PHOTOGRAPHY, FACEBOOK AND VIRTUALISATION OF RESISTANCE IN NIGERIA

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DECLARATION

I declare that *Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria* is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

George Emeka Agbo   11 November 2016

Signed...............................

ABSTRACT

Nigerian post-independence history (1960 to the present date) is steeped in socio-political upheavals. The majority of the citizens are frustrated with the injustice, inequality and fraudulent politics that pervade the country. The central argument of this thesis is that these conditions are critiqued through the photographic practices produced on Facebook. Through the circulation of photographs and the conversations around them on the social media platform, Nigerians demand social change. The sociality that underpins the visuality of social networking is explained by Ariella Azoulay's notion of "civil discourse," which theoretically organises the thrust of this thesis. The formulation suggests that the photograph is an outcome of the interaction among many individuals. It is a site of exchange, a process which I have argued to be reinforced by digital and internet technology. For five years, I have followed the visual social production on Facebook in the context of virtual participant observation, downloading photographs and the comments that go with them. A number of the photographs and the accompanying comments are analysed with semiotic tools to understand the key concerns of Nigerians. To explain how the agitation is presented, and the efforts invested in the production, I have reflected on the related questions of technological mediations and appropriations. A network of digital infrastructure conditions the creation and editing of the photographs and their dissemination and meaning-making processes on Facebook. Again, the Nigerian example demonstrates how state failure fuels activism, insurgency and counter-insurgency, all of which are actuated by digital photographic production. In this situation, the photographic image is burdened with the task to produce violence and to counter it. What ultimately emerges are complex relations among people, photography and technology. I conclude that the virtual movement presents possibilities for socio-political transformation in Nigeria. From the perspective of photography, this thesis contributes to the debates in social media activism and how it is shaping politics in Africa. It demonstrates the possibility of reading the tensions in an African postcolony through the connected digital, visual and social practices of the ordinary people. We are prompted to acknowledge the influence of digital infrastructure in the political use of the image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

While most of the photographs examined in this thesis came from Facebook, some were taken from other online platforms (blogs and news media website), and a few from print newspapers and magazines. The majority of the filmic documents whose screen shots are analysed are Facebook and Youtube videos.

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Action Group
APC	All Progressives Congress
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
DAA	Domestic Abuse Awareness
ECONET	Enhanced Communication Networks
FIWON	Federation of Informal Workers' Organisations of Nigeria
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Corps
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Glo	Global Communications Limited
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communication
GUI	Graphical User Interface
HTTP	Hyper Text Transfer Protocol
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
INEC	Independent Electoral Commission
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISP	Internet Service Providers
JAF	Joint Action Front
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
NAFDAC	National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control
NBA	Nigerian Bar Association
NCC	Nigerian Communications Commission
NCJSP	National Coalition for Jonathan and Sambo Presidency
NIPOST	Nigerian Postal Services
NIS	Nigerian Immigration Services
NITEL	Nigerian Telecommunications Limited
NLC	Nigerian Labour Congress
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps

PDP	People's Democratic Party
POMEC	Patrick Ogugua Memorial Centre
PTF	Petroleum Trust Fund
SNG	Save Nigeria Group
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UCC	Ugandan Communication Commission
UI	User Interface
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNN	University of Nigeria, Nsukka
URL	Universal Resource Locator
Wifi	Wireless Fidelity
WWW	World Wide Web

Introduction

Background

Contemplating *Consequences* – the title of a contemporary art exhibition in which I was to participate in Lagos in October 2012 – I became obsessed with the conditions of my practice as an artist working in Nigeria. My work which is located within the disciplinary convergence of photography and computer-aided graphics is impeded by the dearth of basic infrastructure, including electricity. I shared my predicament on Facebook. The response was enormous: a pool of photographic images corroborating critical comments in which many users linked Nigeria's infrastructural failure to failed governance. Some other concerns – corruption, mediocrity, unemployment, poverty and insecurity – were expressed through the medium. The pictorial and typographical texts were appropriated as visual resources for the production of the artwork I showed in the exhibition.

