9. See Dare (2007); Olukotun (2002a, 2002b); Adebanwi, 2000, 2002, 2004).
10. On hegemony in general, see, e.g., Agbaje (1992); Downing et al. (2001); Hall (1982); Louw (2001).
11. Initially, the magazine relied mainly on the resources provided by its financiers. Sales and limited advertisement provided some resources, too. However, with the incessant seizure of whole editions, or some copies of the magazine, they could no longer rely on sales and advertisement. Consequently, the magazine had to rely mainly on its financiers and on credit from those supplying newsprint and credit from the commercial printers that printed the magazine. However, with the coming of *TEMPO,* which was cheaper and quicker to produce, the company made so much money from sales that it no longer relied on its financiers and advertisements (which were rare) to survive.
12. Ransome-Kuti was later arrested and also charged alongside the accused for "accessory after the fact of coup" for faxing the documents to his contacts abroad.
13. A famous musician, Orlando Owoh—who was framed, detained, tortured, and humiliated there for eighteen months because of a song he had released about Dele Giwa, the journalist who was parcel-bombed by suspected agents of the Babangida regime—released a popular album highlighting the sadism of the policemen in charge of the detention center.
14. There were several exclusive cover stories published on this controversial ("phantom") coup. All the stories were sourced from security agents, including those who were directly involved in the investigation, interrogation, and trials or those who were linked to them. See, e.g., "Coup Fall-Out: I am Innocent—

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Gwadabe Writes Mother," *TheNEWS*, March 27, 1995; "Main Men: Abacha Sets Out a Dragnet, Which Pulls Political opponents and Perceived Critics," *TheNEWS*, March 20, 1995.

15. See Barton (1979); Lamb (1995); Buckley (1996); Marnogues (1996); Olorunyomi (1996); Switzer (1997a, 1997b); Seeger (1997); Kerina (1998); Switzer (2000); Tettey (2001); Pinnock (1997); Kasoma (1995, 1997); Switzer and Adhikari (2000); Dare (2007).
16. See Imayara (1992:21); Louw and Tomaselli (1994:64); Sanbrook (1996:71); Tettey 2001:10).

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