

## POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS AND THE QUEST FOR RATIONAL DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE: THE NIGERIAN EXEMPLAR

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines how the acceptance of a political appointment by media workers either amplifies or stifles their critical voice. In this paper, a distinguished media intellectual in Nigeria is studied as a critical case. Twelve textual exemplars were theoretically sampled from three leading national newspapers in Nigeria. The textual exemplars were selected from editions published between 2008 and 2012. The textual exemplars were categorized and presented in three titled tables. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to interpret the sampled texts. Insight was also received from comments elicited from journalism union officials in Nigeria. Analysis found that giving a political appointment to Nigerian media intellectuals smothers their critical voice. It is also found that contradictory views are brilliant professional conduct if it helps media intellectuals in a government appointment to polish the image of their pay masters. The article ends by urging media intellectuals in government appointments to ensure that they blend the pressure to parrot what their pay masters want to hear with critical rationality.*

**Keywords:** Political appointment, democratic discourse, unattached intellectuals

### INTRODUCTION

In every era of history, communication occupies a central position amongst the issues that bother humans. Right from the time communication was practiced at the interpersonal level to the present internet era, intrigues about communication have remained fresh. The attention that communication commands results from its social relevance. Communication nourishes human consciousness and reasoning. The reason-nourishing role of communication accentuates its social relevance. In Nigeria, social agents who believe they have a stake on the consciousness of fellow citizens often engage one another in struggles to control communication. The struggle over communication centers on its contents, how the contents should be packaged, how it should be disseminated and what the disseminated should mean. The class that worries more about the state of human consciousness and how communication nourishes it is the political class. Like their counterparts elsewhere, the overriding interest of Nigerian politicians is for politics to remain on track. Politicians believe that politics is on track when every social institution operates in ways that are not only “congenial to the concerns of politicians” but “supportive of the interlocking institutions whose normal functioning reproduces politicians as a ruling class” (Gouldner, 1976, p. 233). Politicians deploy diverse subtle strategies in order to sustain this key interest. One of the strategies politicians use is that of inducing others to acquiesce, without question, to politicians’ changing needs (Gouldner, 1976). This strategy betrays politicians’ dread of ideological and rational politics. As a class, politicians often seek the exclusion of the custodians of ideological rationality. Politicians do this by labeling them as “unsocialized outsiders who may not play by the rule” (Gouldner, 1976 p. 249). Persons who possess the competence for

ideological rationality are mostly found amongst the intelligentsia. The rule politicians do not want the intelligentsia to violate is Politicians' habit of reeling out promises which the politicians easily "compromise and conceal" as soon as they gain access to power (Webster, 2011, p. 35).

Politicians' discomfort with rational ideological politics has a critical implication on the degree of critical rationality that politicians expect their citizens to possess (Wilensky, 1995). A political system that dreads critical rationality becomes comfortable when majority of the citizens mistakes information babble for rational discourse. When information babble is privileged over rational discourse, people "think and feel alike" and behave in a manner that is "susceptible to fad and fashion" (Wilensky, 1995, p.88). When citizens behave in the manner Wilensky writes about, their attitude to politics and democracy resonate with those of the "new indifferent" (Habermas (2001, pp. 216 & 217). Citizens become like the new indifferent when they are cajoled to believe that none of their actions can influence politics in a way that can bring positive impact to their lives. With such political class-induced dejection, the attitude of the new indifferent to politics resembles those of spectators who merely sit idly when they notice that something has gone wrong with political games that affect their lives (Carew, 1996).