That experience whetted my appetite to investigate the complexities of the emergent practice of civil resistance in Nigeria. There is a growing intellectual interest in new media and how it shapes public opinions through the sharing of information among the people it brings together. The individuals "can challenge authority, such as that of the government … and (contribute) to changing … political practices, and (offer) new ideas for reaching people and facilitating political discourse."[1] Here I am interested in how these possibilities get produced through photography and visual technologies. This work is a historical inquiry that deploys an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the activist use of photography on Facebook.

Through the practice, Nigerians document the turns in the country's contemporary life. They bring their knowledge of the historical evolution of the country as a

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[1] Jarice Hanson, *24/7: How Cell Phones and the Internet Change the Way We Live, Work, and Play* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 66.

postcolony to bear on the process. While paying attention to that historical dimension, this study explores the modalities of cyber-visual culture. These include the driving technology, the pictorial framing of public agitations and the possibilities of socio-political transformation these hold. In an age when politics and digital culture are intertwined, the research brings the Nigerian experience into the debates around the new global culture of civil engagement produced on social media. In so doing, it furnishes an important new perspective on photography as a political tool. Further, we encounter a new mode of producing the history of a postcolony – a process that involves public visual practices mediated by digital technology.

The decision to anchor this investigation in Nigerian society was informed by two factors. First, I am fascinated with the vibrant online network formed by the citizens in the face of limited infrastructure. Digital resources, internet access and electricity are some of the facilities that are crucial to social media culture, but which are insufficient in Nigeria. It is amazing how these odds are managed. Secondly, despite the social construction of Nigerians as "resilient" people, the ordinary citizens show strong resistance to state authorities in their demand for accountability. In this work, the term "resistance" is used interchangeably with activism, protest, civil struggle and social movement. But it also does more. It connotes various forms of relation to power: confrontational and subtle, localised and broad, explicit and surreptitious. Again, it is not only about rebelling against power, but about what the rebellion tells us about power.[2] Accordingly, the use of the word allows for unrestricted political reading of images and their accompanying semiotic codes to understand the Nigerian condition.

The problem

There is a growing research interest in how social networking re-enforces public demand for accountability in governance. Photography, however, has not been

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[2] Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990).

significantly engaged in this regard. This research examines the photographs[3] circulated on Facebook in relation to socio-political tensions in Nigeria, to explore their underlying context of civil resistance. This enables a broader understanding of how new media has reconfigured social movement and the political use of photography, bringing the two together in intriguing ways. It adds to the literature on online activism, which has mostly concentrated on the following broad areas. First, the digital and cyber infrastructure of information dissemination is argued to be the driving force of the practice. It redefines the formation of political views and the communication between leaders and their subjects. It democratises access to information and facilitates civil movements through interpersonal networking.[4] Second, the virtual culture has been examined in terms of its offline materialisation. Manuel Castells uses the theoretical notion of "space of flows"[5] to explain how the interaction among people is reconfigured in the "information age." One of the implications of the idea is that social media mobilisation ultimately prompts the gathering of individuals in actual spaces for mass protest. Other researchers have focused on the logic of counter-resistance by the political organisations that have been challenged. They crack down on protesters, shut down online platforms or use the same to fight back.[6] Still, there are studies that argue for the transformative power of social media regardless of the resistance against it.

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[3] The sense in which the term, "photograph" is used in this work is explained in the section, "the photograph."

[4] Much scholarly work has been done on the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on civil activism. See for example Wim van de Donk *et al*, "Introduction: Social movements and ICTs," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movement*, eds. Wim van de Donk *et al*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1. Using case study approach, the edited volume evaluates "the implications of the use of ICTs (such as the internet) for citizen mobilization and the formation, activities, legitimacy and effectiveness of…social movements." See also Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler, *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York, "Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements," *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012); Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism," *Polity* 31, no. 1 (1998); W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012).

[5] Manual Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movement in the Internet Age* (UK and USA: Polity Press, 2012), 56.

