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**Playing “Carrot and Stick”:
Canadian Press Coverage of Nigeria
on the Hanging of Nine Ogoni Rights Activists, November - December 1995**

Gabriel Ejikeme Ezewudo

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Communication Studies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at
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ABSTRACT

Playing “Carrot and Stick”: Canadian Press Coverage of Nigeria
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Gabriel Ejikeme Ezewudo

Events are made to mean by their definers. So with one voice the international media “shocked” the world in 1995 with the story that the military regime in Nigeria hanged Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni ethnic rights activists. International reactions were dramatic especially at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand where the body swiftly handed a two-year suspension to Nigeria. Offences against democracy and human rights became the trigger-phrases that rendered the executions in Nigeria meaningful.

This thesis does a contextual, epistemological interrogation of the Western definition of the Nigerian event based on the study of the contents of three Canadian daily papers - the *Globe & Mail*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Le Devoir*. Employing cultural-critical discourse analysis, the research found that (i) the Canadian news dislocated the Nigerian story from its native moorings and employed Western/Canadian fiction about Africa and the developing world in framing the news narrative; (ii) the Canadian news embodied the Western tendency to universalize its socio-cultural and political (ideological) values; and (iii) the dominance of the Western news interpretation rendered alternative and oppositional interpretations unacceptable and hence delegitimized. By drawing attention to news as a cultural event, and to the occlusion of Other cognitive contexts, the Canadian news, as part of the international news discourse and containment of events in the non-Western world, is seen to have kept alive a questionable, but yet dominant, Western paradigm of representation.

Acknowledgements

Going against what everybody knows requires guts. Understandably, confronting the dominant ideas have subjected prophets to a lot of heat, misunderstanding and even condemnation. Yet society needs the prophetic insight to pursue the hopes and dreams that sustain the race and guarantee justice.

From conception to its defense on March 10, 1998, this work, in the genre of media criticism of the Western press, was seen as a daunting, provocative and controversial task. Several people contributed to making this possible, especially for keeping my eye on the ball, and for the needed inspiration. Providing an exhaustive list of such persons is not possible. The indulgence of those I miss to mention by name is hereby craved. I particularly recall the teachers who provided me with the tools for cultural criticism in the Media Studies programme at Concordia: Dr. Marty Allor, Dr. Marc Gervais, SJ, Dr. Lorna Roth, Dr. William Buxton and Dr. William Gilsdorf. Their seminars, the peer discussions they provided, and the personal interactions I have had with them found their way into this work. I am grateful to them. I believe that having Dr. William Gilsdorf as my thesis supervisor did the trick. Bill was respectful and humane and enabled me to take his open-mindedness for granted: I could give full rein to my African imagination knowing that while he would disagree with me, I still counted on him as a 'co-conspirator.' He became for me a living symbol of academic freedom and dedication.

I am equally indebted to those who gave me logistical support. First is the Canadian province of The Spiritans for bed and board at the community of Résidence Le Roy,

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I also profited by some contact with the Ogoni issue as well as with the three Canadian papers that I studied. My trip to Ogoni in November 1995, soon after the executions, would not have been possible without the friendly assurance and company of Rev. L. Barinem Boniko. Similarly, the interviews granted me by the foreign news editors of the **Globe & Mail**, the **Ottawa Citizen**, and **Le Devoir** ensured that I was on top of my topic. These and other unnamed persons who assisted my research deserve special thanks for making me grasp the inner workings of the phenomenon studied. Still the responsibility for my interpretations remains mine to bear. Let the reader be the judge.

Ultimately, the inspiration for this work derives from my late father, Nze Umeojike G. Ezewudo, and other property-owners in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, who pondered the injustice and folly of the Abandoned Property Edict (1969) implemented after the Nigeria-Biafra War. As I dedicate this work to them, these men and women should rest assured that history does not forget.

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Abbreviations

AFP	- Agence France Presse
AG	- Action Group
ANC	- African National Congress
AP	- Associated Press
BBC	- British Broadcasting Corporation
CHOGM	- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CIA	- Central Intelligence Agency
CMAG	- Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
CNN	- Cable News Network
CP	- Canadian Press
ECOMOG	- ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	- Economic Community of West African States
EMIROAF	- Ethnic Minorities Rights Organization of Africa
EU	- European Union
G&M	- Globe & Mail
IMF	- International Monetary Fund
LD	- Le Devoir
MAMSER	- Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery
MOSOP	- Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
MPLA	- Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NAN	- News Agency of Nigeria
NADECO	- National Democratic Coalition
NATO	- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCNC	- National Convention of Nigerian Citizens
NEPU	- Northern Elements Progressive Union
NGO	- Non-governmental Organization
NNPC	- Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NPC	- Northern Peoples Congress
NWICO	- New World Information and Communication Order
NYCOP	- National Youth Council of Ogoni People
NYT	- New York Times
OAU	- Organization of African Unity
OC	- Ottawa Citizen
OMPADEC	- Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission
OPEC	- Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PRC	- Provisional Ruling Council
SAP	- Structural Adjustment Programme
UN	- United Nations
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	- United States of America

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive, but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning."

- Stuart Hall, *New Ethnicities*.

1.1 Nigeria in International News: November - December 1995

The year 1995 brought Nigeria two big seasons of international media bashing. The first was the international pressure mounted against the guilty verdict that, perhaps, prevented the execution of some among 43 alleged coup-plotters including a former military head of state, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo. The second, and by far the most dramatic and ultimately unsuccessful, concerned members of the Ogoni ethnic group charged with murder in the deaths on May 21, 1994, of four Ogoni leaders - Chief Samuel Orage and his brother Chief Theophilus Orage, Chief Albert Badey and Chief Edward Kobani. The accused included nine Ogoni environmental and ethnic rights activists¹ among whom was Ken Saro-Wiwa, a renowned author and playwright, a Nobel Prize nominee, president of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and also leader of the Ethnic Minorities Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF). The Nigerian military leader, General Sani Abacha, had rescinded the death sentences on the convicted coup-plotters in his October 1, 1995, Independence speech. The same generosity was not applied to the second group when they were equally found guilty as charged. Following their sentencing on October 30

¹The other 8 were: Dr. Barinem N. Kiobel, John Kpuniem, Baribor Bera, Saturday Dobue, Felix Nwante, Monday Eawo, Daniel Gbakoo and Paul Levura.

and 31, 1995, by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal led by Justice Ibrahim Auta, the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) headed by General Abacha confirmed the sentences on Wednesday, November 8. The Nine were hanged in a Port Harcourt prison at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, November 10, 1995, overseen by Lt. Col. Dauda Komo, the military administrator of Rivers State, Nigeria.²

Prior to the executions, strong pressure came from the international media and diplomatic circles especially among the British Commonwealth whose heads of governments (CHOGM) summit was scheduled in Auckland, New Zealand, from November 10 - 13, 1995. Amidst the reactions, Soji Akinrinade, an assistant editor and columnist of **Newswatch**, a major independent Nigerian weekly, wrote in “distress” at the embarrassing international attention that the event was bringing to Nigeria:

Open any foreign newspaper and you will find some uncomplimentary reports about this our great nation. Tune to the CNN and you will hear Jonathan Mann or Rick Collins say some terrible things about human rights abuse in Nigeria. Editorials, news reports and features in all the great newspapers in the developed and developing world are just bashing us.³

More than the media attention, swift actions were taken against Nigeria at the news of the executions such as the unprecedented two-year suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth; “All European Union, EU, nations, the United States, US, and South Africa ordered their ambassadors home for consultations”; the United States imposed a ban on sale of military goods and services, and reiterated a ban on issuance of visas to senior military

²Cf. *Ogoni Executions - The World Vs Abacha*, **Tell** magazine, Nov. 27, 1995.

³**Newswatch** November 20, 1995, p. 8. (The writer happened to have been in Nigeria at the period. The extent of internal apprehension among the less-informed in Nigeria was that following the news of the executions and the strong international reactions voiced in the news, it was feared that Nigeria would be hit with super-power invasion from the United States, Britain and the United Nations).

officials and including “civilians who actively formulate, implement or benefit from the policies that impede Nigeria’s transition to democracy.”⁴ Press accounts in Canada (which shares association with Nigeria in the then 52-member Commonwealth organization) were in step with the international reactions. The Nigerian news instantly made front pages in at least three major dailies in Canada - the **Globe & Mail (G&M)**, the **Ottawa Citizen (OC)** and **Le Devoir (LD)** - in their reporting of the executions and especially the deviant nature of the act by the Nigerian military regime.⁵ There was continuity coverage of the Nigerian news in news stories, editorials, features and letters, which obviously pointed to its significance for the Canadian news context and audience. As Akinrinade pointed out, the issue of ‘human rights abuse in Nigeria’ became the focus of the international media attention. Equally interesting in his comment was that the international media was ‘just bashing us’. This perhaps adds to the appropriateness of the metaphoric title, playing “carrot and stick,” which needs to be explained as I discuss the goal of this research.

1.2 Goal of the Research

The attention of the international media to the Nigerian event and the diplomatic reactions became quite spectacular. There was shock at the action of the Abacha government and an outpouring of sympathy for the victims of the executions. Here are a few front-page headlines of leading international papers on the breaking news on the morning of November

⁴*Nigeria - Under Fire*, in *Newswatch* Nov. 27, 1995, p. 15.

⁵*Saro-Wiwa’s execution sparks global outrage* (G&M, November 11, p A1); *Commonwealth suspends Nigeria for hanging dissidents* (OC, November 12, p A1); *Le Nigeria au pilori - La potence pour neuf opposants* (LD, November 11, p A1).

11, 1995:

- *Commonwealth set to expel Nigeria after executions; Major Condemns 'judicial murder' of Playwright* by David Williams, John Deans. - **Daily Mail** (London, England).
- *Nigeria faces expulsion for hanging nine* by Nicholas Wood. - **The Times** (London).
- *World fury as Nigeria sends writer to gallows; Ken Saro-Wiwa among nine hanged by military junta* by Steve Crawshaw & Karl Maier. - **The Independent** (London).
- *World shock at Ogoni hangings* - **The Irish Times**.
- *Nigeria executes Critic of Regime; Nations protest... Writer and Environmentalist Is Hanged in Murder Case Despite Mercy Pleas* by Howard French. - **The New York Times**.
- *Defiant Nigerian regime executes rights activist. Africa: Playwright, Eight other activists are hanged.* - **The Los Angeles Times**.
- *Nigeria hangs 9 rights activists; Military rulers ignore worldwide calls for clemency* by Mark Matthews - **Baltimore Sun**.

This characterization of the event furnished a view of the political situation and culture in Nigeria that was seen as Nigeria-bashing. One stops to ask: what did the news of the Nigerian event mean? What chords did it strike to provoke such international responses? In other words, what was the cognitive context of the news discourse?

The Nigeria news in Canadian papers has been chosen as an instance of international news coverage. In dealing with the problem posed above, the goal of this research is as follows. Firstly, this work performs a study of what the news event that took place in Nigeria, a non-Western (African) nation, came to mean in Western news discourse. By “West” or “Western”, this work has in mind the countries and cultures that derive from Western Europe. These usually comprise the *industrialized* as distinct from the *developing* nations

and former colonized peoples. Alternatively, the term refers to the North/South divide in international discourse depicting the powerful metropolitan *centres* of Europe and North America, and the *peripheral* or *marginal* countries often referred to as the “Third World”. In effect there exists a perceived socio-cultural, political and economic distinction between the two geo-political regions. Nigeria as a former British colony falls under the latter category. Canada, on the other hand, is an industrialized, medium-power, Western country.

The three Canadian papers sampled in this study - the **G&M**, the **OC** and **LD** - represent the Canadian milieu as well as the West in regard to the coverage of Nigeria as a non-Western developing nation. I need to make a further statement on the reason and adequacy of my choice as I proceed. Ultimately, I propose to interrogate the knowledge of the Nigerian event as constructed by the news operatives for the Canadian/Western audience.

Another specification is that this study does not stretch into audience research or media effects. A useful distinction made by Ericson, Baranek and Chan is that paying attention to the symbolic content of media messages is prior to questions about effects. The authors cite Gitlin’s argument as follows:

Since the media aim at least to influence, condition and reproduce the activity of audiences by reaching into the symbolic organization of thought, the student of mass media must pay attention to the symbolic content of media messages before the question of effects can even be sensibly posed.⁶

Attending rather to the symbolic content of news highlights the nature of news as a

⁶Cf Ericson et al., **Representing Order**, Toronto: U of T Press, 1991, p. 49. See also Gitlin, **The Whole World is Watching**, 1980, p. 14.

socially constructed knowledge, as an event of culture.⁷ Thus news organizations and their sources cooperate in the provision of a diet of information that is meaningful to their audience. Because there is communication of influence and interests in news construction, news has been problematized, calling into question the ideal of objectivity, as the guarded creed of journalism as a profession.⁸ Critical questioning of news points to the potential for falsehood, bias, the lack of contextualization, sensationalization and, more germane to this enquiry, a hegemonic construction of what becomes consensual and accepted news knowledges. Here particularly, news actively engages and controls common understandings in its major formats of the press and broadcasting.⁹ Accordingly this research spots and studies the ideological construction that lifted the Nigerian story into the realm of Western hegemony as “human rights abuse” which, in the current global context, is traced to the absence of “democracy” in Nigeria. Put briefly at this point, my argument is that the international news was spotty, dehistoricized, and was at the service of Western socio-cultural and political interests owing to the dominance of Western news construction. This shall be elaborated in the next chapter.

I have adopted the “carrot and stick” metaphor as apt for describing the Canadian press coverage, mainly because the press closely reported the actions of the Canadian foreign-policy actors as they pushed the Canadian proposal through the CHOGM meeting in Auckland, 1995. The purpose of the proposal was to guide erring countries such as the

⁷Tuchman, 1978; Ericson et al., 1987; Schudson, 1995.

⁸Schudson, 1978.

⁹Cf. Hall et al., **Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order**, London: Macmillan, 1978. See also John Hartley, **Understanding News**, London: Methuen, 1982, pp. 93ff.

Nigerian dictatorship towards democratic governance. “Carrot and stick” was the metaphor used for this Canadian initiative.¹⁰ In effect, it stood for the play and the power that stretches the continuum from gentle diplomacy to strong economic sanctions against Nigeria. As shall be shown, it proved to be an eloquent metaphor that captures the uneven relationships in the one-sided distribution of international power between the West and the rest.

1.3 Significance of Study

There are two key points of significance in this study. Firstly, as far as I am aware, this represents the first attempt to research on the Canadian press coverage of Nigeria. It, therefore, provides a unique window to Canadian social cognitions in regard to the West African nation characterized as “Africa’s most influential” nation.¹¹ The study therefore offers an opportunity to examine the now familiar criticisms regarding the broader cultural divide that is evident whenever the West reports events in Africa and other non-Western regions of the world.¹² The approach here builds on the theory noted above that news operatives and their sources attempt a cultural construction of commonsense knowledge in the production of news. This will be clearly described in the next chapter; but presently I observe that it is of interest to see what the current scorecard reads in terms of the criticisms of Western cognitions as portrayed in the press.

Secondly, based on the international outrage at the November 1995 executions in

¹⁰Cf. *Commonwealth suspends Nigeria for hanging dissidents*, OC, Nov. 12, 1995, p A1.

¹¹Ihonvbere, J., *Nigeria: The Politics of Adjustment & Democracy*, London: Transaction publishers, 1994, p. 48.

¹²More on this in the next chapter.

Nigeria, this study specifically examines how a given Western country interpreted and reacted to the Nigerian event in the context of the current global environment. Although, as noted above, Canada shares membership with Nigeria in the Commonwealth, and had taken giant steps towards greater economic cooperation when the Canada-Nigeria Business Council was inaugurated on September 24, 1990¹³, the relationship between the two countries began to deteriorate following the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections in Nigeria. The annulment of the election purportedly won by Chief Moshood Abiola was particularly unacceptable to Canada who protested unilaterally by downgrading its diplomatic relations with Nigeria in 1993.¹⁴ The move was apparently consistent with Canada's position in the Commonwealth when it began to insist on human rights and democratic values in considering development aid to recipient countries. In the words of then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, to the CHOGM Summitters in Harare, Zimbabwe: "Canada will not subsidize repression and the stifling of democracy", the Harare declaration should "make it clear that nothing in international relations is more important than respect for individual freedoms and human rights."¹⁵ Thus following how Canada's foreign policy impacted on the coverage of the Nigerian event provides a significant aspect of the Western cognition of events in the African sub-region.

¹³Canadian International Relations Chronicle, Oct. - Dec., 1990. Canada was represented by Joe Clark, and Nigeria by Rilwanu Lukman; both were their countries' respective foreign affairs ministers. This deal incorporated strategies to strengthen trade relations considering that total trade between the two countries in 1989 stood at \$550 million.

¹⁴Canadian International Relations Chronicle, July-Sept, 1993; April-June, 1995. See also G&M April 19, 1996 p A8.

¹⁵Canadian International Relations Chronicle, Oct - Dec, 1991.

The Canadian perspective on the Nigerian news is central to this research. This perspective, I would argue, reflects the Western cultural news definition and as such participated in the international reactions towards Nigeria which came to be seen as the “bashing” referenced earlier. This research of news perspectives needs further delineation.

1.4 Research Questions & Perspectives

Essentially, the research asks *what did the Nigeria news come to mean in the Western/Canadian news context and why?* Stuart Hall’s insight regarding the “meaningful structure” of a text as involving the process of *encoding* and *decoding* (that is the dual process of production and consumption)¹⁶ deserves recalling here in delineating the key research issues. The processes presume a socio-cultural, cognitive, environment within which news is constructed, circulated/transferred, and appropriated bearing the “preferred reading” encoded by the producer. Apparently, a common cognitive context embodies the symbols of communication that constitute meaningfulness. This will be dealt with in the next chapter. For the moment I need to specify that the research questions deal with what the news texts mean by asking -

- (i) primarily *what* became the ‘dominant’ definition of the Nigeria news in the Canadian press? Note shall also be taken of the ‘alternative’ and ‘oppositional’ definitions of the news;
- (ii) *how* did the process of news production and consumption and hence the

¹⁶*Encoding/Decoding* in S. Hall et al., eds., **Culture, Media, Language**, London: Hutchinson, 1981, p. 130. Attempting a broad and rather indeterminate definition, Lindkvist states: “The meaning of a text can be identified with the producer, the consumer, and the interpreter of the text or with the text itself.” *Approaches to Textual Analysis* in Karl Erik Rosengren (ed.), **Advances in Content Analysis**, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981, p. 23ff.

Western/Canadian cognitive context contribute to the construction of the Nigeria news?

Posing the *how* question of the processes responds to what appear as commonalities, similarities or differences where the same news event gets reported by people in discreet cultural and geographical locations.

(iii) *why* was the news made to bear a given “preferred reading” or meaning? In other words, what ideologies and interests were at work in the production/consumption of the news on Nigeria in the Western/Canadian context?

In posing the above research questions, in themselves critical of what became the news about Nigeria in the Canadian papers, I am challenged to state my position in this research. Clearly, I operate from a standpoint that a structural defect exists in the Western approach to events in Africa, and that this needs to be represented as much as possible. Firstly, I pursued this research as a Nigerian with an experience of the impact of international intervention during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70, and who has lived in Canada since 1991. Secondly, I had a rare chance to be visiting Nigeria when Saro-Wiwa and the eight others were hanged. I experienced the shock like every Nigerian who woke up on Saturday, November 11, 1995, to the unexpected radio news of the executions. People were evidently amazed and in grief at the loss, within one year and half, of the cream of Ogoni sons. Weeks after the executions, I drove forty kilometers from Port Harcourt to Bodo City to have a sense of the situation in Ogoni itself. Although there was evidence of security personnel, the mishap came to be taken in stride. But for the prevailing economic hardships in Ogoni, just as elsewhere in Nigeria, life went on. By contrast, I returned to Canada late in December of 1995 to witness the outpouring of “concern” in the Canadian media, the public policy

personnel, and among groups of activists and non-governmental organizations. For these the Nigerian executions became equivalent to a call to arms. This attitude, I need to add, was not peculiar to Canada because across Europe and North America one could hear and read scathing remarks and comments in both the secular and ecclesiastical press, and in group journals, against the regime in Nigeria. The “bashing” was consensual; Nigeria indeed had blundered its way into ‘global’ isolation.

Post-Colonial governments in Africa, including Nigeria, have no doubt recorded a litany of political disappointments, bureaucratic incompetence, ill-advised economic programmes, corruption and suppression of political opposition. These articulated failures notwithstanding, cultural critics such as Edward Said¹⁷ have, however, noted that Western definers, especially through the media, characteristically propagate a standard of progress and political culture that give scanty attention to, and understanding of, the differences in the African situation and history. The tendency to homogenization ('imperialism' by another name) has meant that the central issues of social and political discourse in the West are employed in the assessment of events in African countries. For instance, liberal capitalist democracy, human (often read as individual) rights and environmental degradation, are in the list of those issues that are dislocated from their social contexts. The theoretical grounds for this shall be matter for the next chapter. Presently, I mention that these issues scarcely mean the same thing and have equal cogency for all peoples, despite the current state of global awareness. Even for those for whom such ideals may be seen to invite universal acceptance, their actual practices have revealed different shades of meaning in time and

¹⁷For an elaborate discussion, see his **Culture and Imperialism**, NY: Vintage, 1993.

space. This should clarify my perspective in the pursuit of the above research questions.

1.5 Object of Study & Limitations

What precisely are we looking at here? I have chosen to study the press rather than the broadcasting media. The medium of the press is known to provide more in-depth coverage and analysis than the broadcast media. (Both major formats also repeat themselves.) For political and business news, people are more drawn to newspapers than TV and radio.¹⁸ In addition, at least until recently, newspapers have more archival resources than radio and TV. Finally, the nature and distance of the event in the news made it more of an unfolding rhetoric than an image-driven drama. The former is better followed by a look at the press than the electronic media.

Two general considerations determined the choice of the three Canadian daily newspapers for this study. Firstly, I mean to capture the broad spectrum of the Canadian newspaper population. Hence I took into consideration the key strategic centres of Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal; and I bore in mind their dependence on the Canadian Press and, in the case of the Southam papers, the Southam News, as common news agencies in Canada. Both are strategic for providing news wire services for all major cities of Canada. Secondly, I limited myself to the three newspapers because I consider a wider population unmanageable and probably redundant. Specifically, the relevance and adequacy of my choice can be seen as follows:

¹⁸Christopher Dornan, *Newspaper Publishing* in Dorland, Michael, ed., **The Cultural Industries in Canada**, Toronto: Lorimer, 1996. Table 3-2, p. 67. The international character of the news makes it all the more political and elitist.

- (i) The **G&M** in English has head office in Toronto. Among the major city newspapers, it is the "national" paper of record, with five simultaneous editions; a staple for the Canadian elite - politicians, intellectuals and business people; and most prone to covering international news. Its weekday circulation in 1995 was 314,972, second only to the **Toronto Star** (519,070).¹⁹ It is owned by Thomson Newspapers Co. Ltd.
- (ii) The **OC** is an English daily published in the national capital and has a strategic affinity to Ottawa capital politics. (The **Ottawa Sun**, the other newspaper in town, was regarded as a tabloid and posed no real competition to the **OC**'s dominance in the city.²⁰) Its weekday circulation in 1995 was 164,120.²¹ At the time, it was owned by Southam Newspapers until last year when Conrad Black's Hollinger Inc. bought it over.
- (iii) **LD** is published in Montreal and adds a Francophone flavour to the news coverage for the French section of the population. The dependence on the French news agency - AFP - for international news offers a unique perspective different from the two above.²² More than **La Presse**, also based in Montreal, with a larger weekday circulation (196,283 in 1994), **LD** with a weekday circulation of 29,900 in 1994²³ is disposed to publishing foreign news, and in terms of 'elite' readership, it is the French language equivalent of the **G&M**. It is an independent title. There should be more on each of the papers when I perform the analysis

¹⁹Dornan, Christopher, op. cit. p. 65.

²⁰My August, 1997 Interview at the OC foreign news desk in Ottawa.

²¹Dornan, Christopher, op. cit. p. 65.

²²Hackett, Robert, **News and Dissent**, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1991, pp. 100, 101.

²³Dornan, Christopher, op. cit. pp. 76, 78.

of their coverage of the Nigerian event.

I restricted the research to the two-month period - November/December, 1995 - for two reasons. Firstly, it was the time of unprecedented coverage of Nigeria in the Canadian papers when the executions and the reactions were the focus. For instance, when I performed an initial search on the **Canadian News Index**, 30 items were provided on Nigeria under **G&M**; it was twice the number of items in the four months from July to October 1995. Secondly, the period saw the sharp rise and maintenance of the international outrage and pressure for sanctions against Nigeria. By the end of December 1995, the news had reached its crest and the story had played itself out in terms of the event definition. Subsequently, Nigeria dropped back to occasional mention with a recycling of what became symbolic threats of further international sanctions or keeping watch on developments in Nigeria as it implemented its programme of return to democracy.

To supplement the story in the Canadian news, and hence to better appraise interpretations, it was necessary to consult other news outlets and chronicles and to follow significant developments regarding the event. Such resources included the **Canadian International Relations Chronicle**, Nigerian newsmagazines²⁴, and a couple of international magazines²⁵, and relevant journal articles that dealt with the substantive issues in the Ogoni agitation. Comparing accounts (by 'triangulation') enabled a necessary check on accuracy/bias in the Canadian press coverage as well as monitoring the developments

²⁴E.g. **Newswatch**, **Tell**, **This Sunday Magazine (TSM)**.

²⁵**Africa Today**, **Focus on Africa**, **Maclean's** (which surprisingly had only one mention of Nigeria in the entire period), and **Time**.

regarding the news event. However, the content of the three papers remained the principal object of study and this includes the various news genres of news stories, editorials, features and letters to the editor.

1.6 Methodology

Although the focus of this study is the news texts constructed in the Canadian papers, I am not doing quantitative content analysis. Beyond what Berelson sees as “a method of objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of a text”²⁶, I perform a qualitative cultural-critical analysis based on an empirical examination of the Canadian press coverage of Nigeria, especially concerning the event in question. As depicted by Ericson et al.,

Qualitative analysis, aimed at understanding how human expression articulates social order, begins by picking apart the order that is presented to us as common sense. In the process, the analyst picks what is relevant for analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders.²⁷

In this case, “human rights” and “democracy” constitute the items of social order which the action of the Nigerian military government breached. But to further underline my need to get beyond the news texts and their ‘meanings’, this work attends to the cognitive and social context that assign ‘meanings’ to texts. A helpful explication and application of this methodology which searches for meanings as consensual understandings is adequately

²⁶Lindkvist, Kent, *Approaches to Textual Analysis* in Karl Erik Rosengren (ed.) *Advances in Content Analysis*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981, p. 34.

²⁷*Representing Order*, Toronto: U of T Press, 1991, p. 55.

captured in the “discourse analysis” propagated by Teun van Dijk.²⁸ According to him, ‘Discourse analysis emphasizes the obvious, but as yet not fully explored fact that media “messages” are specific types of text and talk.’²⁹ The notable point here is that meanings are “not limited to textual structures”, hence the need for “an analysis of the cognitive, social, political, and cultural context”³⁰ which assigns meaning to a text. This methodological approach responds to my inquiry into what the Nigerian news came to mean in the Western/Canadian context and why. Sections of the analysis and interpretations that examine the Nigerian context as well as the Canadian/Western context of the news discourse are therefore helpful to the pursuit of what the news meant.

Furthermore, Teun van Dijk notes the various approaches in the application of discourse analysis in mass communication such as linguistic approaches, critical linguistics, social semiotics, and the critical and cultural approaches of the Glasgow Media Group and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.³¹ My orientation is more akin to the critical and cultural approaches to be explained in the next chapter. Their attention to ideological and political dimensions of media messages rather than to the purely linguistic approaches

²⁸Cf. van Dijk, 1985b; 1988a; 1988b. NB. “Discourse analysis emerged as a new transdisciplinary field of study between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s in such disciplines as anthropology, ethnography, microsociology, cognitive and social psychology, poetics, rhetoric, stylistics, linguistics, semiotics, and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences interested in the systematic study of the structures, functions, and processing of text and talk.” Teun van Dijk in Jensen & Jankowski, eds, **A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research**, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 108.

²⁹Van Dijk, *The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse* in Jensen & Jankowski, eds., op. cit., p. 108.

³⁰Ibid. p. 116.

³¹Ibid. p. 109.

address my concerns in this research. My use of ideology follows the broad socio-cultural perspective provided by van Dijk as follows:

Ideologies are basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group. Besides their social function of sustaining the interests of groups, ideologies have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of its members.³²

Although this will be further explained in the context of the next chapter, its use in the structures and techniques of the news format is worth mentioning here with regard to the technique of news framing.

To deal with the *ideological structures of the press*, a key technique of news construction which this research intends to focus on, as it examines what texts come to mean, is the technique of *framing*.³³ For the moment, it suffices to state that it provides the range or parameter within which 'preferred meanings' are enclosed in the context of news discourse.

Along with framing, one can list related techniques of news presentation that direct the reader's attention to certain aspects of reality while hiding others. This will be further clarified in the course of the analysis. These techniques include such distinct micro-linguistic details as lexicalization, word processes, the use of metaphors, nomination, illustration,

³²*Discourse semantics and ideology* in *Discourse & Society*, vol. 6(2) 1995, p. 248.

³³Allied techniques which are not specifically pursued here include 'agenda-setting': using the news to help to shape "what people think about"; and 'priming': using the news to shape "how to think about what we're thinking about." Cf. Schudson, *The Power of News*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1995, p. 41. N.B. Even when stories planted using these techniques may appear innocuous, they are non-the-less effective cultural reminders. *Ibid.* p. 42.

picture images, use of headlines, thematization and quotations.³⁴ Heather Brookes observe that as linguistic properties they are effective ways of constructing news by narrowing down vision, channeling attention, simplifying otherwise complex materials, while at the same time establishing credibility.³⁵

Similarly, the various newspaper genres constitute dimensions in the overall framing process. A *News Story* is clothed with the professional ideology of objectivity; it is dependable and timely. An *Editorial* bears the informed and authoritative viewpoint of a paper. A *Feature* article provides an in-depth account/analysis on an issue, event, or personality. An *Opinion* piece is personal, but everybody's opinion does not make it on the pages of a respectable newspaper. A *Letter to the Editor* tells the reaction of a named writer who could be you or me; it offers a feedback line, and creates the impression that the paper is open to its public. These genres, the sections of the paper (such as the front page or the business pages) in which they appear, and sometimes other texts with which each article appears (intertextually) fit into the overall reporting frames of a newspaper and contribute structurally to ideology in news communication.³⁶

³⁴Brookes, Heather J., '*Suit, tie and a touch of juju*' - the ideological construction of Africa: a critical discourse analysis of news on Africa in the British press in *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 6(4) 1995, pp. 464ff.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶A genre is a system of aesthetic or textual conventions; specific genres may be said to function ideologically. Cf. Peter Larsen, *Textual analysis of fictional media content* in Jensen & Jankowski, (eds.), *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*, London: Routledge, 1991. p. 129.

1.7 Research Analysis Protocol

To enable a methodological study of the news texts, my research and analysis protocol was conducted as follows:

(i) Every item appearing in each of the three dailies sampled for the months of November and December 1995 constituted the **primary documents**. The terms of the study and categorization include: the newspaper publication, date, page, origination or institutional sources, headline/theme, key words, tone, style, message content; the authorized definers in the news, actions urged or taken, argumentation, the underlying attitudes and stereotypes. This is followed by a summary and my comments/reactions.

(ii) **Genre Categorization** - Each unit was classified under newspaper genre categories as *News Story*, *Editorial*, *Feature*, *Opinion*, or *Letter to the Editor*. (The genre designations provided by each newspaper was respected.)

(iii) **Frame Categories** - derives from (i) and (ii) and responds to what turned out to be the "preferred meaning" and how this was communicated. For instance, to make news immediately significant, it is framed as "horror" or "crisis" or "human interest". This stage proved to be strategic since it corresponded to the key theoretical framework as enunciated in the following chapter. It is on the basis of these that inferences are drawn regarding what the Nigerian news came to mean for the Canadian/Western context as constructed by the news producers.

(iv) Search for **Patterns, Similarities and Peculiarities** - This comparative examination of the items within each newspaper sample as well as among the three papers sampled goes back to the primary data, and takes account of other publications, events and developments

in the environment, that is, the social context. Information derived from observation and interviews enriched my interrogations. The aim was to ascertain uniformity or agreements, contradictions, difference or balance, in order to raise critical questions regarding ideological positions.

(v) **Summaries and Interpretations** - These followed from the foregoing and constitute the core of the analysis and the basis for the inferences. The news frames remain my schemes of interpretation in this research.³⁷ I conclude this introduction by presenting the Chapters.

1.8 Chapter Presentations

This introductory chapter has drawn attention to the Nigerian event that received wide international coverage in the November-December 1995 period, as well as raised the issue of contextualization regarding what the event came to mean in the West. The Canadian press coverage of Nigeria as an instance of Western news reporting of a developing country is the focus. I also spelt out the goal and significance of this research along with the methodology and protocol that I adopt in my analysis of the three Canadian papers selected.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework and orientations to enable an ideological interrogation. The approach favours the cultural-critical paradigm of Media research on account of the interest in news as a cultural event. In effect it embodies the argument that based on the cultural dominance of the West, the Western media imposes

³⁷The framing scheme in my research protocol corresponds to what Lindlof refers to as the 'reduction of data.' He writes: "Any kind of analysis involves the reduction of data... With qualitative data, the reduction comes in two forms: The first is primarily at the physical level, and the second is at the conceptual level." Lindlof, op. cit. p. 216. The weight of the frame category is that the concept derives from news production practices.

Western frames in the news construction and interpretation of African events. The chapter also provides a review of the literature of African coverage in the Western media; the examination of the institutional arrangement of global media agencies; and the micro-processes of Western news construction. The latter isolates news framing as critical in targeting social cognitions and spells out the frames under which the Nigeria news was researched.

Chapter 3 steps back to offer a historical argument by providing the Nigerian and international context for the Nigerian event that made the international news headlines. Precisely, an analytical look at the Nigerian socio-political and economic situation helps to locate the Ogoni Uprising (which directly led to the executions) within the national question in Nigeria. The historical examination anticipates the problematic interpretation of Nigeria's problem as simply military rule, whereas the absence of 'democratic rule' in Nigeria could be seen as symptomatic of a British Colonial legacy (forceful acquisition, pursuit of greed and self-interest, imperial autocracy and undemocratic territorial unification of what stands today as the Nigerian entity). What dominated the news as seen from the perspective of the Commonwealth was therefore an occlusion due to the Western political and cultural dominance in news definitions. This illustrates that there is more than one way of seeing the Nigerian event.

Chapter 4 performs the analysis of the three Canadian papers using the methodology of discourse analysis. The goal is to perform a comparative discussion of what each paper made of the Nigeria news from its institutional, political and cultural standpoints; to note their similarities and differences; and to emerge with an overall assessment of the dominant

Canadian/Western definition. Notably, there was consensus in the dominant definition of the Nigerian event.

Chapter 5 does a contextual interpretation of the dominant news discourse under the three frames of Deviance, Us and Them, and Power. Here the second-order news genres - the features, opinions, and letters to the editor - are employed as illustrations for portraying the Western/Canadian attitudes towards Nigeria, Gen. Sani Abacha, and how the Canadian government and people dealt with the Nigerian event. The Canadian proposal known in the Commonwealth circles as “carrot and stick” became the apt metaphor for the Western activist attitude towards Nigeria.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, draws attention to the professional belief in objectivity for journalism in the face of unavoidable ideological bias. How the Western bias emanated from the cultural-critical research on the Canadian coverage of Nigeria is highlighted. The enquiry ends by positioning the research findings in the context of the cultural struggle for the articulation of non-Western perspectives and the needed cultural democratization of international media definitions.

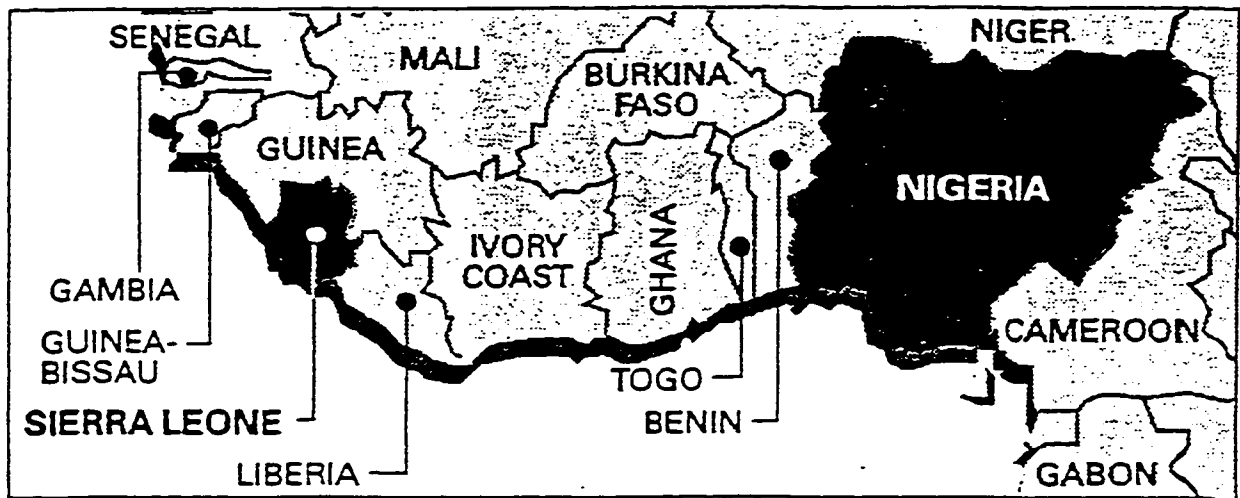
The Knowledge of Power: Theoretical Perspectives

"I think the truest theory of the matter, Socrates, is that the power which gave the first names to things is more than human, and therefore the names must necessarily be correct." - Cratylus.

2.1 A News Scenario: Different Reporting Perspectives

In the early hours of May 25, 1997, Sierra Leone experienced a military coup d'état that ousted its newly elected president, Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. He escaped to neighbouring Guinea by helicopter. On June 2, "there was a brief naval bombardment of Freetown (Sierra Leone) in which it was reported 20 people were killed and terrified civilians fled the city." It was in the attempt to restore the elected President.¹ Four days later, on June 6, **G&M** ran a headline: "Nigerian dictator aiding democratic government." The byline is attributed to Paul Knox, a foreign news staff who operates from Toronto. A three-line supporting lead printed in italics provides an explanation: "Behind General Abacha's attempts to restore Sierra Leonean government is a desire to bolster regional power base and enhance image for delayed elections." Directly below this, an illustrative map of West Africa educates the Canadian reader on what to make of this new crisis in Africa. (See Map 1, page 24) The map bears names of the 16 countries in the region. Nigeria and Sierra Leone are highlighted in black. If the reader still failed to get it, that Nigeria has no challenger in the region, the size contrast between Nigeria and Sierra Leone (about 8:1) says it all: the 'spectacle' of Nigeria, the big, descending on Sierra Leone, the small.

¹Africa Today, July/August, 1997. p. 24.



Source: The Globe & Mail, June 6, 1997

Map 1. Nigeria and its West African (ECOWAS) neighbours

The article goes on to elaborate on why the Nigerian dictator is “sending gunboats and troops to nearby Sierra Leone in a bid to restore a popularly elected president.” Surrounded by much lesser endowed countries, Nigeria is capable of exerting influence in the region despite its “corruption,” “bad management” and “undemocratic government.” Abacha’s personal political gains in the intervention became the story for this news reporter: “... if Gen. Abacha can prevail, he may enhance his stature both inside and outside Nigeria.” This perspective obscures the aspect of the report that the military intervention was in connection with the regional force of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), engaged since 1990 to restore peace in war-torn Liberia, Sierra Leone’s close neighbour.

Compare this with another coverage of this same phenomenon. This time from **Africa Today**, July/August 1997, a news magazine that has a different editorial perspective on African events. The headline ascribed to a “special correspondent” runs: “ECOWAS intervenes to restore democracy.”² The supporting lead follows: “Collusion between a major jailed for treason and sprung by mutinous soldiery, and a rebel who started four years of bloody insurrection has brought Sierra Leone into dangerous confrontation with its neighbours...” The three pictures on the two-page article are facial shots of ousted President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, then a much bolder print of Major Johnny Paul Koroma, the military incumbent, and finally Corporal Foday Sankoh, his Vice-Chairman and the rebel leader under house arrest in Abuja, Nigeria. Building on the eloquence of this mise-en-scene, the article goes into some background to further underline that the news is about a Sierra Leonian event (and not about Nigeria). In the report, Abacha was neither the story nor was he nominated as the “dictator.” He was actually called “President Abacha.” His response to the coup was partly because he was “the current chairman of ECOWAS.” This is further buttressed by the State of Forces Agreement (SOFA), a military and defense pact between Nigeria and Sierra Leone under which Nigeria had a battalion stationed in Freetown to assist Sierra Leonean armed forces. Moreover the support of other countries in the region such as Guinea and Ghana, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), featured in the report. So did the statement of the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, that “(N)eighbouring states, regional groups and international organisations must all play their parts to restore Sierra

²For a look at what began the legacy of intervention in the West African sub-region adopted by the ECOWAS see Robert Mortimer, *ECOMOG, Liberia, and Regional Security in West Africa* in Kellner & Rothchild, 1996: 149-164.