### **The Intelligentsia and Rationality**

Often, some Nigerian intellectuals hold different views from those of the politicians. Intellectuals' different view spawns contention between them and the politicians (Adetayo, 2011). The view a Nigerian intellectual holds about Nigeria is grounded on the orientation of the intellectual holding the view. Like everywhere else, Nigerian intellectuals are classifiable into different categories (Frow, 2005). The most outstanding of the categories are the "unattached" and the "attached corporate intellectuals" (Gouldner, 1976, pp. 182 & 183). In Nigeria, the unattached intellectuals command the smallest number of devotees. The unattached intellectuals are the very cream of the pack among Nigerian intellectuals. Their reputation could be compared to those described by Gouldner as "intellectual entrepreneurs who confronted problems of their own selection and who took initiatives in formulating public policies and social goals to be pursued" (p. 182). According to Gouldner, the unattached intellectual conscientiously gets committed to recommending only what they believe. Nigerian unattached intellectuals reject Nigeria the way it is because they believe that it is "defective" (Gouldner 1976, p. 85). The belief that Nigeria is defective summons such intellectuals to seek a better Nigeria through the exercise of knowledge, reasoning and ideas. Unattached intellectuals vest a supreme trust in the power of thinking and reasoning (Gouldner 1976, p. 67). The weight of trust the unattached intellectuals bestow on reasoning impels them to often invoke the mantra "Cogito ergo sum – I think therefore, I am" (Gouldner 1976, p. 26). Thinking impels unattached intellectuals to see themselves as "foci of power" who have "moral responsibility to change their community in ways defined as rational" (Gouldner, p. 57). According to (Gouldner, p. 28) the self-assigned responsibility to change the world commits unattached intellectuals to the logic of ideas. The logic of ideas reminds the unattached intellectuals that they are the custodians of a precarious, embattled and endangered truth. This reminder summons them to "put forth special effort to safeguard the truth they husband" (Gouldner 1976, p. 46). This mentality helps unattached intellectuals to among others, overcome terror and to endure several costs which their supreme loyalty to rationality throws up (Gouldner, 1976). When unattached intellectuals reject lucrative party positions in order to safeguard their allegiance to rationality, they draw strength from the steadfastness of some of their past role models like Karl Marx and Engel. When those men

were tempted with a lucrative party position, they declined the offer by referring to it as a “barren position inhibitive of freedom of discussion” (Gouldner 1976, p. 100).

### Media Intellectuals and Logical Discourse

Unlike the unattached intellectuals, corporate intellectuals do not consider the rejection of lucrative party jobs as virtuous. For the corporate intellectuals or the “technocrats” (Gouldner, p. 183), offering of one’s skill or talent in exchange for money with its concomitant loss of the prerogative to specify the end to which their skill is put is nothing to blush about. When technocrats sneer at unattached intellectuals for disparaging lucrative political appointments, they draw strength from the belief that “one course of public action is no more valuable than the other” (Gouldner 1976, p. 184).

It might be correct to assert that the quality of information that the media serve to their audience is determined by the convictions that media intellectuals hold on social issues. Where/when media intellectuals cherish unflinching loyalty to critical rationality; they do everything to ensure that their expressed convictions/opinions remain steadfast. But when media intellectuals start expressing views that counter the ones they previously held, such moves provoke comments about the integrity of journalists. Comments about the integrity of media intellectuals on matters of integrity and allegiance to rational democratic discourse do not place them on an enviable light. There are claims that ascribe the “quelling of slavery,” the “Vietnam war” and “easing out of military rule in Nigeria” to journalism (Rosen, 1999, p. 307; Osagie, 2012). Yet, there are damning remarks against the media and the intellectuals who work in the media. One of the most caustic of such remarks is the one made by Hunter S. Thompson. According to him:

I have spent half my life trying to get away from journalism, but I am still mired in it – a low trade and a habit worse than heroin, a strange seedy world full of misfits and drunkards and failures. A group photo of top ten journalists in America on any given day would be a monument to human ugliness. (Beck, Bennett and Well, 2004, p. 320)

In a similar vein, Stuart H. Swartz claims that a typical journalist is perceived as “a cynic, a low-life whose social standing is as low as the alcoholic content of his blood is high” (Kunczik, 1995, p. 40). Perhaps, Ololade’s assessment of Nigerian journalists could be adjudged more acerbic. After regretting that Nigerian journalists hasten the death of reason because of their over-willingness to accept the role of errand boys of the powerful, Ololade went a step further to point out that “Nigerian journalists remain among others, emissaries of distrust, rancor and pitiful pawns in the designs of god-fathers” (Ololade, 2011, p. 23). Despite these damning remarks, the Nigerian mass media often gloat over the things they claim they have accomplished. The Nigerian mass media take credit for ensuring that the Nigerian constitution was not amended to accommodate a third-term ambition of President Obasanjo, (Osagie, E., 2012).