[6] See Sarah Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights," *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2012); Ahmad Shehabat, "The Social Media

In these intellectual engagements, photography has not been well explored. As is the case with Bonilla and Rosa's essay on the #Ferguson protest enacted online and offline in 2014, the photographic image could be read closely by scholars, but is not central to the problematisation of the social movement in which it is situated.[7] The pictoral image is so crucial to protest, especially on social media, that it deserves to be more thoroughly examined as a mode of scholarly enquiry. This study brings the photographic image to the centre of virtual protest (on Facebook) using the Nigerian example. It analyses how Nigerians visually frame their obsessions. The dissemination of the images is guided by the notion that "there are knowledges attached to seeing,"[8] and that important political decisions are made through the directing of people's eyes to injustice.[9] The production, distribution, meanings and effects of the images are analysed to bring out how they are conditioned by digital technology, and the promise of socio-political change they offer.

Objectives

In a general sense, the goal of this study is to examine how the circulation of images on Facebook constitutes an alternative mode of civil resistance in Nigeria. The specific objectives include first, to trace the history of photography in the country along the grain of civil struggle. It is an attempt to construct a different history from the dominant narrative of photography as a branch of art on the one hand and of the print media on the other. Granted, the research is centrally on the visual practices supported by a recent phenomenon – the new media. Through their contents and meanings constructed online, the images connect current national issues to the period spanning the second half of the 20th century. Given that

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Cyber-war: The Unfolding Events in the Syrian Revolution 2011," *Global Media Journal* (2013); Albrecht Hofheinz, "Netopia? Beyond Revolution 2.0[1]," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011).

[7] The #Ferguson protest was prompted by the shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri, USA, an act broadly understood in relation to racism. See Yarima Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital Proptest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial politics of Social Media in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015).

[8] Patricia Hayes, "Santu Mofokeng, Photographs: 'The Violence Is in the Knowing,'" *History and Theory* 48 (2009): 37.

[9] Wim Wenders, *The Act of Seeing: Texte und Gespräche* (Frankfurt: Verlag der Autoren, 1992).

connection, it is appropriate to evaluate the political attributes of the photographic practices that predated the digital age. Ultimately, it becomes feasible to establish that since the end of colonial rule in Nigeria in 1960, photography has remained entwined with civil resistance. Analogue practices that filtered through professional, institutional, and commercial paradigms initiated an activist tradition that got transformed and democratised by the internet.

Besides historical reading, the research examines the concerns of the online activists[10] as they are framed in "placards" held up in virtual spaces in the form of electronic images. The current wave of protest across the world is generally perceived to be prompted by related demands, especially for more responsible government and socio-economic change. Yet, the activist organisations can better be understood in terms of how they are localised, and the grievances peculiar to individual societies. Social media images are analysed in this project with the intention to understand the anxieties that are specific to Nigeria. In other words, the patterns of socio-economic and political concern of Nigerians are examined. Through the contents of the images and their accompanying comments, we understand the demands of the protesters.

Furthermore, the underlying technological relations of the civil movement are evaluated by scrutinising the dynamics of production and circulation of the images. There is ever-increasing access to image-making devices – cameras, cell phones, tablets, computers – and image-editing applications that have made photography accessible to the public. On the other hand, Facebook supports multiple and complex ways of disseminating the images. As these infrastructural facilities operate with the logic of user-friendliness, the acts of taking, working and sharing photographs constitute a mass practice. The technological mediations that govern the online struggle are explained in terms of how they enable images to produce meanings and create desired visual representations. The dynamics of display and

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[10] The online activists or protesters are the internet-connected individuals who are disturbed by the injustice in Nigeria and remonstrate it on the cyber platforms. They may not be physically in touch with one another, but depending on proximity, they at times organise themselves in groups offline to enact protests in actuality.

circulation on Facebook are also analysed to understand the effects created by the virtuality and interconnectivities of the internet.

Lastly, cyber activism in the Nigerian context is appraised in terms of its potentiality for socio-political and economic transformation. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions (2010-2011) largely organised online led to the overthrow of the holders of the highest political positions in both countries. As a result, the events are usually cited as examples of how social media activism is transforming Africa. One of the objectives set out at the beginning of this research is to make a case for a "Nigerian revolution" as experienced not in an explosive sense but in a variety of other intriguing ways. Also explored is the sense in which the image gets implicated in the virtual practice. All at once, photographs are put to uses that oppose each other: it is deployed to fight the same calamity it is used to create.