Leone's constitutional and democratic government." Remarkably this article points out that "the criticism has been raised that, since Nigeria's regime is not democratic, Abacha had no moral right to intervene." To dislodge this criticism appears to be the goal of the article.

Looking at both news reports, one can safely conclude: two accounts, two sides to the same event. It is providential that this event took place even as international pressure is on Nigeria to democratize. Now despite the different perspectives in the two reports, particularly in what they each identify as the story, the last statement cited above shows that the **G&M** article presents what is not an isolated opinion: Abacha had no moral right to intervene. Perhaps the reader agrees with this statement. This calls to question the backing of the Nigerian-led intervention in Sierra Leone by the regional and continental African institutions - ECOWAS and OAU. In the light of the vehement criticisms of the Abacha regime following the November 1995 executions in Nigeria, and by mostly Western European and North American countries, it is fair to suggest that the **G&M's** take on the above story is the commonsense in the West. A difference in ideology partly explains Western perspectives towards African events.

As will be shown, ideology in this work is used in a 'general' and inclusive sense.³ It is here that I locate my theoretical inquiry. Fortunately the difference in news perspectives has attracted the attention of scholars investigating Western news coverage of non-Western zones of the world. In this chapter, I will review the literature of Western news coverage of Africa, isolate the macro discourse regarding the transnational media coverage of the Third World, and plumb the essential aspect of Western news construction. I begin with the

³See footnote 38 page 38.

literature review.

2.2 Trends in Western news coverage of Africa: A Literature Review

This examination of the literature on Western news coverage of developing countries aims at locating the epistemological and ideological theme of this research. The approach strikes at the root of Western bias in the media. I assume the awareness arising from the criticisms that were championed in the movement for the New World Information and Communication Order⁴. The movement which began in the early 1970s argued the impossibility of a New World Economic Order if the prevailing system of international media dominance by the West continued. The Political Declaration of the 5th Summit Conference (Colombo, August 1976) concludes that “a new international order in the fields of information and mass communications is as vital as a new international economic order.”⁵ What the Non-Aligned countries sought was the “decolonization of information” which hitherto was dominated by the transnational news agencies. In the “New Delhi Declaration”

⁴The movement which derives from the agitation of the Non-Aligned countries in the 1970s targets the dominance of Western industrialized nations and their transnational news agencies in information and communication. It criticizes the status quo of media coverage of the developing nations and seeks redress for the imbalance, distortion, under-coverage, and negative reporting that put these other regions in bad light. The Sean MacBride (UNESCO) Report, **Many Voices, One World**, presented to the United Nations (UN) in 1980 incorporates the concerns and objectives of this movement. Unfortunately the recommendations failed to meet the acceptance of the big powers behind the international media conglomerates. For a discussion of the travails of this movement in the United Nations, see Roach, Colleen, *The movement for a New World Information and Communication order: a second wave?* **Media, Culture and Society**, Vol. 12 (1990) pp. 283-307. The intellectual commitment to find fresh platforms to keep the issues alive, as globally relevant, and not as the peculiar demands of the Non-Aligned nations, is discernible in Gerbner, George, H. Mowlana & K. Nordenstreng, (eds.), **The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall and Renewal**, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1993.

⁵Nordenstreng, K & W. Kleinwachter, *The New International Information and Communication Order* in Asante M.K. & W.B. Gudykunst, **Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication**. London: Sage Publications, 1989. p. 91.

(July 1976) the group observed as follows:

The dissemination of information rests at present in the hands of a few agencies located in a few developed countries and the rest of the peoples of the world are forced to see each other and even themselves through the medium of these agencies.⁶

Considering this focus, it is obvious that the path to be traced in this project is not entirely new. The question one might want to keep in mind is to what extent Western coverage has improved in the past 20 years since the agitation. Although the Canadian perspective is central to this work, it is symbolic of Western coverage. Therefore my search keeps in focus the global dimensions of the phenomenon.

Critics of Western press coverage of non-Western countries are drawn from within the non-Western societies as well as from the West itself. This, I believe, creates some muddle in what the issues are at a given time. I see the need to separate from the concerns of the present work the institutional objectives of Herbert Schiller⁷, or Cees Hamelink⁸ who pursue Western media dominance and manipulation from the perspective of political economy. Their works are in turn classed as charging the West with media or cultural imperialism.⁹ Unlike their approach, this work does not critique the commercialized media institutions of the West (USA) so much as the media texts and the knowledge of peoples that is constructed, aided by the economic and political power and dominance of the West. This

⁶Ibid. p. 90.

⁷E.g. *Transnational Media and National Development* in Nordenstreng and Schiller (eds.) *National Sovereignty and International Communication*, New Jersey: Ablex, 1979; Schiller, *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*, NY: OUP, 1989.

⁸E.g. *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications*, NY: Longman, 1983.

⁹See for instance, John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991, pp. 37ff.

project unveils the ideological perspectives of Western coverage.

A work that responds to why the Western media constructs the knowledge of other peoples is Anthony Smith's **The Geopolitics of Information**.¹⁰ The author notices a continuation in the work of the 19th century explorers, missionaries and colonizers, and describes what media correspondents/reporters do as "...one civilization to scrutinize another. Reporting is exploration carried on by other means."¹¹ Furthermore his work attempts to bring the international media concerns face-to-face with the technological advances in an increasingly interconnecting world. Smith wrote in the heat of the international media debate. Regarding researches conducted on both sides of the debate (those advocating 'free press' and their Third World opponents) especially with regard to the activities of news agencies, he skeptically disagrees with the claim, for instance, that tragedy and disaster are exclusive media images of the 'Third World.' What he confirms, though, is noteworthy, "that the Third World was rather presented in sketchy form and from ethnocentric perspectives in the process of satisfying a Western-dominated news market."¹² Even as Smith was critical of the self-serving politics and the frivolous cultural policies of the elites of the Non-Aligned nations, as well as the idealism of the MacBride Report, he makes a noteworthy admission, what he calls an *intractable issue of information*:

behind the argument over the New International Information Order lie the facts of history; what the issue really entails is coping with the long-term psychic consequences of colonialism and protecting the world against the intensification of

¹⁰London: Faber & Faber, 1980.

¹¹op. cit., p. 24.

¹²Ibid. p. 91.

the process of dependence in the late twentieth century, the era of advanced electronics and satellite-born information.¹³

This socio-historical appraisal agrees with the powerful diagnosis of the situation in the famous intervention of Mustapha Masmoudi.¹⁴ This was when the media debate burst into UNESCO in the late 1970s. Masmoudi's polemics which were directed against the Western transnational media in the coverage of events in the developing world drew attention to (a) the *hegemonic ideology* and *domination* of the Western news media; (b) the *universalization* of Western interests, values, messages and journalistic norms that ignore the needs of developing nations and minorities; (c) the tendency to *ridicule* and to focus on *crises* in these regions; (d) the *imbalance* and *distortion* in news accounts; and (e) a territorial gaze that derives from a *mentality* that feeds on the historical experience of *colonialism*¹⁵ (and the Slave Trade). This summary of his criticisms represents the track that is variously followed in the research literature on the coverage of African events and of minorities by the Western media. It is important to point this out because the tendency is for the dominant discourse to appropriate the struggles of the underlings. I find it useful to examine the American and European studies in turn.

¹³Ibid. p. 33.

¹⁴Masmoudi, M, *The New World Information Order* in **Journal of Communication**, vol. 29, no. 2, Spring 1979, pp. 172-185. Mustapha Masmoudi was Tunisia's Secretary of State for Information and is First President of the Intergovernmental Coordinating Council for Information of the Non-Aligned Countries. He was a member of the International Commission for the Study of Communications Problems established by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 19th session.

¹⁵Colonialism is not used lightly in this project. In the context of the European settlement of the "scramble for Africa" at the Berlin Conference of 1884/5, not to acknowledge the callousness of its brutal implementation, the greed of the European countries involved, and the inhumanity of the policy, must be a classic instance of the power of the dominant to define reality and reproduce what enters the realm of commonsense knowledge.

One good collection of researches from the American perspective is appropriately called **Africa's Media Image** (1992), and edited by Beverly G. Hawk. The book has more than a dozen analytical studies on the coverage of African events (includes the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya¹⁶, the Civil War in Nigeria¹⁷, U.S. Food Aid to Africa¹⁸ and Savimbi's Image in the U.S. Media¹⁹), and with additional reflective chapters. A reformist agenda undergirds the publication which derives from contributions by media researchers, Africa specialists, editors, and correspondents. TV and newspaper studies are featured; for instance, *New York Times Coverage of Africa, 1976-1990* by Hassan M. El Zein and Anne Cooper. The major reasons/excuses given for the kind of news treatment that the continent receives are as follows: ignorance of reporters and media gate-keepers, inadequate staffing, an emerging sense of the irrelevance of sub-Saharan Africa to American economic interests, a presumed lack of interest in African news, poor communications infrastructures, exorbitant costs, and indirect censorship by African governments. Consequently, with a small percentage of Western news bureaus in Africa, the transnational media sparsely cover Africa and practice 'parachute journalism' whenever an event is deemed newsworthy in the region. But beyond the paucity of coverage, it is the narrow framework within which Africa is covered that concerns the present project.

¹⁶Wunyabari Maloba, *The Media and Mau Mau: Kenyan Nationalism and Colonial Propaganda*. pp. 51-61.

¹⁷Ibelema, Minabere, *Tribes and Prejudice: Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War*, pp. 77-93.

¹⁸Fair, Jo Ellen, *Are We Really the World? Coverage of U.S. Food Aid in Africa, 1980-1989*, pp. 109-120.

¹⁹Windrich, Elaine, *Savimbi's Image in the U.S. Media: A Case Study in Propaganda* p. 194-205.

Dealing closely with this focus is the study of the **Time** magazine coverage of the Nigerian Civil War which employed three dominant (rhetorical-analytic) themes used in the Euro-American media coverage of Africa viz: (a) “the tribal fixation” that sees Africa in terms of primitivity, (b) the Cold War fixation, and (c) a cultural affinity with the United States.²⁰ As Ibelema argues, the themes of tribal fixation and cultural affinity were espoused in the **Time** coverage, although the war involved “a classic clash between the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity.”²¹ (Hawk, 1992: 77) This throws some light on the phenomenon of news framing discussed later in this chapter.

Beverly Hawk’s *Metaphors of African Coverage*, which introduces this corpus states:

The African story is different from other foreign relations stories... Africa has been viewed as the “dark continent” by the West, an allusion not only to the skin color of its inhabitants but to their ignorance of European ways.²²

Speaking to the epistemological aspects of these studies, Hawk sees the media representation of Africa as consonant with

paradigms ... chosen ... not because they are an accurate summary of African reality and experience. They do not originate in Africa at all. They were chosen because they correspond to notions about Africa already existent in the minds of Westerners. The “news” is not new, nor challenging to colonial notions about Africa. The news is not a flow of information from the South to the North at all but a flow of information from the North to the North.²³

Affirming this judgment is left to the individual studies in the collection. I need to pursue this

²⁰Cf. Ibelema, *Tribes and Prejudice: Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War*, Hawk, 1992: 77-93. See also Fair, Jo Ellen, *War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image* in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 17:2 (Summer 1993): 5-22.

²¹Hawk, op. cit. p. 77.

²²op. cit., p. 4.

²³op. cit., p. 13.

interesting trajectory as contained in another important study, Peter Dahlgren's *The Third World and TV News: Western Ways of Seeing the "Other"*.²⁴ It captures the ideological and symbolic perspective in Western TV news coverage where events in the Third World are concerned. He puts his findings admirably:

over time...TV news promotes certain "ways of seeing" the world, and thus of necessity, excludes other ways... Ways of seeing are a reflection of existing social practices and commitments, and they serve as a force for the promotion of those commitments.²⁵

In Dahlgren's study, three themes/motifs are identified as characterizing the way the West sees the Third World - social disorder, flawed development and primitivism.²⁶ (Adams, 1982: 48) This study used structural anthropology and its theory of bipolar opposite (whereby "the meaning of each motif thus resides in the tension between its actual and its implied negation or antithesis") to detail the opposite motifs which are used to represent the "specific touchstones within the Western culture's perception of itself and its relation to the Third World."²⁷

A look at another set of studies, this time in the specifically European media, helps to round up this review of Western news perspectives. Two of them will suffice. **News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid** (1986) by Paul Harris & Robin Palmer, reports on the Western

²⁴Adams, William C, **TV Coverage of International Affairs**, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1982. Pp. 45-65.

²⁵Ibid. pp. 45, 46. For an institutional discussion and analysis of this news practice, see Ericson, Baranek and Chan, **Visualizing Deviance**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

²⁶Ibid. p. 48.

²⁷Ibid. The concept of "bipolar opposites" as developed in structural anthropology is a paradigm for analyzing myth. Thus the bipolar opposite of the motif of 'social disorder' is 'stability'; for 'human rights abuse' it is 'ethical government'; for 'primitivism' it is 'modernism', or 'being civilized'.

media coverage of crisis in Africa including once again the Biafran War in Nigeria (1967-70), and later the coverage of the Ethiopian Famine (1984). The significant contribution of this study lies in anecdotal accounts of the triumph of images. It serves to detail the struggle of radical journalists to break into the dominant media definitions of the African news narrative, especially in the BBC establishment. On that account the gruesome images of atrocities of war and famine met with determined initial refusal until the images got to the British public via the alternative media. The book thus makes a point of demonstrating that a hegemonic control exists in the Western media.

Finally, Heather Brookes²⁸ employed critical discourse analysis (made famous by Teun van Dijk²⁹) to conduct a comparative study of two politically and ideologically opposed British papers - **The Daily Telegraph** (part of the conservative press) and **The Guardian** (supports liberal causes and oppressed minorities). Despite their differing 'public idioms' they showed similarity in their representations of a "stereotypical, naturalized and dominant discourse on Africa." The study equally focused on "the role of these discourses in terms of the relations of power and dominance between the West and the 'third world'." More than the other works reviewed above, the methodological concerns of Brookes' study adequately address my focus in studying the coverage of Nigeria in the three Canadian papers chosen.

²⁸*'Suit, tie and a touch of juju' - the ideological construction of Africa: a critical discourse analysis of news on Africa in the British press. Discourse & Society* (1995) vol. 6(4): 461-494.

²⁹*Discourse Semantics and Ideology, Discourse & Society* (1995) vol. 6(2):243-289; *Elite Discourse and Racism*, London: Sage Publications, 1993; *Racism and the Press*, London: Routledge, 1991.

In summary, I have acknowledged an increasing body of literature critical of the Western news coverage of the Other; some derive from the Third World, others from the West itself. The range of focus span the continuum of the purely quantitative to the qualitative content of the coverage. It is important that this project be seen to move beyond the sparse coverage to the ideological content of the media coverage. A dominant Western idea of Africa operates in the media. Put concretely, the review indicates that African events in the Western media have been subjected to antithetical frames that have scarcely moved beyond the images constructed at the initial encounter of Africa with the West. For the purpose of this study, significant trajectories in this ideological construction include: (i) a dehistoricization that tends to obscure and decontextualize events in Africa. I shall endeavour to provide what is missed as part of my criticism of this event coverage; (ii) the perception of African events or stories in keeping with dominant Western “ways of seeing”, often cast in symbolic/mythical forms to accentuate the cultural differences. Ironically this gives rise to the urge to universalize Western values and commitments; and (iii) the stereotypical frame that emphasizes the dualism between the West and the Other. Together these approaches give rise to the peculiar coverage that Africa receives in the Western press. Although I shall be looking at the Canadian coverage as an instance of Western news reporting, my literature search did not turn up any specific study of the Canadian coverage of an African news including the Nigerian news that is of specific concern here. My assumption is that Canada falls under the survey of Euro-American perspectives³⁰ - in which case this study undertakes

³⁰The affinity of the Canadian press to the American perspective is more closely studied in Robert Hackett's *News and Dissent: The Press and the Politics of Peace in Canada*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1991.

what might be a pioneer attempt to articulate the press coverage of a sub-Saharan African country from the Canadian perspective. I need to locate the theme of this research in the field of Media Studies. The objective is to underscore the necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the hidden but pervasive symbolism and ideology in the construction of news.

2.3 Cultural-critical approach & the location of Ideology

The theoretical framework of this study emerges from the acknowledgement that the imperial experience introduced an indelible mark in the way Western nations construct the Other nations. Such awareness has been expressed by scholars of Post-Colonial Literature³¹ and Historiography,³² Cultural Theory and Critical Social Theory. Among these, Edward Said's questioning of entrenched Western orthodox knowledge of the Other in **Orientalism** (1978) articulates an academically credible formulation of this phenomenon.³³ Earlier critics of Western imperialism and colonialism such as Aimé Césaire³⁴, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon³⁵, and a host of African nationalists have assailed Western dominance within a different (African) context and in a less intellectually elaborate but still political front. The

³¹See for instance, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, **The Empire Writes Back**, London: Routledge, 1989; and **The Post-Colonial Studies Reader**, London: Routledge, 1995, edited by the same group.

³²For a look at the critical discussion of the evolving historiographical trends particularly in African history see Temu, A, & B. Swai, **Historians and Africanist History: A Critique**, London: Zed Press, 1981.

³³See also E. Said, **Culture and Imperialism**, NY: Vintage Books, 1994.

³⁴See Aimé Césaire, **Discourse on Colonialism**, NY: 1957.

³⁵See Frantz Fanon, **The Wretched of the Earth**, NY: 1963.

wide implications of the imbalance of power and knowledge between the West and the rest (not just the Oriental) can be found in this definition of Said's epistemological and sociological theme:

Orientalism is ... above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with *power political* (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), *power intellectual* (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), *power cultural* (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), *power moral* (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do) ...³⁶ (Italics is mine.)

As can be seen, I take further liberty to extend this assessment to Africa as another non-Western region, and to add to the list of power relationships, the *power economic*. The interchange between the metropolitan centres of the West and the outlying independent but former colonies in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America, continues to perpetuate the condition of subordination, where the latter are seen as different from the West who see themselves as destined to be the models in virtually every sphere of the human definition. The raw deal is that the West gets to perform this definition. The voices of the peripheral regions are yet to acquire the aura of respectability. I need to relate this cultural divide to the specific discipline of Media Studies.

Media Studies already experienced the awakening to cultural duality. This took off predictably from a purely European cast where social class conflicts were the issue. In a journal article, *Media Communications vs. Cultural Studies: Overcoming the Divide*, Douglas Kellner traces the incorporation of Cultural Studies into Communications. Firstly, there was the pioneering step of the adherents of Critical Social Theory. Representing this

³⁶Said, op. cit. NY: Vintage Books, 1978, p. 12.

group are Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt school. Their classical essay, *The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception*", in **Dialectic of Enlightenment**, inaugurated the term "cultural industries" which then was a derogatory term to depict their aversion for mass-produced cultural (media) products. Guided by their separation and preference for "high" (class), as distinct from "mass", culture, they criticized the underlying capitalist enterprise as subversive of "authentic art" and accused it of introducing a debased and ideological form of culture. This critical approach, though useful for providing a tool for ideological critique failed (a) to acknowledge its own bias and (b) to recognize that "the active audience often produces its own meanings and uses for products of the cultural industries."³⁷ Thus its interpretation of ideology stops at assailing the opponent.³⁸ This represents a peculiar Marxist use of ideology.³⁹

Continuing, Kellner observes that the rapprochement between Communications and Cultural Studies became complete in the work of the British Cultural Studies of the Birmingham School. Outstanding names here include Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.

³⁷Cf. Kellner, Douglas, *Media Communications vs. Cultural Studies: Overcoming the Divide. Communication Theory*, a Journal of the International Communication Association, May 1995, p. 165.

³⁸Karl Mannheim's work in the definition of the field of sociology of knowledge formulates a theory of ideology in a 'general' sense. By this, he writes, "it is no longer possible for one point of view and interpretation to assail all others as ideological without itself being placed in the position of having to meet that challenge." Thus we are all prone to ideology. This is over and above "the proletariat's use of ideological analysis to unmask the hidden motives of its adversaries." Cf. K. Mannheim/Louis Wirth, *Ideology and Utopia*, London: Routledge, 1936. p. 66.

³⁹On the other hand, I draw attention once more to the adequacy of van Dijk's broad cultural sensitivity according to which, "*Ideologies are basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of sociocultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group. Besides their social function of sustaining the interests of groups, ideologies have cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of its members.*" *Discourse semantics and ideology in Discourse & Society*, vol. 6(2) 1995, p. 248.

Beyond the quantitative and more empirical methodologies usually employed in communications research, this school developed a broader base and a multi-disciplinary approach that enhances the critique of ideology. Thus it became possible to engage the theories of political economy, social theory, cultural analysis, philosophical speculation, and political critique in the study of media, culture and communication. According to Kellner: "These alternative approaches also destabilize the discipline and open up the study of culture and communications to the fields of history and society."⁴⁰ Thus the thoroughness of this approach lies in its openness to accommodate relevant disciplines in conducting research in the social sciences and humanities. Especially by employing the hegemony theory of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, it became possible to understand how societies maintain stability through a combination of physical force and inducing consent using religion, schooling, or the media, to obtain a dominant social order whether as "liberal capitalism, fascism, white supremacy, democratic socialism, communism or whatever."⁴¹ Kellner continues, "Birmingham cultural studies aimed at a political project of social transformation in which the location of forces of domination and resistance would aid the process of political struggle."⁴²

Within this unified scheme and multidisciplinary approach, one can appreciate the broad critical dimension that Said employs in his discourse of Orientalism. To recall the

⁴⁰Ibid. p. 166.

⁴¹Ibid. p. 167. For an instructive account of the systematic employment of these ideological and repressive apparatuses see Althusser, Louis, *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*, in his *Lenin and Philosophy*, London: New Left Books, 1971.

⁴²Op. Cit., p. 167.

argument once again, the charge is that whenever the media of the Western world cover events in the non-Western zones, there is a pattern in the interplay of forces that carries the baggage of the historical encounter dating back to the experience of the slave trade (with regard to Africa), imperialism, colonialism and the mentality that operates a dichotomy between the modern, industrialized nations and the traditional/primitive societies; between a progressive and self-reliant West and the developing (underdeveloped) and aid-strapped nations of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. These cultural opposites of the West are usually considered to be at the lower end of the evolutionary ladder: "They" are seen in terms of "us," the West, and "they" need to evolve to catch up with "our" political, cultural, moral and economic standards. To place the coverage of the Nigerian event within this dualistic discourse reveals more than is fore-grounded in the news. The research approach sees the news as an active construction by historicized and located human agents with interests in a hegemonic social order that intervene in the knowledge so constructed. Ironically there appears to be more of the newsworker's worldview in the news than there is the event reported in its "objectivity." (Objectivity is explained under news construction.) The following concludes the above citation of Said's theorization which interprets the world of the West vis-a-vis the "Orient" that is constructed:

Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is - and does not simply represent - a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world.⁴³

That world of the West is seen in direct contrast with the subordinate groups. Hence the Other exists to offer the West the occasion to define itself and its social order with all the

⁴³Said, 1978:12.

powers available to it – intellectual, political, cultural, moral, economic.

It is in order to exploit the multidisciplinary approach that would unveil the hegemonic mentality indicated above that the rest of this chapter will discuss just three of several fruitful avenues that one could pursue. These three are: (i) News as cultural construction: its position in the West; (ii) News in social cognition; and (iii) The framing technique in news construction. These avenues enable a micro-cultural critique of Western news practices and will hopefully facilitate my analysis that builds on the macro-discourse of global media concerns as expressed by critics of cross-cultural media representations. They also provide my grid for the understanding of the Canadian news coverage of Nigeria as a non-Western country. Before this discussion of the theory behind actual news practices, I need to briefly situate the political distribution of the major international news agencies who are the gate-keepers or filters through whom news passes from the periphery back to the Western metropolis. The three Canadian papers chosen depended at one time or the other on this international system of news in their reports on Nigeria. Even as they sometimes perform some editing on the news agency copy, the practitioners interviewed⁴⁴ lay claim to respecting the news quality of the product.

2.4 The transnational news cartel: the Euro-American news agencies

In the age of satellite technology and computer/Internet capabilities, foreign news coverage has acquired a facility and efficiency that have far outstripped the marvels of speed transmission when the telegraph, the telephone and the radio made their entry in the 19th

⁴⁴This is the claim of the foreign desk editor of the **G&M** whom I interviewed on August 1, 1997.

century and the early part of the 20th century. Images, text and voice now achieve instant transmission with the speed of light while respecting no territorial borders. The physical presence of a news reporter ceases to be a requirement for assembling and reporting on events in foreign countries. Commenting on the earlier inventions in the 19th century, James Carey interprets what took place then as the “annihilation of space and time” and the imposition of a separation between communication and transportation, freeing it from the constraints of geography.⁴⁵ Noteworthy too is that these pioneering inventions for global communications came side by side with the ‘age of empire.’ That period marked the expansion of monopoly capitalism and the competition among the powerful European nations to acquire territories in Africa, Asia and the South Pacific. France, Germany and England supported and were respectively served by, Havas news agency (changed to Agence France Presse in 1945), Wolffe and Reuters. These emerged as the three major news agencies of the period who, in 1870, parceled out the global information market.⁴⁶ With Germany’s misadventures in the World Wars, Wolffe dropped out of the picture in the early part of the 20th century while the American Associated Press and the United Press International finally joined the international news cartel.⁴⁷ The two American news agencies, unlike the European agencies, detached themselves early from the tent-hooks of the American government. This made them neither less nationalistic nor less Western in their outlook. Now with the

⁴⁵**Communication as Culture**, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988, pp 203, 204.

⁴⁶Mattelart, A., **Mapping World Communications: War. Progress, Culture.**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993. p. 11. See also Tunstall, **The Media are American**, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977, p. 29,30.

⁴⁷Tunstall, Jeremy, op. cit., pp. 28-32.

exception of the countries in the Communist bloc, these global media conglomerates continue to provide any serious press in the countries in the Western hemisphere and beyond with a staple of news reports of distant territories. It is no exaggeration when Jeremy Tunstall's book, **The Media are American**, bears a chapter with the caption - *World news: Made in USA and UK*. The only alternative to global coverage is where a newspaper can afford to send a correspondent/reporter, depend on a stringer, or is part of a less equipped news service.

With regard to this case study, Reuters, the Associated Press and the Agence France Presse dominated the reports deriving from news agencies. Additionally, all the Canadian papers made use of the Canadian news agency, the Canadian Press. This established control is significant for an appreciation of the cross-cultural coverage in international news. If certain city newspapers end up offering what appears to be a "standardized" coverage of international news events, a look at the origination reveals what is often a common dependence on one of the global news agencies. Moreover the phenomenon of "pack journalism" whereby reporters for different news agencies share story ideas and spread news among themselves is well-known. It is also remarkable that the peculiar difficulty in reading news of distant lands has remained the unfamiliarity of the reader or viewer with the context. R. Hackett affirms that "people are more likely to accept media messages about subjects in which they lack direct experience or strong predispositions. For most North Americans, that is the case with most aspects of international affairs."⁴⁸ To that extent, the uncritical consumer is fair game for reports packaged by the network of Western news agencies and

⁴⁸Hackett, 1991: 14.

media organizations. Where an insider can dismiss exaggerations or distortions in news reports, a novice to the situation is held captive except he/she takes to skepticism. For those who care to know, the power of the news agencies to control what is known objectively is enormous. I now turn to the micro-cultural question of news construction, beginning with the cultural position of news in what I assume are the media-saturated societies of the West.

2.5.1 News as a cultural construction: its sociological position in the West

What position does news occupy within a liberal democratic society, such as there is in countries of the West? Responding to this question is preferable to seeking an objective definition of news. In effect, the discussion is situated in a search for what news stands for in the worldview of the Western consumer of media products. My assumption is that in the West, media saturation has attained a critical level. Skeptics may argue about this, but here news is said to have acquired a prominence hitherto assigned to scientific reports, anthropological records, expert and specialist knowledge in area studies, political records or reports of administrators credited with on-hand experience of distant lands. The trick is that people get to know who these elite definers are, and what they have to offer, through the media. Teun van Dijk states:

None of the other power elites, and especially the political elites, and their discourses could be as influential as they are without the mediating and sometimes reinforcing functions of the press, radio, and television. What most people know about politicians, scholars, and corporate top managers is based on their refracted picture constructed in the media.⁴⁹

⁴⁹van Dijk, Teun, **Elite Discourse and Racism**, Sage series on race and ethnic relations, Vol. 6, London: Sage, 1993. p. 241.

In this section, I shall attempt to demonstrate how the news has acquired this competence in the society. Firstly, the news has become the site for the construction of what is accepted knowledge for a given society. It is in this sense that, I believe, Michael Schudson⁵⁰, a prominent American media scholar declares: "News is culture." (Schudson, 1995:31). He explains that it is misguided to conceive news either as information or as ideology.⁵¹ As culture, news is consensual public knowledge:

what Americans get in their news is not so much the idiosyncratic interpretation of an individual journalist or newspaper but a more or less consensual interpretation springing from the common vantage of regular political correspondents who step into a public arena where political parties do not provide comprehensive viewpoints themselves.⁵²

What news professionals do is to provide what is pertinent to their publics. For Gaye Tuchman, "the public character of news is an essential feature of news." (1987:193) The shared knowledge that is derived from news is an essential component of culture that can be invoked upon for action. The Canadian news media is not very different. Recounting his encounter with the late Barbara Frum, the celebrated Canadian broadcaster, the **G&M** editor-in-chief, William Thorsell, recalls her saying to him, "All I'm asking you to do is tell me something that I don't already know about something that matters to me, or should."⁵³

⁵⁰His 1978 book, **Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers**, studies the rise of the professional (news) ideology of objectivity as a product of political, economic and social democratization in the United States. In **The Power of News** (1995), he locates the power of news in the democratic culture itself.

⁵¹*Ibid.* pp. 30, 31. The sense is that news workers are not out to propagate an ideology. This is not to say that news is not ideological. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say that news is hegemonic.

⁵²*Ibid.* p. 31.

⁵³**Time** magazine, Canadian Edition, Sept. 29, 1997. p. 43.

Furthermore, Michael Schudson insists that the news is neither abstract nor interest-free. What news professionals produce and reproduce conforms to the structures and traditions of given societies:

Media professionalism is defined not in relation to some abstract measure of professional integrity but in relation to some political structures and the political culture of a given society.⁵⁴

This sociological appraisal offers more than a purely institutional and professional definition of news as a presentation of objective facts seen as “consensually validated statements about the world predicated on a radical separation of facts and values.”⁵⁵ To maintain credibility, the method adopted by the reporter is the “use of single credible sources, or two sides in a conflict within a point/counter point format...” (Ericson et al., 1987: 53) This is apparently a means to preclude the inclinations, prejudices, biases and partiality of the reporter. To be precise, however, bare facts, even if they exist, do not make news. Unless these so-called facts are clothed with significance they are not news; they are irrelevant. To make news relevant, interesting and even entertaining to their audience/readers, is the task of newswriters who engage in *interpretation* and *representation* of the news. They believe they need to do this to stay in business. The “facts” therefore must be “en-fleshed” and communicated in narrative form.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Schudson, 1995:31.

⁵⁵Schudson, 1978:122. Note also that Gaye Tuchman defines facts in terms of a methodology of news production, as “pertinent information gathered by professionally validated methods specifying the relationship between what is known and how it is known.” Tuchman, *Making News*, NY: Free Press, 1978, p. 82.

⁵⁶The eminence of form over content can be inferred in Marshall McLuhan’s dictum: the medium is the message.

Amidst other institutional and professional criteria for news⁵⁷, the reporter's role is primary. Ericson et al. describe the task of the trained journalist: "the 'trained' journalist is one who can readily recognize an event in terms of its significance as news, know how to proceed with selecting and interviewing sources or acquiring documents relevant to the task, and produce an account within news discourse that will be judged competent." (1987: 135)

The important premise here is that every news report has a bias or perspective, which stands for the angle from which an event is reported to render it meaningful to a given news audience. In the Western liberal democracies, the professional news ideology has insisted on objectivity (usually accompanied by fairness and balance). Objectivity is a means of ensuring that news reports are trustworthy and credible⁵⁸. On the other hand, if news is naively regarded as a mirror of what happens in society, the agency (and therefore interests of news operatives) is given minimal credit. The "news as mirror" (of events) viewpoint is not able to account for differences in the news reports on the same event. Rather, media theorists⁵⁹ rightly see news as an intentional construction, as cultural, as ideological, and as a product of the overall process of production, distribution and consumption in its socio-political context. News does not just happen; news is made. This takes into account the various

⁵⁷Some of these criteria listed in Hartley (1982) and Ericson et al (1987) are: simplification/unambiguity, dramatization, personalization, continuity, consonance, the unexpected, deviance and control, threshold, frequency, meaningfulness (proximity and relevance), composition, elite nations & personalities.

⁵⁸Michael Schudson argues that in response to the skepticism of the 'democratic market society,' the objectivity claims of journalism took a methodological turn: "It was not the final expression of a belief in facts but the assertion of a method designed for a world in which even facts could not be trusted." Cf. **Discovering the News**, Basic Books, 1978. p. 122.

⁵⁹Hartley, John, **Understanding News**, London: Methuen, 1982. pp. 93ff; Tuchman, Gaye, **Making News: A study in the construction of reality**. NY: Free Press, 1978; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, **Visualizing Deviance: a study of news organizations**, Toronto: U of T Press, 1987.

intervening encounters between an event that is considered newsworthy and its appearance as knowledge offered for consumption to the situated hearer, reader or viewer. In other words, a critical examination of news that unmask its creation is essential to the discovery of the existence of bias in news reports. It is the presence of bias and perspectives that makes a discussion of a peculiar coverage of non-Western territories possible.

2.5.2 News in Social Cognition

Where precisely do we locate the power of news? It remains vague to simply describe it as culture. It is necessary to explain how and in what sense the news is influential. Although media effects is beyond the scope of this project, media effectiveness is another matter. The latter deals with the symbolic power of news. Todd Gitlin's argument is relevant:

Since the media aim at least to influence, condition and reproduce the activity of audiences by reaching into the symbolic organization of thought, the student of mass media must pay attention to the symbolic content of media messages before the question of effects can even be sensibly posed.⁶⁰

To speak of media in terms of social construction of knowledge acknowledges the interaction between the event, the news institution and the audience in what is commonly accepted as the news.

To pose the question of influence in another way, how does the newsworker render the news significant and therefore meaningful to the reader? A number of significant steps have been taken to analyze the process of social cognition where people interact in given social contexts. Three such steps are indicated here to respond to the question posed above.

⁶⁰The Whole World is Watching, Berkeley: University of California, 1980. p. 14.

I discuss them as symbolic interactionism, meaningful structure and the context model.

2.5.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

This represents a pragmatist approach in “the study of how the self and the social environment mutually define and shape each other through symbolic communication.”⁶¹ With roots in the works of William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Charles Sanders Peirce, this American contribution flourished in the Chicago School of sociology. What is emphasized is the particular relation “between knowing and experiencing” where, according to pragmatists, knowledge is not “the rationalist belief in an obdurate reality” but tailored by doing.⁶² With regard to the power ascribed to meaning and definition, this statement of W.I. Thomas is viewed as an interactionist touchstone: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”.⁶³

In the work of G. Mead⁶⁴, the use of ‘significant symbols’ (gestures - verbal and non-verbal) in communications “incorporates the anticipated response of the other,” and this makes *role taking* possible.⁶⁵ In the context of the knowledge constructed in news, the ‘significant symbols’ feature in the media text itself. For instance, one can distinguish between an *elected government* and a *military regime*: one is democratic; the other is not. Whether the readers’ responses to such appellations are actually posited is another matter.

⁶¹Lindlof, Thomas R., *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, London: Sage Publications, 1995, p. 40.

⁶²Lindlof, op. cit., p. 41.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Mead, G.H., *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

⁶⁵Lindlof, op. cit., p. 42.

As a matter of fact, their responses can range from disbelief to total indifference. What is taken for granted is that there is mutual understanding within the social context of the media definition. There has been a meaningful interaction based on a common acceptance of symbols.

2.5.2.2 Meaningful Structure

The Birmingham school of Cultural Studies, already referred to above, has provided a multidisciplinary scope to a hitherto linear mode of communications research. Stuart Hall's landmark essay, *Encoding-Decoding*⁶⁶, employs Roland Barthes' semiotics⁶⁷ (study of meanings) to theorize media (TV) texts. The article serves to explicate the way meanings are structured to acquire dominance in the discourse of given societal contexts, what he refers to as the "structure of discourses in dominance." Because of the hierarchical organization of discourse, certain meanings acquire the distinction of being the "preferred meanings."⁶⁸ This, one should venture to add, explains, for instance, why the culture of democracy has acquired such a connotatively meaningful acceptance in the Western mind that despite its empirical (denotative) discontents in practice, it is widely perceived as the best form of government, and therefore naturalized. Consequently democracy has become the dominant and powerful ideological structure. Let me briefly present Hall's helpful thinking on the processes of encoding and decoding.

For Hall, encoding and decoding represent distinct discursive moments. In the first

⁶⁶Hall, S., *Encoding-Decoding* in Hall et al. (eds.), **Culture, Media, Language**, London: Hutchinson, 1981.

⁶⁷Barthes, R., *Myth Today* in his **Mythologies**, NY: Hill & Wang, 1972 pp. 109-159.

⁶⁸Ibid. p. 134.

moment, the event must be cast as a 'story' to be meaningful:

In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event.⁶⁹

The 'rules' are the structures of meaning which are in turn decoded.

Before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded.⁷⁰

Thus appropriation begins the second moment. Relevant too is his remark that due to polysemy (complexity despite the limitedness of meanings), "the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical." Thus there exist degrees of "understanding" or even "misunderstanding."⁷¹ Central to his analysis, therefore, is the existence and use of "codes" of meaning. The denotative or the connotative use of language would enable the effectivity of the use of codes in social contexts:

These codes are the means by which power and ideology are made to signify in particular discourses. They refer signs to 'maps of meaning' into which any culture is classified; and those 'maps of social reality' have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest 'written in' to them.⁷²

Although Hall's discussion is geared towards the TV medium and has immediate bearing on the Western context, his theory of meaningfulness is generalizable. Societies operate with codes of meaningfulness or 'meaningful structures.' Within these codes, as he further elaborates, there exist three hypothetical positions in the encoding-decoding moments: the

⁶⁹Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 134.

dominant-hegemonic position, the *negotiated* position and the *oppositional*.⁷³ While stopping to elaborate further on this, it should suffice to see from these positions that even as there is shared social cognition, knowledge hardly attains uniformity. Nevertheless, there is a dominant discourse. This creates room for questioning the power, the interest and the history behind each position, and for acknowledging the existence of struggle in the construction of meaning within structures of meaningfulness.

2.5.2.3 Context Model

To further enunciate how news can be effective through investigating shared meanings, I now pick the work of Teun van Dijk. His discourse analysis relates more directly to my study and I consider his treatment of ‘models’ as central to the use of framing (explained below) in news construction. Moreover he helps to situate the elite politics behind the dominant news discourse.

Before explaining his use of “model”, I draw attention to what he thinks of media influence. He insists that “whatever the immediate effects of specific media messages may be on specific readers in specific circumstances, the *overall* influence of the media, particularly the news media, on the structures and contents of social cognitions of groups is considerable.”⁷⁴ In his structural appraisal of meaning in the news, he follows Stuart Hall. Evident too is his interest in elite discourse of racism in the news. His work is therefore relevant to my theoretical perspectives regarding Western coverage of the Other as different from the dominant West. For instance, he notes that “(P)art of the explanation of the contents

⁷³Ibid., pp. 136f.

⁷⁴**Elite Discourse and Racism**, London: Sage Publications, 1993, p. 242.

and structures of news report about ethnic affairs should be sought in the social and cognitive processes involved in news production.”⁷⁵ This calls to mind news-gathering practices that adopt the coverage of elites and their definition of issues as norms of newsworthiness, and hiring practices that discriminate against ethnic minorities. He draws this conclusion in his study:

The result of these processes of discrimination and exclusion is that news is largely produced by white journalists who have grown up with and were educated and socialized with a set of dominant white group norms and values, which will tend to define an overall perspective on news events.⁷⁶

In Robert Hackett’s assessment of Canadian newsrooms, he affirms this compliance with the dominant narrative and concludes that anything different would be “virtually nonsensical and unintelligible to the average news consumer in the West.”⁷⁷ On the other hand, Keith Kenney’s study of **Newsweek** and **Emerge**, a news magazine for the black middle-class in America, explains their different perspectives and the avoidance of stereotypes in **Emerge** as follows: “The best explanation for these differences is the simplest one - that **Emerge**’s black middle-class audience influences the way its reporters and editors cover Africa.”⁷⁸

This situates the politics of news discourse of the Other. But so far we presume what is fundamental - the models of cognition. What are models? van Dijk distinguishes two levels - the personal and the group/social. At the personal level, models are “mental

⁷⁵ibid., p. 244.