When the media take credit for influencing the Nigerian society positively, there are journalists who receive prominent mention. One of such names is that of Reuben Abati. Before he accepted to serve as a presidential spokesman in the Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, Reuben Abati has been an estimable journalist in Nigeria. Many hold him as brilliant, fearless, rational and eloquent (Ajetunmobi, 2012; Osahenye, 2010). This level of estimation distinguishes him as a foremost media intellectual in Nigeria. By virtue of such distinction, this paper considers him as a “critical case” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.229) for examining how the acceptance of a government appointment by an outspoken journalist help or hinder logical democratic discourse in Nigeria.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sophistry, as held by Socrates is the “readiness to sell one’s virtue/skill for money” (Gouldner 1976, pp. 183 & 184). Sophistry is also decried as “the use of clever argument to make something that is false to appear as true” (Hornby, 2005, p. 1406). The act of selling one’s skill for money and that of using clever argument to make what is a lie to appear as truth are acts that different occupational groups, more so lawyers, display in their line of duty (Olabode, 2012). Since sophistry as held by both Socrates and Hornby are not virtuous acts, the claim that “no one course of public action is more valuable than the other” (Gouldner, p. 184) needs to be problematized. In this paper, I sought data to ascertain whether a prominent journalist’s value to the society is more important when the journalist is raising critical voice outside the government or whether a journalist’s value to the society is better when the journalist joins the government to help the government polish its image.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is designed to tap data from comments made by persons who are knowledgeable about the Nigerian mass media and the role of the media in the evolving democratic trend in Nigeria. At the beginning of the design, it was certain that getting data from such persons was not going to be easy. The first challenge was that of accessing and recruiting such persons. Even when such persons were found, getting them to make comment was difficult. Another challenge was that of minimizing “research-subject reactivity” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, pp. 67 & 109; Smith, 1996, p. 190). Research-subject reactivity is a constant challenge in research. Researchers are often cautious to ensure that comments made by research subjects are not influenced by the awareness that such comments will be tapped as research data (Roulston, 2010, p. 34; Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 236; Madge, 1976, p. 131). The bid to minimize these challenges necessitated looking for a blend of comments. The blend was got from the pages of leading Nigerian newspapers and from comments volunteered by research subjects. The use of newspaper texts are considered advantageous because such texts carry utterances that were made when the utterer was not reckoning that the utterance will be used as data.

### Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Three leading Nigerian newspapers – *The Guardian*, *Punch* and *The Nation* – were “theoretically sampled” (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 167) within a period covering 2008 to 2012. A total of 12 comments were sampled from the selected newspapers. The 12 comments from the selected newspapers targeted the generation of a data pool that agrees with this paper’s theoretical perspectives and explanations. In other words, the sampling procedure was done in order to access comments that were categorized on the basis of their “relevance to the problem, theoretical positions and explanations” given in the paper (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 167).

The 12 sampled comments were categorized into three themes and presented in three tables. The tables were designed to, among others, show the source of the comment, the page of the newspaper a comment was sampled from and the date of the publication of the newspaper. The analytic tool of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2006) was used to read and interpret the sampled texts. The perspective of critical discourse analysis used resonates with the notion that critical discourse analysis is appropriate for describing, interpreting and critiquing social life as reflected in texts (Luke, 1997). Also drawn on in the analysis is the view that critical discourse analysis is useful for revealing discursive sources of power, dominance and inequality (Vandijk, 1988). When researchers use critical discourse analysis for qualitative data analysis, what they do is to “attribute a class of phenomenon to segments of text” (Fielding & Lee, 1998, p. 41).