The photograph

It is crucial to explain how the term "photograph" is used in this study. To set in place certain histories of photography, the literature review section adheres to the stable notion of photography (in opposition to film) as the production of still images with the use of the camera. But in the rest of this work, "photograph" is used to also refer to two other kinds of images that overlap each other– video still and screenshot. These visual forms are not produced through the conventional mode of aiming the camera lens at an object in actual space and clicking the shutter button. Yet, in digital culture, they are photographs at other technical levels and in the way they are used.

Historically and technically, cinema emerged from photography following late 19th century experiments to create the illusion of motion with still images. So film is fundamentally a sequence of photographs. Some of the images I retrieved for analysis from Facebook are frames grabbed from videos of important events originally circulated on other media such as television. In a similar mode, I read a number of videos I found relevant as still photographs by grabbing the frames that would allow me access into the narratives of the videos.

The other kind of image that I have worked with – screenshot – is also a photograph in technical terms. It is taken through actual shooting of the screen of the device by itself. Facebook pages are replete with screenshots of web contents such as tweets and other Facebook posts which may be composed of typographical or pictorial signs, or both. Video still and screenshot are taken through the same process of grabbing what is displayed on the screen of the digital device such as the computer and smart phone. But while video still is the photograph of another experienced in motion, I use screenshot to refer to anything other than a playing video photographed by the device on which it is displayed. What I read as photographs in this work – *video stills*, *screenshots* and *conventional photographs* – were selected becaue they possess semiotic codes that offer an understanding of the Nigerian condition that I analyse.

Meanwhile, I cannot end the discussion of my notion of "photograph" without a note on first, the importance of captions in setting the thematic focus of the images, and second, the fact that most of the photographs are portraits. The assertion that photographs make sense through "textual contextualization and references to other pictures"[11] is particularly pertinent to images that circulate on social media. By "caption," I mean the "note" with which the photograph is posted on Facebook before other users begin to make their comments. Given that it is not suitable to have a long paragraph or a whole passage as the caption of an image, I take the first line as caption in the instance of a long accompanying note. The caption comes in form of rhetorical question, sarcasm, or what I refer to as "plain descriptive statement" that directly reflects the event depicted in the image. While plain descriptions usually accompany images with self-evident depiction of particular social problems, interrogative and sarcastic captions serve to thematically recontextualise photographs to draw attention to issues which may not be originally related to the image.

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[11] Lasse Heerten, "'A' as in Auschwitz, 'B' as in Biafra: The Nigerian Civil War, Visual Narratives of Genocide, and the Fragmented Universalization of the Holocaust," in *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, ed. Fehrenbach Heide and Davide Rodogno (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 252.

Caption is therefore capable of transmitting political critique in the photographic practices produced on Facebook. Raoul Birnbaum writes that "inscriptions provide a further element of power that is added onto the photographic image."[12] Birnbaun makes this assertion in an attempt to bring a Chinese photographic tradition into the reading of portrait photography in Africa. So, strong statement is made through the depiction of the face and the inscription on the image. This holds true for the visual production on Facebook, where most of the images I have analysed in this thesis are incidentally portraits of people. Nigeria has a long-standing tradition of studio portrait photography through which we encounter the politics of self-presentation and identity construction. But in the more public context – from the analogue print media photography to citizen photography in a soial media era – portraits produce political effects. Portraits of political elites are captioned and circulated in ways that enable political critique of the Nigerian postcolonial condition.

Review of Literature

There is a wide range of scholarly work on the key issues with which this research engages: photography, digital imaging, social media activism, and socio-political issues in Nigeria. This categorisation accordingly defines how the examination of the relevant literature is structured.

I begin with photography and my discussion here is guided by the question of how Nigerians see photographs in the context of their postcolonial situation. I first emphasise how the medium has been situated within truth-telling and evidentiary paradigms. Those regarded as the inventors of photography in the 19th century worked within these and other frameworks that would influence the use of the medium in different societies and periods. Louis Daguerre of France and Henry Fox Talbot of England undertook independent experiments that culminated in two different photographic processes announced publicly in 1839. Daguerre's was

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[12] Raoul Birnbaum, "Foreword," in *Portraiture and Photography in Africa*, ed. John Peffer and Elisabeth L. Cameron (Bloomington and Indianapolis Indiana University Press, 2013).

named "daguerreotype,"[13] and Talbot's, "calotype" or "photogenic drawing."[14] Each technique sought to establish photography as the objective picturing of the world by nature itself. Talbot's understanding in particular had implications for the way photography would later be placed within the discourses of evidence. The note he made on his photograph of ceramic wares published in *The Pencil of Nature* is that should the wares be lost to theft, the photograph if presented in the court would be used as evidence against the thief. The Nigerian activists who post photographs on Facebook work with the consciousness of the evidentiary understanding of photography. But they construct the "evidence" through different forms of technological mediation of the image.