⁷⁶Ibid. p. 245.

⁷⁷Hackett, 1991:196

⁷⁸*Images of Africa in news magazines: Is there a black perspective?* Gazette 54 (1): 61-84, July 1994. p. 81.

representations of personal experiences of specific actions, events or situations (hence also called 'situation models', 'event models' or 'episodic models').⁷⁹ They feature one's "subjective mental constructs" and "personal opinions" which can be described as accurate, ideological, "biased, wrong, fictitious or misguided representations of reality"; for instance, in racist representations of ethnic events. They form the basis for our attitudes, generalizations, stereotypes and interpretations. Where this personal model or representation establishes an interface with "group discourse and communication" (that is, the group/social) then we have a context model. The group thereby engages with understanding in a discursive context. This is what Heather Brookes describes as "the sociocognitive representations which writers and readers draw upon for the production and interpretation of texts."⁸⁰ To ascertain the meaning and effectiveness of news one must not overlook the critique of the context model of media discourse:

Context models ... define the point of view and perspective and their associated opinions, from which the events of a model will be described in discourse, and hence explain the crucially ideological implications of social position.⁸¹

By the foregoing explanations of symbolic interactionism, meaningful structure and context model, I have dealt with the several moments aimed at clarifying the reality of news influence, referred to the ideological contents of this influence, and noted the levels at which one can describe this influence. Hopefully, I have sufficiently underlined that in the meaningful construction of news there is a dialectic that characterizes its production,

⁷⁹*Discourse Semantics and Ideology, Discourse & Society*, vol. 6(2): 243-289.

⁸⁰*Discourse & Analysis*, vol. 6(2): p. 463.

⁸¹Van Dijk, *Discourse Semantics and Ideology*, op. cit. p. 253.

circulation and consumption within a given social context. In the construction, circulation and interpretation of knowledge/social order there is a struggle for meaning even as the inquiry furnishes dominant discourses as forming the backbone of the communication context. In the final analysis the phenomena discussed guarantee that this project can identify and talk about a specific Western representation of events in the news. One last move in the explication of news construction is to describe the technique of framing.

2.5.3 The Framing Technique in News Construction

Since newswriters interact with their readers in news, employing the context model to arrest attention and interest, I wish here to describe framing as one very crucial strategy⁸² that serves this purpose. In a broader discourse, frame, as Goffman points out, refers to the “organization of experience”, a way to let someone get hold of the situation, to respond to the question “What is going on here?” In other words, it serves to demarcate the provinces of meaning and presumes knowledge of someone’s cosmological framework or structure of meaning: “We tend to perceive events in terms of primary frameworks, and the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied.”⁸³ For instance, one can distinguish between a war game and an actual war based on one’s prior experience of a game or a war. We are going to use the frame in a still more restricted sense with regard to the news media.

The frame in terms of news or the news angle is what news workers engage in while

⁸²Other key techniques for focusing the attention of readers would feature in an overall placement of news items. These include “agenda-setting” and “priming” whereby news workers either by placement, continuity or repetition of themes, demonstrate what are important, of priority, urgent or necessary. They achieve this by making the themes what everybody should know or talk about.

⁸³Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974, p. 24.

even beginning to construct their news stories. This habitual practice takes the format of a 'significant symbol' or everyday 'angle' on which to hook a story and make the news immediately meaningful. Ericson et al mention three such frames: 'the crisis', 'horror' and 'human story'.⁸⁴ The news frame thus becomes the newsworker's way to digest and signify or symbolize an event to the readers. Citing Gamson and Modigliani (1989:3) Gaye Tuchman writes,

The frames or "condensing symbols" of news packages are a form of "shorthand, making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device."⁸⁵

It means giving a focus to a story, "a mode of reality discovery and affirmation which gives tangibility and detail to otherwise nebulous events."⁸⁶ In the light of van Dijk's "context model" a frame would resonate directly for group members. What follows the choice of frame is putting flesh to the story, an activity which Jeremy Tunstall sees as "to take the American western tradition of the tall tale and to dress it in clothes of fact."⁸⁷ Making an illustration with the 'crisis' frame, Ericson et al state as follows:

The crisis formulation quickly establishes the reality of the 'problem' so that particular 'immediate' solutions can be called for and effected. It frequently inhibits the asking of alternative or critical questions. The news formulation is based on limited assumptions and a limited range of solutions. Nevertheless the particular formulation takes on the character of reality, and the preferred solution takes on the character of inevitability.

⁸⁴Ericson et al., 1987: 44.

⁸⁵Tuchman, *Qualitative Methods in the study of news* in Jenson & Jankowski, **A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research**, London: Routledge, 1991. p. 89.

⁸⁶Ericson et al., 1987: 61.

⁸⁷Tunstall, 1977: 37.

To illustrate with the event under study, the news of the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues caught the international community off guard. The Commonwealth meeting in Auckland became the seat of the drama. As shall be seen in the next chapter, the suspension order handed to the Nigerian government was a swift reaction against what was perceived to be an act of deviance. In this connection, I draw attention to Daniel Hallin's classification of three domains of reporting, each operating by different journalistic rules: (a) "legitimate controversy" whereby the news must present both sides of the controversy; (b) "deviance" news, seen as beyond the reach of normal reportorial obligations of balance and fairness; and (c) "human interest" that requires the reporting of shared human values.⁸⁸ This classification is very instructive. If, as can be seen from Hallin's second class (which dispenses with fairness and balance as the rule), the 'crisis' frame illustrated above is applied in the coverage of news of "deviance", the reporting rule no longer obliges balance and fairness. Consequently, the perspectives of the alternative account are entirely suppressed in favour of the dominant discourse. It follows that in the analysis of news of crisis, horror, and particularly deviance stories, extra caution is required for one to maintain a critical stance.

The above theoretical discussions have attended to the social position of news in the media-saturated society of the West. By outlining the process of meaning construction in news I have attempted to describe how news acquires meaningfulness in the Western audience. News thus achieves social cognition within the social context of its production and consumption. More specifically I have attended to the technique of framing as critical in the appropriation of significance. Consequently news of events in Africa acquire significance by

⁸⁸Hallin, *The Uncensored War: the Media and Vietnam*, NY: OUP, 1986. p. 116-117.

being constructed according to Western frames to respond to the Western social context. Earlier in this chapter, the review of the literature on Western news coverage of Africa served to provide this project with some working hypothesis. I shall conclude the theoretical explorations in this chapter by applying this hypothesis to the Canadian news scene.

2.6 The Canadian News Frames in the Nigeria News

The definition of the Canadian news frames that operated during the Nigerian coverage is hereby postulated. Firstly, this takes into account the global as well as the particular historical experiences peculiar to the powerful metropolitan centres of Europe and North America in relation to the countries that are weakly positioned at the peripheral regions. Although as a nation, Canada has no colonial experience in Africa, its very close affinity to Britain and to the United States makes it part of the dominant discourse in the international media. Moreover Canada's news culture, liberal capitalist economy, political institutions and Euro-American affiliations, form the worldview of the average Canadian. Secondly, on account of the dependence on the dominant transnational news agencies, Canada shares in the Euro-American media construction of Africa and hence Nigeria. Thirdly, there is a direct relationship shared by Canada and Nigeria as members of the British Commonwealth. This will be an item in the next chapter. Thus in the light of the foregoing discussions on the macro as well as the micro elements of the knowledge constructed in the news, the following postulates serve as the frames for studying the news genres in the Canadian papers:

- (i) The event in question fits the category of the "deviance" frame. This is based on the fact

that there was an international as well as a Canadian apprehension at the sentencing and execution of the Nine Ogoni activists. A glance at the news headlines show that the international opinion was clearly antagonistic and unyielding to any other interpretation of the executions.

(ii) There was the Us and Them frame in the coverage. Nigeria in relation to Canada is classed as culturally different; say, from Australia or any country in Europe and North America. (Japan and China would be included as well). In the words of Jo Ellen Fair,

Spatially separating countries, cultures, or peoples allows difference to remain unproblematic as merely “us” and “them” (or perhaps even “us” versus “them”... Classification is all about bringing certain people or groups together and keeping others apart, especially to ensure that relations deemed unnatural remain separate.”⁸⁹

Culturally therefore, events in the African region are looked upon from the media perspective of what makes Canada or the West different from ‘our’ image of Africa.

(iii) Canada occupied a position of power relative to Nigeria. Canada is listed among the industrialized G7 countries. Its international reputation in terms of a perceived moral edge, economic and political stability, and what I refer to as ‘a defining position’, weighs against Nigeria. As shall be shown in the next chapter, Nigeria, on the other hand, has an image problem in the international community. Moreover some news accounts raised the issue that unlike the USA, Britain and other countries of the EU, or the neighbouring African countries, Nigeria’s economic ties with Canada was not considered vital to Canada’s well-being as a nation.

Consequently, the Canadian news copy editor was in the position to implant his/her

⁸⁹Fair, Jo Ellen, *War, Famine, and Poverty: Race in the Construction of Africa's Media Image*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 17:2 (Summer 1993) p. 11.

news story within the parameters of a frame or context model as described above, to resonate with the Canadian reader. Framing reports about Nigeria in this way enters the dominant hegemonic discourse and fits the Canadian ideological image about events happening in Africa/Nigeria. As noted above, within this dominant discourse there can be subordinate and possibly oppositional interpretations of the event. But these do not subtract from the fact that the news so constructed is meaningful to Canadians.

However, to raise questions of accuracy and bias regarding the Canadian news construction derives from an ability to name the Canadian perspective vis-a-vis the event. Walter Lippmann wrote that the press “is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another into vision.”⁹⁰ What this indicates is that some episodes and ways of seeing are foregrounded at each turning, even as some aspects are hidden in the background or purposely obscured. Meanwhile, opinions are formed, decisions have to be taken, before seeing the whole episode and from other perspectives. We shall attempt to see the broader context of the Nigerian story in the next chapter.

⁹⁰Lippmann, W. **Public Opinion**, NY: Macmillan, 1954. P. 341.

Chapter 3

The Nigerian Story in Context

"Yesterday I read something about the movement back to democracy. After slavery, colonialism, before colonialism, we knew the tribes ... So, how are we able to promote democracy, when they colonized our kings?"

- Julius Nyerere.

In discussing the theoretical framework in the last chapter, I subscribed to the view that Western news of the Other is the North reporting to the North. The negative consequence is that qualitatively (and quantitatively) very little of the Third World gets reported in the Western media. The reason is partly because Western news reports need to provide a frame of understanding for the home audience. This will be closely studied in terms of the Canadian coverage in chapters 4 and 5. In this chapter, I attempt an exposition of the fundamental terms in the Nigerian story that provided the raw material for Western media representation. I need to go beyond the event that took place, 1) by focusing on the Nigerian political economy to underline the national problem; 2) by providing a background context to the event that got reported in the international media; and 3) by examining the wider international environment within which meaning was constructed regarding the event. The goal here is to provide a critical stance by indicating what the Western media omitted or purposely obscured while making the Nigerian event susceptible to Western values so as to appeal to a Western reception. I argue that the transnational media cast Nigeria's *problems* as Western *issues*,¹ which ultimately justified Western responses.

¹This distinction is inspired by, but not restricted to, C. Wright Mills' distinction between personal *troubles* (problems) and public *issues*. According to him one needs to be seen as intersecting with the other for there to be at work a *sociological imagination*. Cf. *The Sociological Imagination*, London: OUP,

Peter Dahlgren has rightly noted that “News, as a form of social knowledge, is inevitably ahistorical in its orientation; it is not to be expected to remind the audience that the instability of the Third World is at least in part due to the West’s role over several centuries.”² Nigeria, as shall be shown, has no doubt merited the qualification of instability, etc., but why it is not also seen as partly created by the West is part of the concern here. A critical research approach can ill-afford to dispense with historical analysis.³ Hence my look at the Nigerian context shall necessarily go beyond hurried journalistic accounts. In fact, I opt for analytical sources in discussing the history, politics, economy and cultures of Nigeria and their inter-relationships with global events. This can only be in an outline fashion to avoid diverting attention from the ultimate goal of this research.

3.1 The highlights of Nigeria’s political economy

In the analytical approach adopted here, I first present the highlights of the history of the Nigerian state. The aim is to enable an appreciation of the nation’s political economy. What follows is a brief review of the physical geography, the economic endowments, the population and the touchstones of Nigeria’s socio-cultural and political history. Detailed

1959, pp. 7,8. Firstly, I would wonder whether one can talk of intersection between the personal and the public where the voice of the public drowns out that of the personal. Secondly, I substitute his use of ‘personal’ and ‘public’ with Nigeria and the international (Western) community respectively.

²*The Third World on TV News: Western Ways of Seeing the “Other”*, in Adams, W.C., 1982: 54.

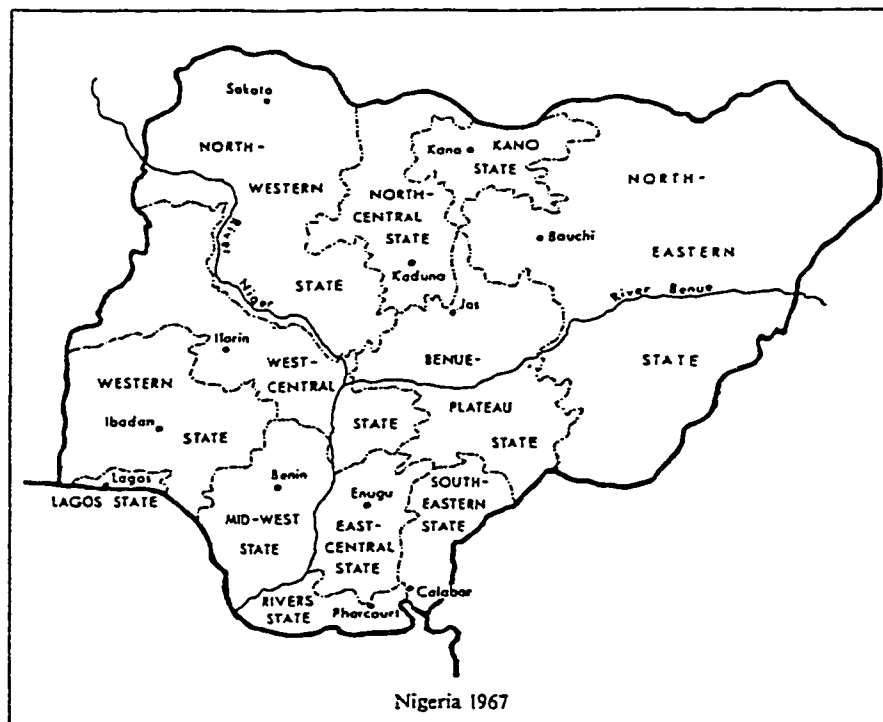
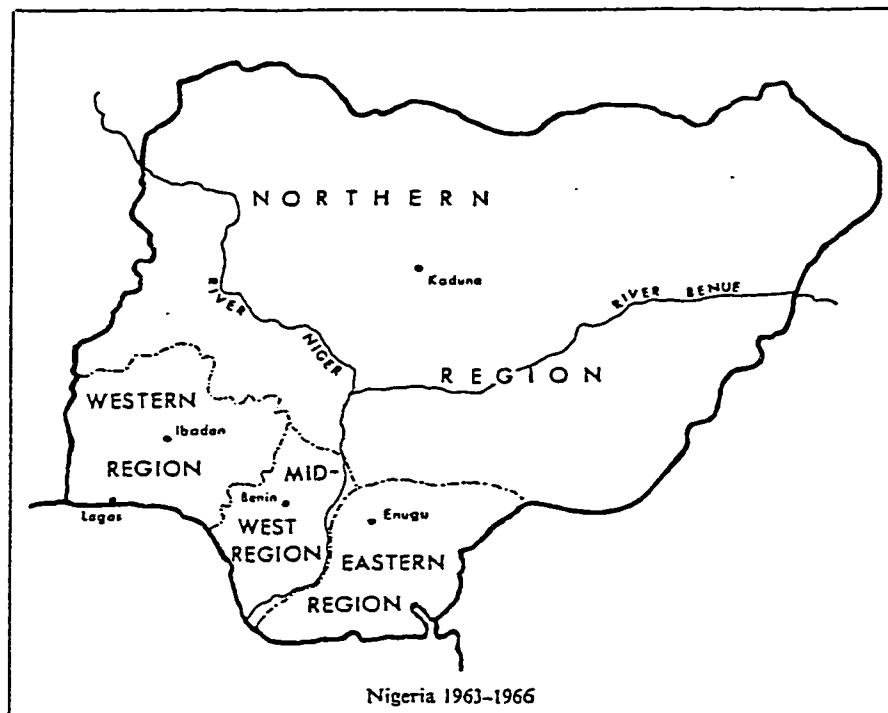
³Hardt, Hanna, *Critical Communication Studies*, NY: Routledge, 1992, pp. 118-122. Note particularly the reference to the sensitivity of Dallas Smythe to “historical consciousness” in formulating general communication theory.

accounts of the above are available elsewhere.⁴

The **geographical entity** controlled by the Nigerian state occupies a land area of 924,000 square kilometers (smaller than the province of Ontario with 1,068,582 sq kms). It is located at 10 degrees North of the Equator, and sitting on the Gulf of Guinea in West African region. Nigeria's vegetation varies as one moves northwards from the coastal mangrove forests of the Delta, to the heavy rain forests still in the southerly regions. Further north are the grass land, Savana regions and, finally the much drier land in the far north. This follows the variation of the annual rainfall which "ranges from 150 inches (380 cm.) at Forcados on the coast of Bendel State to less than 26 inches (65 cm.) in Maiduguri in Borno, and its incidence which is between extremes of almost twelve months in the south and less than five in the north."⁵ Two prominent rivers - the Niger and the Benue - flowing from the west and the east respectively merge in a confluence that divides the entire territory into three natural regions as the Niger flows southwards into the Atlantic Ocean. (See Map 2, p. 64)

⁴The following are suggested: Dike, Kenneth O., **Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1835**: An Introduction to the economic and political history of Nigeria, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959; Sklar, R.L. **Nigerian Political Parties**: Power in an emergent African nation, Princeton: University Press, 1963; Stremlau, J.J., **The International Politics of the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-70**, Princeton: University Press, 1977; Kirk-Greene, A. & D. Rimmer, **Nigerian Since 1970**: A political and economic outline, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981; Forrest, Tom, **Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria**, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993.

⁵Kirk-Greene, op. cit. p. 61.



Source: Kirke-Greene, 1968

Maps 2 & 3. Nigeria's transition from Regions to States

Nigeria's immediate neighbours are the French-speaking countries of the Cameroons in the east, Benin in the west, and Chad and Niger in the north. Thus Nigeria shares with its neighbours the fortune of the 19th century European imperial expansion and influence. What needs to be emphasized is that the British contact with the territory had roots in commercial profit. The Atlantic slave trade which blossomed from the 16th to the 19th centuries was gradually replaced with trade in raw commodities to service the burgeoning European industries in the 19th century. As shall be shown later, British influence in Nigeria began with the British traders. Colonization started with the partition of Africa among the European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884/5. The countries involved include Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain.⁶

Oil resources presently account for over 90% of export revenues. Before oil dominated the national economy from the late 1960s, Nigeria's export crops and minerals included palm oil and palm kernel, cocoa beans, rubber, raw cotton, timber and coal from the South, and groundnut, millet, cotton, tin, hides and skin from the North.

The current **population**⁷ of Nigeria is a heterogenous mix of peoples variously estimated from 88.5 million to 110 million. About 80% of the population lives in the rural areas. Nigeria's population makes it the largest single black country in the world. One in

⁶Cecil Rhodes the arch imperialist from Britain after whom was named Rhodesia (present day Zambia and Zimbabwe) argued in 1895: "In order to save the forty million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced by them in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists." Cited in Mazrui, A., **Africa's International Relations**, London: Heinemann, 1977, p. 108.

⁷Not surprisingly, Nigeria's population remains an estimate. Every census (1952, 1962, 1973, 1990) has come up with figures that have been contested because of the highly politicized nature of the emerging figures. Population figures determine election, representations, and revenue allocation.

every five sub-Saharan black is a Nigerian. Within Nigeria there are an estimated 250 ethnic groups.⁸ On account of the disparity in the relative size of the ethnic groups, the major groups have exercised dominance in their regions or states of origin, and vied for control in the central government of the Federation. This conflictual situation was instituted in 1914 when Lord Frederick Lugard, the British Colonial Governor, was mandated to amalgamate the two Protectorates of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria.⁹ Subsequently as regionalism was introduced in the 1946 Richards Constitution to respect the separate cultures, and developmental stages of the regions, dominant ethnic groups emerged.¹⁰ Thus the North became dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the West by the Yoruba, and the East by the Igbo. (See Map 2, p. 64) This turn of events is in part consistent with Lugard's policy of Indirect

⁸The prominent ethnic groups are as follows: Yoruba, Edo (West); Igbo, Ibibio-Efik, Ijaw (East); Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, Tiv (North). Cf. Forrest, 1993:18.

⁹For documentary account see Kirk-Greene, A.H., **Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria**, London: Frank Cass, 1968. The spate of press reactions against the imperial autocracy that hatched the Amalgamation is seen in the following prayer published in 1914 in the *Times of Nigeria*: 'Good Lord, deliver us From a prancing pro-consul who must have his way, From a born-and-bred-in-law Chief Justice who mercilessly drafts out oppressive Ordinances; From a Colonial Secretary who, having been influenced by the man on the spot, deliberately deafens his ears and shuts his eyes to the moans and groans of an oppressed people...' Cited in Kirk-Greene, op. cit p. 23.

¹⁰Oyediran lists as key features of this constitution: "(a) division of Nigeria into three administrative regions, each under a chief commissioner; (b) establishment of three regional Houses of Assembly at Enugu, Kaduna and Ibadan with power merely to discuss general legislation and the right to pass their own regional budgets; (c) selection of membership of each regional House from existing native authorities, who in turn selected five of their number as representatives to the central Legislative Council which met successively in Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna and Enugu..." Oyediran, 1979:3. Under the Colonial government, Nigeria had 5 Constitutions named after the Colonial Governors as follows: the Lugard Constitution (1914), the Clifford Constitution (1922), the Richards Constitution (1946), the Macpherson Constitution (1951), the Lyttleton Constitution (1954). In the 1954 Constitution universal adult suffrage was introduced in the East and the West, while male adult suffrage began in the North.

Rule known to be particularly successful in the British administration of Northern Nigeria.¹¹ Subsequently political parties emerged along ethnic lines. Whenever party elections were held between 1951 and 1959, "each major party easily won the majority of seats in its home base."¹² Thus ethnic sentiments became entrenched and serve as leverage for obtaining political power. Ironically the political elites swallowed their ethnic differences when it came to throwing off the burden of British colonialism.¹³ This notwithstanding, the ethnic groups nursed their discontents and continued to complain of marginalization and neglect in both the regional/state and central governments in Nigeria. Minority agitation was already part of the national problem in the march towards independence. Nevertheless, the Willink Minorities Commission of 1957, appointed to study the fears of Nigeria's minorities, preferred to leave the problem for Nigeria's political leaders after independence.¹⁴ Britain's

¹¹The British implementation of Indirect Rule (as distinct from French Assimilation or Integration of its Colonies) made use of the existing traditional rulers who still exercised power over their people, provided they remained subjects to the British imperial rule. Its success in the North, and to some extent, in the West (but not in the East) is because the two regions had Emirs and Obas respectively who held dominance over their people, or their vassals. The East on the other hand featured the Igbo majority. The Igbos were republican and leadership was according to clan or village heads. Cf. Nnoli, Okwudibia, **Ethnic Politics in Nigeria**, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978; Green, M.M., **Ibo Village Affairs**, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1947.

¹²Awa, E., **Federal Government of Nigeria**, (1964) p. 101. The major parties were: North - the Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC) led by Ahmadu Bello; West - Action Group (AG) led by Obafemi Awolowo; and East - National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe.

¹³This was the general trend in the multi-ethnic European creations across Africa. Cf. Davidson, Basil, **Black Man's Burden: Nationalism and the Curse of the Nation-State in Africa**, NY: Random House, 1992.

¹⁴That Britain, following the Sir Henry Willink Commission, left the problem of the minorities to be solved by the political process, i.e. that "once the leaders realize that it is in their own best interests to consult the wishes of all groups in the country, they will begin to act rationally, and once they do so, the various problems will be adjusted..." must remain one of the foundational political jig-saw puzzles that Britain bequeathed to post-colonial Nigeria. Cf. Erne Awa, op. cit., pp. 318. See also his discussion of the States Movement, pp. 61-71.

failure to adequately respond to the complaints has been viewed with suspicion and apprehension by Nigeria's intellectuals.¹⁵

Apart from ethnicity, another cogent factor in the composition and politics of Nigeria's peoples is the existence of three distinct religious affiliations. The North, because of the Islamic *jihad* (or 'holy war' led by Usman dan Fodio) earlier in the 19th century, is predominantly Muslim. The Islamic religion also penetrated substantial parts of the Western Region. The South, on the other hand, is predominantly Christian following the contact with Europe on the Atlantic coast, especially in the accelerated Christian missionary endeavours of the 19th and the 20th centuries.¹⁶ Nevertheless adherents of the Traditional religions are found in all the regions. While adherence to the Traditional religions have been greatly diminished, the population ratio of Christians to Muslims is presently estimated to be at a par.¹⁷ Religion has emerged in the issues confronting the Nigerian nation state¹⁸ leading to

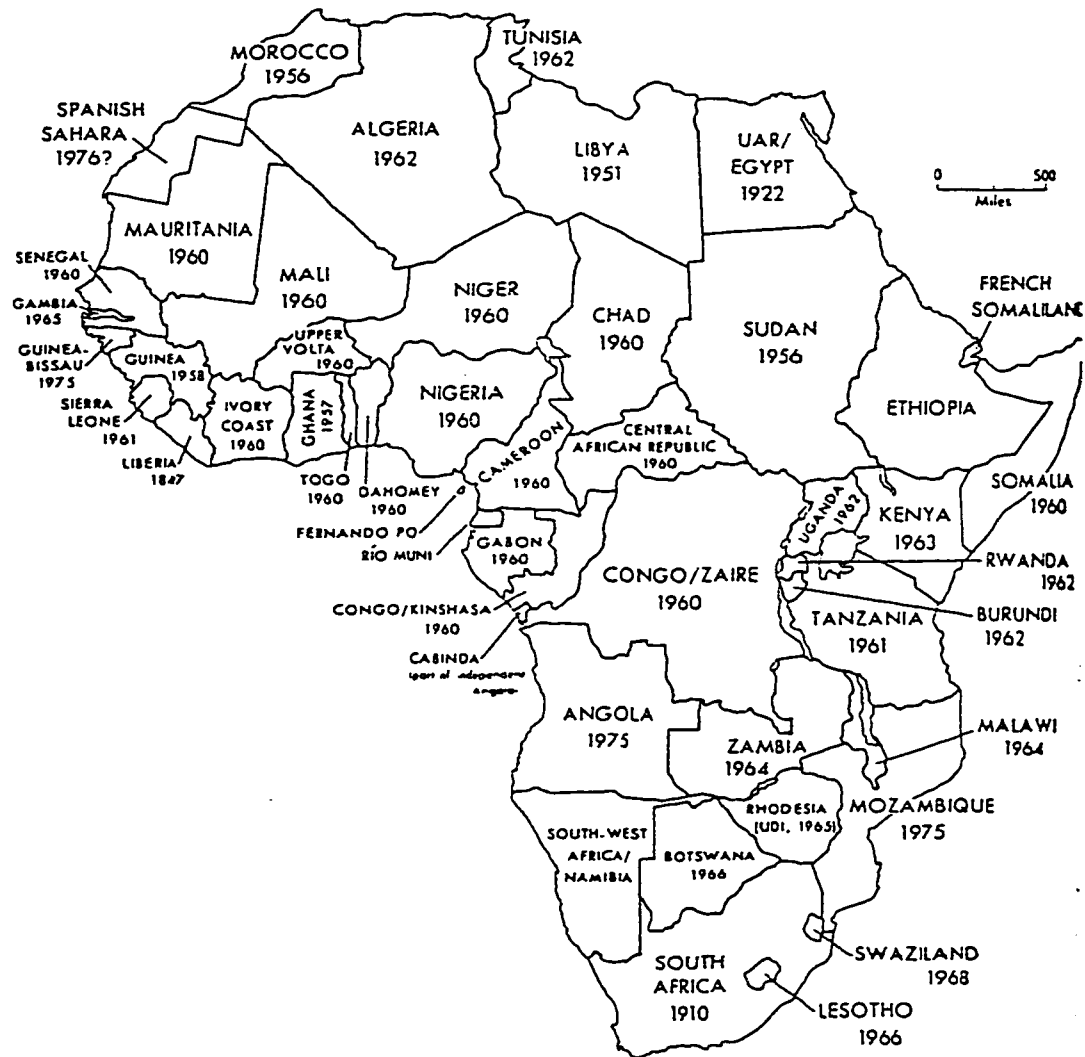
¹⁵With "no fewer than fifteen claims" put forward for the creation of more regions, the British even resorted to blackmail when, in 1958, it laid down the ultimatum that "if the Nigerian leaders wanted independence in 1960 no new states would be created and that if states were to be created the demand for independence should be abandoned..." Cf. Oyediran, 1979: 11, 12. The suspicion was that Britain backed the North's refusal for more creation. The North had the slogan - One North One People. Consequently more creation was countered by "the argument that such a development would dismember the territory, weaken the hold of the Moslem religion, and constitute an encroachment into the territory that the great Othman dan Fodio is alleged to have conquered before the advent of the British." Cf. Enwe Awa, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁶It should be noted that most Western missionaries saw colonialism as a divinely-inspired means of delivering the African natives. Such is Boer's summary: "Colonialism is a form of imperialism based on a divine mandate and designed to bring liberation - spiritual, cultural, economic and political - by sharing the blessings of the Christ-inspired civilization of the West with a people suffering under satanic forces of oppression, ignorance, and disease, effected by a combination of political, economic, and religious forces that cooperate under a regime seeking the benefit of both ruler and ruled." Cited in Enwerem, I.M., *A Dangerous Awakening: The politicization of Religion in Nigeria*, Ibadon: IFRA, 1995, p. 27.

¹⁷Enwerem, I.M., op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁸ibid.

such misrepresentations as when some Western (Euro-American) quarters interpreted the Nigerian civil war (1967-70) as the Muslim Hausa/Fulani versus the Christian Igbo.¹⁹



Source: Wilson, H., 1977

Map 4. African independence, including the chronology of independence

¹⁹If such were the case, it would neglect the large Christian populations in the rest of the country. Similarly the civil war "managed to escape Cold War meddling" cf. Obasanjo, O., *A Balance Sheet of Africa and the Cold War*, Keller & Rothchild, ed., *Africa in the New International Order*, (1996), p. 17.

To fast-track this account of the historical flashpoints, the **nationalist agitations** and campaigns that were quickened after the global experience of World War II led to Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960. Although Nigeria soon became a Republic in 1963, it retained its membership of the British Commonwealth. Preceding Nigeria in the group of former British colonies who gained independence were India and Pakistan in 1947, and Ghana in 1957. The subjects of the former British colonies were coopted in the defense of freedom and British imperial fortunes in the war against Hitler. The experience of the War appeared to have punctured the myth that white superiority vis-a-vis his/her black counterpart was natural. The lesson of the War went beyond the British empire: if freedom for the metropolitan countries was worth fighting for, so too for the peripheries. Thus was the door of political independence cast open for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa hitherto colonized by Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Italy.²⁰ (See Map 4, page 69) But remarkably, political and economic upheavals bedeviled each of the newly-independent nations. "Africa has experienced some sixty coups d'état and countless coup attempts."²¹ This has prompted the questioning of the style of the transfer of power. Henry Wilson's assessment is as follows:

Just as indirect rule, in practice, usually meant "find a chief," so, for successive

²⁰In 1960, all Nigeria's neighbours (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Dahomey/Benin) became independent. Others include Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, Togo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Congo Kinshasa, Congo/Zaire and Somalia. See Map 4. The wave of independence swept through Africa all through the 60s into the 70s when countries such as Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique fought to obtain their independence in 1975 from Portugal. Cf. Wilson, H., **The Imperial Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1870**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 272.

²¹Gambari, Ibrahim, *The Role of Regional and Global Organizations in Addressing Africa's Security Issues* in Keller & Rothchild, op. cit., p. 32.

British governments, the concept of preparation was reduced to one simple rule: find a leader and hand over to him.²²

Nigeria at independence got an elected but turbulent government where the politics of the central government became a do-or-die battle between the three major ethnic groups. The Federal Election results favoured the North with its in-built majority structure vis-a-vis the rest of the Regions. Oyediran reports on the electoral seats won by what were in effect regional parties:

In this election, the NPC emerged with 142 seats, NCNC/NEPU alliance with 89 and the AG with 73 in the 312-member House of Representatives.²³

In the arrangement that ensued, Tafawa Balewa, the Northern Region NPC winner, became the Prime Minister and head of government; Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of the NCNC/NEPU coalition partner from the Eastern Region became the Governor General; while Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the AG party of the Western Region, became the Opposition leader. In this way was constructed the unstable tripod of incompatible ethnic-conscious political structures that have continued to stultify attempts at institutionalizing a democratic process in Nigeria. It is sufficient for the purpose of this survey to mention the sequence of political crises that eventually led to the disintegration of Nigeria's first civilian administration. These include: the Action Group crisis in the Western Region; the census controversy of 1962-64; the 1964-5 Federal elections; and the 1965 Western elections.²⁴ Each of these events resulted in confrontations with political opponents that became physical, resulting in killing and

²²Wilson, op. cit., p. 303.

²³Oyediran, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁴ For a discussion, see Oyediran, Oyeleye, *Background to military rule* in Oyediran, ed., *Nigerian Government & Politics under Military Rule 1966-79*, London: Macmillan, 1979, pp. 12-22.

arson.

On the whole, **political leadership** in post-colonial Nigeria has been split between civilian rule and military rule, with the latter taking the lion's share. An experiment with the British parliamentary system featured during the first six years (1960-66) of civilian rule. Another civilian rule, aimed at conferring more power to the government leader, experimented with the American presidential system²⁵; then Alhaji Shehu Shagari emerged as president in the Second Republic. This lasted four years (1979-1983) before another military coup intervened to stop the process. Not much had changed since the first civilian government.²⁶ The last civilian experience was the brief interregnum of the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. His appointment came from the exiting military leader, General Ibrahim Babangida, who left him with the mandate to see to another election. Shonekan's government had to deal with the opposition which adamantly sought a ratification of the June 12, 1993, election annulled by Babangida. It came as no surprise that Shonekan's precarious toe-hold on power was terminated on November 17, 1993, when General Sani Abacha assumed power in a bloodless coup. This latter putsch came to quell the unprecedented uprising of the civil society and the ominous threat of national disintegration that greeted Babangida's annulment on June 26 of the June 12

²⁵For why the US presidential system was adopted by the 1979 Constitution and the peculiar differences in the Nigerian application, see Tom Forrest, 1993: 64f.

²⁶Political protectionism, and economic corruption were rife. Most election results were contested. Leadership illegitimacy, favoritism and distribution of ethnic and political patronage pervaded the era of the Second Republic. Nigerians were not surprised when General Buhari's coup came in December 1983.

presidential elections.²⁷ Military rule has lasted for 29 out of 38 years of Nigerian independence. Each military transition came in a coup d'état. Six such successful transitions decorated Nigeria with the following military rulers: General Aguiyi Ironsi (1966); General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975); Generals Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo (1975-1979)²⁸; General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985); General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and General Sani Abacha (1993-1998?).

The **period of military rule** has sired Nigeria through some memorable experiences. These include the gruesome Nigeria-Biafra civil war which lasted from July 6, 1967, to January 12, 1970, and resulted in an estimated one million deaths; the creation of states from the four regions (1964) to 12 states (1967), to 19 states (1976), 30 states (1990) and to the present 36 states (1996); the multi-billion Naira transfer of the national capital from Lagos to Abuja in the 1980s²⁹; three Constitutional Conferences (1975, 1988, 1995), two ratified Constitutions (1979, 1989)³⁰, and a string of ad-hoc Decrees, some of them Draconian.³¹ The

²⁷"To make matters, even worse, a Lagos High Court declared the Chief Ernest Shonekan led ING illegal, and by so doing created a veritable administrative vacuum in the leadership of the country." Cf. *General Sani Abacha: Three Years On, Africa Today*, March/April, 1997 p. 24.

²⁸The two generals are listed together because Mohammed was killed in an unsuccessful coup d'état in 1977 led by B.S. Dimka. When the coup was foiled, Obasanjo, his second in command, took over and successfully led the country to the only smooth transition to civil rule in 1979.

²⁹The movement became formally complete on December 12, 1991. *Newswatch*, Dec. 23, 1991.

³⁰The recommendations of the 1995 National Constitutional Conference await promulgation by the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), the highest governing body in the Abacha administration.

³¹E.g. The Decree under General Buhari that imposed capital punishment on Drug Trafficking; the Press Decrees especially the infamous Decree 4 (1984) that targeted a free press; and the Civil Disturbances Decree of 1987 under General Babangida. It was under this 1987 Decree, that a Special Tribunal tried Ken Saro-Wiwa and co.

army rule has also presided over the mismanagement of oil revenues³², introduced the much-vilified IMF-induced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, and overseen the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira, mounting inflation³³, and the increase in fundamentalist religious riots³⁴.

Of direct concern to this project is that recent military administrations are seen to have further frustrated the democratic process. The culmination was the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, purportedly won by Moshood Abiola. This occasioned the eruption of the civil society in unprecedented but hardly all-embracing acts of rebellion as evident in the activism of labour unions, pro-democracy groups and human rights associations.³⁵ Finally, in what Yakubu Gowon, a former military leader, described as “a tactical blunder”³⁶, the Abacha regime attracted swift international condemnations in

³²Nigeria's external debt in 1995 stood at \$32 billion despite Nigeria's daily oil production which hit 2 million barrels since 1973. Cf. Kirk-Greene & Rimmer, 1981:84.

³³Cf. *Economic Crisis and the Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria* in Ihonvbere, J., Nigeria, London: Transaction Publishers, 1994, pp. 111-152.

³⁴Apart from the Maitatsine religious riots which erupted in Kano in 1980 during the Second Republic and spread to Maiduguri, Kaduna, Bornu and Gongola states, Nigeria under the military witnessed a series of murderous religious confrontations. Sometimes it was between Christians and Muslims, such as in Ilorin and the Universities of Sokoto and Ibadan in 1986. Religious riots also took place in Kafanchan, Kaduna, Zaria and Funtua in 1987, Sokoto in 1988, and in Katsina, Bauchi and Kano in 1991. Under the Babangida administration, religious tension in the country took a more alarming turn following the alleged entry of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference in 1987. This prompted the increased political activity of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Cf. Enwerem, op. cit.

³⁵Prominent among activist groups and pro-democracy organizations within Nigeria, some of them with ties to international NGOs, include the Civil Liberties Organization, the National Democratic Convention (NADECO), the Campaign for Democracy (CD), Committee for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), the Nigerian Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL). International organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa, environmental activists and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) have also been active in monitoring the Nigerian scene.

³⁶*Tell* magazine (Lagos) November 27, 1995, p. 17. Dr. Adebayo Williams, a Nigerian columnist, refers to the ordering of the execution on the eve of the Commonwealth meeting as a “monstrous miscalculation”. *Africa Today*, Jan/Feb 1996, p. 4.

November of 1995 when it carried out the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 other Ogoni rights activists. With this, Nigeria's external image, which had flourished under the Mohammed/Obasanjo military regime (1975-1979)³⁷, plummeted drastically. Thus began the current unwelcome international attention on military leadership in Nigeria .

3.2 The Problem of the Nigerian State: its historical roots

Nigeria does have a problem. Apart from its huge size, its multi-ethnic/cultural composition and primordial loyalties, its much-publicized corruption, and the global economic system which has humiliated the developing economies, the most visible sign of Nigeria's problem in the current international estimation is the military regime. This has been dramatized in the current pressure mounted in the (British) Commonwealth body to get the military government of Nigeria to democratize and return to civil rule. (More shall be said on the Commonwealth later in this chapter.) But clearly the military has become part and parcel of Nigeria's political life, indeed a veritable political class, to the extent that most people under the age of 40 in Nigeria are more familiar with military than with civil rule. It would be mistaken therefore to imagine the Nigerian military as "a band of illiterate, rag-tag buffoons."³⁸ Nigerians have lived under the "watchful eye of the military", writes Pita

³⁷Nigeria's radical recognition of the MPLA in Nov. 1975 (against South Africa and the US support of UNITA-FNLA) as the legitimate government in Angola led the rest of Africa to change its mind. Cf. Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990:107. Obasanjo reacted to British Petroleum's sale of oil to Apartheid South Africa by nationalizing its share in the Nigerian oil operations. This latter act was on the eve of the Commonwealth meeting in Lusaka, 1979. Cf Kirk-Greene, A. & Douglas Rimmer, 1981: 49, 50.

³⁸This is conventional wisdom and unrealistic if one considers that over the years, the military in Nigeria has undergone a transformation and constituted itself as having a political mission in Nigeria. Cf. Agbese, Pita O., *The Military as an Obstacle to the Democratization Enterprise - Towards an Agenda for Permanent Military Disengagement from Politics in Nigeria*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol.