**Table 1. Contradictions and Legitimation of Rhetoric of Presentation**

<i>S/No.</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Textual Exemplar</i>	<i>Date</i>
1.	<i>The Guardian</i>	President Jonathan's description of PDP as the only truly democratic party is a wakeup call to other parties that thrive on lack of internal democracy and imposition of candidates P.49	11/3/12
2.	<i>The Guardian</i>	PDP is ten; Nigeria is ten years behind... PDP have failed... and are now a party where the end justifies the means and the meanness... who does not know that the PDP is a party of Godfathers, family members, thugs and ballot box snatchers? It is a party of corrupt men and women. P.46	2/11/08
3.	<i>The Nation</i>	.... people in government put in much effort to move Nigeria forward... I have seen a lot of hard work, rigor and commitment in Jonathan's administration P.44	24/2/12
4.	<i>The Guardian</i>	Jonathan is spending valuable time on time-wasting activities... Cleverly, Jonathan is pushing himself ahead. He is playing politics and not working. He is perpetually receiving visitors and junketing all over the place... P.62	6/6/10
5.	<i>The Guardian</i>	Jonathan's style of leadership lacks bicep, most of the things he does indicate he is lacking courage... we have a government that has no focus... it is not dynamic, it is ineffectual... P.55	26/2/12
6.	<i>The Guardian</i>	There's no gainsaying President Jonathan's administration has lost focus... Today Nigerians endure atrocious poverty in midst of plenty... while the minister coordinating the economy has gone into deep sleep and snoring P.55	26/2/12
7.	<i>The Guardian</i>	Jonathan has continued to create the impression that he could turn out to become a national tragedy in terms of political leadership... so far, he has delivered disappointments P. 52	8/7/11

### **Analytic Interpretation**

It is important at the start of this analysis to explain why the seven textual exemplars presented in Table 1 are categorized and presented in a table titled 'Contradictions and Legitimation of Rhetoric of Presentation.' In Nigeria, the media gloat over their positive contribution to the growth of rational democratic discourse (Osagie, 2012). As a result, the critical minority in Nigeria do expect the utterances of prominent media intellectuals to endure and remain logical. They also expect such utterances to resonate with the tenets of *articulation theory* (Slack, 2004, pp. 114 & 115; Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 222). When the utterances of prominent media practitioners resonate with the tenets of articulation theory, such utterances do not only remain logical but "coordinate one reality to another, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality" (Slack, 2004, pp. 114 & 115; Anderson & Ross, 2002, p. 222).

Utterances that are coordinated in the manner described above are free from the contradictions that mar public discourse. Public discourse is marred with contradictions when inconsistencies that are inherent in the discourse of the powerful are glossed over (Fiske, 2004, p. 214; Gripsrud, 2002, pp. 35, 237-8). The textual exemplars in Table 1 are categorized into a table that has 'contradictions' as part of its titled because the analysis below the table pinpoints elements of contradictions in those texts. In addition, the analysis demonstrates how elements of the texts in Table 1, wittingly/unwittingly, attempted to

legitimize the flaw of “rhetoric of presentation” (Mayhew, 1997, pp. 14, 269 & 274). To be sure, rhetorical of presentation is a discourse anomaly which promotes the view that there is nothing wrong in using empty phrases in communication.

In Table 1 above, exemplars 1 and 2 are tainted with contradictions and rhetoric of presentation. The person that uttered the two exemplars is Reuben Abati, the presidential spokesman of the current Jonathan’s administration in Nigeria. Many, including Nigerian journalists, do believe that Reuben Abati is among the best journalists in Nigerian. Abati had a first class honors in his bachelor’s degree. He earned a PhD at the age of 24. He is touted as an intellectual of international repute. Abati has won many awards like those of Cecil King Memorial Prize for Print Journalism, The Diamond Award for Media Excellence for Informed Commentary and many others (Garba, 2011).

Reuben Abati had been the chairman of the editorial board of the prestigious Nigerian *Guardian* newspaper. Against this backdrop, Reuben Abati is a “critical case” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229) for an analysis that seeks to understand not only the character of Nigerian media but more so those of the intellectuals who work in the media. As a critical case, any action or inaction, expression or repression, fallacy or contradiction that is associated with Abati could be adjudged as characteristic of Nigerian media and the intellectuals that work in them. Reuben Abati uttered exemplar 1, Table 1 in a bid to clarify President Jonathan’s claim that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party in Nigeria, is the only party in Nigeria that organizes itself within the precepts of democratic norm. When the entailments and the tenor of exemplar 1 is squared against those of exemplar 2 of the same table, anybody that cherishes the ethos of consistency in human conviction/opinion cannot help but twitch in frustration. To be sure, exemplar 2 was uttered by Abati in 2008 before he became the presidential spokesman. To persons who cherish the virtue of consistency in human conviction, it might be very frustrating to read Reuben Abati, the celebrated champion of rational media discourse in Nigeria, wallowing in the contradictions entailed in exemplars 1 and 2 of Table 1.