Agbese in a 1996 journal article,

the military has ruled Nigeria for twenty six of the thirty five years of Nigeria's attainment of national sovereignty. This means that military rule has become the norm in Nigeria and civilian rule has become an aberration.³⁹

Agbese's argument is however that the military is not only unable to provide the solution but has itself become the problem. The military constitutes a fractious political body as became clear with the 1990 coup led by Major Gideon Orkar. It became the first to proclaim a sectionally-motivated coup, engineered on "behalf of the patriotic and well-meaning peoples of the Middle Belt and the Southern parts."⁴⁰ After the litany of poor performances that indicate why the military should be held accountable for Nigeria's problems since independence, Agbese sums up and concludes:

The air of uncertainty created by military rule, the sheer wastefulness of military governments, the open hostility of the military to democratization and the possibility of the military itself disintegrating into a band of armed camps makes it imperative to reduce its influence on Nigerian society.⁴¹

While Agbese's article adequately reflects the disenchantment with the military in the Nigerian public opinion, particularly in the civil rebellion that followed the annulment of the June 12 elections, it notes cautiously that "it is the complicity of the civilian politicians

XXXI, June 1996, pp. 84. Perhaps one should also be reminded that retired General Olusegun Obasanjo served as a cochair of the Eminent Persons Group, and was in 1991 sponsored for the position of secretary-general of the UN.

³⁹Ibid. p. 83

⁴⁰Ibid p. 92. The Middle Belt stands for mainly the Tiv ethnic group immediately below the North proper, and forming a buffer 'region' between the North and the Southern states. They have always been opposed to the Hausa/Fulani domination in the North and demonstrated this in the Tiv Riots of 1962.

⁴¹Agbese, Pita, art. cit., p. 93

that sustain military rule in Nigeria.”⁴² Agbese’s treatment fails to explore why the military showed up in the first place⁴³ and why the army could count on the complicity of the civilian politicians.

Perhaps it is necessary at this point to pose a number of analytical questions. Why has Nigeria been ruled for so long by the military? Why does it appear impossible for Nigerians to effectively resist the rule of the military despite the latter’s known bad record? Why has a military alternative to civilian rule remained open? Are there structures in place for implementing the “democratic process”⁴⁴ to forestall future interventions by the military? These have been pressing questions for opinion leaders in Nigeria. My view is that these questions would not succumb to journalistic answers that fail to attend to Nigeria’s historical experiences as it became one nation, and was launched into the Western system of governance. This is a call for a deep and critical look at the Nigerian problem.

In a much cited book, **The Trouble with Nigeria**, the famous Nigerian novelist, Professor Chinua Achebe, identified leadership as Nigeria’s problem:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is

⁴²ibid. p. 98. He demonstrates: “The ease with which the military reaches accommodation with civilian politicians was epitomized after the Abacha coup in November 1993. Many of the politicians who had vowed that they would never allow the military to seize the reins of power again, immediately rushed to serve in the Abacha regime.” *ibid.*

⁴³Oyediran’s *Background to military rule* argues that the combination of the *external* political instability of the country and the *internal* structural dilemmas of the army accounted for the advent of military rule. Cf Oyediran, 1979:1-24.

⁴⁴Ike Udogu postulates what are the ingredients of Western democracy in *Complete Metamorphic Democracy* as distinct from *Incomplete Metamorphic Democracy*. These include: “accountability, multipartyism, legitimacy, orderly change of government, successful elections at intervals, freedom of expression, etc.” Cf. *Incomplete Metamorphic Democracy as a Conceptual Framework in the Analysis of African Politics - An Exploratory Investigation* in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. XXXI, nos 1-2, June 1996, p 13.

nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else.⁴⁵

While this assessment looks plausible, at least to Nigerians who have experienced occasional flashes of principled leadership, such as in the short-lived regime of General Murtala Mohammed (July 29, 1975 to February 13, 1976), it gives scant cognizance to the Nigerian historical reality. Why, one might ask, must we fall back to a military administration, of all situations, in order to approximate what leadership should be in Nigeria? It is here that I want to introduce Jeffrey Herbst's article, *Is Nigeria a Viable State?*⁴⁶

The article attempts a commendable definition of Nigeria's problem with a marked sensitivity to the nation's political economy. His treatment however betrayed a typical Western perspective on African issues. He argues, perhaps rightly, that Achebe's assessment of the Nigerian problem follows 'conventional wisdom'. He writes:

In fact, there is no reason to believe that Nigeria's leaders have been below the norms for intelligence, tactical insight, or propriety compared to their counterparts in Africa or the developing world generally...Nigeria's problems actually stem from a peculiarly corrupt political economy combined with an unfortunately generous oil reserve. The Nigeria the British created forced many different groups to live together. Indeed, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of the central figures in Nigerian politics, noted in 1947 that a fundamental problem facing Nigeria was that at the time it was, in many ways, little more than "a geographic expression." As a result, "The state, or more accurately, the government, was often perceived as remote and alien. It came to be seen as a purveyor of services and employment that belonged to no one." Thus was begun a pernicious political dynamic in which control of the state became critical in order to regulate the flow of patronage.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Op. cit, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1983, p. 1.

⁴⁶**The Washington Quarterly**, 19:2, Spring 1996, pp. 151-172. Herbst is associate professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University. His publications include **The Politics of Reform in Ghana, 1982-1991** (1992).

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 156.

The historical sensitivity in this assessment is noteworthy and calls for further exploration. On the other hand, the arrogance does not escape notice where the writer 'classifies' the intelligence of Third World leaders. The writer's ideological agenda emerges as he canvasses against the suggestion that "Nigeria should have one of the new permanent seats on a revamped Security Council" on account of its "dysfunctional economic and political policies."⁴⁸ This oppositional stance may also have accounted for his glib recommendation for Nigeria's disintegration. For him,

Western governments and international organizations should also try to provide opportunities for Nigerians to think about alternatives to the current political arrangements ... including fundamental changes to the nation state ... Saro-Wiwa was executed in part because he was seen as a threat to the integrity of the Nigerian state.⁴⁹

One can actually read in his recommendation a 20th century version of the "*scrambling of Africa*" where he reminds Africans of the probably forgotten terms of the Berlin Conference,

The enduring attachment felt by Africans and others to the current state system is particularly ironic given that the parties to the Berlin West African Conference of 1884-85, which set the rules according to which the European powers demarcated Africa, noted explicitly that they reserved the right to change the principles on which they acted "as experience may show to be expedient."⁵⁰

Hence although the writer admits that Nigeria's problems are created in part by Western colonialism, he persists in imagining that the solution must still be arrogated to the Western scramblers, and settled to suit the West, rather than the Nigerians themselves. This is not to deny that there have been calls, even internally, for the disintegration of the country. But the

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 168,9. For him, this overrules the relevant merits of Nigeria's size and status in the African region.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 169.

reality is that post-Independence Nigeria, under the Gowon rule, took on the task of a 30-month civil war, at a heavy cost in lives and materials, 'to keep Nigeria one'. It is one thing to discuss federalism with more autonomy to regions/states and quite another to call for secession and disintegration.⁵¹ That Nigeria did not slide into another war following the political disturbances of 1993 and 1994 came as no surprise to anyone familiar with the lessons of the Nigerian (Biafran) civil war. Therefore, Herbst's article is quite perceptive, but in it one discerns the habitual/cultural Western arrogance.

It is however in the analysis of the political economy of the Nigerian state by the late Claude Ake⁵² that this project locates a critical attempt to plumb the root cause of Nigeria's problem. Furthermore Ake is able to offer a clue to why Western democracy remains impracticable in the newly independent African states. Beyond what ought to be taken as symptoms of Nigeria's problem such as military rule, the caliber of leadership, and the appeal to primordial ethnic loyalties, Ake opts for examining "the generic logic by which the Nigerian state and social formation proceed."⁵³ His analysis of the situation is adequate in my view.

⁵¹An American journalist who had confessed to his "sympathy for the Biafrans" in the 1967-70 civil war as "the aggrieved people, the Jews of Nigeria in anguish after terrifying pogroms" was later to reflect after the conclusion of the futile Biafran struggle against the Nigerian odds, "When I look back on the war now, I realize that the Ibos were brought down by their own arrogance and innocence, still believing the romantic, foolish maxims they had learned in imperial schools - God would save them, right would triumph, good Christians everywhere would never turn their backs on misery and injustice. They spurned all compromise. They haughtily refused to accept anything less than their independence. In the end, they collapsed and salvaged nothing." Meisler, Stanley, *Committed in Africa: Reflections of a Correspondent* in Hawk, G., ed., *Africa's Media Image*, NY: Praeger, 1992, p. 33. This is a lesson for all potential minority secessionists in Nigeria.

⁵²Ake, Claude, ed., *Political Economy of Nigeria*, London: Longman, 1985. See 1. *The state in contemporary Africa*, and 2. *The Nigerian state: antinomies of a periphery formation*. pp. 1-32.

⁵³Ake, op. cit., p. xi

Beginning with a fundamental description of what obtains in the Western market democracies, Ake identifies the society as a market where the web of relationship is based on commodity exchange. He outlines the terms of exchange and the necessary rule as follows:

Being formally free, equal and self-interested proprietors, the community of commodity bearers will necessarily evolve executive power (or government) as an independent public force administered in strict conformity to the rule of law. The rule of law epitomizes the political form under capitalism as the summation of the necessary conditions of market society and of the realization of the law of value. The rule of law expresses the embodiment of political domination just as the laws of demand and supply do in the economic sphere.⁵⁴

His term for the guiding rule of the web of market relationship is *autonomization* that “among other things institutionalizes the equal treatment of the unequal, which underlies the capital relation.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately, post-colonial African states can only operate a “limited autonomy” because the capitalist middle class has not emerged as a critically sizeable formation, as happened in the West in the 18th and 19th centuries. This was when Western democracy was replacing the monarchical and feudal systems. In post-colonial Africa, on the other hand, “the social formation cannot institutionalize individualism, competition, freedom, equality or even proprietorship as its operative forms.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, Ake identifies state capitalism as a feature of the Nigerian economy. For instance, the state is heavily involved in the oil industry. For instance, the Federal Government participation in the oil industry through the Nigerian National Petroleum

⁵⁴Ibid. pp. 2,3.

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 3.

⁵⁶Ibid. p. 4.

Corporation had, by 1979, moved up to 60% in each of the six multinational oil companies engaged in exploration, extraction and marketing of Nigerian crude oil.⁵⁷ Ake goes on to say that the Nigerian state lacks autonomy on account of the following social forces that are articulated to, and are in conflict with, it. These are listed in their hierarchical order: 1) foreign/metropolitan capital, 2) the Nigerian bourgeoisie (who include the military/political class), 3) the proletariat (Labour), 4) peasants, and 5) primary/ethnic groups.⁵⁸ While the peasants and primary/ethnic groups can be galvanized by the elites during elections or provoked to resistance by charismatic leaders, Ake notes that

For all practical purposes they have not yet emerged fully as legal subjects, they are not in civil society and not, strictly speaking, a constitutive element of the Nigerian state... Politically they are essentially sources of legitimation and objects of power.⁵⁹

The proletariat, the Nigerian workers, have fluctuated in their struggles, at times taking advantage of the lack of autonomization, and at other times being manipulated by the government and the bourgeoisie.⁶⁰ Among these social forces, Ake recognizes the Nigerian bourgeoisie and foreign capital as the dominant forces in the Nigerian state. They engage in a complex relationship with the state:

Nigerian local capital and foreign capital represent, respectively, a contradiction between political power and economic power, the one directly in charge of the state apparatus but with a weak material base and limited control of the productive base of the economy, the latter not directly involved with administration of the machinery

⁵⁷Cf. Kirk-Greene & Rimmer, 1981: 88. The major oil producing companies in Nigeria include Royal Dutch Shell-BP, Mobil, Texaco, Chevron, Agip-Phillips, Satrap (Elf).

⁵⁸Ake, op. cit., pp. 17-27.

⁵⁹Ibid. p. 29.

⁶⁰See also Ihonvbere, Julius, op. cit., Chapter 5, *Transition to Democracy...* pp. 153-189.

of state but powerful through its hold over technology and capital.⁶¹

Again it is helpful to take the example of the multinational oil companies in Nigeria. While these companies need the political clout of the local bourgeoisie to enter the country, the latter are totally dependent on their partners' foreign capital and technical competence. In this relationship, and on account of the limited autonomy of the state, the rules, where they exist, can be easily altered. The prevailing situation in the Nigerian society is depicted as follows:

The Nigerian state lacks autonomy by virtue of the state of the development of productive forces in the social formation... Since metropolitan capital gains access to the Nigerian economy only through the consent of the Nigerian ruling class, its entrance already entails accommodation of the state power and capital in a manner that compromises autonomy... The specialization of fractions of the Nigerian bourgeoisie in maintaining the political conditions of accumulation makes the premium on political power extremely high and encourages accumulation by political means, conditions which reinforce the lack of autonomization in the Nigerian state.⁶²

In this way the Nigerian state and economy are reduced to a market with no binding rules.⁶³

This environment, I contend, is a throwback to the colonial times when the terms of commerce were dictated by a superior colonial master, because he was superior. Presently, neocolonialism demonstrates that in spite of political independence, conditions of Western colonial dominance and Third World dependence have scarcely altered. Ake captures this historical moment,

...the colonial state in Nigeria started as a commercial concern, the United Africa Company. In 1886 the company was granted a charter and its name changed to the Royal Niger Company... The charter conferred on the company the powers of a

⁶¹Ibid., p. 20.

⁶²Ibid., p. 27.

⁶³Turi Muhammadu and Mohammed Haruna arrive at a similar analysis of a lack of principles: "The corrupt politician always invoked the spectre of ethnicism to cover up his guilt, with the predictable result that matters of principle were resolved in an unprincipled manner." Oyediran, 1979: 26.

government; it was to maintain law and order, collect taxes, oversee commerce, administer justice and so on. In time it mobilized an effective army and extended British rule, subordinating not only the emirates of Ilorin and Nupe but also Gwandu and Sokoto.⁶⁴

This historical and critical approach to the problem of Nigeria provides the underlying logic in the political culture where dominant political groups seek to secure power at all costs as the means of accumulation and patronage. It is therefore of minor consequence whether there is a military, ethnic, regional or even religious manifestation to the Nigerian problem. The root cause is historical, traced to the lack of binding rules. Allied to this, is that the distinct groups in the Nigerian state never exercised a choice whether to belong to it or not, but were militarily subjugated and shunted into one Nigerian entity. The result has been that national political struggles replicate grabbing and keeping power as did the colonizer. The British colonial state employed coercive governance, catered to British self-interest, generally played down the will of the people, and ignored the agitation of the Minorities in Nigeria. At independence, Britain provided for the Northern leadership of the country and predictably stood behind Nigeria against the Biafran secession in the Nigeria-Biafra war.⁶⁵ Arguing that Nigeria's problem is an offshoot of what he calls the English "obsession with a unitary system", Patrick Keatley, a former diplomatic editor of *The Guardian* (UK) writes,

It can be no accident that the organisation opposed to effective local devolution, over the sweep of years in Nigeria since independence, is the army. It is, perhaps, inevitable, given the sequence of events and the strong role of armed force in Nigerian history since the Royal Navy began its Niger River patrol in 1861. The

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁵Britain needed and actively supported a united Nigeria in order to protect her economic investments. See Ekwe-Ekwe, Herbert, *Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1990, pp. 16ff.

official Whitehall account of Nigeria's history, as set out in the HMSO Yearbook of 1972, says primly that "force was used against Benin in 1897 and by the Niger Company against Ilorin and Nupe in the same year...the Ijebu were conquered by force in the 1890s."⁶⁶

The conclusion here is that governance in Nigeria has taken after British colonial practice, replete with rules made to favour the powerful and the dominant and keep aside the 'unknown quantity'. The rules, where they exist, govern an uneven societal marketplace in a state system of "limited autonomy". The path to avoid marginalization and join in the accumulation leads to obtaining recognition in the corridors of power ("having connection" as it is known in Nigeria); and the controller of state power automatically acquires legitimacy. As Shehu Othman and G. Williams argued, "The unconstrained pursuit of power, by military rulers and their civilian rivals, continues to stand in the way of the establishment of a democratic political order."⁶⁷ This situation represents Nigeria's post-independence experience; perhaps made easier under military rule, where the democratic process is more easily manipulated, as exemplified in 1993 when Babangida annulled a presidential election, leaving many unconvinced or confused as to the process or rules applied.

The foregoing account makes one point: Nigeria's political instability is not natural; it is created. Just as with other African states, the challenge of the Nigerian government is "how to transform the legacies of divisiveness, structural imbalances, and the denial of basic rights bequeathed by colonial rule."⁶⁸ This challenge presently frustrates attempts to engage

⁶⁶*The Unnecessary Tragedy, Africa Today*, January/February 1996, p. 9.

⁶⁷*Why democracy eludes Nigeria, Africa Today*, Nov/Dec 1995, p. 15.

⁶⁸Cf. Gomes, Solomon, *The OAU, State Sovereignty, and Regional Security* in Kellner & Rothchild, op. cit.

in the game of Western democracy.⁶⁹ Consequently, when transnational news reports leave out or minimize Nigeria's historical experiences and social formations, the bias accentuates the self-interest of the West. Readers are denied an honest diagnosis of Nigeria's problem. I contend that it is only within the discussion of the socio-political and economic configuration of Nigeria that news of the Ogoni agitation and the hanging of the nine achieve contextual meaning. What follows is an examination of the Ogoni uprising which rightly falls under the discontents within the Nigerian nation state.

3.2.1 The Ogoni Uprising - its Nigerian Context

The sentence and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his colleagues has brought the Ogoni ethnic group more international publicity than any other minority group in Nigeria. Reading the accounts in the Western papers, the frequent misspellings ("Oganis", "Ogomi") and the charge of "genocide", in part orchestrated by Ken Saro-Wiwa himself⁷⁰, lead one to imagine the level of confusion and misrepresentation surrounding the Ogoni phenomenon. For instance, the word "genocide" is not new in the Nigerian experience. It was used to describe the plight of the Igbo in Nigeria who became victims of an ethnic pogrom in Northern Nigeria that resulted in the killing of an estimated 30,000 Easterners, and their

⁶⁹The tempting question here is: why has Africa failed to move beyond the state of the colonial mentality to achieve "democracy". The response of Martin Klein is in order: Nowhere was there a tradition of democracy in 18th century; France created a revolutionary democratic tradition in 5 years and fought about it for the next 160; Britain spent 2 centuries to create the parliamentary democracy it is offering the colonies; in 1832 Great Britain was ruled by several thousand wealthy property owners. Presently we are seeing democracy created in Eastern Europe and Africa - it is their struggle. Cited in Udogu, E. Ike, art. cit. in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, June 1996, p. 14.

⁷⁰Cf. Saro-Wiwa, Ken, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992.

forced return to their ethnic homeland in 1966-67. Subsequently “genocide” sustained the Biafran propaganda effort to maintain an international sympathy towards Biafra all through the civil war. But as used by Saro-Wiwa in 1993, “genocide” meant,

If you take away the resources of the (Ogoni) people, you take away their land, you pollute their air, you pollute their streams, you make it impossible for them to farm or fish, which is their main source of livelihood, and then what comes out of their soil you take entirely away...if more people in Ogoni are dying than are being born, if Ogoni boys and girls are not going to school...if those who manage to scale through cannot find jobs...then surely you are leading the tribe to extinction.⁷¹

Perhaps stretched wide enough Saro-Wiwa’s definition achieves fit. But Eghosa Osaghae disagrees,

Saro-Wiwa’s reference to genocide should (therefore) be seen as a way of drawing attention to the gravity of the situation.⁷²

For one thing, the situation described is “true of all other oil-producing communities in the country and there are in fact communities in Delta State whose environmental degradation and underdevelopment are worse than those of the Ogonis.”⁷³ Saro-Wiwa’s statement is also true of the plight and frustration in the wider Nigerian society following the introduction of SAP in 1986; but this is beyond the scope of this study.⁷⁴

In the hope that the above illustration helps to remind the foreign news reporter and

⁷¹Tell (Interview), 8 February, 1993, p. 29 cited in Eghosa Osaghae, *The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State*, *African Affairs* (1995), 94, p. 330.

⁷²Ibid. p. 331.

⁷³Ibid. For a detailed study of the neglect of standards, corruption and collusion of the multinational oil companies and their Nigerian bourgeoisie (counterparts) in the treatment of oil communities (e.g. the Funiwa-5 blow out), see Hutchful, Eboe, *Oil companies and environmental pollution in Nigeria*, in Ake, 1985: 113-140. Oil-industry pollution includes crude oil leaks or ‘spills’, industry wastes’, ‘refinery effluents’ and ‘thermal pollution’ such as gas flaring.

⁷⁴For a discussion of the crisis in Nigeria, see Ihonvbere, 1994, op. cit. Chapter 4, *Economic Crisis and the Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. pp. 111-152.

reader that events in Nigeria, as elsewhere, are scarcely black and white or as straightforward as stated, I shall now introduce the Ogoni agitation in the context of the Nigerian state. Who are the Ogoni? What is their bone of contention? How did their campaign get awry, leading to the arrest, trial and execution of the Ogoni Nine?

Briefly, the Ogoni are one of six minority ethnic groups in the Rivers state, formerly within Eastern Nigeria. (See Map 5, page 90) They therefore fall within the rebel territory that seceded from Nigeria in 1967 and later became the defeated and defunct Republic of Biafra.⁷⁵ With a population of 500,000 drawn from six sub-groups or clans - Nyo Khana, Ken Khana, Babbe, Gokhana, Tai and Eleme - the Ogoni homeland has three local government areas: Gokanna, Khana, and Tai-Eleme.⁷⁶ Ogoniland covers about 1000 square kilometres. Shell oil exploration began in Ogoniland in 1958 where the first oil wells were drilled in Ebubu and Bomu.⁷⁷ In 1965, Nigeria's first oil refinery was established at Alesa Eleme also in Ogoniland. Although the Ogoni struggle for separate autonomy dates back to the colonial days, cohesion among them began to be achieved through the campaign of the elites.⁷⁸ "In

⁷⁵With the Calabar and Ogoja provinces, the present Rivers State constituted the C-O-R minority of the then Eastern Region. To separate them from the Igbo-dominated East was championed by the political opponents of the Eastern Region; e.g. Obafemi Awolowo of the Western Region. The Rivers State was created on May 27, 1967, when Yakubu Gowon's military regime, 'unconstitutionally' proclaimed the 12 States structure. Three days later, Ojukwu, the Eastern Regional Governor declared the Biafran secession. Cf. Oyediran, 1979: 30, 31.

⁷⁶Cf. Osaghae, E, *The Ogoni Uprising...* op. cit. p. 327. Each of the 6 autonomous clans were headed by the Gbenemene or king. Ibid. p. 328. Nigeria runs a three-tier system of government - the central/federal government, the states, and the local governments.

⁷⁷Ibid. p. 329.

⁷⁸Osaghae notes as follows: "Later in the 1950s, Paul Birabi (the first Ogoni university graduate - he took a degree in mathematics from Southampton University in 1948) organized the Ogoni State Representative Assembly to join other minorities in the then Rivers province to demand a separate Rivers state from the Eastern Region." p. 329.

fact, some sub-groups have rejected a pan-Ogoni identity in the past, encouraged by administrative divisions and the autonomous clan system which has kept them apart.”⁷⁹ These differences made their appearances in the agitations in the 1990s.

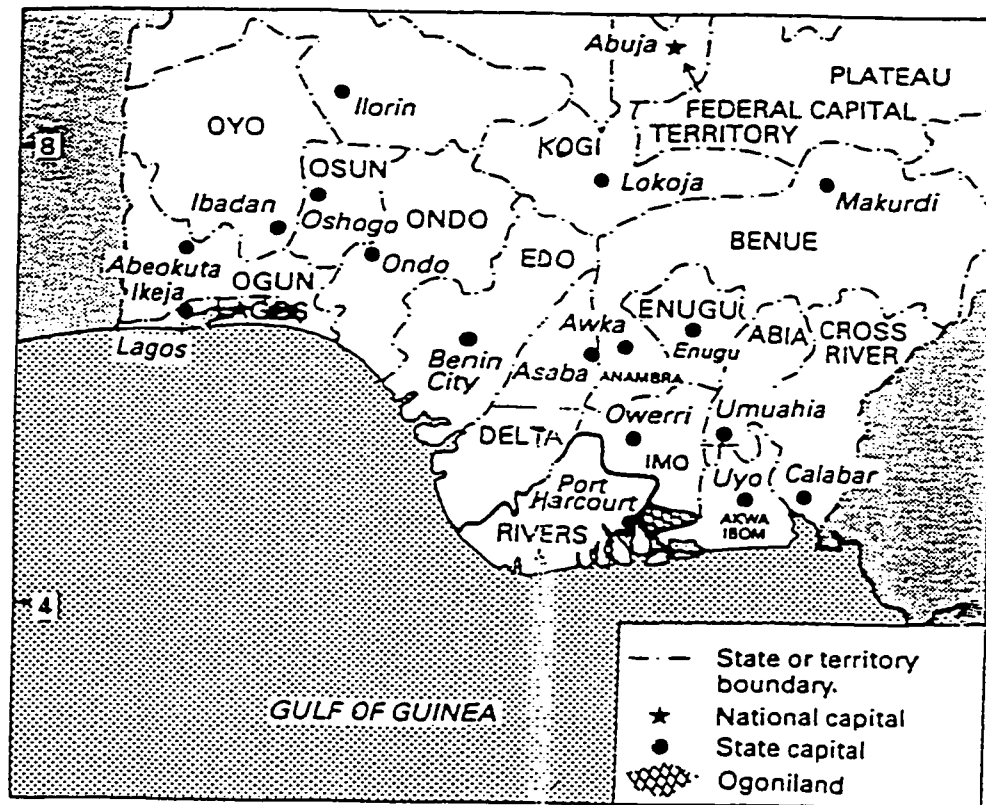
On August 26, 1990, the Ogoni ethnic group made public the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* which they had presented to the head of state and the Rivers state governor bearing the following demand:

That the Ogoni people be granted POLITICAL AUTONOMY to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this Autonomy guarantees the following:

- (a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people.
- (b) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.
- (c) Adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions.
- (d) The use and development of Ogoni languages in Ogoni territory,
- (e) The full development of Ogoni culture.
- (f) The right to religious freedom.
- (g) The right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Ibid. p. 328

⁸⁰*Ogoni Bill of Rights*, p. 4.



Source: African Affairs (1995), 94, p. 328

Map 5. Southern Nigeria and Ogoniland

The Ogoni leadership thus confronted the Nigerian government under the banner of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). This was a clear issue of minority agitation against majority domination and marginalization - both against the Ijaw of Rivers state, and the domination of the whole country by the major ethnic groups. Remarkably what is at stake are “group” rather than “individual” human rights.⁸¹ Precisely

⁸¹This is a point of constant misunderstanding with regard to the use of “human rights” between the Western individualist mentality and the group/communal thinking of Africa. See Osaghae, E. *Human Rights and Ethnic Conflict Management: The Case of Nigeria*, in *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33, no.

the Ogoni demand for autonomy stems from “the argument by Ogoni leaders that their oil-producing status has not improved their political and material situation because they are a minority group.”⁸² The Ogoni agitation is the first of its kind. As Osaghae observes, “no oil-producing community has gone to the extent of asserting the right to self-determination.”⁸³ Saro-Wiwa, as the president of the Ogoni Central Union, writes in the Introduction to the *Ogoni Bill of Rights*, “The Ogoni are not the only ones labouring under this terrible weight (of social injustice) imposed by their country. But they are a symbol of how Nigeria treats its minorities.”⁸⁴ Osaghae reasons that out of frustration with the arrangements of the government (this includes being ignored by the governments and their dissatisfaction with the commission set up in 1992 to directly address the needs of the oil-producing areas - the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Commission [OMPADEC]) - the Ogoni people were “led to assert their right of self-determination to deal with the oil companies directly.” In this regard their campaign focussed on compensation and environmental degradation resulting mainly from gas flaring and oil spillage.

From 1993, frustration led the MOSOP to engage in acts of civil disobedience which later degenerated into violent purges among their members.⁸⁵ For instance they defied the

2, 1996, pp. 171-188.

⁸²Osaghae, 1995, p. 332.

⁸³Ibid. p. 332.

⁸⁴Notably, an earlier crusade to liberate the people of the Niger Delta (especially the Ijaws) was led by Isaac Adaka Boro in January 1966. This was during the first Republic. It was effectively crushed by the first military government under General Aguiyi Ironsi.

⁸⁵The unpleasant term ‘vulture’ was used for the MOSOP leaders who assumed a moderate approach in the struggle. Cf. *Ogoni - The untold Story* in *Newsservice Magazine*, no. 30, 1997 p. 12. C. Don Adinuba, a friend of Saro-Wiwa, had this to say in reaction to the question whether Ken committed

government order not to hold a mass rally on January 4, 1993; they sacked all Shell operations in Ogoniland starting June 1993⁸⁶; and the radical group of the MOSOP enforced a boycott of the Federal election of June 12, 1993. Ogoni people also had violent border clashes with their neighbours - the Andoni between July and September 1993, and the Okrika in December 1993.⁸⁷ However, it was the boycott of the elections that caused a rift in the leadership of MOSOP. Garrick Leton resigned as president and the MOSOP leadership went to Ken Saro-Wiwa who had been the publicity secretary, while Ledum Mitee became his vice president. MOSOP had become fractionalized into camps especially over the "main strategies of mobilization" and the struggle. Radicalism was pursued by NYCOP⁸⁸ in agreement with Saro-Wiwa, while Garrick Leton, the former president, led the moderate camp. His vice president, Edward Kobani, along with Albert T. Badey, Samuel Orage and his brother Theophilus Orage, were the four Ogoni leaders clubbed to death at Giokoo on May 21, 1994.

the crime for which he was convicted: "I can't imagine Ken directing those youths to kill people. But I'm sure that the liberal use of certain words by some partisans in the Ogoni drama to refer to those who were not enthusiastic in the struggle would tend to deny the validity of these people's claim to humanity, thereby morally preparing the ground for getting them out of circulation." *Newswatch*, November 27, 1995, p. 23.

⁸⁶In an open letter - *From prison with love* - Saro-Wiwa revisits the terms under which Shell would be allowed back to continue their operations in Ogoniland: "We have already laid down the conditions under which they may resume operations. Pay royalties for all minerals mined from our soil, protect the environment, pay compensation for all past environmental damage, give us an adequate share of profits and ensure that our resources are so used that they will benefit the present and leave enough for future generations. If they do not accept these conditions, you must drive them from our land." *Vanguard*, Aug. 26, 1994, p. 5.

⁸⁷Osaghae, op. cit. p. 337. MOSOP leaders have it that the attacks were instigated by the oil companies with the support of the state and federal governments.

⁸⁸NYCOP, National Youth Council of the Ogoni People, is one of several groups that sprung up from MOSOP following the radical strategies emanating in 1993. NYCOP controlled a militant group called the Vigilante. One Bardian Lekara described by MOSOP as a non-existent character advertised in the *The Guardian* (Lagos), 26 September, 1993, p. 13: "The truth is that one person, Ken Saro-Wiwa, out to gain...cheap popularity, has brainwashed our people promising each adult Ogoni 3 million Naira reparation if the struggle succeeds'. Cf. Osaghae, op.cit. p. 334.

Their bodies were dumped in a volkswagen car and burnt. Inciting these murders was the charge for which Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight were tried and sentenced to death in Port Harcourt on October 30 and 31, 1995, by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal made up of Justice Ibrahim N. Auta, Justice Etawo Eyo Ankpo and Lt. Col. Ahmed Ibrahim Ali.

Nigerian accounts of this trial vary according to stake-holders.⁸⁹ For instance, the families of the murder victims (along with the Federal Government of Nigeria) were satisfied that justice was served.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the pro-democracy movements, human rights groups, and the international public opinion, saw nothing short of a “travesty of justice” and state terrorism perpetrated by the military regime in Nigeria. The executions were seen as consistent with the massive military operations aimed at suppressing and silencing the Ogoni uprising.⁹¹ Whichever side is accurate, it is my view that once again Nigeria succumbed to a generic logic where might triumphed, protests were ignored, and the dominant took advantage of the weak. Perhaps this accounted for the anger of the international community

⁸⁹See for instance, *Abacha's Revenge* (cover story), *Tell*, no. 46, November 13, 1995; *Auta Tribunal Was Biased*, *Tell*, Nov. 27, 1995, p. 18-20. And for a view that makes the judgment less doubtful as well as discussing the prosecution's account of the fractionalization of MOSOP, see *Saro-Wiwa's Death Sentence*, *TSM (The Sunday Magazine)* vol. 11, no. 36, Nov. 12, 1995. p. 9-14.

⁹⁰*From Dorah Badey To Ken Saro-Wiwa*, *TSM*, Nov. 12, 1995, p. 15, 16. The trial lasted February to October 1995. “The Provisional Ruling Council, PRC, at the end of a five-hour meeting ... upheld judgment of the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal which found Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others guilty of the murder of four Ogoni leaders in May 1994.” *Newswatch*, November 20, 1995, p. 24.

⁹¹A special military task force was set up early in 1994 by the Rivers State government aimed “at restoring normalcy in Ogoni land”. This was placed under the command of Major Paul Okuntimo, a veteran of international peace-keeping in Lebanon and Angola. Cf. Olukoya, Sam, *The Ogoni Agony*, *Black Academy Review*, vol. 7, no. 1/2, 1996. A special propaganda video, “Delta Force”, aired on the CBC TV programme, “Witness”. This was featured one week after the executions and depicts the environmental degradation in Ogoniland, the charismatic leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the brutal suppression of the Ogoni people carried out by the military task force.

as well. But before discussing what became a curious adherence to principles in the Commonwealth, I need to make a rendez-vous with history by a close look at the man who, in the international media, was undoubtedly the hero and the martyr in the Ogoni cause. As I shall show later, he became central to the story for what he represented.

3.2.2 The Ken Saro-Wiwa Phenomenon

Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa was born October 10, 1941 in Bori, Ogoni, Rivers State, and educated in Government College, Umuahia, (1954-61) in the then Eastern Region, and at the University of Ibadan (1962-66).⁹² On graduation he taught at his alma mater in Umuahia (1966), was a graduate assistant at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1967) and then worked as associate lecturer at the University of Lagos (1967-73). On account of his aversion for the Igbo majority⁹³, he proudly dissociated himself from the Biafran secession, even as some of those who became his opponents in MOSOP such as Edward Kobani, Dr. Garrick Leton and Mr. Badey stayed with Biafra. As soon as the Rivers state was carved out of Eastern Nigeria, he commenced what became almost a 20-year stint working with the military government of Nigeria when he was appointed the Administrator of Bonny (1967-68). Subsequently, he served as the Rivers state Commissioner of Works, Lands and Transport (1968-69). At this time, he became 'one of the architects of "Abandoned Property"

⁹²For the historical data in this section I rely on Mezu, S. Okechukwu, *The Life and Times of Saro-Wiwa*, *Black Academy Review*, Vol. 7, no. 1/2, 1996, pp. 5-60. See also *Profile - Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa* in *TSM*, November 12, 1995, p. 16,17.

⁹³In an interview published in *AM News*, Tuesday November 21, 1995, Saro-Wiwa is quoted as saying, "...as a 15 year old school boy in Government College, Umuahia, I was taunted and teased by the Igbo cooks about being Ogoni and I never forgot. I knew from that moment onwards, I would have to fight for the dignity and rights of the Ogoni people."

in Rivers State through which Igbo people were expropriated in their country losing all the houses they built and owned in Port Harcourt before the Nigerian Civil War.⁹⁴ From 1969-71 he was the Commissioner for Education, and in 1972-73 controlled Information and Home Affairs. 'It was during this period of military rule and as Commissioner for Education and later Information that Ken Saro-Wiwa "blossomed" as a writer.' (Saro-Wiwa owned a publishing company, Saros International Publishers, and authored up to 50 books. He was also famous for writing the TV Series, *Basi and Company*.) The apex of his career with the military was 1987-88 when, under General Babangida, he was appointed a Federal government director. It was then that the Babangida administration promulgated the Civil Disturbances (Special Tribunal) Act, CAP. 53, (1382-1299), *Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, 18th March, 1987, which vaguely states:

A tribunal shall have jurisdiction to try any person in the First Schedule to this Act and shall have power to award any penalties specified for the offences in either the Criminal Code or the Penal Code. (1384)⁹⁵

This was the Decree under which Saro-Wiwa and company were tried in 1995 by a tribunal rather than a regular court. Mezu notes perhaps wryly,

It is the irony of history, that in 1987, when this Decree was promulgated, Ken Saro-Wiwa was Executive Director of MAMSER, National Directorate for Social Mobilisation, ... the apologist for the Nigerian military government and the fulcrum of its mass orientation and propaganda machine.⁹⁶

This was not a long way to 1990 when the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* was born and soon came to

⁹⁴Mezu, op. cit., p. 26. This was the "Abandoned Properties Act, CAP. 1, (1-3) promulgated on 28 September 1969.

⁹⁵Cited in Mezu, *ibid*, p. 41.

⁹⁶*ibid*. p. 41.

get the local and international publicity that Ken Saro-Wiwa could give it. By 1990, he threw his literary weight fully behind a cause very close to his heart - the deliverance of the Ogoni - and the campaign for the creation of an Ogoni ethnic State within Nigeria. Perhaps one can understand his activism and the depth of his commitment in his own words to his people while under arrest in 1994, and while awaiting trial for civil disturbances involving the murder of the four Ogoni leaders:

I warned at that time, that our struggle would not be an easy one, given that we were facing two powerful enemies, Shell, the multi-national oil giant which had declared an unprecedented, lethal and genocidal ecological war against us since 1958, and the rulers of Nigeria who are determined to rob us of our resources and have enacted laws which give sanctity to our exploitation and dehumanization. I advised that we confront these people with the only weapon which they lack: truth. And I said that we would have to be ready to suffer arrest, detention, imprisonment and death as the only alternative to the struggle is extinction.⁹⁷

He concluded this communication by pitching his charismatic appeal on the global issues and implications of the Ogoni struggle - democracy, human rights, the environment - and expressed reliance on the national and international attention which he appears to have single-handedly brought to the Ogoni cause,

All Ogoni people must remain in the vanguard of the pro-democracy struggle in Nigeria and press home our demand for ethnic autonomy, environmental and resource control as the beacon of Nigerian democracy. My beloved people, we are not friendless. We have support in Nigeria among democrats and in the international community among environmentalists, human rights experts and activists and writers. Let us then go forward in unity, with faith in God to claim our rights through non-violent struggle. I have no doubt at all that we shall emerge victorious. God bless you all.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Saro-Wiwa, *From prison with love*, *Vanguard*, Friday, Aug. 26, 1994. p. 5

⁹⁸*Ibid.* Apart from becoming MOSOP president, Saro-Wiwa was "president of EMIROAF ... and used his connections with the media and international human rights and environmental protection organizations to pursue the Ogoni case." Osaghae, 1994: 333.

In retrospect, when Saro-Wiwa switched from writing to activism and confrontation, he was certainly on a collision course with the Nigerian military political class with whom he got on well, and from whom he personally profited over the years from 1967 to 1988. His personal fortunes which included the plots he owned in Port Harcourt, his publishing business, and his ability to have his son study and live in Britain have been traced to his days of association with the military⁹⁹. Like some among the Nigerian elites and virulent critics of the military, such as Professor Wole Soyinka, Dr. Olu Onagoruwa, Dr. Bolaji Akinyemi, and the late Dr. Tai Solarin, who were tricked into service with the military, Saro-Wiwa was part of the Nigerian bourgeoisie. As Mezu rightly observed, "The bitterest opponents of military regimes in Nigeria and Africa are usually those who have gained, sometimes undeservedly, most from military regimes."¹⁰⁰ Although Saro-Wiwa deserves every compliment for his courage and convictions in the fight for the Ogoni, it is still in order to acknowledge that he was one of Nigeria's bourgeoisie who profited from the legacy of the colonial arrangement of forceful acquisition. He garnered international recognition for his literary talents and activism.¹⁰¹ But as an opportunistic collaborator with the Nigerian military, it is one of those ironies of history that he got caught by the web he helped to

⁹⁹Mezu, *op.cit.* pp. 11, 12, 24, 26.

¹⁰⁰*ibid.* p. 26.

¹⁰¹ 'Between his arrest in 1994 and his death sentence on October 31, 1995, he won several international awards for environmental activism and literary excellence, including the prestigious "Alternative Nobel", the 1994 Right Livelihood Award.' Cf. *TSM*, November 12, 1995, p. 17.

spin.¹⁰²

3.2.3 Summary: Refocusing the story on the Nigerian Problem

The argument of the foregoing is that the Ogoni agitation is part of the larger issue of national cohesion within the Nigerian state. Firstly, a key Nigerian problem is how to integrate the 250 ethnic groups to live without fear and suspicion in the one entity created by the *fiat* of the Colonial Office in Britain. The MOSOP solution would ultimately divide Nigeria into ethnic States. Implementing the creation of States (and countries) on the ethnic principle with regard to Nigeria and indeed other countries in post-colonial Africa poses a political dilemma. Secondly, it is one thing to charge that one should cease living in the past¹⁰³, quite another to respond to the genuine demands of those who complain of marginalization by the very structures of existence in the Nigerian society, both on the political and economic fronts. Politically, the issue of sectional or ethnic dominance has in part guaranteed the military expediency. A civil war became the price, dearly paid, to keep the nation together. Economically, revenue sharing, mainly from the oil sector, remains a

¹⁰²He wrote in respect of his assessment of the Government's promulgation of the Abandoned Property Edict that dispossessed the Igbo of their houses in Port Harcourt, "*No respectable government, it was argued, would stand aside and have landlords come to create problems that might lead to serious social disorganization.*" In Saro-Wiwa's **On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War** (1985). Cited in Mezu, *ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁰³This view is held by those who would rather dispense with history, and with the imbalance in the global economic system encountered by the newly independent states in Africa. These argue that the years since Independence were enough for Nigeria to have gotten its acts together to forge a powerful and progressive nation.

sore point, especially where the bulk of the oil is extracted from the minorities.¹⁰⁴ In a system where power guarantees what one gets, the struggle for power remains a do or die affair. Thirdly, the Nigerian situation derives from the cultural legacy of colonialism in which unprincipled and unfair structures define civil relationships. The result, in Nigerian terms, is that the rule of law or constitutionalism has remained a mirage. What obtains in Nigeria has been aptly described as the “politics of anxiety” where retaining power, rather than production, is the key to accumulation.¹⁰⁵ Groups who are marginalized, like the Ogoni and other neglected areas, are inevitably in conflict with the military-political class. On the other hand, the clamour for autonomy by the marginalized groups is not so much for what is a fair rule for allocation in the context of the Nigerian federation as a desperate bid to have their piece of the cake - to enjoy what is derived from their land. In the light of the above socio-political and economic realities, my contention is that the reduction of the Ogoni story to issues of Western democracy, human rights and the environment (i) became readily meaningful in transnational news and discourse, but (ii) eclipsed the Ogoni demands¹⁰⁶, and (iii) failed to acknowledge the historical situation, and therefore to address the Nigerian problem. In effect the story ceased to be Nigeria’s story. Nigeria is neither Canada, nor

¹⁰⁴For a discussion of the centre-inspired competition, the conflict between states and the fight for revenue sharing in Nigeria, see Osaghae, E., *Interstate Relations in Nigeria*, **Publius**, vol. 24, Fall 1994, pp. 83-98.

¹⁰⁵In the situation where there is preference of efficiency norms to legitimacy norms, “Contending groups struggle on grimly, polarizing their differences and convinced that their ability to protect their interests and to obtain justice is coextensive with their power.” Ake, 1985:10.

¹⁰⁶I indicated above that Western individual rights are quite distinct from group rights. While the West may get crazy with the denial of individual rights, others are more willing to let group (communal) rights override their rights as individuals. In any case, the Ogoni agitate in defense of their rights as an ethnic group within Nigeria.

Europe; nor is Nigeria sustained by the same capitalist structures in which Western democracy thrives. Therefore, Nigeria has political problems which are peculiar to its situation. The rest of this chapter discusses the Commonwealth and Canada (or the West) in their appreciation of the Nigerian story.

3.3 The Commonwealth, Canada and Western liberal values

My treatment so far has focused on Nigeria's experience with Britain as an instance of the umbilical link that post-colonial African states have with Europe. I bracketed the impact of the two Cold War ideologies, particularly the struggle between the Western (American) capitalist model and the Soviet communist model, in the structuring of events and alliances in post-colonial African states.¹⁰⁷ The event in question is free of such constraints. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War (1989-91) is known to have impacted on the upstaging of certain issues in international relations. Issues of good governance, democratic process and human rights have acquired unusual prominence and inevitability. Remarkably, these issues or values which were submerged in the Cold War days, as the superpowers and their allies jockeyed for influence in Africa, are now fore-grounded. "Military assistance is now being de-emphasized in favor of promoting good governance, democracy, and economic reform."¹⁰⁸ Keeping this in mind, I shall proceed with relating the international context to the reactions toward the Nigerian event particularly in terms of

¹⁰⁷Canada while pursuing "internationalism" in its foreign policy was aligned with the capitalist bloc. Obasanjo, O. observes: "Allied with the United States were Canada, Japan, and the industrialized capitalist countries of Europe;..." Cf. *A Balance Sheet of the African Region and the Cold War*, in Keller & Rothchild, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁰⁸Keller, Edmund & Donald Rothchild, op. cit., p. 9.

Canada and the Commonwealth. My argument here relates to what the Western press and governments embrace as the issues and project into international institutions such as the Commonwealth. These issues provide the prism through which to judge the behaviour of the less powerful regions of the world. The consequence is that the news reports Western values and we are left with a dominant Western story.

The Nigerian military government under General Babangida was party to the Commonwealth Harare Declaration of 1991 that adopted to pursue the following: good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and economic and social development. This new emphasis is a post-Cold War approach of the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁹ Nigeria became its first victim at the CHOGM that opened in Auckland, on November 10, 1995. News of the executions on December 10, 1995, coincided with the meeting in Auckland. It was on the basis of the Harare Declaration that Nigeria was handed a two years' suspension order with a threat of expulsion if the country failed to return to democracy by their next meeting in October 1997. A new body, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), was set up to monitor Nigeria's programme to return to an elected (democratic) government.¹¹⁰

As we shall see, the press reported that several leaders of the Commonwealth countries were outspoken in their condemnation of the Nigerian action. These include South

¹⁰⁹In the Singapore Declaration 1971, the Commonwealth already affirmed its faith in international peace and order, the rule of law, belief in the right to participate in the democratic process, and abhorrence towards military rule. Cf. *Newswatch* (Lagos) November 27, 1995, p. 19. Harare 20 years later revisited these agreements.

¹¹⁰At the CMAG meeting held in June 1996, the Nigerian delegation argued that the suspension order was in error because the Harare Declaration stipulated that "the erring member must be given two years' grace before suspension." Cf. *Africa Today*, Sept/Oct 1996, p. 39.

African Nelson Mandela, Britain's John Major, Canada's Jean Chrétien, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and the host, Jim Bolger of New Zealand. Other than the leaders, several pro-democracy and human rights groups along with environmentalists put pressure on government leaders and international institutions, for instance, the EU and the UN, to 'punish' the Nigerian regime. As shall be seen in the next chapter, efforts by Canada to use *la Francophonie* meeting (to which Nigeria never belonged) to incite Nigeria's condemnation by its neighbours ended in a fiasco for Jean Chrétien. No other institution had as much international exposure vis-a-vis the Nigerian event than the Commonwealth. Thus among international institutions, the Commonwealth occupies a significant place. Hence the Commonwealth, as the international forum for enforcing the Western democratic political culture among member states, deserves some critical examination.

The Commonwealth, presently made up of 54 nations, some of them with no British connection (for instance, lusophone Mozambique and francophone Cameroon), has emerged as second only to the United Nations among influential international institutions. It includes all (16) former British African colonies. Applications now come from ideologically divergent countries such as Rwanda, Israel, Palestine, and Yemen, a sign of the attractiveness of its positioning as oriented towards trade and assistance to developing nations.¹¹¹ Thus the Commonwealth has evolved from the time that allegiance to the British Crown and citizenship were prerequisites. A quick historical reminiscence is in order here.

Prior to 1949 when newly independent India was admitted into the British Commonwealth, Britain and its far-flung imperial territories were distinguishable from the

¹¹¹ *Le Commonwealth Nouveau* in LD October 27, 1997, p. A1

four Dominions - Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand - all settler colonies of previous British citizens. It was the issue of autonomy among the Dominions that introduced the term "commonwealth" for the first time. In an atmosphere where war and peace occupied the centrepiece of international relations, the British Prime Minister "Lloyd George realized that the Dominions could not be expected to continue making sacrifices without being called to Britain's councils."¹¹² The Imperial War Conference which he summoned in 1917 hammered out Resolution XI (largely the work of the Canadian Robert Laird Borden) which recorded that any postwar readjustment of constitutional relations "should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth."¹¹³ By 1931, the *Statute of Westminster* established "the theoretical right of the Dominions to full legislative autonomy."¹¹⁴ In terms of Canada, this stopped short of "independence" and the power to amend its Constitution, as laid down in the 1867 British North America Act. This would be overturned only in 1982 at the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution. (For some strange reason, beyond the scope of this enquiry, Canada and Australia, unlike South Africa and New Zealand, retain the Queen of England, and representing her, a governor-general). With the admission of independent India in 1949, the British monarch was declared "the symbol of the free association of its member nations, and as such Head of the Commonwealth."¹¹⁵ Thus both in the age of empire and after, Britain enjoyed the alliance of

¹¹²**The Canadian Encyclopedia**, vol. II, Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988, p. 740.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Cited in **The Canadian Encyclopedia**, vol. 1, p. 468.

those countries and territories under the British Crown. Canada fought on the side of Britain in the Boer War (1899-1902)¹¹⁶, and the two World Wars and, as part of NATO and the UN, in the Korean War (1950-52) and the Gulf War (1991).

Canada gradually established its foreign affairs autonomy from Britain but in terms of the Commonwealth, Canada's position is similar to an elder son with high stakes in the family. Just to mention a few instances: Canada's Arnold Smith served as the first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth secretariat established in 1965¹¹⁷; Canada is the second highest financial contributor to the Secretariat (after Britain); up until 1995 Canada contributed 20% to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (founded in 1971); Pierre Trudeau played a key role in the crisis that arose in the Commonwealth over Britain's wish to sell arms to Apartheid South Africa¹¹⁸; in 1991, the Brian Mulroney emphasis on "good governance" was instrumental to the new awareness espoused in the Harare Declaration¹¹⁹; then in Auckland (1995) it was expected that Jean Chrétien would pursue the enforcement of the Harare Declaration on the issue of democracy and human rights.

¹¹⁶This Canadian cooperation to protect British interests in Southern Africa coincides with the imperial interests behind the conquest of the Native Peoples in Canada as well as the earlier French settlers in Quebec. It was no surprise that Quebec refused to volunteer. Henri Bourassa, the founder of *Le Devoir*, sharply criticized the British government and Wilfrid Laurier for committing Canada in the war. Cf. Nossal, 1997:142.

¹¹⁷He has been followed by two others, Sir Sheridath Ramphal (1975-1990) and Chief Emeka Anyaoku, a Nigerian (1990 -).

¹¹⁸Britain under the Conservatives became envious of French (legacy of de Gaulle's 'pragmatic self-interest') defiance of UN sanctions in the lucrative arms "sales of planes, submarines and military equipment to South Africa." Cf. Mazrui, A., *Africa's International Relations*, (1977) p. 63. In terms of principles, this trade deal is all the more curious considering that South Africa was expelled from the British Commonwealth in 1961.

¹¹⁹Nossal, 1997:183.

(Curiously, the consensus on principles at the Auckland Summit could not get the British John Major on side in the condemnation of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific.)¹²⁰

History reveals that the adoption of dominant principles in foreign affairs is traceable to the fluctuating choices of sovereign governments rather than what is natural to countries.¹²¹ For instance, Canada embraced “internationalism” when Louis St. Laurent, the external affairs minister under J.W. Mackenzie King, articulated the nation’s foreign policy principles in his 1947 Gray Lectures at the University of Toronto. These include: “national unity, political liberty, the rule of law in international affairs, the values of Christian civilization, and the acceptance of international responsibility.”¹²² These principles undergird Canada’s embrace with international institutions after 1945. As recently as 1995, at the Second Annual Forum for Foreign Relations held September 10, 11, 1995, weeks prior to the Auckland Summit, the recommendations reiterated Canada’s confidence in international institutions. It was premised on the belief that Canada’s security and prosperity were based on (a) a rules-based regime; (b) Canada’s deeply held values of respect for fundamental human rights, good governance, equity, tolerance of diversity; and (c) civilian participation

¹²⁰The mutual protection of interests between Britain and France is not new. In the 1956 Suez Crisis, the two countries declared war on Abdel Nasser’s Egypt for nationalizing the Suez Canal. The US under Eisenhower condemned the aggression; Canada abstained from voting on the UN resolution demanding a cease-fire and an Anglo-French withdrawal, but proposed an international peacekeeping force to supervise the cessation of hostilities. This kept the Commonwealth together, and earned Lester Pearson, the then Canadian external affairs minister the Nobel Peace prize. Furthermore, under Conservative Margaret Thatcher, Britain in 1982 once again demonstrated its imperial will during the Falklands War. **The Canadian Encyclopedia**, vol. 1, p. 468.

¹²¹Nossal K., demonstrates Canada’s dominant foreign policy ideas since independence as moving progressively through “imperialism”, “isolationism”, “internationalism” and a budding “regionalism” in the post-Cold War period. **The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy**, Scarborough, On.: Prentice Hall, 1997, pp. 144-162.

¹²²Nossal, op. cit., p. 156.

(through NGOs) in international institutions, to ensure responsibility and transparency.¹²³ On the projection of Canadian values abroad the report reads:

The working group applauded the Government's stated commitment to the goal of projecting Canadian values abroad. Members emphasized that Canada can project its values in international organizations such as the United Nations, international financial institutions, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), la Francophonie and the Commonwealth.¹²⁴

If this helps to explain Canada's foreign affairs principles and the use of international institutions to propagate Canadian values, the question remains regarding the uncritical application of foreign policy ideas and universalizing one's value system in the assessment of distant and rather discrete events. As shall be shown in the next chapter, even the "Team Canada" trade missions to some Asian countries including Communist China were seen not to correspond with Canada's chosen principles and its uncompromising stand on the Nigerian question. The bewilderment at how the big or medium powers create and manipulate principles to suit their self-interests represents the experience of the Third World and the former colonies. I recall here that the use of force and sanctions when the empire's patience runs out was part of the imperial/colonial logic. Wilson encapsulates this logic:

When the European states extended their influence into other continents, the tendency was to judge the new states that arose in accordance with how far they conformed to the pattern exemplified by the states of Europe. As the European states developed superior military and naval power, they were able to compel the rest of the world to deal with them on their own terms. States that were not made dependencies, pure and simple, of their European masters were expected to adopt the principles of

¹²³Report of the Second Annual National Forum, *International Institutions in the Twenty-first century - Can Canada Help to Meet the Challenge?* (1995). The Annual Forum was set up in 1993 by the Chrétien government

¹²⁴Ibid. p. 13.

law recognized by the European states in their relations with one another.¹²⁵

Also notable is that in the post-Cold War era, trade sanctions, in themselves forms of violence, are substitutes to the use of military force for propagating one's ideological values. This, however, is on condition that the powerful nation/s can afford to boycott the trade ties. The United States through its current Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, recently formulated an economically sensitive articulation of dialogue rather than sanctions in approaching a powerful interlocutor. In her defense of the US-China trade links prior to the US Annual Congressional Debate she proclaims:

The Clinton administration would like to see China travel down the road toward full observation of international norms, particularly those on human rights. But given the undemocratic nature of its government, we expect movement to be gradual, and would be disappointed, but not surprised, by setbacks ... Whatever the outcome of the debate, China will be a rising force in Asian and world affairs. History teaches us the wisdom of encouraging emerging powers to become part of international arrangements for settling disputes, facilitating shared economic growth and establishing standards of behaviour.¹²⁶

Perhaps it was economic rationalism that served to restrain the move to boycott Nigeria's oil by the US and the countries of the EU following the executions. Both trading blocks formed the big buyers of Nigeria's oil.¹²⁷ They failed to join South African Nelson Mandela and Canadian Jean Chrétien's leading calls for multilateral trade sanctions against Nigeria. In fact this would be expected considering that the US, Canada, South Africa,

¹²⁵Wilson, op. cit., p. 78.

¹²⁶*Cutting trade ties with China is not the solution.* Montreal *The Gazette*, June 14, 1997. Appeared first in *The Washington Post*.

¹²⁷While Canada's annual purchase of Nigeria's crude oil was \$600,000 in 1994 (12% of Canada's annual imports), 45% of Nigeria's annual exports is sold to the US, and another 45% to the EU countries.

Russia and all EU countries recalled their ambassadors as soon as the news of the executions flew out. While those under the halo effect of Western principles of democracy and human rights gazed in disbelief as these high diplomats began returning within one month, and oil sanctions were not forthcoming, others who were familiar with the logic of economic self-interest were not surprised. Here is how Mezu saw it:

The price of Nigeria's oil rose in the spot market as America witnessed the worst winter in years. The economic signals from defiant and unrepentant Nigeria were too cold for the comfort of the Western Ambassadors in wintry European capitals. They had to come back immediately to monitor Nigeria's "transition program" to democratic government. Exactly or may be a few days after the "month's mind" of the executions, the indignation simmered down, the anger mellowed and the indignant Ambassadors quietly moved back to Lagos and Abuja.¹²⁸

Still in retrospect, one could say that the international reactions to the Nigerian executions lasted barely long enough to mourn the man whose victimhood was linked to his eloquent articulation of the values of Western democracy, human rights and equity, and who challenged "authoritarianism" as represented in the Nigerian military regime. As shall be seen in the subsequent chapters, Saro-Wiwa became the Western story because he was perceived as standing for the values of Western society. By the same token, the Western issues he represented meant that the Ogoni uprising lost its meaning as another manifestation of a festering Nigerian national problem. If I may recall once more, this problem is essentially how to deal with minorities in a federal system of a multiethnic nation where the conflicting groups engage in the "politics of anxiety." What the news largely ignored is that the present Nigerian social formation is ill-adapted to practise Western democracy built on a stable foundation of capitalism and "enlightened self-interest."

¹²⁸Mezu, op. cit. p. 45.

3.4 Conclusion: the two stories

This chapter has endeavoured to provide a necessary background context for a critical appreciation of the Canadian newspaper coverage of the Nigerian event. I have attempted to say (i) that in the event that happened, there are two underlying dispositions: one Nigerian, the other Western. In the Western disposition, the hanging in Nigeria was an offense against international agreements. (ii) This is so because Western values as articulated in the context of the Commonwealth and championed by Canada's foreign policy actors dominated the news discourse in Canada. The Nigerian context of the event was virtually eclipsed in the international news. The next chapter closely studies this Western/Canadian bias based on the analysis of the three Canadian papers.

The Nigeria news in The Globe & Mail, Ottawa Citizen and Le Devoir: The Analysis

"The ruling ideas of any age are ideas of its ruling class."
- Karl Marx.

One of the earlier criticisms made against Western coverage of events in Africa is that readers are provided with 'spotty information' as different from 'contextual information.'¹ This failure to learn the context and attend to local issues involved in an event leads to reductionism, a kind of 'historical shorthand', such as making Nigeria reducible to the Western understanding of Nigeria's treatment of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight.² In the continuity reporting which the Nigerian executions of November 10, 1995, commanded in the Canadian press, the spotty information in some publications contained initial errors of fact. As factual accuracy improved, the news turned more and more into a self-reflexive look with attention focused increasingly on Canada's interests as a nation rather than on the Nigerian event. As shall be seen, this extrapolation nevertheless determined the dominant interpretations regarding Canada's condemnation of the Nigerian regime and the need for Canada to intervene; the coverage of Nigeria became equally the coverage of the socio-economic and political configurations of Canada.

¹Himmelstrand, Ulf, *The Problem of Cultural Translation in the Reporting of African Social Realities* in Stokke, Olav, ed., **Reporting Africa**, NY: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971, p. 118.

²Himmelstrand provides an interesting *visual* illustration where 'A skilfully made photograph of a starving child from "Biafra" with protruding ribs and an old man's face is a very effective kind of spotty information' but it does not answer contextual questions such as issues of the conflict that gave rise to such grave consequences. Ibid.

4.1 The Key Research Procedures

This chapter employs empirical examination in the study of the definition of the Nigerian event in the **G&M**, the **OC** and **LD**, within the two-month period (November/December 1995). The items that qualify as the *primary documents* constituted the basic units of the analysis. A critical discourse analysis of the texts led to the meaningful structure or context model within which the newspapers operated. This assumes attentiveness to the Canadian socio-economic and political context within which the Nigerian event became a Canadian story; editorial selection of texts would be presumed to have the Canadian readers in mind. The two key research procedures adopted in this chapter are as follows:

(i) A close study and *genre classification* of the primary documents, that is, all publications with any bearing on the political situation in Nigeria. Virtually everything the papers had about Nigeria during the period qualified. The genre classification took account of internal designations as News, Editorial, Feature, Opinion and Letter to the editor.³ These designations carry their ideological messages. For instance, news stories go by the journalistic myth of objectivity, and editorials represent the “informed” position/opinion of the paper. I took note of the frequency of Nigerian items during the 2-month period as indicative of the significance that the Canadian papers attached to this news event. Fig. 1 classifies the primary documents according to genres. The 10 items under **LD** do not mean

³In my classification, I found it necessary to separate Opinions and Features, and to place Column and Focus pieces under Features. While Opinions express purely subjective viewpoints as in Letters, they differ from Features because the latter attempt to go in-depth and to be “objective” in their treatment of topics.

a lack of serious coverage when compared with the relatively higher numbers for the items under G&M (46) and OC (45).

	News	Editorial	Feature	Opinion	Letter	TOTAL
<i>G&M</i>	28	3	7	-	8	46
<i>OC</i>	36	2	-	3	4	45
<i>LD</i>	9	1	-	-	-	10
TOTAL	73	6	7	3	12	101

Fig. 1 *Genre Categories of documents in the 3 Canadian dailies for Nov - Dec 1995.*

To push this interpretation would amount to equating quantity with quality. Moreover, all three papers gave Nigeria increased coverage during the period⁴; firstly on account of the perceived deviant nature of the executions and the degree of international publicity given to the Ogoni Movement; and secondly, due to the high expectations for Canada's leading role on issues of democracy and human rights, both at the Commonwealth Summit (Nov 10-13) and at la Francophonie Summit (Dec 2-4).⁵ These claims should be clarified in the course of this chapter and the next.

ii) For *textual analysis* each item is examined (a) to discover the *preferred meanings* of the text. Here the analysis according to topic/macro-proposition, headline and lead, lexical construction, verbal semantic meaning, serve to reveal the dominant as well as the subordinate or, where applicable, the oppositional definitions of an event in the news. (b) To

⁴An initial research in the **Canadian News Index** showed the G&M had a total of 30 titles on Nigeria for the Nov/Dec months, over two times as much as in the 4 months from July to October 1995.

⁵See previous chapter, 3.3, for Canada's foreign policy and the international institutions.

derive the *context models* that match the macro-understanding of the event is a function of its correspondence with the Western and/or Canadian sociocognitive beliefs.⁶ In the use of verbal processes, qualifiers, metaphors and 'public idioms' to convey shared meanings, the writers betray the underlying Western beliefs about sub-Saharan Africa. Technically this indicates the socio-cognitive worldview of the Canadian audience as part of the Western society. I need to acknowledge that my methods of interpretation accommodates earlier studies in the field⁷ along with my awareness of the Canadian/Western environment vis-a-vis the Third World as foreshadowed in the concerns expressed in Chapter 2.

4.1.1 Hypothetical Statement on the Findings

Before taking up the sections mentioned above, it should be recalled that the goal of the study pertains to the naturalized knowledges or operating ideologies used as frames in constructing and presenting the news and editorials primarily, but also the features, opinions and letters.⁸ In other words, I attend to the *Weltanschauung*, the values and beliefs, or the socio-economic and political ideologies presumed about the Canadian reader in so far as these constituted the dominant frames employed in the publications. It is perhaps helpful to

⁶See 2.5.2 above, News in Social Cognition.

⁷Cf. Teun van Dijk, *Elite Discourse of Racism*, London: Sage, 1993, pp. 71-109. He also spells out subtle forms/strategies of racist discourse such as *positive self-presentation*; *negative order-presentation*; *firm, but fair paternalism*; *disclaimers or reversals*; *for-their-own-good* argumentation. All of these aptly capture Canada's image abroad and its crusading propaganda for "human rights and democracy" as *universal* ideological values propagated through international institutions. Cf. his *Communicating Racism*, London: Sage, 1987. See also Hartley, J., *Understanding News* (1982) pp. 24, 63 & 116; Hall, S., *Culture, the media, and the "ideological effect"* in Curran, J., Gurevitch, & Woollacott eds., *Mass Communication and Society*, London: Arnold, 1977.

⁸N.B. Contents of these genres are looked upon as 'second-order' news in so far as they respond to or elaborate on the 'hard' news stories.

anticipate the overall result of the study. Stated hypothetically at this point, what is believed as issues in the event in the Canadian papers include: that the Nigerian military government violated human rights, prevented democratic rule, broke the terms of international agreements, dared the international community by carrying out the executions, as well as tested the Canadian resolve to pursue its foreign policy objectives in international organizations.⁹ These, I argue, eclipsed any other definition of the Nigerian event. The drama that featured Ken Saro-Wiwa and co who were “rail-roaded” by a brutal and exploitative military regime became the simplified and meaningful representation for Westerners/Canadians. This mental picture¹⁰ informed the international reactions against Nigeria following the news of the executions. The requirement for hard proofs or background contexts was virtually unnecessary. It was a clear issue of deviance in Nigeria; hence the press almost entirely dispensed with balance and fairness in its coverage. Although an alternative definition is discernible, an oppositional viewpoint, equally simplified and advanced by the Nigerian government, viz: that the men were executed for murder, was rendered incredible in the international press. These findings shall be demonstrated shortly as I proceed with the textual analysis. I now turn to examine the primary documents more closely.

⁹Cf. the previous chapter.

¹⁰Walter Lippmann, *The world outside and the pictures in our heads* in his PUBLIC OPINION, 1922.

4.2 Classification of the Primary Documents : the dependence on Western Institutional Sources

As already noted, primary documents pertain to every news item on Nigeria in the three dailies which bears any relation to the Nigerian event being studied. A general and preliminary discussion of the three papers is hereby performed in terms of the geographical origination of the news, the transnational news agencies or correspondents on whom the papers depended for this event coverage, and how these ultimately contributed to the ideological frames that they each adopted in representing Nigeria for Canadian readers. In other words, before discussing *says what* I begin with *says who*¹¹. *Who* here refers to the institutional sources that filter news as distinct from those sourced for actual news content or the event definers. Necessary as it is to consider the peculiar institutional character of each newspaper, this has to wait until the textual analysis of the publications.

As Canadian dailies, sampled to cover both the English and French populations, the three newspapers plugged into the two “globalized” and historically dominant media languages of the West. The illustration in Fig. 2 indicates each paper’s preferences among the transnational news agencies and other news sources or foreign publications that appeared in the reports.

¹¹I am here recalling Harold Lasswell’s 1948 proposal for analyzing the process of communication by throwing the following questions: “Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect?” Cf. W. Schramm, ed., **The Process and Effects of Mass Communication**, 2nd Edition (1971)

	G&M	OC	LD
<i>Other News Agency</i>	Reuters, AP	Reuters, AP	AFP, Reuters
<i>Canad. News Agency</i>	CP	CP, Southam News, (Canadian News Service)	CP
<i>Correspondent</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Other Publications</i>	The Economist (London, Johannesburg), The New Republic - Cambridge, MA.	The Guardian, The Independent (London), NY Times, LA Times	None

Fig. 2 *Institutional Sources on which the papers depended for publications.*

The following remarks describe the use of institutional media sources. A common thread running through all the papers is some dependence on the big news agencies - Reuters, AFP and AP. All three papers used Reuters and the Canadian Press. Of the three dailies, OC alone used Southam News, and the Canadian News Service¹². Then only LD depended on AFP, the French news agency. Occasional news articles and features were culled by OC (4) and G&M (4) from other newspapers and newsmagazines as shown above. The criteria for selection of news or feature articles from foreign agency wires, newspapers or magazines appear to depend on editorial choice and therefore reflect shared cultural viewpoints as shall be shown in the analysis.¹³ None of the papers got their correspondent into Nigeria during

¹²The foreign editor for the Citizen explained to me that the Canadian News Service is peculiar to its paper. It refers to news derived from various news agency sources and edited for publication.

¹³This includes a judgment that the writer is accurate and adopts an appealing writing style, adds the foreign editor of Ottawa Citizen at the time of this coverage. Cf, my August 1997 Interview.

the period.¹⁴ However the two summit meetings (the Commonwealth in Auckland and la Francophonie in Cotonou) commanded such importance that the three Canadian papers relied on reporters on the spot. LD did not publish culled articles from other papers or magazines on the Nigerian issue during the period. Instead, all 9 news stories were directly derived either from agency news or a correspondent on the spot as follows: Abuja and Lagos (Nigeria) - 5; Auckland (New Zealand) - 2; Cotonou (Benin Republic) - 2. A physical analysis of the news derivation according to places of generation is shown in fig. 3.

	<i>Can./USA</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>S. Pacific</i>	TOTAL
G&M	13	4	5	4	2	28
OC	8	9	8	6	5	36
LD	-	-	5	2	2	9
TOTAL	21=28.7%	13=17.8%	18=24.6%	12=16.4%	9=12.3%	73=100%

Fig. 3 *All news reports under analysis according to Country/Zone of generation*

Of the 73 news items, the percentages of news origination according to geographical zones were as follows: Europe and North America (West) = 46.5%; Nigeria and other African locations (Benin, S. Africa, Ivory Coast) = 41.0%; South Pacific (Auckland/Japan) = 12.3%. The agency reports from Nigeria constituted 24.6%. Hence all news items including the ones generated from Nigeria were filtered through foreign reporters and foreign

¹⁴Apart from costs, one of the foreign editors interviewed blamed it on the insecurity of foreign reporters getting into sub-Saharan African countries and the difficulty of obtaining Visa into Nigeria at such occasions.

news agencies¹⁵.

News writers are known to target their professional peers in the news institution as well as their audience.¹⁶ Despite this disposition, the passing of time, relative to the event, and the local mood of the news generation also affect news reporting. This was dramatized as the coverage of Nigeria shifted from Auckland to Cotonou. The atmosphere was different in terms of the attitude toward Nigeria. Because different reporters operated in the two locations it is not possible to discuss the impact of the different moods on a given reporter. Nevertheless the different locations, the intervening time, and perhaps the ideological differences in the membership of the Commonwealth and la Francophonie accounted for what we shall see as a shift in attitudes toward Nigeria, and the difference in reporting perspectives that developed in *G&M*. This notwithstanding, the pointer to Western dominance in the definition of events is substantially due to this pervasiveness of the Western news institutions.

If we further accommodate the following: that none of the three papers had an African on its foreign news desk; that with the exception of Peter Maser in Harare¹⁷, none had a permanent correspondent in Africa; that none had any reporter inside Nigeria during

¹⁵For the purpose of this classification, I counted news items that a reporter or compiler co-authors as coming from the location of the compiler/co-author, e.g. *Saro-Wiwa's execution sparks global outrage* (N11 p A1) is written by Paul Knox in Toronto using (as indicated) AP and Reuters newswires.

¹⁶Although news consideration gives pride of place to what Ericson et al refers to as the *hermeneutical circle*, the audience at least as consumers of news products are the ultimate targets of news production. Cf. Ericson et al, 1987:351.

¹⁷Peter Maser was a Southam News reporter who covered la Francophonie summit. At my August interview, the OC foreign editor said he was based in Harare.

the entire period of coverage¹⁸; one can see the overwhelming dependence on Western construction for the news reports from Western transnational news agencies, correspondents, foreign news reporters and editors. Specifically, the conclusion that I draw here is that the coverage of Nigeria in the Canadian papers became an overwhelmingly Western construction of the events in Nigeria, irrespective of where the stories originated. Thus from institutional considerations, that the reporting of Nigeria reflected the distance of the outsider was inevitable. In terms of the question *says who*, the foregoing analysis indicates that it was the Western media that performed the definition of Nigeria in the papers studied.

4.3 Textual Analysis - an overview

The *says what* aspect of this analysis more closely targets the definitions of the Nigerian event in the Canadian dailies and what became the story for the reader. A number of questions helped to focus the research: What sense was made of the Ogoni/Saro-Wiwa agitation - human rights abuse, or minority/ethnic agitation? What were the issues involved and who became the authorized and hence credible definers? How was Nigeria and its leadership portrayed - negative/positive? What were the international reactions against the Nigerian government? What was the stand of each paper in relation to the dominant definition of the event? How was Nigeria's power/weakness portrayed? What peculiar aspects of the Canadian socio-economic and political configurations were at work in the event/issue definitions? Because of the space limitation of this project it suffices that I

¹⁸I ascertained these points during my August, 1997 research interviews at the foreign desks of the three papers.

indicate, in summary fashion, articles that are illustrative of definite viewpoints with respect to the questions posed above. This is followed by a detailed critical discourse analysis of some significant items or writers. I leave the *why* questions especially for the interpretations in the next chapter. While I try to draw comparisons as I examine the individual papers, this chapter ends with a comparative summary account of the definitions of the three papers. The goal shall be to underline what became the dominant Canadian story.

Of the five genre categories listed, studying a combination of the News and Editorial readily conveyed the definition that a news institution brought to the event. The other genres no doubt depended on the agenda set by their definitions and, as happened on a few occasions in the case of letters to the editor, could be critical of the editorial position.¹⁹ I therefore found that studying the news and editorial together was a solid step towards grasping the *says what* of each of these papers.²⁰ A helpful analytical tool used is the schemata for news structure and editorial employed by van Dijk in his study of discourse on elite racism. In analyzing media discourse²¹, the “superstructure” of news is studied according to two categories: the *Summary* - headline and lead; and the *Body* - main events, backgrounds (context, history), verbal reactions and comments.²² Similarly he classifies the

¹⁹A number of letters in **G&M: Ken Saro-Wiwa** (N6 pA14) by Peter Stoett; *Shell's media spin* (N24 pA18) by Elizabeth May. Contrary to **G&M's** editorial judgement, May writes: “...Shell's protestations of innocence ring hollow. The Ogoni people remain at the mercy of a ruthless and brutal dictatorship. Their homeland remains polluted and despoiled. And Shell International continues to profit from the situation. May God forgive them. Meanwhile, I'm boycotting Shell.”

²⁰This strategy is employed in the detailed analysis conducted later in the chapter.

²¹See van Dijk, Teun, **Elite Discourse and Racism**, London: Sage, 1993, pp. 241-282.

²²**Elite Discourse and Racism**, London: Sage, 1993, p. 251.

editorial as an argumentation containing the following sequence: the *Definition* or subjective summary of the event; the *Evaluation* of the event; and the final *Conclusion* or *Moral*, “which may feature advice, a recommendation, a warning, or another normative speech act, usually addressed to prominent news actors, such as politicians or other elites who are responsible for political decision making.”²³ These categories map the structure of discourse in the press. For the purpose of summarizing the definitions in the Canadian news (with special attention to how the framing technique was employed), I found helpful van Dijk’s statement regarding *topics* and *overall meanings*:

They define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorize best from a news report. The relevance of topics in news is specifically marked in the text, namely, by the *headline* and *lead*, which conventionally express the main topics. They do so intersubjectively, however: They express the most important information of the cognitive model of journalists, that is, how they see and define the news event. Unless readers have different knowledge and beliefs, they will generally adopt these subjective media definitions of what is important information about an event (van Dijk, 1988b).²⁴

Employing these insights, the research engaged in summarizing and classifying the coverage of Nigeria in the three Canadian papers using the headline/lead of the news and the argumentation structure of the editorials. This shall be illustrated in the treatment of individual papers. For now the results are given as the dominant definitions in the Canadian press as shown in Fig. 4. They are presented as macro-propositions, their frequencies according to the papers in which they were carried, and an example.

The macro-propositions are arranged in a hierarchical order of dominance. Where a

²³Ibid. p. 265.

²⁴Ibid. p. 248.

news item or an editorial adopted more than one of the two propositions, I counted them accordingly. For instance, the LD editorial by François Brousseau, *Le Canada et l'offense nigériane* (N11 pA12), both condemned Nigeria's act as prejudicial and reprehensible (the nine were executed 'par une brutale junte militaire, au terme d'un "proces" dénoncé de toutes parts'), and criticized the Chrétien government for its duplicity in verbally condemning Nigeria while pursuing trade ties with worse human rights offenders such as China and Indonesia.

<u>Macro-proposition</u>	<u>G&M</u>	<u>OC</u>	<u>LD</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Example</u>
Actions, calls for sanctions against Nigeria	11	18	1	30	OC,N12 pA1
Nigeria/government acts/defies world opinion	2	6	5	13	LD,N11 pA1
Nigerian execution condemned, human rights abuse	3	6	2	11	G&M,N11 pA1
Oil business with Nigeria goes on (despite the executions)	8	1	-	9	G&M,N15 pB3
Canadian government position under scrutiny	3	2	2	7	G&M,D7 pA1/A19
Tough action against Nigeria on reverse	1	2	2	5	LD, D4pA1
(Other marginally related items on Nigeria)	2	1	-	3	OC,N14 pA9
Shell's involvement under attack	1	1	-	2	G&M,D18p2
Canadian government action approved	-	2	-	2	OC N14pA10

Fig. 4. *Macro-definitions of the Nigeria news in News and Editorials, Nov/Dec 1995.*

Sanctions against Nigeria would appear to serve two purposes: firstly as punitive reactions for the "brutal" executions, for instance, *Hangings spark call for Shell boycott*

(G&M, N15 pA13); and secondly, as a strategy to guide Nigeria towards democracy as in *Foreign ministers meet to consider new action against Nigeria* (OC, D20 pB6). Although closely related, the call for actions/sanctions against Nigeria is here separated from the condemnation of the action of Nigeria. The former presumes the latter: that Nigeria's action is basically unacceptable to the international community. Putting figures for the two categories together shows that there existed in the definitions a still higher degree of disapproval towards the Nigerian government in the Canadian coverage.

By putting together definitions of Nigeria as *acting* and as *defiant*, I merged both the positive accounts, such as letting the Nigerian government explain its action to the news audience in *Abacha se fâche* (LD, N19 pA9), and the negative presentation captured in *OC's Nigeria's dictator sneers at Commonwealth* (N24 pA7). While the first article fully accessed Abacha responding with understandable human reaction to what the LD news report cited as “la campagne de provocations et de calomnies sans precedent” dirigée contre le Nigeria’, in the OC account, that the Nigerian leader “sneers,” conveyed sinister irrationality in defying the weight of “international isolation” and the calls for “a boycott of Nigerian oil, the country’s main source of foreign exchange.”

The foregoing account of the summary definitions support the following statements regarding the definition of the Nigerian event in the Canadian papers studied: (i) The executions were reduced to an issue of human rights abuse perpetrated by the undemocratic Nigerian military regime of General Sani Abacha; (ii) Despite its protestations, the action of the Nigerian government was deviant and called for international action; (iii) The debate to impose oil sanctions against Nigeria was of significant interest to the Canadian business

audience as well as other interest groups; (iv) The event tested the human rights policy of the Chrétien government especially at the Commonwealth and la Francophonie summits; (v) Although Canada's position stayed unmoved, over the period the strong international reactions against the Nigerian government experienced a decline. The conclusion is that the Canadian papers unanimously conveyed the idea that the Nigerian event was an issue of human rights abuse which triggered international revulsion and action against the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. To that extent, what became the dominant definition of the papers resonated with the international/Western condemnation of the executions in Nigeria and the need for international/Western sanctions against Nigeria. The next section still uses discourse analysis to examine the coverage of Nigeria in each of the three papers. It is significant that despite the apparent consensus, each paper, as we shall see, displayed peculiar nuances in reporting Nigeria, thus creating a diversity based on ideologies, institutional locations, and the news operatives. What follows is what made it the Canadian news.

4.3.1 The Globe & Mail - the struggle for overall balance in the reporting of Nigeria

On a preliminary note, the Toronto-based **G&M** which calls itself "Canada's national newspaper" holds a reputation as "the newspaper of record"²⁵ across English Canada. This derives from the conscious effort of its management²⁶ over the years to keep it among the

²⁵Cf. *On Top of the World*, *Time* magazine Canadian Edition, Sept 29, 1987, p. 42.

²⁶Ownership of the **G&M** went to Kenneth Thomson, proprietor of the Thomson Newspapers Ltd, on Jan. 11, 1980, at \$164.7 million, after a bidding war with Howard Webster and Conrad Black. Cf. Hayes, D., *Power and Influence* pp. 161ff. Andrew Megarry, a corporate business-minded entrepreneur, was retained as general manager.

class of elite papers focussing on international, national and business news. They have as models the **London Times**, the **New York Times** and **The Wall Street Journal**.²⁷ As a result, **G&M** assumes the persona of the voice of reason and decorum in the Canadian press, “one unrivaled in influence among the political, cultural and business elite.”²⁸

It was natural that the international attention that the Nigerian event attracted would not escape the **G&M**, more so as the high-quality Nigerian oil became the focus of the calls for international sanctions. As seen in Fig. 1, of the three papers, the **G&M** vied with **OC** for the highest number of articles on Nigeria during the period - 28 News stories, 3 Editorials, 7 Features, and 8 Letters to the editor. Its business section, Report on Business (ROB), kept track of the business outcomes of the occurrence.²⁹ As it were, the paper portrayed the synergy of politics and economy. The **G&M** had the most editorials, features and letters. Its features provided elite readers with “enlightened” discussion of the Nigerian event; some were occasionally culled from other news magazines such as the London-based **Economist**.³⁰

From November 1 through December, 1995, the **G&M** carried items that reflected a fierce condemnation of the Nigerian leadership, a mood which later fluctuated with the

²⁷An institutional history of the **G&M** by David Hayes, **Power and Influence - The Globe and Mail and the News Revolution**, Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1992. In the last couple of decades, the **G&M** under the influence of its Editor/Publisher Oakley Dalgleish, (pp. 43, 44) and later, Andrew Megarry, as Publisher (pp. 220ff), energetically targeted elite readership in Canada.