If the contradictions of exemplars 1 and 2 are frustrating, the inconsistency of Abati’s view in exemplar 3 vis-à-vis the views entailed in exemplars 4 to 7 of Table 1 could be adjudged an unconscionable endorsement of “rhetoric of presentation” (Mayhew, 1997, pp. 269 & 274). The odds against the claims Abati was pushing in exemplar 3 are too overwhelming. In pushing the bluster entailed in exemplar 3, Abati might have forgotten that he wrote exemplar 4 just two years earlier. The entailments of exemplars 5 to 7 are written by prominent social commentators in Nigeria. As the dates portray, these commentators wrote in different dates and were unaware of one another’s views. Despite this fact, the views they express echoed the same thing that Abati’s exemplar 4 of Table 1 expresses. An argument could be raised that the realities that compelled Abati to write exemplar 4 in June 2010 has since changed. But in the context of the entailments of exemplars 7, 6 and 5, such argument cannot stand. If what compelled Abati to write exemplar 4 in June of 2010 had improved/changed, there is no reason Levi Obijiofor, exemplar 7 Table 1, would echo the same thing more than one year after. The same could be said about the entailment of exemplar 5. The commentator in exemplar 5, Professor Tam David West, was a former Petroleum Minister in Nigeria. David West is well-known for his candidness. More so, he is from the same geo-political zone – South-South – as President Jonathan. In Nigeria, commentators hardly criticize leaders from the same tribe as they. In fact, both President Jonathan and Tam David West, the author of exemplar 5, are of the same Niger Delta tribe of Ijaw. In that light, if David West’s comment on President Jonathan in February 2012 echoes what Abati had said about the President in June of 2010, any attempt to justify Abati’s February 2012 volt-face on the ground that what

prompted Abati's June 2010 comment on Jonathan had changed would be a feeble argument. This same line of reasoning holds true for exemplar 6.

**Table 2. Counter Framing**

S/No.	Source	Textual Exemplar	Date
1.	<i>Punch</i>	... the Jonathan administration has embarked on extensive electoral reform that all Nigerians can be proud of. P.10	14/11/11
2.	<i>The Guardian</i>	...if Jonathan runs for Presidency, all his promises about electoral reform would be considered by all Nigerians as a calculated attempt to ensure the fulfillment of his ambition. P.51	14/5/10

### Analytic Interpretation

The two textual samples in the above table exemplify *counter framing*. Counter framing is a ploy that power elites in the society exploit to present news and other communication contents in a way that serves their ideological interest (Watson, 2003, p. 351, Reese, 2010, p. 20). Furthermore, Sillars & Gronbeck (2001, pp. 144 & 177) explain framing as "the perspective from which text producers subtly cajole readers to understand and evaluate information." When read within its broad context, the entailments of exemplar 1 of Table 2 vis-à-vis the entailments of exemplar 2 of the same table exemplify counter framing in its despicable actualization. Reuben Abati uttered exemplar 1 in a bid to denounce Chinua Achebe's rejection of a national honor offered him by the Jonathan administration. Achebe had declined the offer on the ground that Jonathan's administration has not reformed Nigeria enough to warrant his acceptance of such offer. But what baffles is why Abati chose electoral reform as an achievement that typifies Jonathan's commitment to reform Nigeria. Reuben Abati's choice of flaunting electoral reform flies in the face of his conviction of May 2010 as entailed in exemplar 2 of Table 2.

The entailment of exemplar 2 Table 2, written by Abati in May 2010 was emphatic in stating that should President Jonathan decide to run for presidency in 2011, that such decision would make Jonathan's effort at electoral reform look as a calculated attempt to ensure his victory at the polls. Jonathan did, indeed, ran for presidency in 2011 and won. The concern here is that Abati has used the entailment of exemplar 1 Table 2 to counter-frame his conviction of 2010 as entailed in exemplar 2, Table 2.