²⁸Cf. *On Top of the World*, ibid.

²⁹See Fig. 4. Eight of nine articles on the business implications of the Nigerian news were published in the **G&M**.

³⁰Some of the titles include *Dealing with Nigeria* (N20 p A15) and *Multinationals and their morals* (D04 p A13)

“stabilizing” of international attitudes toward Nigeria. This transition apparently altered the reportorial perspectives. The mood swing from the strong protests to a self-critical coverage is evident when one compares the Toronto-based foreign desk reporter, Paul Knox³¹, and John Stackhouse³², the **G&M** development correspondent, who filed reports on la Francophonie meeting at Cotonou. An examination of clusters of news stories from both reporters captures the ambiguity in the overall coverage of the **G&M** during the period. This shall engage us in the following sections.

4.3.1.1 Protests (Social Activism) Against Nigeria in News and Editorials

Because the three **G&M** editorials came early (Nov 3, 10, 11) in defining the critical moments in the Nigerian story and had a close affinity to what we shall see as the ‘crusading’ reports from Paul Knox, the editorial interpretations complement Knox’s coverage of the Nigerian story. The dominant Western frame operated at this stage of reporting; its bias was in favour of the victim, Saro-Wiwa, and the Nigerian “opposition”. This reflected the social activism earmarked for the foreign policy agenda of the Chrétien government.³³ A look at the publications will demonstrate this assessment.

Preceding Paul Knox’s Nov. 9 report, *Nigeria upholds death sentences*, the wire

³¹Knox had four stories as follows: *Nigeria upholds death sentences - Decision thumbs nose at Commonwealth*, Nov 9; *Saro-Wiwa’s execution sparks global outrage*, Nov 11; *Nigerian was voice of Ogoni*, Nov 11; *Hangings spark call for Shell boycott - Greenpeace urges Canadians to join one-day protest against oil company*, Nov 15.

³²Stackhouse was based in New Delhi. He filed three stories: *Summit dilutes rights position - Canada criticized for “selective” stand*, Dec 4; *Canada, allies differ on rights*, Dec 5; *Small countries fear regional giant - Nigeria’s record looks better to its neighbours*, Dec 7.

³³See under 3.3 above for Canada’s role in the international institutions.

news of the death sentences pronounced by the Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal appeared on Nov. 1 as *Nigeria death sentences provoke calls for sanctions*. The guilty verdict delivered against Saro-Wiwa and co prompted the first **G&M** editorial - *Sentence of death* (N3 pA22). As the keynote editorial on the Nigerian story, its significance was to set the activist tone pursued in the subsequent editorials. It began by defining the issues in the Ogoni agitation for the Canadian reader. Positioning itself, albeit cautiously, against the decision of the Nigerian tribunal which pronounced the nine guilty of murder, the editorial noted: "The charge is almost certainly false." Then it discredited key claims of the Ogoni movement as follows:

It is unclear whether Mr Saro-Wiwa is right to say that the Shell oil company has ravaged the environment of Ogoniland... It is unclear whether he is right to whip up ethnic sentiment in a country as ethnically fragile as Nigeria which was torn by civil war when Biafra tried to secede in the 1960s...

What was then clear in the view of the editorial was stated: "...Mr Saro-Wiwa has been railroaded for political reasons." Thus did this editorial appeal to a mentality preoccupied with the absence of democracy and with human rights abuse in Nigeria, making these the issue. No further investigation was required. The recommended action deals with the issue as follows:

The Auckland meeting is a golden opportunity to put the principles of Harare into practice and show Gen. Abacha that he cannot go on jailing and abusing his opponents with impunity, much less sentence innocent men to death.

The selective judgment/definition behind the above recommendation evoke the Western treatment given to the Nigerian event. Clearly, the Harare Principles advocated simply the

promotion of Western democracy and liberal humanism as a universal model.³⁴ Thus while the editorial presumed the individual rights of Ken Saro-Wiwa and co, and Shell's business rights in Nigeria, the Ogoni group/ethnic rights and the environmental degradation were not the issue.³⁵ Equally the event definition showed a sensitivity to the disruption of secessionist and separatist agitations. (An indirect notice served by Canadian federalism to sponsors of the Quebec separatist or confederalist agenda).

With the confirmation of the death sentences on Nov. 8 by Gen. Abacha's Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), the call for Canada to act intensified in the second editorial - *Canada, the Commonwealth and Nigeria's generals* (N10 p20). Leaving Shell out completely in this discussion, it was They, the Nigerian regime, "which has robbed the country of its oil wealth, ruined its economy..." Thus Nigeria's generals, qualified as "rapacious brutes", were entirely responsible. Comparing Canada's action with the tough postures adopted by the British John Major (six months probation for human rights offenders) and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth), urging Nigeria to live up to its commitment as the Chrétien government did "is not exactly ambitious". Its recommendation which was echoed in the third editorial, *Nigeria's crime* (N11 pD6), marked the desire to preserve a nationalistic momentum and sustain an established moral image on the international scene:

Canada took the lead in expelling racist South Africa from the Commonwealth. Canada led the campaign to impose economic sanctions against South Africa. And Canada pushed at the 1991 Summit in Harare to put human rights at the core of the

³⁴See under 3.3 above, Canada's foreign policy objective: to promote its values in international institutions.

³⁵This is a misleading definition by the **G&M** considering that *political autonomy* and an *Ogoni ethnic state* were central to the Ogoni agitation and Saro-Wiwa's campaign both within and outside Nigeria. Cf. previous chapter.

Commonwealth's mission. It is up to Mr Chrétien to continue the job.

Coming to Paul Knox's reports, the mood of activism assumed a pro-Saro-Wiwa and an anti-Nigerian government hardline. Moreover, with him we encounter the representation of the Other typical of elite Western frames of understanding.³⁶ Presently, I use the front page article of Nov. 11, *Saro-Wiwa's execution sparks global outrage*, to illustrate Knox's incorporation of a dominant Western news definition of the Nigerian event. Firstly, the writer appealed to international public opinion. The words in the headline captured this by the purposeful use of hyperbole and action/reaction imagery. The supporting sentence reports:

Condemnation of the regime of General Abacha was *swift*, and it appeared that *major powers* would finally begin to put strong pressure on Nigeria to conform to the international human rights norms it has pledged to respect. (Italics are mine)

The *major powers* accessed were the US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, the British John Major, South African Nelson Mandela and Canada's Christine Stewart, Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa. Thus reactions from these countries (including Mandela's South Africa) which maintain the dominant Western ways of seeing, qualify for "global." The presumption is that these countries' representatives knew the facts, and that their reactions were legitimate, rational and therefore incontrovertible.

The second strategy adopted by the writer was to access a *statement* by Amnesty

³⁶A scrutiny of an earlier news story by Paul Knox, *Commonwealth pressed to take action on Nigeria - Human rights abuses must end, former secretary-general says* (Oct. 13, 1995) shows that (a) Knox's sense of the Nigerian political situation made Nigeria similar to, and therefore as condemnable as, apartheid South Africa; (b) even if he might be unaware of it, he employed elite racism in his news discourse. One reference to the Commonwealth secretary general is an instance: "Emeka Anyaoku, whose status as a *tribal* chief from Nigeria makes his position somewhat awkward." Here one reads a fixation with the "Chief" attached to Anyaoku's name. What Knox interprets as a "tribal chief" to suit the Western contextual imagination amounts in essence to the use of "Sir" for the Westerner. Surely Westerners do not usually regard the latter use as awkward.

International as the other *authorized knower* with regard to the issue of human rights in Nigeria, and indeed in the “global” scene. The statement described Saro-Wiwa and Mr Kiobel as “prisoners of conscience, sentenced because of the non-violent expression of their political views.” The same credible source interpreted that “Fundamental rights of defence ... in particular the right of appeal to a higher and independent court” were denied. By privileging this statement and keeping silent on the use of military decrees for governance in Nigeria³⁷, the current Nigerian legal system was in effect declared a sham. Another statement, equally credited to the Amnesty spokesperson, referred to hundreds killed in the delta region (of Nigeria) “in inter-ethnic clashes apparently instigated by the security forces.” By implication this charge of government instigation, in itself a speculation since no confirmation was attempted, was again rendered credible. Then in a show of balanced and fair reporting, the writer accessed the Nigerian side on two instances and each time discredited them. The voice of Zubair Kazaure, the Nigerian ambassador in Washington, was cited halfway down the lengthy news article. His explanation, “We have a different background and different laws”, was rendered unconvincing by following immediately with the ‘contextualization’:

The executions turned the spotlight on a country of about 110 million people that is as rich in oil as it was in promise when it gained independence from Britain 35 years ago, only to slide into a morass of violence, corruption and authoritarian rule.

This information about Nigeria naturalized the violent executions, the corrupt legal system and the repression in the current event in the former British colony. The concluding section

³⁷Recall that the nine were tried under the 1987 Civil Disturbances Decree whose decisions were referred to the PRC for confirmation.

was a report about Mustapha Adeyanju, the acting Nigerian high commissioner in Canada, telling representatives of Amnesty International, Greenpeace and PEN Canada that their campaigns on behalf of Saro-Wiwa were based on false information. This again was immediately followed with “The next day, Mrs Stewart summoned Mr. Adeyanju to her office and told him she was dismayed by the death sentences.” Thus the writer rendered the statement of the Nigerian diplomat unbelievable to the readers by a humiliating summons from a Canadian superior, Mrs Stewart, who of course, had credibility.

In an act of protection, apparently aimed at exonerating Shell, the Western multinational, and to place the blame squarely on the Nigerian leadership, the reporter provided the information that “Shell had called for the death sentences to be commuted on *humanitarian* grounds.” This ‘civilized’ intervention was of course ignored by the “brutal” Nigerian leadership. On the other hand, the ‘civilized’ Nigerian mentioned in this article was Saro-Wiwa, the intellectual and “man of ideas.” Paul Knox gave his impressive credentials a more elaborate treatment in his second news article on the same day, *Nigerian was voice of Ogoni*. In what was more of a eulogy than news, Knox rolled out Saro-Wiwa’s curriculum vitae: “Novelist, poet, television writer, political activist, businessman, publisher, teacher, one-time government administrator - and now martyr.” Thus did the writer make the Nigerian event reducible to the treatment of Ken Saro-Wiwa with all the cultural connotations that separate Us from Them. Fighting on his side was therefore justified as the editorials maintained. Paul Knox’s other news stories maintained this crusading perspective.

4.3.1.2 A Self-critical Canadian Reporting: towards the alternative definition

John Stackhouse began sending in reports from Cotonou on la Francophonie summit, almost a month after the Commonwealth meeting in Auckland. All three articles filed by him abandoned Knox's representations to pursue what became an alternative to the Canadian government's interpretation of the Nigerian event. This can be partly explained by the mood that seemed to have pervaded the meeting which included all Nigeria's French-speaking neighbours.³⁸ The *G&M* had no further editorial on Nigeria during this period. Compared with the earlier perspective, Stackhouse's viewpoint evokes the maverick within the institution. His article on December 7, *Small countries fear regional giant - Nigeria's record looks better to its neighbours*, polarized the perspectives on what hitherto was a "global" condemnation of Nigeria for offences against "human rights" and "democracy". The lead for this article illustrates the unmistakable reversal in attitudes towards Nigeria. The Canadian position was up for ridicule:

When he was halfway around the world last month at the Commonwealth summit in New Zealand, PM Jean Chretien saw how easy it was to lambaste Nigeria's military regime. When he was next door to Nigeria ... last weekend at Francophonie summit in Benin, Mr Chretien saw how awkward it could be too.³⁹

³⁸The Nov 7 report, *Small countries fear regional giants*, attempted to situate the power dynamics in the West African sub-region and the fear that Nigeria's disintegration into tribal conflicts would be disastrous for its neighbours. Thus the report cited Jerry Rawlings, the Ghanaian president, advising caution to each prominent personality that came his way during the period. These included Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Al Gore, Jimmy Carter, and the Canadian foreign affairs minister, André Ouellet. Losing Nigeria's contribution to the ECOMOG peace-keeping force in Liberia could mean that Liberia's neighbours would deal with another influx of refugees into their territories. The Liquified National Gas (LNG) project in Nigeria, when operational, would bring down the cost of oil in Ghana, Togo and Benin, enabling each of these countries to save \$500 million over 20 years, so reported the World Bank. Also with a population of 100 million, Nigeria provided a major export market in the region. Moreover Chad, Niger and Cameroon needed to work with Nigeria to repair ecological damage on Lake Chad.

³⁹*Ibid.*

Thus unlike a simultaneous coverage of la Francophonie meeting done by the Southam correspondent, Peter Maser⁴⁰, Stackhouse's report displayed a critical stance towards Canada's loss of its activist momentum in la Francophonie; he let the reader hear alternative voices. Hitherto subdued definitions of the situation were given full access, revealing the crack in the anti-Nigerian coalition. Refusing to buy into Chrétien's persistence that the meeting should follow the lead of the Commonwealth in condemning Nigeria, Nicephore Soglo, the Benin president, interpreted the situation as follows:

Democracy around the world, particularly in Africa, is moving at different speeds...Sometimes it works well, sometimes there are accidents and difficulties, and that's what we see in our neighbour.⁴¹

This was no isolated opinion as the reporter went on to write: From Benin to Burkina Faso 'the countries of West Africa were united in what Mr. Chrétien called their "timidity" about criticizing their giant neighbour.' Even France, the ex-colonial master, failed to appreciate Canada's verbal condemnations of Nigeria. In *Canada, allies differ on rights* (D5 pA16), Jacques Chirac, the French president, was quoted as saying, "We prefer to be more moderate in our expression and more effective in our involvement." On this occasion, Chirac stated what perhaps underlined the policy differences between the two international organizations:

You can't give lessons to everyone publicly. As a general rule, I find that those who do are full of ulterior motives, giving lessons with one hand and protecting their economic activities with the other.⁴²

This is not to say that Stackhouse failed to document the still dominant definition of

⁴⁰Cf. *Francophone summit: Rights group slams Canada for meek stand. French nations pass tame resolution on abuses in Africa*. OC, D04 p A4.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

the Nigerian event. In *Summit dilutes rights position - Canada criticized for "selective" stand* (D04 p A10) he reported that Chrétien "had pushed for a tougher stand on Nigeria but could not find the same consensus that exists in the Commonwealth." It was left to Pierre Sane, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, to reflect in anger that "a historic opportunity" had been missed'. It appeared that at the Cotonou meeting the heat was turned on Amnesty International and on Canada.

Focussing on Paul Knox and John Stackhouse illustrates how the **G&M** was able to accommodate in its coverage the dominant and the alternative definitions of the Nigerian event. Apart from the different perspectives covered by the writers, this accommodation of tension could be explained by the fact that in Canadian politics, the **G&M** is known to have inclination to the Progressive Conservatives.⁴³ We now turn to the **OC**, a paper which was by 1995 solidly behind the incumbent Liberal government of Jean Chrétien.⁴⁴

4.3.2 The Ottawa Citizen: pro-Liberal activism

OC in 1995 was a Southam newspaper and after the closure of **Ottawa Journal** in 1980⁴⁵ enjoyed a monopoly in the Ottawa market. In 1996 however it was acquired by the media mogul, Conrad Black, as part of the Southam-Hollinger Incorporated controlling 58

⁴³These clips of evidence from David Hayes, op. cit, support my interpretation: "...the *Globe* was often unabashedly pro-Conservative - on its news pages and its editorials" p. 44; "...the *Globe* was mildly progressive on social issues and conservative on economic matters." op. cit. p. 176.

⁴⁴Ascertained during my August interview in Ottawa.

⁴⁵Cf. Hayes, 1992:163.

of Canada's 105 newspapers.⁴⁶ Ottawa continues to house its offices. It is necessary to keep this institutional (ownership) difference in mind to understand the coverage of Nigeria during the period under study. Then its political leaning was admittedly pro-Liberal, but presently it is pro-Tory and the reporting could have been done differently.⁴⁷

As noted in Fig. 1, OC published 36 news stories, 2 editorials, 1 feature, 3 opinion pieces and 4 letters to the editor, and carried the highest number of news stories and opinions. Fig. 2 also above indicates that among the three papers, OC depended on Southam News agency (among other news agencies) and culled from **The Independent** and **The Guardian** (both London papers), **NY Times** and **LA Times**. The criteria for selection depended on which articles in these papers presented the fullest and best coverage, the one "best written, clearest ...and has all the points".⁴⁸ Its foreign desk editor at the time admitted to having a special admiration for the writings of Howard French, a **NY Times** correspondent based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. His *Analysis* in the **NY Times**, *Dictator fears coup more than condemnation*, appeared in the OC as news on Nov 12. Although this article was high on negative speculative claims supported only by unnamed *analysts* and *diplomats*, its interpretation of the Abacha regime in Nigeria appears to have influenced the editorial perspective of OC.

The first OC editorial came on the day the news broke to the world that Saro-Wiwa and the nine had been hanged. It captures OC's institutional commitment with regard to the

⁴⁶Conrad Black's *Private Agenda*, *Maclean's*, June 17, 1996, p. 34.

⁴⁷August 1997 Interview with the foreign news desk in Ottawa. My interviewee insisted on this difference in perspectives.

⁴⁸Interview with the OC foreign desk editor, Aug. 29, 1997.

event. The headline summarized the action urged: *Hangings prove world must act against Nigeria* (N11 pB7). Sparing the reader the time to understand what the issue was all about, the first two sentences urged action with a string of evaluative qualifiers as follows:

With *ferocious* speed and *determination*, the *homicidal dictatorship* in Nigeria has executed minority-rights activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. In one *outrageous act* of injustice, the regime in Lagos has silenced a *brave opponent* - and compelled the world to act. (Italics are mine.)

The descriptions of the *dictator*, and his *contest* with the *opponent* continued with the use of “murderers in office”, “anti-junta militants”, “cooked-up charges of murder”, “injustice was swift”, “show-trial”, “a charade”. In line with these, the evaluation of the trial was validated in one sentence: ‘But the “trial” was a charade from the start, discredited by lawyers and human-rights advocates in Nigeria and abroad.’ With such loaded qualifiers, the editorial simplified the issues for the reader by further fictionalizing a dramatic, even mythical, contest between good (Saro-Wiwa)⁴⁹ and evil (Nigerian government and Shell oil operations) in which “The fight has been violent on both sides, and often deadly.” While it called for “strong international action, for as long as it takes”, and included a list of recommendations from the Commonwealth human rights group⁵⁰, the editorial ruled out other options:

With dictators like Nigerian Gen Sani Abacha, gentle reasoning might not succeed. Power is too profitable to surrender easily, and reform is too dangerous for the

⁴⁹The mythical and even epic struggle is also conveyed in a news article with the story lead, ‘*The struggle continues, ’ vows activist in moments before death* (N13 pA6). This story carried what was given as Saro-Wiwa’s final words: “Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues.”

⁵⁰Four sanctions recommended: 1. End of military cooperation; 2. Denial of visas to Nigerian leaders and their families; 3. Preparation to freeze their assets abroad; 4. Efforts to stop Nigerian oil exports.

murderers in office⁵¹.

Apart from the rather strong anti-Nigerian government prejudices, the editorial displayed haste and lost its candour as seen in the reactionary response and the avoidable errors of fact. For instance, it referred to Lagos instead of Abuja as the seat of the Nigerian government; Ogoni was wrongly spelt on each of three occasions it appeared as "Ogani"⁵². This would make one interrogate the accuracy in the information that the OC editorial staff needed to warrant its definition of the news, and the strong recommendations it put forward.

Three days later, the second editorial, *Putting on the Pressure* (N14 pA10) was celebrating the Liberal government's hardline against the Nigerian government:

Canadians should be further heartened by the fact their government led the charge for a sterner posture at last week's gathering in Auckland, New Zealand.

There is need to point out that this editorial satisfaction with the action of the Canadian

⁵¹This assessment of Sani Abacha accords with the analysis provided by the NY Times Africa correspondent, Howard French. It appeared the following day in the OC.

⁵²These factual errors in OC are not isolated. Here are some examples: 1. In an article earlier in the year, April 8, pB6, *Oil company, Nigeria Rulers abuse a nation*, Nigeria's population was erroneously given as "more than 100,000 people"; also that "Canada is the second-largest importer of Nigerian oil (after the United States)". [The two major importers of Nigerian oil are the U.S. and the European Union at approximately 45% each.] The article by Chris Young, a Southam news columnist, marked the visit to Ottawa by Saro-Wiwa Jr to lobby Canada to boycott Nigerian oil to protest his father's incarceration and trial going on in Nigeria. 2. In *PM says Nigeria to be expelled* (N11 pA6), the writer, Les Whittington, made erroneous and misleading statements: "...Gen Sani Abacha who overturned a 1993 election to seize control" [The election was annulled by General Babangida]; that "Saro-Wiwa, 54, was ... accused of murdering four rival chiefs." This phrasing is wrong [he was accused of "inciting" not "murdering"] and perhaps with the intent to ridicule and discredit the Nigerian government considering that the writer went on to assert that the "military ignored evidence that he was in another part of Nigeria when the murders took place." 3. A story from AP, Lagos, *The struggle continues, vows activist before death* (N13 pA6) wrote about "the four political rivals who were shot at a 1994 political rally." [Nigerian media reports have it that the four Ogoni leaders were attacked while they were at a meeting in Giokoo, Ogoni, on May 21, 1994, and "clubbed to death" by irate Ogoni youths and their bodies burnt] 4. Notice also that the OC editors turned a blind eye to such ignorant but perhaps useful rhetorical statements as "no country sentences people for inciting murder". Cf. an Opinion article by Patricia Akpan. Cf. *Canadians can combat dictatorships* (N17 pA13).

government was peculiar to OC. From what we saw above, the G&M shared with OC the same opinion about Nigeria's deviance but displayed more sophistication in distinguishing claims. For instance, the G&M was both critical of the claims of the Ogoni movement and wary about the action the Chretien government was capable of taking. Again unlike the OC position, G&M did not lump Shell together with the brutal Nigerian regime; nor was oil sanctions ever a serious option. OC took the agenda of activism to a new height. Activism dominated its headlines and every chance was seized to emphasize Canada's leading role. (This approach, I argue, served to make the news less Nigerian.)

The Canadian initiative was the theme in *PM says Nigeria to be expelled from Commonwealth for hangings* (N11 pA6), one of four stories filed from Auckland by Les Whittington, a Southam News correspondent. This news story made the execution a personal tragedy for Chrétien more than for Saro-Wiwa's son who was also in Auckland to campaign for his father's life. The writer accessed the PM's reaction on learning of the execution:

So I was very sad, when you meet a young man and he knows that his father is about to be executed, and you wake up in the morning, he's been executed, you feel terrible.⁵³

Similarly Secretary of State, Christine Stewart, said: "Canadians are outraged by this travesty of justice". Ahead of the Commonwealth expulsion that he predicted was on the way, Chrétien also confirmed that "Canada has recalled its acting High Commissioner to Nigeria and the federal government will likely support multilateral trade sanctions against Nigeria." All these came before the reader was allowed to read that Saro-Wiwa's son called for "a worldwide boycott of Nigerian petroleum exports and Shell Oil..." Thus what Canadians and

⁵³Ibid.

their leaders did become predominant in this reporting perspective. (As we shall see, LD offers a strikingly opposite approach).

Also evident in this article is the dichotomy between the West and the Other. While the news story documented Canadian humanitarian feelings and the concern for human rights, and that “Canada wants to maintain a dialogue with Nigerian authorities to try to halt the widespread human rights abuses taking place there and see the country returned to democracy”, with respect to the Nigerians, “that dialogue is one-way”. Every mention of Nigerian authorities was negative, from Abacha “who overturned a 1993 election,”⁵⁴ “stunned the meeting of the 52 Commonwealth nations...by ignoring their pleas for clemency,” to Nigeria’s UN ambassador, Isaac Ayewah, who “lash back at the Security Council envoys who blasted his government.” In a rather curious association, African countries were to blame for the inability to adopt a trade embargo against Nigeria as seen in the report as follows:

... it is unlikely that the Commonwealth would adopt a trade embargo against the oil-exporting nation. Some African members of the Commonwealth have in fact defended Nigeria from Western criticism ...⁵⁵

When the Commonwealth came down with its action against Nigeria, it was not the expulsion that OC and Chrétien predicted but a two-year suspension that soon after included setting up the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), made up of 8 members including Canada, to monitor and report on Nigeria’s efforts to return to democratic rule.⁵⁶

⁵⁴This is obviously an error. See footnote on errors of fact in the OC editorial.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Cf. *Canada leads push for human rights* (N13 pA6) by Les Whittington.

Canada's activist role in the organization continued to be foregrounded. In fact, Les Whittington's front page story that appeared under *Commonwealth suspends Nigeria for hanging dissidents* (N12 pA1) sustained the Canadian nationalist fervour. According to the report, "Chrétien alone among the leaders here had used a speech to appeal to Nigeria for clemency." More significantly, it reported that there was a *Canadian proposal* to guide dictatorships to democracy, "the initiative involves a carrot-and-stick approach that would range from providing support for free elections to suspension from the Commonwealth."⁵⁷ However as hinted earlier, a month later, at la Francophonie meeting in Cotonou, Peter Maser, another Southam News correspondent, reported different attitudes and approaches to the Nigerian event.⁵⁸ There the Canadian PM stood out like a sore thumb, neither in agreement with his colleagues nor admired by a disappointed Pierre Sane of the Amnesty International. Throughout the report, the OC maintained its support for the uncompromising stand of the Chrétien government.

4.3.3 Le Devoir: Critical Reporting, Accessing the Nigerian voice

LD was chosen for representing the Francophone population and the Quebec political context in Canada. The belief that Canada began with the two founding peoples is strong in the LD institutional tradition. This underscores its embrace of confederalism.⁵⁹ LD is an

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Cf. *Rights group slams Canada for meek stand. French nations pass tame resolution on abuses in Africa.* (D04 pA6). The follow-up report appearing Dec. 5 continued the criticism of Canada by Amnesty International and the concerns became even more in-ward looking in *National unity prevails on human rights.*

⁵⁹Derived from my August 1997 Interview with the foreign desk.

independent newspaper title.⁶⁰ Its elite appeal among the French audience approximates the influence of the **G&M** for English Canada and Robert Hackett placed both among the national and “agenda-setting dailies” in Canada.⁶¹ It has no permanent political affiliation, although at the time (in the heat of the 1995 referendum in Quebec) it was soft towards the Bloc Quebecois, and was unabashedly critical of the federal Liberal Government.⁶² This showed in its coverage of the Nigerian event. What is perhaps more significant is that **LD**’s concern for political activism was more symbolic. It was neither the ambivalent version of a neo-conservative **G&M** nor the uninhibited social activism of the pro-Liberal **OC**. Consequently one gets to reading a distinct approach to the press coverage of the Nigerian event, still faithful to the dominant Canadian definition, but making available an alternative, even sympathetic Nigerian definition. I need to illustrate this.

Unlike the **OC** approval for the foreign policy actors of the Liberal Government, **LD**’s only editorial, *Le Canada et l’offense nigériane* (N11 pA12) by François Brousseau, was skeptical, even critical of Jean Chrétien’s apparent hypocrisy.⁶³ At issue in this editorial was Chrétien’s performance: his actions did not match his words. In effect the editorial’s conclusion regretted that unlike the Brian Mulroney era, when Canada ebulliently led the fight against apartheid, Chrétien’s recent performance at the Commonwealth cost Canada its

⁶⁰Publisher, Lisa Bissonnette, owns 51% of the shares; the rest come from other investors including the **LD** staff. Cf. Information from August 1997 research interview.

⁶¹Cf. **News and Dissent**, 1991: 94. For coverage of Canada’s international relations, **LD** and **G&M** are equally treated as dependable sources in the **Canadian International Relations Chronicle** publication.

⁶²I refer to my August interview with the **LD** foreign desk in Montreal on Aug 28, 1997.

⁶³The editorial, it must be noted, did not overlook the “deviance” in the action of the Nigerian leadership.

international moral aura: “hier à l’ouverture du sommet du Commonwealth, le Canada a largement perdu, aujourd’hui, de son aura morale à l’étranger.” Thus while clearly acknowledging that Nigeria’s action put it among “la famille des régimes politiques les plus detestables au monde, en compagnie de la Chine et de l’Indonésie”, the editorial criticized Jean Chrétien for rolling out the red carpet for Li Peng, the PM of China, where political executions went on yearly, monthly and weekly, whereas he talked tough with Nigeria. Brousseau therefore targeted the inconsistency and trade-as-priority of the Liberal government. This scepticism is carried on in his mockery of the famous Canadian “carrot and stick” proposal which was meant to urge erring Commonwealth countries to democracy. Addressing the Liberal Government’s reaction to the Nigerian executions, the editorial read:

Alors, quand on entend les protestations du premier ministre canadien contre les exactions des militaires d’Abuja, on reste perplexe. Proteste-t-il avec l’idée de faire suivre des mesures de rétorsion concrètes; du genre du Commonwealth ou sanctions économiques? Non, trois fois non, il l’a dit: il faut plutôt jouer “de la carotte et du bâton”. Le bâton des protestations verbales et la carotte du *business as usual*...

With regard to the 9 news stories, it is immediately striking to see from the headlines⁶⁴ and their accompanying leads that (1) The news was about Nigeria, and Canada’s role was secondary. Abacha/Nigeria could be “heard” and not just interpreted; (2) there was less impassioned reporting: *information* with relevant background was provided⁶⁵, rather

⁶⁴Cf. *Le régime maintient les peines de mort - Condamnation des opposants au Nigéria* (N9 pB6); *Le Nigéria au pilori - La potence pour neuf opposants* (N11 pA1); *Le Nigéria en accusation à Auckland - ... les autorités d’Abuja dénoncent “l’inquisition”...* (N12 pA8); *Neuf exécutions et beaucoup de pleurs - un concert de condamnations a accueilli la nouvelle dans le monde* (N12 pA8); *Le Nigéria rappelle ses ambassadeurs - Après l’exécution de neuf opposants, le régime défie l’opinion mondiale* (N14 pB4); *Abacha se fâche* (N19 pA9).

⁶⁵See for instance *Le régime maintient les peines de mort* which provided the background to the Special Tribunal that sentenced the 9 in two separate audiences. Their names were given. The tribunal was also contextualized as set up in a 1987 decree to try civil disturbances. This was under the Babangida administration.

than *persuade* the Canadian reader. Saro-Wiwa was not cast as the mythical hero; nor was Abacha or Shell demonized. One can speculate that this professional sensitivity might be explained by LD being the only one among the three papers that depended on AFP reports. However it is more useful to seek the explanation from its institutional/editorial commitments.⁶⁶ This includes a critical stance vis-a-vis the Liberal government which apparently enabled the paper to pursue an alternative perspective, as well as articulate its concern for “the problems of underdeveloped countries.”⁶⁷

To illustrate this editorial stand that tended to make the news Nigerian, even if directed to the Canadian reader, I choose *Le Nigéria au pilori - La potence pour neuf opposants* (N11 pA1)⁶⁸. It broke the news of the executions for the LD reader as coming from AFP, Lagos. The lead presented Sani Abacha, acting, even if he was defying the international community:

En faisant exécuter hier l'écrivain Ken Saro-Wiwa et huit autres opposants ogonis, le chef de l'État nigérian, le général Sani Abacha, a lancé à la communauté internationale un défi qui devrait être lourd de conséquences pour son pays.

The reference to the Commonwealth meeting was to account for the timing of the action. The

⁶⁶Outside the period, LD published anti-Nigerian views, so it is not to be taken that its editors were unaware of how to go after the Nigerian military government on account of its breach of the democratic culture. See for instance, *Dérivés nigérianes* of July 28, 1995 p A7 (culled from *Le Monde*); and Antoine Char's *Le Nigeria, un géant diminué* (Aug. 10 pA1) which relied on the Nigerian exile, Wole Soyinka's propaganda, to report Nigeria as a post-colonial disappointment, and to ridicule the Nigerian leadership. A still more activist disposition was in the anti-Nigerian speech by Ed Broadbent, published as *Le Canada doit sévir contre le Nigéria* (Jan 4, 1996 pA7). Ed Broadbent is a former leader of federal NDP and was, at the time, head of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

⁶⁷The concern with the problems of underdeveloped countries is traced to its dependence on AFP. Cf. R. Hackett, *News and Dissent*, 1991: 101.

⁶⁸Practically any of the news items could be used to demonstrate this focus on the news as Nigerian, as distinct from the coverage in G&M and especially OC.

reason for the act and why the government put aside pleas for clemency was ascribed to observers, and given: to forestall at all costs the spread of political claims to other regions of Nigeria. As background, the story noted that the Ogoni were the first of 250 minorities to launch a veritable struggle for political autonomy and equitable share of oil riches extracted from their land. Only in a last sentence does the reader encounter that the Washington White House announced that it would impose “diplomatic” sanctions. Standing beside the article was a photograph ascribed to Reuters. It displayed the international indignation on the face of a placard-carrying youngster and others in front of the Nigerian embassy in Washington. “Abacha Snorts Nigeria Rots”, “Don’t Kill Ken” were legible on the placards. At the top left corner of the frame was imposed a close-up shot of Ken wearing a toothy grin with his cupped right hand touching his lower jaw. Despite these, the report refrained from evaluating the Nigerian act for the reader. One could see that the “facts”, so to say, were left to speak for themselves.

Even where the action of the Commonwealth became the news, the voice of the Nigerian authority still got a fair hearing. In *Le Commonwealth adresse un ultimatum au Nigéria - Le pays a deux ans pour se démocratiser sinon il sera expulsé* (N13 pA5), from Reuters, Auckland, it was not Jean Chrétien, but Jim Bolger, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, whose speech to the journalists explained the imposition of an ultimatum on Nigeria. As context and reactions, the steps already taken by the Nigerian side towards democracy were acknowledged, citing, rather generously, the voice of David Atta speaking to the BBC:

“Nous avons besoin de votre coopération, et non pas de votre condamnation”, a-t-il dit à propos du tollé soulevé dans les chancelleries par les exécutions. “Nous vous

invitons à venir nous aider. Ne nous condamnez pas! Venez nous aider et nous encourager. Reconnaissez les efforts que nous faisons pour régler nos problèmes.”⁶⁹

Meanwhile, Canada received no mention in the article whereas John Major and the United States were both accessed with regard to reactions against the Nigerian regime. A month later, Michel Venne, the Quebec parliamentary correspondent, who reported for **LD** on la Francophonie in Cotonou, joined the other correspondents in recording Chrétien’s disappointment that the forum could not muster as strong a condemnation of Nigeria as at the Commonwealth.⁷⁰

Hence in the editorial treatment of **LD**, the enthusiastic promotion of the Chrétien government over the Nigerian event was out of the question. This distancing from the Canadian foreign policy actors, I think, contributed to a coverage that revealed more of the Nigerian problem for the Canadian reader than the nationalist activism espoused in varying degrees in **G&M** and **OC**.

4.4 The Canadian Coverage - A Summary Definition

It is certain that the Nigerian news that came to Canada passed through Western filters. The Western media agencies involved included Reuters, AFP, the Associated Press, Southam News, the Canadian Press, as well as foreign correspondents and other Western publications. The first part of this analysis took account of this to establish that Western institutions did the news definition. This, I need to mention, allows for the wider cultural

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Cf. *Timide condamnation du Nigéria - Le Canada aurait préféré un langage plus dur mais la Francophonie a finalement misé sur une diplomatie feutrée* (D 4 p A1)

implications in what became the news.

Secondly, in studying the three Canadian papers, this chapter asked what became the Canadian story regarding the Nigerian event? What news definition did the papers offer their Canadian audience? Clearly, both **G&M** and **OC** made Ken Saro-Wiwa the story, and human rights abuse the issue. The tone of condemnation prevailed as seen in the macro-definitions of the event. This fitted the international reactions against the Nigerian government, and represented Canada's involvement especially at the Commonwealth and la Francophonie summits. In this, both papers conveyed a dominant news definition of the Nigerian event and thus discredited the Nigerian definition. This overt 'partisanship' infringed the professional myth of objectivity but is to be expected in deviance coverage.⁷¹ Although the infringement of human rights and democracy was **LD**'s definition as well, it began early to expose an alternative viewpoint by accessing the Nigerian side. This appearance of balance in its news stories came closest to 'professionalism'. The angle of reporting perhaps served to push its anti-Liberal political position, or suited its concern for the "problems of underdeveloped countries." The **G&M** eventually accommodated this alternative viewpoint particularly with the news files that came later from John Stackhouse, its development correspondent. Evident also was **G&M**'s interest in its elite, neo-conservative and pro-business audience. Editorially the paper became wary of a simplistic interpretation regarding the dominant definition of the Nigerian event and portrayed a certain ambivalence: condemnation of Nigeria and Shell was not so "global" after all. At least

⁷¹See 2.5.3 above on Hallin's rules for the three domains of reporting, viz: i) "legitimate controversy"; ii) "deviance" news; and iii) "human interest". More in the **G&M** and **OC** than in **LD**, the Nigerian event fell under the domain of deviance.

Nigeria's nearest neighbours, according to John Stackhouse, thought differently. Also Shell, the multinational oil company, could have been falsely accused of complicity in the executions and the "devastation" in Ogoniland. The **G&M** editorial position equally portrayed its ambivalence regarding the tenacity of the Liberal government in separating human rights and trade. The **OC**, on the other hand, became the quintessential 'cheer-leader' for a Canadian pro-Liberal, nationalistic, activist posturing. Its definition served a simplified and "spotty information" all through the period. For the **OC**, more than the other papers, the Nigeria news was a drama with its heroes and villains *tout court*.

On the whole, however, one would conclude that the Canadian readers were treated to a story about Nigeria that in fact became a reflection of the ideological hues in the political and socio-economic configuration of the Canadian environment. As told in the Canadian news, the action of the Nigerian government was deviant, even punishable. From the Commonwealth in Auckland to la Francophonie in Cotonou, the dominant news in the Canadian papers that purportedly discussed Nigeria turned out to be reporting Canada's effort to define its international image as promoter of human rights and democratic governance. This shall be further argued in the next chapter.

We are left with conducting an interpretive discourse in order to draw inferences based on the textual analysis and the macro-definitions of the Nigerian event in the Canadian/Western society. Beyond the editorials and news stories, the other genres of feature articles, opinions and letters published in the three papers reflect the socio-cognitive context within which meaning is constructed. An inquiry into this affords the opportunity to evaluate the Canadian and Western definition of the Nigerian event vis-a-vis the postulated frames

guiding the research. While taking into account the international developments since the event in 1995, the next chapter shall be paying attention to the three frames in which the news was made to mean.

Playing “Carrot and Stick”: The Interpretations

“Crime then, is ‘news’ because its treatment evokes threats to, but also reaffirms, the consensual morality: a modern morality play takes place before us in which the ‘devil’ is both symbolically and physically cast out from the society by its guardians.” - Stuart Hall et al, 1978:66

5.1 News and society - a Recapitulation

Before embarking on an interpretive discourse of what the Nigerian news came to mean in the Canadian papers, I need to recapitulate the key points about news and society that have been substantiated in the foregoing chapters (2, 3, 4). Firstly, in presenting the theoretical framework for this project, attention was drawn to Edward Said’s intellectual critique of the imbalance of power and knowledge between the West and the rest in his articulation of Orientalism.¹ Agreeably the media is a significant player in the propagation of Western knowledges. Said is obviously not alone in his analysis as other cultural critics of the media testify: “The news media deploy their discourses within a net of determinations produced by politics, science, education, religion, and other determinations of knowledge production.”² I have demonstrated that the construction of international news is dependent on the established news agencies, the reporting media institutions, and the operating ideologies of historically situated newswriters. The analysis of the Canadian press coverage

¹See 2.3 above.

²Peter Bruck cited in Fair, Jo Ellen, *Are We Really the World?* in Hawk, *Africa’s Media Image*, p.112. Louis Althusser mentioned the media among the *Ideological State Apparatuses*. Cf. his *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses, Lenin and Philosophy*, London: New Left Books, 1971. Stuart Hall insists on the play of ideology in practices within the social formation. Cf. his *The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology’: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies*, in Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran & Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Society and the Media*. London: Methuen, 1982, pp. 56-90.

in the previous chapter identified the link with these exclusively Western institutions and reporters as they operated in the reproduction of news on Nigeria.

Secondly, by attending to what the problems were and what became the issues in the event covered, Chapters 3 and 4 attempted to draw the line between the Nigerian context vis-a-vis the story, and the Canadian/Western context. This move suggests a recognition of the different perspectives or ways of seeing the same event, and the attitudes towards the news. Clearly specific social, economic and political conditions determine news production which targets news consumption. Thirdly, the existence of differences alongside the similarities between the papers themselves were adequate to establish the gap between the news event/reactions to the news, and their representations in the three distinguished Canadian papers. This gap, I need to emphasize, provided room for the play of specific ideological standpoints. These, as I shall show presently, became the ideological frames that adequately explain *why* Nigeria was so defined in the Western/Canadian news. Finally, the news analysis revealed that there was a dominant definition as well as subordinate or alternative interpretations of the event. While the latter category of definitions, as articulated by Nigeria's African neighbours, essentially saw the Nigerian event as an unfortunate episode in the political struggle for nationhood³, the dominant Western/Canadian definition offered a moral verdict of deviance perpetrated by an undemocratic military dictatorship that was insensitive to human rights, and that acted contrary to the international public opinion. In

³See the previous chapter, the pursuit of alternative accounts in John Stackhouse's coverage of la Francophonie summit. He accessed the representative view articulated by Nicephore Soglo, President of Benin.

effect the press reproduced the *labelling*⁴ of the event as human rights abuse and thus provided a justification for the international, and particularly Canadian, activism in the reactions to the Nigerian executions. The event was therefore transported into the ideological discourse of news in the Western society.

5.2 The Interpretive (Ideological) Frames

The attempt here to fathom the ideological construction of the Nigerian event is a critical approach to the role of media in society. In this view, it is mistaken to see news as neutral rather than as an agency of social control. Ericson et al argue that “news texts are misread if they are treated only as an account of an event, process, or state of affairs.”⁵ As an ideology-conscious project, the authors’ approach to news in **Visualizing Deviance** builds on the treatment of Stuart Hall et al in their 1978 book, **Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order**.⁶ Rather than see “mugging” as “a particular form of street crime”, Hall et al took a critical stance by asking “why British society *reacts to mugging*, in the extreme way it does, at that precise historical conjuncture - the early 1970s.”⁷ Similarly

⁴*Label* here is used in its ideological sense. NB “Labels are important, especially when applied to dramatic public events. They not only place and identify those events; they assign events to a context. Thereafter the use of the label is likely to mobilise *those whole referential context*, with all its associated meanings and connotations.” Cf. Stuart Hall et al, **Policing the Crisis** (1978) p. 19. For the sake of argument, there is no necessary connection between the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and co and “human rights abuse”. To illustrate, the Nigerian government has insisted (whether rightly or wrongly) that the men were guilty as charged and were hanged for murder. Until the contrary is established, it seems presumptuous to declare that there was a “judicial murder”, and hence to go further to adopt “human rights abuse” as a definition. This accounts for my use of “labelling” to qualify the media definition.

⁵Ericson et al, **Visualizing Deviance**, Toronto: U of T Press, 1987, p. 66.

⁶The Macmillan Press, 1978.

⁷Ibid. p. vii.

my effort to understand what the Canadian papers set out to accomplish in their publications, and thus to discover the operative ideologies, bearing in mind the post-Cold War environment, yielded the three frames that I find adequate in making sense of the coverage of the Nigerian event.⁸ Briefly the frames represent the meaning construction regarding the Nigerian event, the technique of persuasion, and the action Canada expected itself to play in the international community. These frames which render the event meaningful to the Western social context respectively correspond to (i) the Deviance frame; (ii) the Us and Them frame; and (iii) the Power frame. (See Chapter 2 on *framing*) I intend to use illustrations as well as arguments in my discussion of these frames.

5.2.1 The Deviance Frame

The analysis of the news stories and editorials in the previous chapter provided the dominant definition of the Nigerian event, viz: that the sentencing and the hangings of Saro-Wiwa and co breached international agreements on human rights in a judicial process characterized as “a travesty of justice.” The news noted the timing of the executions close to the Commonwealth meeting in Auckland and Nigeria’s defiance of international appeals for clemency.⁹ The signature of Nigeria’s deviance became its military dictatorship, its disregard for the norm of democracy. Thus did the news signify the event and the responsibility for deviance from the norm was primarily placed on the Nigerian leadership,

⁸These emerged from a review of theoretical perspectives of the research in Chapter 2.

⁹*Commonwealth warns Nigeria of retaliation* (OC: N2 pA8); *Rights groups seek Commonwealth sanctions* (OC: N8 pA16); *Writers demand Nigeria spare activist’s life* (OC: N10 pA10).

and General Abacha's personality became topical.¹⁰

I have been arguing that this dominant news definition avoided the complexity of the Nigerian news. The attempt to put the hangings in the context of Nigeria's history in the in-depth articles omitted the pre-Independence or colonial culture of authoritarian violence and economic exploitation under British rule. (See pages 75-77) Rather, the writings highlighted the post-Independence national history as marked by a cycle of false starts in the democratic process, economic stumbling, corruption and violence.¹¹ By focusing on the absence of democracy and on human rights abuses as the issues, the press discourse avoided dealing with why Nigeria failed to stand up to the challenge of Western democracy. On the other hand, the reports cast violent suppressions and human rights abuses as naturalized and objectified characteristics. Some instances from the press coverage will serve to illustrate this frame that supplements what became the news of deviance, first with regard to the Nigerian leadership, and then with regard to Nigeria as a nation.

The Analysis: Dictator fears coup more than condemnation (N12 pA3), by Howard French, a NYT correspondent based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, appeared as news in OC. As one of the earliest and perhaps very authoritative accounts on the personality of General Abacha in the OC, its interpretation of the event is noteworthy and needs an elaborate citation:

¹⁰Others mentioned were responsible by default such as Shell-BP {*Shell could have saved Saro-Wiwa, brother says* (OC: N20 pA10)} and Nelson Mandela {*Quiet diplomacy fails in Nigeria* G&M: N20 pA13}.

¹¹This formed the substance of the background to some news reports. But see especially the Feature article: *How does Nigeria get out from under General Abacha* (G&M: N14 pA21) by Harry Sterling; *Dealing with Nigeria* (G&M: N20 pA15) from *The Economist*; and *Is there a spark of hope in Nigeria's darkest hour?* (G&M: D16 pD4) by Henry Louis Gates Jr from *The New Republic*.

Gen. Sani Abacha, who has become rich plundering Nigeria's oil wealth, believes killing political opponents will deter more serious rivals, especially in the military. In deciding whether to proceed with the execution of one of his country's leading human rights campaigners and authors, Nigeria's military ruler, ... carefully weighed the possible repercussions.

In the weeks before the hanging of opposition figure Ken Saro-Wiwa, the international community had been sending increasingly emphatic signals that his execution would earn Nigeria the world's condemnation.

By going ahead anyway with the executions of Saro-Wiwa, 54, and eight associates, Abacha seems to have decided that international isolation is less terrifying than the perils of Nigeria's internal politics...

In the process, Nigeria and foreign analysts say, Abacha has made so many enemies in this country of 100 million people that he now seems trapped in a destructive dynamic of his own making.

So far the writer presents a personality who, in two years of leadership, has plundered, killed, and been insensitive to international opinion, and by his 'bestial' acts, worked himself into a trap where he is surrounded by self-inflicted hostilities from the outside world and within Nigeria itself. Yet the 'brute' was not totally without his senses as the writer paints a doubtful version of the sequence of events in the Ogoni struggle while naming Abacha's devious calculations:

When the government responded with military raids that have been described in official documents as "wasting operations," members of Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People declared a wish for sovereignty over their homelands.

As the leader of a thinly glued nation of 250 ethnic groups, many of whom deeply resent the long years of domination by northern military officers, Abacha apparently saw the Ogoni struggle for minority rights as a Pandora's box that, once opened, would lead to a breakup of the nation.¹²

However, insatiable greed was at the root of the irrational risks that Abacha was prepared to take, and we have the authority of unnamed but yet *credible* diplomats to substantiate the

¹²It would seem that MOSOP under Saro-Wiwa was already frustrated into pushing violently for sovereign control of Ogoni resources before the "wasting operations" began. See 3.2.1 above on the Ogoni Uprising.

claims:

Perhaps just as worrisome to Abacha, however, was talk of a more equitable distribution of oil revenues. Diplomats say the general has become a billionaire, and many other senior military officials multimillionaires, by controlling the oil sector, which provides more than 80 per cent of the country's foreign-exchange earnings. "Abacha makes his money the old-fashioned way - by controlling oil contracts," one diplomat said.

"The message here is that anybody who interferes with that better be prepared for the consequences."

Although there is cause to doubt that such speculative claims could stand up to Western journalistic standards of verification, its believability in this case would result from framing the news as 'violence' in the context of the current Western discomfort with military rulership in Nigeria.

The following **G&M** feature article derived from **The Economist** agrees with Howard French's assessment of the Nigerian leader:

For all but nine of its 35 independent years, Nigeria has been ruled by soldiers. The current gang, under General Abacha, are the worst: repressive, visionless and so corrupt that the parasite of corruption has almost eaten the host. These days the main activity of the state is embezzlement.¹³

The sweep of this assessment of military rule in Nigeria resonates with the Western attitude and belief about military regimes in other Third World countries.

Pursuing the same frame of deviance, a similar discussion of Abacha's personality appeared in a **G&M** feature article, *Is there a spark of hope in Nigeria's darkest hour?* (D16 pD4) by Henry Louis Gates Jr.¹⁴ Here some actions of "the corrupt and decadent military

¹³*Dealing with Nigeria*, (N20 pA15).

¹⁴The article was culled from *The New Republic*, and the author identified as "W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities at Havard University."

regime of General Sani Abacha” are given: that he

imprisoned billionaire Yoruba Muslim Chief Moshood Abiola, the democratically elected presidential candidate, and scores of other vocal proponents of democracy, forced Mr Soyinka into exile and finally, on Nov. 10, hanged nine Ogoni environmentalists, most notably Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nobel Prize nominee himself.

Apparently the writer’s source was Wole Soyinka whom he reported as maintaining that

Mr Saro-Wiwa’s death ... was part of a larger campaign of intimidation and terrorism. “The Ogoni were just guinea pigs, Abacha’s experiment in ethnic cleansing; break their will, destroy their means for earning a living, turn them into animals.”

Gates’ article also included a damning assessment from an interview he had with US General Colin Powell for **The New Yorker** in which the latter confirmed Soyinka’s opinions about Gen. Abacha:

He said that the profile of Gen. Abacha created by the CIA was one of the worst he’s ever seen, “and I’ve seen lots.” And he said corruption was an inherent part of the culture.

Although the article added that General Powell decided to publish a letter in **The New Yorker** “partially qualifying his remarks,” there was the urge to construct a psychological profile of Abacha as cruel, greedy and abnormal, even if not “the worst”. In these descriptions, Abacha would be comfortable in the league of the notoriously deviant despots in history. The list includes the Idi Amins of Uganda, the Emperor Bokassas of the Central African Republic, the Moammar Gadhafis, and the Saddam Husseins. (To include Adolf Hitler in this list would significantly disrupt the mentality behind this classificatory scheme.)¹⁵

Apart from participating in the negative reporting of Abacha in this event, the dashed

¹⁵In the case of Idi Amin, media accounts about him omitted to mention his British upbringing as a member of the Royal Constabulary force that was sent to crush the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya.

hopes of an independent Nigeria was another prominent theme in Louis Gates' article:

Nigeria contains several of the world's oldest continuous cultures, including the Yoruba, the Ibo, and the Hausa, peoples with rich artistic and literary heritages, whose separate greatness has yet to cohere, 35 years after independence, into the great nation that the sum of its parts promised in 1960.

The nearest that this 'informed' writer came to diagnosing Nigeria's problem with democracy was to state, tongue in cheek, so to say, that

Democracy arrived stillborn, in large part because the British selected the Hausa, whose feudal government most closely mirrored Britain's monarchical system, as their logical heirs. The tensions between the largely Christian south (Yoruba and Ibo) and the Muslim north would make continuing neocolonial economic control fairly easy.

This attempt to explain the Nigerian situation stops at stating the origin of Northern domination in Nigeria, and that divide-and-rule was to the advantage of British neocolonialism. Whatever else went wrong - that Western democracy remains a challenge, the habitual corruption, military coups, the civil war, the Ogoni executions - all seem to find their explanation in a mythical tale. The author explicitly referred to an Independence Day play, *A Dance of the Forests*, by Wole Soyinka, which "foreshadowed the harrowing events - coups and civil war - that would soon follow." The unwary reader is left with the notion that an ahistorical senselessness and deviance account for what has been going wrong with the Nigerian leadership and with the Nigerian nation. The deviance at the execution of Saro-Wiwa remained the focus of discourse. Attention to the historical background that would implicate the West was omitted.

In a related study, *The Media and Mau Mau: Kenyan Nationalism and Colonial*

*Propaganda*¹⁶, Wunyabari Maloba makes a relevant point. He argues that the Mau Mau uprising (1952) which was essentially a revolt against white settlement and land confiscation through British colonial legislation was dislocated from its context through propaganda. The “foreign press characteristically concentrated on *how* the Mau Mau were rebelling not on *why* they were rebelling.”¹⁷ The interest behind the occlusion is argued as follows:

If the revolt was not “the child of economic conditions,” then the white settlers and the government were to be seen not as the heartless villains whose policies had triggered the revolt but rather as victims of unprovoked barbarous assault by Africans under the spell of magic and foul oaths.¹⁸

Thus masking the historical and economic reasons behind such revolts became the pattern of media coverage of Africa.¹⁹ Similarly, by leading readers to believe that violence was natural rather than as a result of historical and social formations and conflicts, the spotty reporting of the executions in Nigeria obscured a fuller appreciation of the social reality. This framing would make the Westerner comfortable.

At this point, it is perhaps helpful to introduce a G&M feature article, *The country that hanged Louis Riel* (N16 pA23) by Michael Valpy.²⁰ The piece offers an alternative

¹⁶Hawk, B.G., ed., *Africa's Media Image*, 1992:51-61

¹⁷Hawk, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 58. In the same article, the writer narrated that during the Kapenguria trial of 1952-53, Jomo Kenyatta, the Kenyan nationalist leader, “was accused of managing an unlawful secret and criminal society” and because he had also visited the Soviet Union between November 1932 and September 1933, “was automatically suspected by the colonial government, and especially by the local white settlers, of being a communist.” *ibid.* p. 56.

¹⁹Maloba asserts that “A study of Western coverage of the Mau Mau movement is ... a study in propaganda and also an effort to trace some of the origin of the negative portrayal which Africa, and especially African nationalism, continues to suffer in the West.” Hawk, op. cit. p. 51.

²⁰Valpy is a former G&M African correspondent; presently an ideas columnist. He is described as one of two “graying radicals in an article on the G&M in *Time* magazine Sept. 29, 1997, p. 43.

definition, albeit shocking, because it was critical of the apparent moral righteousness espoused by the Canadian foreign policy actors, and one would say, by Western countries generally, with regard to international reactions to the Nigerian hangings. Valpy made a defiant declaration: "Canadians and Americans live in an ethnically cleansed continent." He opened his piece as follows:

Hanging a leader of a minority people a la Kenule Saro-Wiwa of Nigeria's Ogoni people? Canadians, in the case of Riel, have been there, done that. Ethnically and culturally "cleansing" a minority people as has been carried out in the former Yugoslavia? Canadians have been there, too. And done that. Not as gruesomely as the Americans, of course; but we also had our quasi-religious version of manifest destiny to which the aboriginal peoples were an obstacle requiring removal.

According to Valpy, Louis Riel, "of mixed French and aboriginal ancestry," led two rebellions against the Canadian authority in 1869-70 and 1885 for the cause of the Metis people.

The Canadian government drove Riel from the leadership of the Red River Colony's provisional government in 1870 through a mixture of military threat and political duplicity. Fifteen years later, it put him on trial as a traitor, rejecting the option of trying him on a lesser charge (treason-felony) which did not carry the mandatory death penalty. He was convicted and, although his jury had recommended clemency, hanged on Nov. 16.

The above historical comparison is not an exact parallel of the Nigerian event. One might argue that the times are far apart. Nevertheless, Valpy's peculiar historical sensitivity shows critical awareness regarding situations where the West sends mixed messages by its impatience and its stereotyping of events happening in non-Western parts of the world. In covering the Nigerian event, the deviance frame, even with regard to the in-depth articles, failed to raise the specter of the legacy of violence and autocracy in British Colonial rule and the imposition of its law and ordinance; and also to point out that the use of military force

received British support in keeping Nigeria 'united' in the period of neocolonialism.²¹

The conclusion here is that flashing the stereotype of military regimes, the deviance frame symbolized the absence of democracy and therefore made a historical occlusion possible. The Western news accessed definers who articulated the deviance in Nigeria, and seemingly offered neutral judgements and hence diverted attention from the unfortunate events that arose from the intrusion of political and economic interests and conflicting social forces. The delegitimized alternative viewpoint is that socio-political realities point to the fact that the West has been there. And done that! Thus the dominant frame of deviance required the reporting of the execution of Saro-Wiwa and the eight to provide a simplified media construction of a psychological profile of General Abacha and of Nigeria that matched the Western cognitional context.

5.2.2 The Us and Them frame

This second frame, as indicated above, is a technique of persuasion in the news narrative. This, I need to point out, is not necessarily peculiar to Western news reporting of non-Western parts of the world. The technique is however critical with regard to the

²¹One sees a contradiction in the fact that during the Nigerian civil war (1967-70), the Nigerian government's suppression of political opposition and national disintegration during the Biafran bid for secession had obtained the support of Britain. This served to protect British economic interests. In effect Britain armed Nigeria to enforce an economic blockade for the duration of the war that led to the starvation of thousands of Biafran civilians. Starvation was seen then as "a legitimate instrument of war." The mainstream British press for long obstructed the news and pictures of starving Biafran children. Cf. Harrison & Palmer, *News out of Africa*, Biafra to Band Aid, London: Hilary Chipman, 1986. But in 1995, the British government of John Major took to "ethics" in its public condemnation of Abacha's use of a tribunal to contain the Ogoni movement which perhaps equally threatened Nigerian unity. The British Prime Minister characterized the Nov. 10 hangings as "judicial murder." Cf. *The Times* (London) Nov. 11, 1995, p. 1.

dominant Western news definition in this case study. Essentially this featured in the analysis of the news construction and distribution, and the editorials which elicited the reaction of the Western/Canadian reader. It consists of emphasizing the difference between Us (the West) and Them (Nigeria as non-Western). It helps to simplify and signify an event by plugging into the familiar stereotypes, story lines, myths, and the 'public idioms' of the press that convey difference by classification.

In the OC editorial of N11 pB7, *Hangings prove the world must act against Nigeria*, I pointed out the mythical contest between good and evil which was used to signify the struggle between Saro-Wiwa and Abacha. Also Paul Knox's treatment under the news story, *Nigerian was voice of Ogoni* (G&M: N11 pA14), profiled Ken Saro-Wiwa's credentials as a replica of the interventionist Western intellectual: one of Us, who was hanged by Them. According to Prof. Killam (introduced by Paul Knox as a specialist in African Literature) who knew Saro-Wiwa as a professional colleague:

They didn't mind as long as it was just novels, But when he shifted into the public arena ... I think they got really scared.

'They' of course referred to the Nigerian leadership. Similarly Henry Gates' feature article²², which showed the writer must have some direct contact with Wole Soyinka, again extracted Soyinka and his fellow Yorubas from other black Africans in so far as the former exhibit characteristic traits of the Greeks as the fount of Western intellectual achievements and 'democratic' culture:

It came as no surprise that Africa's first Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, hails from

²²*Is there a spark of hope in Nigeria's darkest hour?* It has been cited earlier. Perhaps these intellectuals who have been either killed or exiled represented the only "sparks" of hope for Nigeria.

the Yoruba, a people much like the Greeks with a centuries-old tradition of education and political participation. They are a people with a literary, religious and mythological tradition as densely metaphorical as it is deeply lyrical, built around the Ifa Oracle, similar to the Delphic Oracle of the Greeks yet still functioning and regularly consulted today.

Teun van Dijk sees racism behind elite discourse that differentiates in what he characterizes as positive *self-presentation* and negative *other-presentation*.²³ This structural distinction corresponds with Dahlgren's "bipolar opposites,"²⁴ an attempt in the news to say what They are that We are not. Other genres of press reporting are used here to portray this binary thinking.

In a short but richly connotative letter published in the *G&M*, *Crucial Differences* (N17 pA20), Jean Sonnenfield wrote from Toronto:

Re: the front-page headline: Saro-Wiwa's Execution Sparks Global Outrage (Nov. 11).

Has it occurred to Lucien Bouchard how much better off he is to carry on his activities in Canada, and not in Nigeria?

Bouchard as leader of Quebec separatism in Canada is compared to Saro-Wiwa's leadership of the Ogoni movement. The ideological assumption is that the Nigerian event was bizarre: We in Canada are tolerant (even if to a fault); but Those others in Nigeria are not. The persuasive undertones of this letter reassures the Canadian reader that he/she lives in a better country. And, if the reader is socially active, as some Canadians are, to support the propagation of this 'universal' value of tolerance so blatantly lacking in Nigeria. In line with this trend, an opinion piece in the *OC* - *Even small voices can be heard protesting*

²³*Elite Discourse and Racism*, London: Sage Publications, 1993. pp. 244ff.

²⁴See 2.2 above. Similarly, John Hartley, *Understanding News*, (1982) points out that this oppositional structure in the news construction of Us and Them is often value-laden. Cf. p. 118ff.

murderous Nigerian regime (N22 pB5) by Spencer Gallichan-Lowe - described the fate of Nigerians as helpless at the execution of Saro-Wiwa, and invited international action. Purportedly coming from a Grade 10 (high school) student, the opinion would illustrate, from the editorial point of view, the thinking of quite a proportion of the socially conscious Canadian public.

...the (Nigerian) citizens continue to live in fear of their lives, afraid to even cry for the dead.

...

In fact, crying or any other human emotions were forbidden on the day of the hangings. So Nigeria has indeed proven that it can make millions of people feel like they are in hell.

But what should the world do in the meantime? Canada or the U.S. should lobby the United Nations to have a full-scale oil embargo against Nigeria, completely destroying the nation's economy and making the military get down on its knees and beg for forgiveness. That's when the citizens will strike and overthrow the Nigerian government, and freedom will be restored.

But what can people like you and me do to help the people of Nigeria? We can picket the Nigerian Embassy here in Ottawa, write letters to the newspapers, tell people about the problems in Nigeria and make people aware of the human-rights abuses. We should all do our part to help those people; it's our duty as inhabitants of this planet.

Noteworthy here is the underlying mentality suddenly awakened by this execution: the sense that Nigerians were not free even to express their emotions, and were living like They were in *hell*. The advocated intervention was cast as a duty that would flow naturally from Us to Them, to liberate the Nigerians from their despotic military rulers; a veritable stereotype.

The Us and Them frame therefore tapped into what Stuart Hall calls "the dominant-hegemonic position"²⁵ to communicate power and interest because its social function would be to influence and justify actions. Such Western values as freedom, liberal humanism,

²⁵Hall, Stuart, *Encoding/decoding*, op. cit. p. 136.

individual (not group or communal) rights and democracy came to be seen as 'universal' needs which Western governments and their media feel obligated to propagate in the non-Western world as well. Heather Brookes came up with this conclusion regarding why the international media offers stereotypical, naturalized and dominant representations of Africa: the first is a self-definitional ideology to

exploit ethnocentricity through popular feelings of sovereign nationhood, uniqueness, superiority over other societies and resentment towards ethnic groups and foreigners.²⁶

The second social function is

to justify past, present and future political and economic policies and actions with regard to African countries. Governments have to justify, to their own people, actions that would normally be regarded by them as undemocratic and even immoral in a western context. To do this, an image of Africa as uncivilized, barbaric, irretrievably savage, superstitious, corrupt, under-developed and generally chaotic must be reproduced so that actions by western nations can be perceived as being in the interests of those African countries and for the wider common good.²⁷

Hence because of this urge to intervene, 'spotty information' dominated the coverage and quickly specified Our side and Their side of the "contest". By relying on myths to enable intervention, the media dispensed with the context - the history and politics; the narrative fiction acquired the status of fact. Although Shell received negative coverage, the popular belief and expectation that the multinational should have intervened with the Nigerian regime shall be used to demonstrate the rhetorical frame of Us and Them. (The call for sanctions/actions to coerce Nigeria into the international mould would be relevant here.)

²⁶*'Suit, tie and a touch of juju'--the ideological construction of Africa: a critical discourse analysis of news on Africa in the British press* in *Discourse & Society*, Sage, Vol 6(4): 461-494, p. 487.

²⁷*Ibid.* p. 487,8.

5.2.2.1 A Narrative Stereotype - the Role of Shell

Because Royal Dutch/Shell Group led Western oil interests in Nigeria²⁸ and, along with the Federal Government of Nigeria (as the sole owner of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation - NNPC), became the major target of MOSOP/Saro-Wiwa's campaign for compensation and environmental protection, the Anglo-Dutch multinational got bad publicity before and especially after the executions. There were calls in Canada for boycott of Shell gas pumps in news and letters to the editor.²⁹ Although the **G&M** tried to deflect the blame on Shell³⁰, **OC** reflected the conventional wisdom: that Shell had a hand, even if by default, in the death of Saro-Wiwa and co.³¹ The **G&M** article, *Shell ad sets out stand on Nigeria - Oil giant responds to its critics* (N23 pB6), referred to the Nov. 22 Shell's full-page ad in "major cities in Canada and elsewhere in the world" to counter this popular impression. Furthermore, the **G&M** news, *Nigeria project still on, Shell says* (N16 pA18), carried the

²⁸Shell produced half of Nigeria's crude of 2 million barrels per day, and was widely believed to have influence on the Nigerian government. Other major oil companies in Nigeria include Chevron, Mobil, Texaco, Elf and Agip. See *Africa Today*, Nov/Dec 1996, pp. 18ff. Therefore the two Canadian oil companies that had interests in Nigeria, Abacan Resource Corporation and Profco Resources Ltd, were minor players.

²⁹The **G&M** news: *Hangings spark call for Shell boycott - Greenpeace urges Canadians to join one-day protest against oil company* (N15 pA13); *Allegations slam Shell* (D18 pB2). Five Letters: *Shell boycott* (**G&M**, N18 pD7) by Ronald Labonte; *Shell's ardent neutrality* (**G&M**, N22 pA18) by Peter Stoett; *Shell's media spin* (**G&M**, N24 pA18) by Elizabeth May; *Gone to another pump* (**OC**, N21 pA10) by Pam Edwards; *Hollow Ring* (**OC**, N30 pA12) by Elizabeth May. And the brief news, *Shell could have saved Saro-Wiwa, brother says* (**OC**, N20 pA10). A **G&M** feature article culled from *The Economist*, *Dealing with Nigeria* (N20 pA15) argued rightly that "Shell is an easy target, but it is the wrong one." It further argued that what was the issue was that in the Nigerian event, the Commonwealth "... has been made to look utterly irrelevant."

³⁰Editorial, *Sentence of death* (N3 pA22)

³¹**OC** Editorial, *Hangings prove world must act* (N11 pB7).

confirmation of Shell's continuing participation in the \$3.8 billion Liquefied Natural Gas Project despite international outcry against its alleged role in Nigeria's suppression of the Ogoni dissent.

That Shell became an unwilling star in the drama provides an instance of Western self-presentation in the news coverage. Unlike others whose intervention were believed could have saved Saro-Wiwa (this included Nelson Mandela, the British Government, and the Canadian PM who was represented as speaking out in Auckland), Shell was the Western powerful actor right inside Nigeria. In keeping with Western beliefs, Shell would be well-placed to rescue Saro-Wiwa. This myth of intervention encapsulated a "moral panic"³² operated in a feature article by Martin Woollacott, *Keeping bad company: Multinational corporations' moral relativism spreading rapidly* (N23 pA17).³³ Before dealing with Shell's intervention, I begin by asking why, for the writer, the "moral relativism" in business was "spreading rapidly". This representation embodies a historical occlusion, hiding centuries of Western commercial exploitation of natural resources in Africa, Asia and South America. In an apparent reaction to Shell's "announcement that it will go ahead with a new natural gas project" in Nigeria, and Shell's ad professing its political neutrality, the writer posed the problematic of his piece as follows:

Shell's failure to deal with the consequences of its decisions in Ogoniland is an example of a widespread abdication of responsibility by big corporations.

³²Moral panic is defined by Stan Cohen as "A condition... a threat to societal values and interests...presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media..." Cf. S. Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 16.

³³This Opinion piece was culled from *The Guardian*, London. A related treatment appeared in *G&M, Multinationals and their morals - it is not only Shell's judgment that is on trial in Nigeria* (DO4 pA13) from *The Economist*.

Multinationals are insisting not only that they take an absolutely neutral line on the politics of the countries in which they invest and trade, but that they must “work with” local standards of ethics and morality. This opportunistic relativism is spreading rapidly.

The presumption is that the reader accepts the writer’s evaluation of multinational ‘abdication’ as a new and spreading phenomenon. The article however made a cogent analytical statement regarding the economic advantage which multinationals sought as they entered non-Western zones, usually on condition that there was a reasonable degree of protection for their investments:

The profits of corporations depend so much on exploiting the gradient between the wages, resource costs, and the environmental and safety conditions of different countries that they can be deemed to have an actual interest in the maintenance of certain kinds of authoritarian government. This must not be so oppressive as to lead to social unrest or so lax and corrupt as to permit banditry, but above these low levels corporations may well find bad government not only acceptable but useful.

Now, my contention is that the apparent disappointment carried in this article was based on the myth of Our moral superiority as identified in Western multinationals. Thus Shell’s failure to exhibit high ethical standards in business was seen as a *defect* rather than a *natural* characteristic of Our/Western business practices. The angry reactions against Shell (one of Us) were therefore on a different level from the naturalized evil and greed of the Nigerian leadership (Them). The presumption was that Shell, was *ethically* capable of influencing the ‘brutes’ in Nigeria, and hence the disappointment. Significantly, Shell’s failure to intervene denied the Western press the chance of rehashing a familiar story line. Shell flunked where it could have played the legendary Tarzan in the African jungle by rescuing Ken Saro-Wiwa

from the mindless and brutal menace of the African lion.³⁴

Furthermore, because the dominant view that blamed Shell was operating at the level of myth, it was caught in the naivety of downplaying the role of economic self-interest in international relations. As the swift protests against Nigeria began to die down, it was Shell's 'rational' voice that emerged the winner. Economic considerations seemed to have determined the failure of the Western governments to maintain consistency on human rights in their national and international policy agenda.³⁵ On the other hand, one could argue that considering that Saro-Wiwa led the effective obstruction of Shell's oil operations in Ogoni since 1993, it was actually in Shell's economic interest that he be removed. Stepping back a bit in history, Shell was not the moral standard-bearer when it was kicked out of Nigeria in 1978 by the Obasanjo military administration.³⁶ At the time, Shell had broken the international oil sanctions imposed on Apartheid South Africa by selling oil to the country. Moreover when General Abacha, at his Independence Day speech on October 1, 1995, overturned the death sentences passed on some of the 43 alleged coup-plotters in Nigeria, Shell could not possibly take the credit. Hence the popular outcry against Shell over the

³⁴Tarzan is a legendary white character created by Edgar Rice Burroughs and popularized among American audiences. Tarzan's heroic escapades and rescues in the African jungle became the stuff of Hollywood adventure films at the turn the century. See. Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank, **Black African Cinema**, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 40. These Tarzan films penetrated the Nigerian popular film audience in the 1950s and 1960s.

³⁵The interest of multinationals and US-dominated financial institutions have continued to dictate political, economic and cultural policies of governments in Europe and North America. A resort to a feeble consumer activism owing to the inability of governments to go against multinationals is captured in a Letter by Pam Edwards, "...If it is beyond the power and scope of modern governments to hold these corporate giants responsible for the havoc they wreak while protecting their bottom lines, then it is up to us to put their feet to the fire. This family will not be stopping at a Shell Station in the foreseeable future." (OC, N21 pA12)

³⁶Cf. Kirk-Greene, A. & Douglas Rimmer 1981: 49, 50.

Nigerian executions provided a scape-goat even if to depict where the West missed to deliver. With regard to the revulsion felt at Shell's insistence on participating in the lucrative Liquefied Natural Gas project, the protesters could see Nigeria's *dependence* on Shell's involvement in the operations. On the other hand, that Shell equally *depended* on Nigeria's mineral resources was conveniently occluded.

Thus in the Us and Them framing of the news discourse, reporting the role of Shell secured a dominant Western construction of its capability and moral superiority even if rendered complex by Shell's failure to intervene on Saro-Wiwa's behalf. It was nevertheless clear that the frame put Us in a position where We are different from Them, and where We could rescue, lead, guide Them.

5.2.3 The Power frame

The power frame accounts for the cultural impetus behind both the deviance and the Us and Them frames. What the news was made to mean derives from the Western possession of cultural power. On the institutional level, the means to conduct transnational media definitions of the Other is a reserve of those who excel in the power of media technology. The pervasiveness of the Western news agencies and media institutions has been noted here as well as in previous research studies.³⁷ While the **G&M** and **OC** carried both news reports and features culled from other Western countries, the reports by the transnational news agencies that originated from Nigeria were careful not to accord credibility to the Nigerian

³⁷See for instance, Tunstall, J., **The Media are American**, NY: Columbia University, Press, 1977.

press.³⁸ (I would however suggest that the mentality that the Nigerian media products would be “inferior,” not “objective,” or else ill-adaptable for the Western reader, appears more persuasive than their non-availability due to technological retardation.)

Power here is equally a function of where Canada is positioned economically and politically. Politically, the calls for sanctions and the national and international pressure in support of the “punishment” of Nigeria for human rights abuse, or to urge the Nigerian regime towards democracy, acquired dominance in the Western media. Although this had its limitations, considering that Nigeria fought back³⁹, Canada’s superiority to Nigeria, as an instance of Western superiority, showed in the media coverage just as Canada was vocal at the Commonwealth summit. Once again, I need to refer to some publications and developments around this event.

As noted in the analysis of the news and editorials, the dominant media approach in the coverage of Nigeria was to adopt social activism and hence justify the moves made by Canada’s foreign policy actors. The presumption of Canada’s power is evident in the G&M feature article, *Where are the tough measures against Nigeria?* (N13 pA15). The writer, Nino Ricci⁴⁰ began by establishing his authority to define the situation, having “taught in

³⁸In citing Nigerian press sources they were so qualified to create doubt as to their credibility. E.g. Paul Knox in *Pressure building for sanctions against Nigeria* (G&M, N17 pA12) refers to “according to a report in the majority-government-owned **Daily Times** newspaper”.

³⁹Nigerian propaganda included hiring PR firms in the United States, and a special counter-propaganda campaign - *Not In Our Character* - was put in place to deal with the bad international publicity Nigeria was getting abroad. Cf. *A nation in quarantine* in **Africa Today**, Jan/Feb, 1996, p. 5,6.

⁴⁰Ricci is identified in the article as president of PEN Canada. It is part of a worldwide organization founded in Britain in 1921 and made up of writers who commit themselves to fight for freedom of expression.

Nigeria in the early 1980s, during one of its brief interludes of democratic rule". With this suggestion of his reasonably adequate knowledge of Nigeria, he went on to paint a credible picture of the situation of the victims of the Nigerian executions and to recommend the appropriate action:

... Their mistreatment after arrest, the irregularities of their trials and their sentencing and execution exemplified the hell of degraded democracy and injustice into which the country has descended. For this descent, Nigeria should be condemned as an outlaw state.

However more significant in this article is the reasons that were provided why Canada should take tougher actions against Nigeria. After pointing out that "countries such as Britain which have strong economic interests in Nigeria" resisted exerting sanctions on Nigeria's oil exports, he disclosed as follows:

Canada imports \$600 million of Nigerian oil a year, and has an obligation to take the lead here, especially given its rather shameful record in the recent past - in the case of China, for instance - in allowing trade issues to compromise its stand on human rights.

Ironically the reason why Canada should take the lead was because its power rests in being less economically tied to Nigeria than Britain or the United States.⁴¹ Several news articles would rehearse these same economic considerations as a necessary prelude to urging the actions that Canada could take, even if unilaterally, against Nigeria in Canada's quest to promote human rights.⁴² It is, however, in the forum of the Commonwealth institution that

⁴¹Canada's annual oil purchase from Nigeria is reported as 12% of Canada's imports which go to Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. Cf. *Canada would support oil embargo at expense to public* (N17 pA11). On the other hand, 45% of Nigeria's annual oil exports go to the US amounting to 7% of US annual imports of oil. Another 45% of Nigeria's oil exports go to the EU countries. So while the US and EU import the bulk of Nigeria's oil, they became the more reluctant to adopt the oil embargo.

⁴²*Hangings spark calls for Shell boycott* (G&M, N15 pA13); *Nigeria abuses no deterrent for two Canadian firms* (G&M, N15 pB3); *Canada would support oil embargo at expense to public* (OC, N17

Canada dramatized its power vis-a-vis the Nigerian event.

5.2.3.1 The Canadian Commonwealth Proposal for democracy and human rights

What became the attitude of the Commonwealth towards Nigeria between the Auckland summit (Nov 10 - 13, 1995) and the Edinburgh summit (October 24 -27, 1997) illustrates the underlying mentality conveyed through the power frame in the Canadian press coverage of Nigeria. Apart from the terms of trade considered above, the dynamics of influence at the Commonwealth meeting was computed in terms of financial contributions. Canada's influence would derive from its contribution of 19% to the Commonwealth budget, second only to Britain's 29%. Member countries contributing below 2% to the Commonwealth secretariat included Nigeria.⁴³ They made up the difference of 34%. Considering that the Commonwealth turned out to be a forum where poorer nations sought the assistance of the wealthy members, Canada was seen to command a tremendous influence at the organization. This, I think, came through in the Oct 27, 1997, LD piece, *Le Commonwealth Nouveau* by Claude Lévesque. This front-page column article carried the restatement of Nigeria's suspension at the Edinburgh summit, which meant that the body reneged on the 1995 threat to expel Nigeria if it did not revert to democracy in two years. Noting the diverse faces in the membership of the organization, the writer alluded to why the association refashioned itself to attract even countries with non-British traditions:

pA11); *MPs call embargo on oil from Nigeria* (OC, D15 pA3).

⁴³ *Commonwealth gives Nigeria reform deadline* (G&M, N13 pA11) Other member countries contributing higher than Nigeria included Australia - 10%, India - 3%, South Africa - 3%, New Zealand - 2%.

.... Michael Dartnell souligne que le gouvernement de Tony Blair veut renforcer le Commonwealth en tant qu'instrument pour acheminer l'aide au développement... Le Canada, deuxième contributeur d'aide aux pays du Commonwealth après la Grande-Bretagne, y trouve également une bonne tribune pour promouvoir son image de défenseur de la démocratie et de croisé du maintien de la paix.

Although some reports of this meeting still put a positive spin on Canada's accomplishments,⁴⁴ it became obvious that the powerful campaign both by Canada, the Nigerian opposition groups and other human rights activists for tougher measures in the Commonwealth were indeed limited.⁴⁵ Nigeria was undoubtedly pulling its own resources to counter its poor international image and *pariah* status. In a G&M article anticipating what turned out to be a subdued rhetoric at the Edinburgh Summit, *Lack of action on Nigeria draws criticism* (Oct. 20 pA10) Madelaine Drohan wrote:

... Nigeria is the economic and military powerhouse in its part of the world. Smaller Commonwealth countries such as Ghana are unwilling to risk retaliation by voting for anything tougher than the current suspension. The Commonwealth itself is depending on Nigeria, which is the dominant member in the regional security force, to sort out the strife in nearby Sierra Leone, which was suspended from the Commonwealth after its democratic government was toppled in a coup in May.

As the four-day summit meeting opened, "news of a Nigerian-brokered peace blueprint to

⁴⁴*Commonwealth: Le communiqué final porte la marque du Canada*, by Giles Toupin, *La Presse*, Oct. 28, 1997, p. B8, which reported: "Je suis heureux, a dit M. Chrétien, que notre campagne sur le Nigeria ait été couronnée de succès. Tout le monde s'est mis d'accord sur un communiqué très fort; Abacha et ses gens devront agir avant l'échéance d'octobre 1998 et les pays membres ont demandé au Canada de garder son siège dans le Groupe d'action ministériel,..." See also *Nigerian ultimatum stays in tact - Commonwealth rejects Mandela's bid to hold off on tough sanctions* by Helen Branswell, *The Gazette*, Oct 27.

⁴⁵The Nigerian opposition - both the pro-democracy groups and the MOSOP - was disappointed that Nigeria was not going to be expelled at the Oct. 1997 Edinburgh Commonwealth Summit, despite the non-compliance with the 2 years' democracy time-table that the member was handed in Auckland. See *Nigeria: 'It's out of the Commonwealth - and Nigeria should stay out'*, *Africa Today*, Sept/Oct 1997, pp. 12, 13.

restore Sierra Leone's deposed government within six months reached Edinburgh"⁴⁶ Ironical as it looks, Abacha's Nigeria needed to be seen to also believe in democracy even if there were socio-political difficulties stalling the hoisting of democracy in its own territory. In effect, there is the likelihood that Nigeria's struggle with democracy has been powerfully overshadowed by the dominant definition of "non-democratic" sold in the Western press about the Nigerian leadership.