**Table 3. Spinning and Context Imposition**

S/No.	Source	Textual Exemplar	Date
1.	<i>The Guardian</i>	Those who run the government does not believe in the country, so they steal as much as they can... journalists do not question why the president has not declared his assets. P.67	21/11/11
2.	<i>The Nation</i>	Corruption comes up all the time, what's government doing to fight corruption? P.44	24/2/12
3.	<i>The Nation</i>	You and I were in this country when people complained about ghost workers... The whole idea of ports reform is to deal with corruption. P. 44	24/2/12
4.	<i>The Guardian</i>	Every journalist looks forward to the big pay day when he or she will be made a commissioner for information or special adviser on media ... and the collapse of journalism profession is a reflection of the Nigerian rut	21/11/11

## Analytic Interpretation

Trends in Nigeria's political discourse are of great concern to many (Onumah, 2011). Nigeria's socio-political conundrum is confusing. The confusion justifies the notion that "citizens who claim to understand all that's happening out there is a joke" (Rosen, 1999, p. 64). Because of this confusing socio-political reality, Nigerians are increasingly ill-informed and are finding it difficult to "make important social and political decision on rational basis" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1999, p. 157). As Nigerians strive to make sense of their socio-political reality, the manifestation of *spins* and *context imposition* such as the one displayed in Table 3 above highlights the confusion that confound public discourse.

To be sure, spin or spin-doctoring is a "discursive manipulation that a commentator accomplishes when they change the frame of a discourse by restating the issue and subject in different terms without abandoning the argument" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 237; Watson, 2003, p. 189). On the other hand, context change/imposition is an anomaly which manifests when "there is diversity between participants in an interaction" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 134). Fairclough observes that because of such diversity, a participant with more power tries to impose their own interpretation of the context on a procedure. A close reading of exemplar 3, Table 3, demonstrates a manifestation of both spin-doctoring and context imposition. It needs to be stated that the interaction routine during which exemplars 2 and 3 were uttered was during an interview session between a journalist and President Jonathan's special adviser on media – Dr. Reuben Abati. During the interview, the hapless journalist had modestly raised a feeble question to make the presidential spokesman comment on the epidemic of corruption in Nigeria.

What enfeebled the interviewer's question was the style of phrasing the question. In wording the interview question, the interviewer would have, in that context, valorized the question with the issue of assets declaration by officials of the government. But despite the tamed manner the question was raised, the presidential spokesman who had earned respect as the most acerbic critic of endemic corruption in Nigeria waffled. As a man who decried official corruption with words like "corruption in Nigeria is like a game of poker being played by mischievous children trying to upstage each other" (Abati, 2010), many Nigerians expected Abati, in the context of exemplar 3 of Table 3, to lash out at endemic corruption in the manner he was known for before he became the presidential spokesman. Abati's drivel cited as exemplar 3 Table 3 fell far short of the candidness that earned him admiration by Nigerians. To assess Abati's lack of candidness after becoming government's spokesman, I approached some Nigerian journalists seeking comments about what they think is responsible for Abati's change of tone after taking government appointment. When I asked the chairman of Rivers State branch of Nigerian Union of Journalists to agree that Abati's contradictory views have tarnish the image of Nigerian journalist/journalism? His response was

No! How about lawyers? Lawyers deny that their client has killed even when everybody knows the truth. Does such claim tarnish the image of lawyers? No; because lawyers are performing their professional duty. What you refer to as contradiction in Abati's utterances is just his professional duty. He is just being loyal to the briefs of his client.

**Source:** Interview on June 12, 2012 with the chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Rivers State.

When I stated that experts in the journalism occupation demand that a journalist's ultimate commitment to loyalty lies with the audience that the journalist serves (Rosen, 1999) the chairman retorted:



Who is an expert? An expert changes his or her views as situations change. I think that's what Abati is doing. For me, he's doing his job. The only thing I can suggest is let him carry Nigerians along by explaining himself

A contrary view to the one above came from a member of the same union who works for the *Sun* newspaper. The view taken by the *Daily Sun* correspondent is

I think he played into their hand by accepting the offer. Government has been losing sleep over his comments. And do you think they were going to arrest him? That will be scandalous in a democracy. Their easiest option was to co-opt him. Having him on their side has now replaced his critical comments with the disingenuous babbles he now pronounces.

Source: Interview with a *Daily Sun* newspaper correspondent June 12, 2012.