Democracy and human rights were trigger-phrases for the swift actions that were taken against Nigeria. These included the imposition of the US and EU arms embargo, the downgrading or severing of diplomatic ties as happened with regard to Canada, the suspension of bilateral and multilateral aid, cultural ties, and visa restrictions for Nigeria's military and government personages. The suggestion made here is that the Western countries who could apply such measures were in a position of power vis-a-vis Nigeria. Following closely on the spate of swift Western reactions against Nigeria, a special correspondent for **Africa Today** made this cogent point regarding the media attention focused on Saro-Wiwa:

Whereas in theory the world should have been more responsive to Nigeria's long and difficult struggle to achieve a lasting democracy, the power of the media has meant that Saro-Wiwa's immediate and personal struggle struck a more accessible chord with international public opinion.⁴⁷

But as time went on, the powerful coalition in the Commonwealth began to crumble. This coincided with a strategic meeting of the CMAG in London in June 1996 when it became known that the tide was turning away from the hard line against Nigeria. In an analytical

⁴⁶*Nigeria action muddies summit debate* (G&M, Oct 25, 1997, pA9) also by the same European correspondent, Madelaine Drohan.

⁴⁷*A nation in quarantine* in **Africa Today**, January/February 1996, p. 5.

report, *A dilemma for the Commonwealth*, Kayode Soyinka reviewed Nigeria's successful diplomacy at this meeting as propped by Britain who, with more at stake in Nigeria than with any other Commonwealth member, "was only paying lip service to sanctions against Nigeria." He observed:

Long before the proposed London meeting, the near unanimity that was displayed at the Commonwealth Summit in New Zealand by heads of member-countries to suspend Nigeria had begun to fall apart. In fact, by the Christmas of 1995, only a few weeks after the suspension, not just Africans but countries like Malaysia and Britain (both members of the CMAG) had started to break ranks.⁴⁸

According to this reporter, the Nigerian delegation⁴⁹ at the CMAG meeting argued that it was targeted, and appeared to have successfully contested the propriety of the swift suspension:

Nigeria still strongly feels that its suspension was taken in a very precipitate manner. Even the Harare Declaration which the Commonwealth argues forms the basis of its suspension order on Nigeria stipulates that any erring member must be given two years' grace before suspension. Therefore, in suspending Nigeria, the Commonwealth was acting contrary to the rules it itself had laid down. As one observer put it at the time of the London meeting: "This is the blunder the Commonwealth has made and Nigeria is not helping them to save their face. The Commonwealth should be honourable enough to admit its blunder."⁵⁰

The reporter represented the positions of the other CMAG members at the meeting as follows:

Throughout the Marlborough House meeting, Canada took a hard, no compromise line; New Zealand similarly, on the first day, but mellowed on the second. Ghana was consistently pro-Nigeria throughout. South Africa on the first day adopted a hard-line but, on the second, also mellowed, Malaysia steered a middle course on the first day,

⁴⁸*Africa Today*, Sept/Oct 1996, p. 36.

⁴⁹The Nigerian delegation included Tom Ikimi (Foreign affairs minister), Chief Richard Akinjide (former Nigerian Attorney-General), Samuel Ikoku, Paul Unongo, Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria's chief delegate at the UN), Dr. Yadudu (Legal adviser to General Abacha), Ambassador Debe (Nigerian Ambassador to Ethiopia), and Prof. Tam David-West (former Nigerian Petroleum Minister). *Ibid.* p. 39.

⁵⁰*Ibid.* p. 39.

but veered towards Nigeria on the final day. It was the same with Jamaica and Zimbabwe.

Thus did Canada, which was represented by Christine Stewart, the Canadian Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa, persist in its hard line on the Nigerian issue.⁵¹ It was the CMAG reports that guided the decision of the leaders' meeting in Edinburgh 1997. Judging from the consensus decision to retain the suspension order on Nigeria, it would appear that Canada's powerful influence, though limited, was still evident in the outcome. In effect Canada's position in the Commonwealth allowed it enough influence to implement its "carrot and stick" proposal. At the time of writing, the extension of Nigeria's suspension in the Commonwealth has, as its goal, to "guide" Nigeria towards democracy and the respect for human rights. Whether the Canadian hard line on the Nigerian issue attains universality in international relations is matter for another inquiry.

5.3 Critical Interpretations of the Dominant Canadian Coverage of the Nigeria news

The foregoing discussion on the three frames suggests the following:

(i) that the Canadian news on Nigeria operated from a Western cultural perspective. The frame of deviance includes the following traits: human rights abuse, absence of democracy owing to military rule, legal bungling, senseless brutality, immoral greed, and economic dependency. These are taken to be naturalized traits of Third World regimes, and on this

⁵¹Canada's continued hard line took a more zealous turn when Lloyd Axworthy took over from André Ouellet as foreign affairs minister in January 1996. In the G&M editorial, *Punishing Nigeria*, of June 28, 1996, the new minister was seen as "sending a message both to the world and to Nigeria...that the Commonwealth hasn't been tough enough on a contemptible regime that has annulled free elections, imprisoned the winning candidate and suspended civil liberties and executed dissidents without due process."

occasion, Nigeria fitted the bill. These are traits the Other is guilty of whereas for Us, were these to exist, they would be avoidable defects, just blips in an otherwise well-ordered and stable socio-economic and political environment. Because the West looks on itself as the effective (powerful) model of universal conduct, the news coverage capitalized on calls and actions deriving from government and civil organizations, an interested Nigerian opposition, and some prominent individuals, to press for punishment, sanctions, etc. in order to procure the needed change in the Nigerian regime.

(ii) By settling for the “symbolic spectacle” in the event of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the news narrative became an efficient fiction but thereby lacked historical awareness. Perhaps this has remained the stuff of Western news, but “spotty information” lacks balance. A balanced reporting could have meant seeing the event as part of Nigeria’s struggle for nationhood. (I assume here that all the Western democracies had their struggles. In some cases these struggles are still on-going, and the casualties are not hard to identify.) Because of this occlusion, this research interrogates the propriety of the responses and measures adopted to deal with the Nigerian national question as happened in the Commonwealth. In a post-Cold War era, the absence of “democratic rule” suddenly constituted a socially intolerable arrangement. The Commonwealth solution settled for having in place a democratically elected government in Nigeria. However, it failed to address the necessary capitalist base without which a Western-style democracy would continue to be impracticable for Nigeria. In a recent timely intervention, *Was Democracy Just a Moment?*,⁵² Robert D. Kaplan, questions the urge to plant Western democracy in the non-Western zones of the

⁵²The Atlantic Monthly, Dec 1997, pp. 55ff.

world particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his historical analysis of the unstable political and economic situations in several developing countries, he perceives two extreme options as “democratic anarchy and military tyranny”.⁵³ The middle ground which he would want the West to consider, would be in the form of a hybrid of military cum civilian leadership.⁵⁴ For him, “Enlightened despotism is thus preferable to democracy: the masses require protection from themselves.”⁵⁵ This at least would be an alternative to think about based on analysis of the context rather than on labels and news mythologies.

(iii) The Canadian coverage of Nigeria became a defining moment for Canada’s international image of activism in defense of democracy and human rights. The news operated closely with Canada’s foreign policy actors, from Auckland to Cotonou, and articulated for Canadians their government’s hard line on the deviance of the Nigerian regime. The coverage served to positively present Canada despite the inconsistency of its trade policies with such countries as China and Indonesia; it gave Canadians reason to believe in the humanitarian character of their government. Despite lingering doubts about the nerve of the Liberal government to pursue the active engagement of the Mulroney years, the papers were ideologically in agreement that the human rights abuses, military repression, denial of

⁵³Ibid. p. 64.

⁵⁴He illustrates with the effective control exercised in such “subtle authoritarian” regimes as Peru’s Alberto Fujimori, Ghana’s military-turned-politician ruler, Jerry Rawlings, and Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni whom he quoted as writing: “I happen to be one of those people who do not believe in multi-party democracy ... In fact, I am totally opposed to it as far as Africa today is concerned.... If one forms a multi-party system in Uganda, a party cannot win elections unless it finds a way of dividing the ninety-four percent of the electorate [that consists of peasants], and this is where the main problem comes up: tribalism, religion, or regionalism becomes the basis for intense partisanship.” Ibid. p. 60.

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 64.

freedoms, intolerance, legal bungling, as happened in Nigeria, were taboo in Canada. Thus in covering Nigeria the Canadian papers, in the main, sought to make their readers feel good about themselves, even to feel morally unaccountable for the relatively meagre Canadian businesses conducted in Nigeria. The contradictions in Canada's humanitarian postures and democratic professions (despite democracy's discontents), vis-a-vis the Canadian realities, would be matter for other inquiries. Apart from making temporally distant historical references (à la Michael Valpy), some pointers to Canada's internal struggles would include (i) the social travails of the 1990s including job losses and the vicious cuts in social welfare programmes as a result of economic rationalization⁵⁶, (ii) the agitation for justice and recognition for the First Nations in Canada, and (iii) the Separatist fever in Quebec which in 1971 had prompted PM Pierre Trudeau's invocation of the 'violent' War Measures Act to deal with the Front for the Liberation of Quebec (FLQ). That certain Canadian socio-political anxieties may have determined its interest and projection of human rights abroad is perhaps better left for experts in social psychology. As the Second Annual National Forum (Sept. 1995) put it:

Canada ... has a fundamental stake in the family of international and regional institutions that promote sustainable prosperity, equity, good governance, respect for human rights, and tolerance of diversity.⁵⁷

⁵⁶"The high priority given to the creation of jobs for Canadians gives trade central importance." Cf *Report of the Second Annual National Forum*, September 1995, p. 6. This accounts for the trade preoccupation of the Chrétien administration which remains in conflict with its human rights professions. Canada is equally "deeply concerned about the rising tide of U.S. unilateralism in trade relations" and anxious about the "consolidation of the European Union". This has translated into the added importance it attaches to other regional blocs in the Southern countries including the Commonwealth and la Francophonie. Ibid. p. 11.

⁵⁷Ibid. p. 16.

To this inquirer therefore the purported coverage of the Nigerian story represents a public morality play featuring Canada implementing its “carrot and stick” proposal in the international fora.

The above conclusions derive from the ideological interpretation of the Nigeria news focused on the “spotty information” that was meaningful to the Canadian context; but the news thereby diverted attention from the Nigerian story. What became the international news, its definition and appropriation of the Nigerian event, told more of the West/Canada than of the Nigerian context it was meant to report. The problem of decontextualization in news reporting is not new to journalism and the profession must continue to struggle with it if news content is to be seen for the cultural product that it is.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

"We are writing what Phil Graham once called 'the first rough draft of history' - not the unquestionable truth." (A journalist responds).

This research has called into question the dominant interpretation of the Nigerian news that was filtered through Western media institutions (Chapters 4 and 5). Because of the three Canadian papers sampled, the Canadian context became central to the analysis. The attention drawn earlier to the Nigerian historical situation and the international environment, especially at the time of the event, served to argue that there could be an Other as well as Western "ways of seeing" (Chapter 3). The drama that became the Western/Canadian story derives from Canada's interest in guiding Nigeria back to democracy. This became an instance of what has been theoretically identified as the Western cultural penchant to define and control (Chapter 2). On the coverage of this Nigerian event, the dominant interpretation of the Canadian press would find these lines from Edward Said an adequate representation:

The interrelationships between scholarship (or literature, for that matter) and the institutions of nationalism have not been as seriously studied as they should, but it is nevertheless evident that when most European thinkers celebrated humanity or culture they were principally celebrating ideas and values they ascribed to their own national culture, or to Europe as distinct from the Orient, Africa, and even the Americas.¹

Thus media practice with particular regard to the coverage of international news seems inescapably riveted to the national ethos. As a work of art, the news, I suppose, always has a purpose. This is not lost on cultures that are perhaps more sanguine regarding objectivity.

¹Culture and Imperialism, NY: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 44

To quote Chinua Achebe, a renowned Nigerian novelist, “art is, and always was, at the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories for a human purpose.”² But for the West where objectivity appears to be the worry, this could be the bane of journalism as a profession.³

6.1 The ideological construction of the Nigeria news - Objectivity and Bias

The Scholastic philosophers insisted on definition of terms as the starting-point for argumentation or discourse (“definitio termini initium disputandi est”). How true their approach is when applied to news discourse in general and international news in particular! On news, Western media theorists, especially of the cultural-critical persuasion, have underlined that objectivity, which usually goes with balance and fairness, is contextual, a meaningful professional ideology in journalism, a news production methodology (Schudson, 1987: 122; Tuchman, 1978: 82; Ericson et al, 1987: 19ff, 53). The critical question to ask would be: “objective” in whose estimation? It is therefore instructive to attend to the essentially *relational* use of the term vis-a-vis the social context of news production and consumption. The cultural consensus that undergirds the acceptance of particular news definitions points to the hegemonic import of news representations and interpretations (Ericson et al, 1987:31). Consequently, rather than assume the “objectivity” of news accounts, a recognition of the socio-cultural and political standpoints of news producers and

²*Africa and her Writers in Morning Yet on Creation Day*, London: Heinemann, 1975, p. 19.

³N.B. “the ideal of objectivity as consensually validated statements about the world, predicated on a radical separation of facts and values,” Schudson, 1978:122. See also Peter Golding, *Media Professionalism in the Third World: the transfer of an ideology* in Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1977:300,301.

consumers is fundamental for interpreting news discourse. Therefore where international/distant news is concerned, consumers require a critical edge (a kind of Archimedian standing point) to interrogate news reports. This research, which focused on Canadian press coverage of Nigeria, has endeavoured to provide an orientation based on this critical awareness.

By researching the framing of the Canadian story regarding the execution of Saro-Wiwa and the reactions to the event, it became obvious that objectivity, fairness and balance, as unqualified “public-culture legitimations for journalistic practices”⁴, were cast into serious doubt. The bias and prejudices in the dominant Canadian news definition was culturally determined, patriotic and interventionist.⁵ Again focusing on the technique of framing, this research inquired into the ideological underpinnings: firstly, on account of the nature of the news of deviance; secondly on account of the cultural divide (Us and Them); and thirdly because the Western/Canadian media reflected the power relationship that characterize ‘superior’ Western industrialized countries and their counterparts in the ‘weak’ developing countries. Specifically, the dominant news definition, despite the internal political tensions, flew along with Canadian foreign policy in an international environment that turned temperamental (relative to the Commonwealth posture), and became intolerant and impatient towards Nigeria’s military system of governance. The news in the various genres of

⁴Ericson et al, 1987: 358.

⁵Just to cite a historical note here. The American intervention during the Spanish-American War of 1898 over Cuba may not have been if the American press (Pulitzer’s **New York World** and William Randolph Hearst’s **New York Journal**) did not stumble over each other in their partisan and patriotic coverage of the relationship between the two countries. Cf. Swanberg, S.A., **Pulitzer**, NY: Charles Schribner’s & Sons, 1967; Milton, Joyce, **The Yellow Kids: Foreign correspondents in the heyday of Yellow Journalism**, NY: Harper Perennial, 1990. Cf also Schudson, 1987: 61-64.

press/media coverage therefore cooperated or at least shared in this essentially Western campaign “to return Nigeria back to democracy and human rights.” This socio-cultural and political commitment on the part of the Canadian/Western press qualifies the coverage of Nigeria as basically ideological and hegemonic. To recapitulate, the gap existing between the event and its press representations/coverage was filled with attitudes, interests and ideology. These emerge as one considers the following sets of critical questions:

1. *Why did the Western/Canadian press find it sufficient to rely on the authority of those it selected as the **primary definers** of the Nigerian event to say that Saro-Wiwa was “rail-roaded”, that the executions were a “travesty of justice”, and that the Ogoni were simply victims of military suppression?* Such definers in the story include: Amnesty International and other activist groups, the Nigerian “opposition”, diplomats and Government leaders, made up essentially of Western governments such as Britain, the US and Canada, the EU, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand. On the other hand the balance that could have been sought via the Nigerian government’s side of the story, were readily discredited and delegitimized. Alternative viewpoints expressed by Nigeria’s African neighbours were interpreted as due to weakness and fear of Nigeria’s reprisal. Evidently, balance was dispensed with by the press because the legitimized definers were believed to have offered ‘uncontroversial’ and therefore consensual knowledges within the Western context of the news discourse.

2. *Was there a necessary connection between the military rule, whether of Sani Abacha or of any other ruler for that matter, and the **plight of the Ogoni** as a marginalized ethnic minority in Nigeria?* This question of course relates to the in-depth analysis of the national

question in Nigeria which the Western papers either shied away from, or purposely avoided, or could not understand. In this connection, could it be seen as too hasty for the Western media to demonize the military government of Sani Abacha at the news of the executions? Thus to what extent were the particular reactions a carry-over from previous knowledges or opinions about the regime or about Africa generally? In terms of the Nigerian situation, have the Ogoni suffered as much marginalization as they claim since 1967 when they became part of the Rivers State created in 1967 under the military regime of General Gowon? Against this claim by Loolo (in *History of the Ogoni*), Eghosa Osaghae argued that “the Ogonis have fared better than most other minorities (including oil-producing minorities) in appointments to top government positions which is usually the yardstick for measuring access to state power.⁶ Perhaps the Ogoni have fared better under military rule in Nigeria. But supposing this were the case, the Ogoni, just as other oil-producing areas, would still continue to confront the Nigerian leadership (military or civilian) with the problem of how to treat “the goose that lays the golden egg.”⁷ Thus focusing on the lack of democracy in military rule creates a false impression that once an elected government is in place in Nigeria, the problem of the Ogoni within the Nigerian nation state would be over. Probing these trajectories means getting into the Nigerian story as such. This would require the news to attend to the history and politics of Nigeria. This was dispensed with in the spotty information in the

⁶Osaghae, Eghosa, *The Ogoni uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State* in *African Affairs*, (1995), 94, p. 331.

⁷Osaghae recalls that the Ogoni ‘separatist agitation’ had its precedent in “the rebellion of Isaac Adaka Boro, Sam Owonaro and Nottingham Dick who declared a short-lived independent Niger Delta Republic in 1967 over oil-related grievances”. Ibid. p. 326. This is prior to the Army becoming a recognizable feature of Nigerian politics.

foreign news story.

3. *Could the press have problematized human rights abuse and the absence of democracy as interpretations of the Nigerian event?* By going with this story frame, the press made the Western 'solution' and style of intervention necessary and unproblematic. The lack of questioning involved an ideological closure, even as the Western reporters would claim to be reproducing dissident Nigerian voices, including the campaigns launched by Saro-Wiwa/MOSOP and other Nigerian pro-democracy and human rights groups.⁸ The alternative perspective challenged the Western press to stop to consider the possibility that these 'internal' (Nigerian) definers could be manipulative by taking advantage of the purported international movement towards respect for human rights and democracy in the bid to promote some other 'narrow' political interests; for instance, Ogoni 'political autonomy'. (A notable historical parallel is that before the collapse of the Soviet Union, such African states as Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire received substantial support from the United States for "their perceived strategic value as strongholds against communism".⁹ Then, containing communism in Africa prevailed at the expense of democracy.) One should consider the likelihood that in the post-Cold War environment, the international media was sold a culturally acceptable pitch on human rights, a message it was now ready to propagate. As a *label*, "human rights

⁸One can picture a sense in which the death of Saro-Wiwa may indeed have resulted from the inability of these groups both within and outside Nigeria to muster sufficient forces that could have prevented his execution. In this regard, he also became a victim of the 'betrayal' of the international media.

⁹Lefebvre, Jeffrey, *Moscow's Cold War and Post-Cold War Policies in Africa* in Keller & Rothchild, *Africa in the New International Order*, 1996, p. 215. See also Schraeder, P., *Removing the Shackles? U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Africa After the End of the Cold War*, in Keller & Rothchild, 1996: 192.

abuse” came to assume connotations of reprehensible political conduct: it is associated with Apartheid in South Africa¹⁰; it echoes the racial segregation and inhuman treatment of blacks that gave rise to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in the United States; and more directly, it evokes brutal suppressions of political opponents peculiar to Third World military dictatorships.¹¹ These instances form the ‘discursive histories’ of the Western news context. With particular reference to Canada, under the Liberal Government of Jean Chrétien, the Nigerian news meant an opportunity to propagate Canada’s (Western) values as part of its foreign affairs agenda in the Commonwealth and la Francophonie.¹² Thus the Nigerian event was hijacked into Canada’s moment to claim moral leadership in the international community. Canada’s role bore the imprint of a “civilizing burden” as a significant and exemplary member of these international organizations. In effect, the dominant story in the Canadian press carried this diplomatic and cultural interest in pursuing the Nigerian story.¹³

My goal in this project was not to deal with the above questions; others may wish to

¹⁰Note that although the Apartheid policy was officially in place in South Africa since 1948 and was already fought by the ANC, the United Nations and the Commonwealth never spoke up till the 1960s. Cf. Appendix: *Rise and Fall of Apartheid* in Mkhondo, Rich, **Reporting South Africa**, London: James Currey, 1993, pp. 178ff.

¹¹See Chomsky, Noam & Edward Herman, **The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism**, Boston: South End Press, 1979.

¹²Chapter 3, reference to the Report of the Second Annual National Forum, Sept 1995. This posture refers back to PM Brian Mulroney’s speech in Harare that “Canada will not subsidize repression and the stifling of democracy... nothing in international relations is more important than respect for individual freedoms and human rights.” **Canadian International Relations Chronicle**, Oct - Dec, 1991.

¹³The warm relationship between the Canadian Foreign Affairs and Moshood Abiola (includes the hospitality frequently enjoyed by Wole Soyinka in Canada) as shown during his visit after the June 1993 elections would lead to other tracks beyond this inquiry. Cf. “During a visit to Canada in early September, Chief Abiola met with External Affairs Minister Perrin Beatty, who gave him a copy of the report of the (Nigerian) elections prepared by Canadian electoral observers.” **Canadian International Relations Chronicle**, June-Sept 1993.

investigate them in depth. In raising them, I do not need to be interpreted as taking sides with the position of the Nigerian government on the issue. Rather the questions provide critical pointers to the existing gaps that informed the ideological probes revealing the Western bias in reporting the Nigerian event. Dealing with this epistemological bias is the problem highlighted here.

6.2 Dealing with Western cultural hegemony in international news

The use of this Nigerian case as a sample of a Western coverage of an event in a non-Western developing country seems appropriate. The generalizability of my conclusions is evidently limited by (i) the nature of the news event (violence, prominent personality, timing of the execution close to the Commonwealth meeting); (ii) the three Canadian papers sampled for the research and the international news agencies on which they depended; (Perhaps there is the need to recall that although my findings noted that the **G&M** coverage displayed an overall complexity, while the **OC** rather simplistically pursued the activist approach in step with the agenda of Canada's foreign policy, and **LD** may have created room for some doubt by accessing the Nigerian definition of the event, still the dominance of the Western interpretation of the Nigerian event was unmistakable.) (iii) the two months' period (November - December, 1995) chosen for the in-depth analysis; and (iv) the methodology of cultural-critical discourse analysis which, I must add, proved to be adequate in the study of news framing.

These limitations notwithstanding, this enquiry examined the ideological construction

of Nigeria in the Western media as a cultural practice.¹⁴ I have therefore grappled with epistemological commonalities or the social cognition within which the Western media construct events in sub-Saharan Africa. This goes beyond the differences in news genres (stories, editorials, features, letters) or the differences in story types (deviance, crisis, human interest) and even the different perspectives pursued in individual Western papers. My findings are generalizable in so far as they refer to the hegemonic ideologies which usually deal with the level of the deep-structure of meaning (what things come to mean 'in the last resort'), and therefore accord with Western assumptions or ideological paradigms for making sense of events in Africa. As I noted in Chapter 2 - the theoretical framework - these Western attitudes operate in virtually every sphere of the human definition. At this level of cultural discourse, change is slow.¹⁵ The notion of Western power and dominance, for instance, runs deep in the social cognition. The geopolitics of information has scarcely gone beyond the paradigms of the 19th century explorers, missionaries and colonizers.¹⁶ The empirical-discursive approach adopted in this research has once more demonstrated that the West maintains a pattern - the tendency to universalization as it defines and controls knowledges of events in Africa, and the Third World generally, to accord with the Western mentality, preoccupations, and standards.¹⁷ There would be little to fret about if fictionalizing 'the news

¹⁴Clifford Geertz sees culture itself as "... a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." Cf. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973 p. 89.

¹⁵For the enduring and diffuse characteristics of ideology in social cognition, see Teun van Dijk, *Discourse semantics and ideology* in *Discourse & Society* (1995) pp. 244-247.

¹⁶Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information* (1981) referenced in 2.2 above.

¹⁷Edward Said's criticism in 2.3 above.

of the day' were just 'entertainment' as Neil Postman would make us believe.¹⁸ Unfortunately, because no news is neutral, the news symbolically and significantly embodies and controls socio-cultural, political and economic positions and outcomes.

And so what? Being critical of Western interventionism in the articulation of events elsewhere is not the same as being dismissive of efforts to respond to 'perceived' threats to social well-being. For this writer, human interconnectivity and mutual dependence are more than convenient intellectual theories. In subscribing to this view, in itself an ideology, there is need to work towards universally approved norms of conduct in an atmosphere of growing sensitivity to 'globalization'. But unless issues are dealt with contextually rather than in a spotty fashion, in openness and dialogue with sometimes conflicting viewpoints rather than in an environment dictated by superiority, impatience and intolerance, the silence imposed by the cultural dominance of a section of humanity contradicts the very ideals of democracy. (Democracy must not be restricted to its Western experience since the rise of the capitalist economy and imperialism). If this research has one suggestion to make, it derives from the analysis that found a total absence of non-Western news operatives in the papers studied. The Western ideological interpretations in the newsrooms would be seen to have encountered negligible if any opposition on this account. More than ever, the need to work for "a new world information and communication order" is underlined.¹⁹ Ignoring the issue is in itself undemocratic. Because this project concentrates on news as an ideological construction, one

¹⁸**Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business**, NY: Penguin, 1985.

¹⁹See 2.2, page 24f.

finds support in Michel Foucault's analytic statement - culture is a 'field of struggle.'²⁰ Hence culture/media definitions must be seen as 'a contested terrain'. I chose to identify the personal contributions of newswriters in this research because I acknowledge that within their institutional limitations, they exercise cultural power in their roles as writers. Western media institutions may consider absorbing non-Western media practitioners capable of articulating events and wrestling in the ideological arena which has been marked by the valorization of Western media representations of Africa and the rest of the Third World. The current distribution of power indicates that the balance of perspectives may not be achieved soon, but the alternative definitions deserve to be heard with some clarity.

²⁰**Power/Knowledge**, ed. Colin Gordon, The Harvester Press, 1980.

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From Dorah Badey to Ken Saro-Wiwa, pp. 15,16.

Profile - Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa, pp. 16,17.

Vanguard, August 26, 1994

From prison with love - p. 5.

Appendix 1

Primary Documents in genre categories, headline, date & page

The Globe & Mail

News	<i>Nigeria death sentences provoke calls for sanctions</i>	N1 p A16
	<i>Nigeria upholds death sentences - Decision thumbs nose at Commonwealth..</i>	N9 p A18
	<i>PM condemns death sentences - Commonwealth talks open in New Zealand</i>	N10 p A16
	<i>Saro-Wiwa's execution sparks global outrage</i>	N11 p A1
	<i>Nigerian was voice of Ogoni - Background</i>	N11 p A14
	<i>Commonwealth gives Nigeria reform deadline</i>	N13 p A11
	<i>Shell Nigeria project on hold after hangings</i>	N13 p B4
	<i>Market movers - Abacan/Profco Resources</i>	N14 p B21
	<i>Hangings spark call for Shell boycott - Greenpeace urges Canadians to join one-day protest against oil company</i>	N15 p A13
	<i>Nigerian abuses no deterrent for two Canadian oil firms Abacan, Profco risking \$200 million despite executions</i>	N15 p B3
	<i>Nigeria project still on, Shell says</i>	N16 p A18
	<i>Pressure building for sanctions against Nigeria - European Parliament calls for oil sanctions</i>	N17 p A12
	<i>Call for Nigerian sanctions grows</i>	N18 p A16
	<i>Nigeria hit with EU arms embargo - OPEC delegation on defensive</i>	N21 p B12
	<i>Shell ad sets out stand on Nigeria - Oil giant responds to its critics</i>	N23 p B6
	<i>Market Movers - Abacan Resources (TSE)</i>	N24 p B11
	<i>Mandela calls for embargo in Nigeria</i>	N27 p A8
	<i>Summit dilutes rights position - Canada criticised for "selective" stand</i>	D4 p A10

	<i>Canada, allies differ on rights</i>	D5 p A16
	<i>Nigerians ignore international scorn</i>	D6 p A14
	<i>Small countries fear regional giant - Nigeria's record looks better to its neighbours</i>	D7 p A1/A19
	<i>Sanctions on Nigeria supported by Labour - Military leader's deeds cited by British party</i>	D8 p A17
	<i>Diplomat returns to Nigeria</i>	D13 p N4
	<i>400 Nigerian politicians meet</i>	D15 p A16
	<i>Allegations slam Shell</i>	D18 p B2
	<i>Irving defends deal</i>	D19 p B2
	<i>Abacan predicts Nigerian oil profit</i>	D19 p B15
	<i>Nigerian agents raid magazine</i>	D26 p A12
Editorial	<i>Sentence of death</i>	N3 p A22
	<i>Canada, the Commonwealth and Nigeria's generals</i>	N10 p A20
	<i>Nigeria's crime</i>	N11 p D6
Feature	<i>Where are the tough measures against Nigeria?</i>	N13 p A15
	<i>How does Nigeria get out from under General Abacha?</i>	N14 p A21
	<i>The country that hanged Louis Riel</i>	N16 p A23
	<i>Quiet diplomacy fails in Nigeria</i>	N20 p A13
	<i>Dealing with Nigeria</i>	N20 p A15
	<i>Multinationals and their morals - it is not only Shell's judgment that is on trial in Nigeria</i>	D4 p A13
	<i>Is there a spark of hope in Nigeria's darkest hour?</i>	D16 p D4
Opinion	-	
Letters	<i>Ken Saro-Wiwa</i>	N6 p A14
	<i>Hangings in Nigeria. Re: PM Condemns death sentence (Nov, 10)</i>	N14 p A20
	<i>Crucial differences</i>	N17 p A20
	<i>Shell boycott</i>	N18 p D7

<i>Shell's ardent neutrality</i>	N22 p A18
<i>Shell's media spin</i>	N24 p A18
<i>Silence on Nigeria</i>	N29 p A14
<i>Nigeria [contradicting Henry Gates' Feature]</i>	D27 p A12

The Ottawa Citizen

News	<i>Playwright sentenced to death</i>	N1 p A13
	<i>Commonwealth warns Nigeria of retaliation</i>	N2 p A8
	<i>Rights groups seek Commonwealth sanctions</i>	N8 p A16
	<i>Writers demand Nigeria spare activist's life</i>	N10 p A10
	<i>PM urges pressure.. Campaign for life</i>	N10 p A10
	<i>Poet a martyr to tyranny</i>	N11 p A6
	<i>PM says Nigeria to be expelled</i>	N11 p A6
	<i>Commonwealth suspends Nigeria for hanging dissidents</i>	N12 p A1
	<i>Dictator fears coup more than condemnation</i>	N12 p A3
	<i>The struggle continues, vows activist before death</i>	N13 p A6
	<i>Commonwealth. Canada leads push for human rights</i>	N13 p A6
	<i>Plane crashes in Nigeria</i>	N14 p A9
	<i>77 presumed dead in Northern Nigeria</i>	
	<i>Canada recalls diplomat to protest executions</i>	N15 p A9
	<i>Pro-government marches</i>	N16 p A6
	<i>Canada would support oil embargo at expense to public</i>	N17 p A11
	<i>Shell could have saved Saro-Wiwa, brother says</i>	N20 p A10
	<i>Britain, Netherlands veto EU embargo against Nigeria</i>	N21 p A10
	<i>Nigeria demonstrates, burn US, British and South Africa flags</i>	N22 p A6
	<i>Opposition group wants Canada to push sanctions</i>	N23 p A8

	<i>Nigeria's dictator sneers at Commonwealth</i>	N24 p A7
	<i>Body Shop helped activist escape to Britain</i>	N26 p A3
	<i>Mandela lashes out at Nigerian dictator</i>	N27 p A6
	<i>Despite lack of evidence state presses murder case</i>	D1 p F10
	<i>Francophone Summit: Rights group slams Canada for meek stand. French nations pass tame resolution on abuses in Africa</i>	D4 p A6
	<i>Francophone Summit: National unity prevails on human rights</i>	D5 p A4
	<i>EU adds new sanctions to action against Nigeria</i>	D5 p A9
	<i>Murder victim's relatives support Nigerian regime</i>	D7 p B1
	<i>Cash gifts from Taiwan to ANC*</i>	D8 p A13
	<i>South African leaders back call to punish Nigerian government</i>	D12 p A7
	<i>Mandela touches raw nerve in Nigeria</i>	D12 p A7
	<i>Canadian diplomat returns to Nigeria with 'clear message'</i>	D13 p A5
	<i>MPs call embargo on oil from Nigeria</i>	D15 p A3
	<i>Iraq, N. Korea, Sudan cited as worst human rights violators*</i>	N19 p A11
	<i>Nigerian opposition defies ban on rallies</i>	D20 p B6
	<i>Foreign ministers meet to consider new action against military rulers</i>	D20 p B6
	<i>Commonwealth ministers agree to thread softly</i>	D21 p A7
Editorial	<i>Hangings prove world must act against Nigeria</i>	N11 p B7
	<i>Putting on the pressure</i>	N14 p 10
Feature	-	
Opinion	<i>Canadians can combat dictatorships</i>	N17 p A13
	<i>Even small voices can be heard protesting murderous Nigerian regime</i>	N22 p B5
	<i>Keeping bad company -Moral relativism of corporations</i>	N23 p A17

Letters	<i>Protest over social program cuts in Ontario*</i>	N15 p A9
	<i>Gone to another pump</i>	N21 p A10
	<i>Nigerian youths would be grateful for Canada's concern</i>	N27 p B5
	<i>Hollow ring</i>	N30 p A12
Advert	<i>CBC to air documentary on death of Nigerian writer</i>	N13 p E5

Le Devoir

News	<i>Le régime maintient les peines de mort</i>	N9 pB6
	<i>Le Nigéria au pilori - La potence pour neuf opposants</i>	N11 pA1
	<i>Le Nigéria en accusation à Auckland</i>	N12 pA8
	<i>Neuf executions et beaucoup de pleurs</i>	N12 pA8
	<i>Le Commonwealth adresse un ultimatum au Nigéria</i>	N13 pA5
	<i>Le Nigéria rappelle ses ambassadeurs</i>	N14 pB4
	<i>Abacha se fâche</i>	N19 pA9
	<i>La Francophonie fait ses premiers pas en terrain politique</i>	D2 pA1
	<i>Timide condamnation du Nigéria</i>	D4 pA1
Editorial	<i>Le Canada et l'offense nigériane</i>	N11pA12

Appendix 2

Interviews with Foreign news Editors

Patrick Martin, Globe & Mail, Toronto, August 1, 1997.
Jocelyn Coulon, Le Devoir, Montreal, August 28, 1997.
David Evans, Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa, August 29, 1997.

Appendix 3

Time Line of Events and Political Developments

1960, Oct. 1	Nigeria's Independence from Britain Tafawa Balewa (Northerner), PM and head of government Nnamdi Azikiwe (Easterner), Governor General Obafemi Awolowo (Westerner), leader of Opposition
1963, Oct. 1	Nigeria becomes a Republic, Azikiwe as first president Nigeria moves from 3 to 4 Regions
1966, Jan. 15	First military coup d'état led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu Maj. Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi becomes first military head of state
1966, July 29	Second military coup Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon becomes head of state
1966, May 27	Gowon creates the 12 states in Nigeria
1966, May 30	Ojukwu, Eastern Region military governor, declares Biafra's secession
1967, June 6	Outbreak of Nigeria-Biafra civil war
1970, Jan 12	Biafra surrenders, end of Nigeria civil war.
1971, Jan 14	Commonwealth Meeting, Singapore
1975, July 29	Third military coup d'état Gen. Murtala Muhammed assumes power as head of state
1976, Feb	Creation of 19 states by Gen. Muhammed
1976, Feb. 13	Gen. Muhammed killed in a failed coup attempt Gen Olusegun Obasanjo takes over as head of state
1979, Oct. 1	Second Republic inaugurated. The military hands over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari as first executive president of Nigeria
1983, Dec 31	Fourth military coup d'état Gen. Muhammadu Buhari assumes power
1984, Sept 4	Brian Mulroney becomes PM as leader of Progressive Conservatives; Joe Clark as external affairs minister
1985, Aug 27	Fifth military coup d'état Gen. Ibrahim Babangida takes over power
1986	Gen. Babangida accepts the IMF loan and conditionalities Structural Adjustment Programme imposed on Nigerians
1987	Creation of 21 states in Nigeria Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal Decree promulgated
1989, Nov 9	The fall of the Berlin Wall, End of Communism in Russia
1990, Aug 26	Ogoni Bill of Rights, launching of Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) Dr Garrick Leton as president; Chief Edward Kobani as his vice.
1991, Apr 19	Barbara McDougall appointed Canada's external affairs minister.
1991, Oct. 22	The Commonwealth Harare Declaration. (PM Mulroney's opening speech)
1991, Dec	Abuja formally replaces Lagos as Nigeria's national capital
1993, Jan 4	MOSOP defies government orders to hold Ogoni Day mass rally
1993, June 12	Presidential elections in Nigeria (inconclusive). Canadian electoral observers present. Saro-Wiwa faction of MOSOP enforced boycott of voting in Ogoni
1993, June	MOSOP leadership change: Saro-Wiwa replaces Garrick Leton as MOSOP president. Ledum Mitee becomes vice president [other associations formed by MOSOP including NYCOP, COTRA, FOWA, OTU, and COC].

1993, June 26	Babangida annuls the Presidential election purportedly won by Moshood Abiola. Widespread protests.
1993, Aug 26	Amidst the wide protests, Babangida institutes the Interim National Government of Ernest Shonekan and leaves office;
1993, Sept	Abiola in Canada. Met with Perrin Beatty, Canadian External Affairs Minister.
1993, Oct 25	Jean Chrétien's Liberal government comes to power.
1993, Nov 17	Sixth military coup d'état Gen Sani Abacha takes over power, ends the democratic transition
1994, May 21	The Ogoni murders in the Gbanemene palace at Giokoo. Victims:- Samuel Orage, Theophilus Orage, Albert Badey and Edward Kobani. Suspects are arrested and detained, including Ken Saro-Wiwa
1994, June 11	Abiola declares himself president and goes into hiding
1994, June 23	Abiola arrested and detained
1995, Feb	Ogoni Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal opens sitting. Saro-Wiwa and co formally charged with the murder of 4 Ogoni leaders
1995, June	43 alleged coup plotters sentenced to death by a military court, includes Gen Olusegun Obasanjo.
1995, June 27	Constitutional Conference (elected membership) submits report to government. Abacha partially lifts ban on political activity.
1995, Oct 1	Death sentences of coup plotters commuted to terms of imprisonment. Abacha sets Oct. 1, 1998, as date for hand-over to civil rule.
1995, Oct 31	Death sentences passed on Saro-Wiwa and co for inciting murder of the 4 Ogoni leaders
1995, Nov 8	Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) confirms death sentences on Saro-Wiwa and co amidst international protests.
1995, Nov 10	Commonwealth summit opens in Auckland, New Zealand Saro-Wiwa and 8 others hanged in a PH prison at 11:30 a.m.
1995, Nov 11	International condemnations follow the news of the executions announced by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) (About 20 countries (including all 15 EU countries) recall their ambassadors from Nigeria)
1995, Nov 12	Commonwealth leaders hands a 2-year suspension to Nigeria
1995, Nov 13	The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group set up to monitor Nigeria's compliance prior to the Edinburgh summit in Oct 1997.
1995, Dec 2	La Francophonie summit begins in Cotonou, Benin.
1995, Dec 12?	Canadian acting high commissioner returns to Nigeria
1995, Dec 18?	First meeting of the CMAG chaired by Zimbabwean Stan Mudenge. A team of 5 to visit Nigeria for dialogue.
1996, Jan. 25	Lloyd Axworthy replaces André Ouellet as Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister
1996, April	Second Meeting of the CMAG in London, Marlborough House 8 measures (sanctions) adopted but postponed till September. Nigeria argued against the legality of its suspension according to the terms of the Harare declaration. First indication of split in the Commonwealth coalition.
1996, June 25	Axworthy announces Canada's unilateral sanctions against the Nigerian regime
1996, Sept 6	Nigeria closes down its diplomatic mission in Canada.
1996, Oct 1	Creation of 36 States in Nigeria
1996, Oct	Third Meeting of the CMAG
1996, Nov 11	Canadians mark the anniversary of the execution of Saro-Wiwa
1997, March 12	Canada suspends diplomatic ties with Nigeria and closes its mission in Nigeria. Canadian acting high commissioner, Janet Graham, & other staff leave Lagos.

1997, March 13

Nigeria pronounces treason charges against some NADECO activists including Wole Soyinka for hand in the bomb explosions in various parts of the country. Canada also accused of “formenting terrorism” in Nigeria.

1997, July

Fourth Meeting of the CMAG in London

1997. Oct 24

Commonwealth summit opens in Edinburgh

Nigeria’s suspension extended to Oct 1998.