## DISCUSSION

Despite being greeted as “democratizing the information need of democracy” the internet is still believed to wield some negative influence on rationality (Webster, 2011, p. 28f). The wiki attribute of the internet tolerates ephemeral convictions as it denigrates expert opinion (Webster, 2011, p.37). This aspect of the internet phenomenon might be the only one in the history of communication revolution (Gouldner, 1976, pp. 93& 94) that connives at ambivalent and contradictory utterances. Corporate intellectuals are aware that the wiki phenomenon encourages constant change in the form and contents of communication. For corporate intellectuals who seek justification for contradictory views, the wiki phenomenon is a good reference point. Not only that, those who denigrate expert opinion (Sunstein, 2006) can also find succor in aspects of the internet that rubbish critical discourse. Take for instance, the excuses some persons have made for Reuben Abati's pro-government views. In comparing his new pro-government views to his hard hitting criticism before joining government, some have defended him by comparing the inconsistencies in his post-appointment opinions to the professional conduct of lawyers and public relations spinners. Some apologists have even derided persons who express shock at Abati's new-found pro-government views as persons who are “jealous of Abati and are yearning to usurp his job” (Olabode, 2011). From some standpoints, the suggestion that those who decry Abati's pro-government views are jealous could be interpreted as a diminution of Abati's reputation. It could be possible that persons who think that criticism of Abati is a ploy by the critics to get into a similar appointment are not aware of Abati's views concerning selfish aspiration. It is on record for instance that Abati had decried the tendency to sacrifice honor on the altar of personal aggrandizement with words like “...the politics of self, of individual interests and clash of personal ambition have negated Nigeria's development...” (Abati, 2010, p. 62). By virtue of declarations like this, Abati has projected himself as a man who is opposed to privileging of personal interest above that of majority. Friends who defend Abati with words that suggest that he connives at selfishness are wittingly/unwittingly casting a shadow of doubt on the values that Abati cherished before he accepted government appointment.

It will be a shame if it turns out that Abati is the person encouraging statements that unwittingly portray him as a person who sacrifices collective interest for selfish one. If he is, such encouragement would draw lamentation from his rational circle of admirers. Such admirers expect that his acceptance of government appointment would offer him a new platform to demonstrate that, even at the corridors of power, principled people still remain steadfast to rationality and logical convictions. Abati is an intellectual that many ascribe distinction to (Garba, 2011). If Abati must retain that distinction, he needs to devise a method of blending his pro-government views with critical rationality. Anything short of that would

amount to a lamentable vindication of the belief that “journalists are factotums” (Altschul, 1997, p. 261) or that journalists are “too selfish” (Ololade, 2010, P. 23) or that they belong to a “pariah caste with low ethical representativeness as a result of alienated consciousness” (Kunczik, 1995, pp. 37 & 41). Abati needs to consider his present assignment as a summons to refute or justify these uncomplimentary notions about journalists/journalism. If he chooses to continue with the way he has been trudging on so far, such choice might compel many to join the ranks of those who see journalists and their convictions/opinions as inconsequential drivel that errand boys emit when they are hungry for attention.

## CONCLUSION

Interpretation of studied textual exemplars in this paper points to the inimical influence of political appointments on rational democratic discourse in Nigeria. Comments from the field interview also complement the interpreted textual data in pointing at political appointments as a subtle means of smothering vocal intellectuals who work in the media. The data in this paper include comments that greeted contradictory utterances by media intellectuals as brilliant professional conduct. After synthesizing these diverse views, a recommendation emerged. The recommendation is informed by the fact that holding a pro-government view by erstwhile critical media intellectual is taking the easy way out. Such easy way is predictable and bereft of creativity. In order to infuse creativity in discharging the function of government spokesperson, this paper suggests that reputable media intellectuals like Reuben Abati need to strive beyond the mere parroting of what the politicians who appointed them want to hear. Rather than that, they should seek to blend their pre-appointment views with their obligation of saying what pleases their new political masters. For this paper, such blending-effort is the way to retain the respect of the rationally-minded minority in Nigeria. It would also distance journalist from the irrational claim that “one course of public action is no more valuable than the other” (Gouldner, 1976, p. 184).

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