Meanwhile, the truth-telling and evidentiary frameworks were not the only way photography was seen. Exploring the technological dimension of the medium, Felix Nadar who worked between 1853 and 1910 voiced a certain ambivalence through his argument that the camera is magical and the image potentially "homicidal".[15] Nadar's concern underlines the questions, disagreements and ambiguities presented by photography in its early days and which persists to the present date. For instance, in relation to the Boko Haram insurgency examined in chapter 5 of this work, there is a profound instability of the photograph. The militants, the Nigerian army, the media and the networked individuals are all simultaneously image brokers pursuing different agendas but deploying evidentiary discourses, resulting in what I call "dilemma of the image."

While Nadar was ambivalent, Walter Benjamin whose scholarly work appeared in the 1920s and 1930s was concerned with the dangers of reproduction offered by the technologies of his time including photography. Mechanical reproduction undermined the "aura" of the image. But more importantly, it had ominous political implications for photography as the German fascists who controlled the means of visual production and representation used the medium to pursue their

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[13] Louis Daguerre, "Daguerrotype," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Heaven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 13. Daguerre worked in collaboration with Nicéphore Niépce until his (Niépce's) death in 1833.
[14] Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, 1844), 9.
[15] Felix Nadar, Gaspard Felix Tournachon and Thomas Repensek, "My Life as a Photographer," *October* 5 (1978).

egotistic agenda.[16] But we are now in a different age where the masses are deeply involved in making images, re-working them and constructing their meanings. So, unlike the German audiences of Benjamin's time where the masses were theorised as consumers or targets of fascist propaganda, the Nigerian Facebook users are themselves mass producers in a new era of visual literacy. They have access to image production and circulation devices and platforms that have transformed photography into an even more significant aspect of "mass culture" with strong political effects.

In the rest of the 20th century, much critical writing on photography has emerged. Roland Barthes is one of the most often cited. He offers to photography theory the concepts, *punctum*, the "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me, and the *studium*, which is culturally informed.[17] I do not deploy these concepts because they are not pertinent to the interpersonal relations of the photographic image which is my concern in this thesis. I find Susan Sontag more useful. The practices of image editing associated with Facebook activism constitutes a particular way to understand her argument about photography's capacity to create new realities. Again, in *On Photography*, Sontag argues that the medium is empowering, allowing "people to take possession of space" and to dominate others.[18] It is thus a particular kind of "weapon" where the camera and the gun share operational attributes and the capability of domination.[19] Sontag in a sense talks about the power that filters through the control of the means of visual reproduction and representation. The analogue framework within which Sontag worked has been largely replaced by digital photography where visual practices have become a mass affordance. Everything from the production of the image to its reconstruction and circulation can be undertaken by the common people. This enables ordinary Nigerians to rock the fraudulent political sphere in which they live.

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16 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illustrations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schochen Books, 1969), 221.

17 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 26-27.

18 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 177.

19 Ibid.

There are other bodies of work that have been indirectly useful to this study, exploring a variety of questions about ethnographic relations and the construction of colonial knowledge. Christopher Pinney and Elizabeth Edwards examine the medium as a means of knowing which turns its subject into an object of gaze. To defend that position, each of them juxtaposes photography with anthropology in certain ways. Pinney argues that the two disciplines have "parallel histories." They emerged in the 19th century as an outcome of the Western curiosity for observation, drawing "their representational power through nearly identical semiotic procedures."[20] In fact, photography came to be absorbed into anthropological method of fieldwork. This is demonstrated in *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic Perspectives* edited by Richard Vokes. Examples of fieldwork in parts of Africa are used to examine the relational dimension of photography that allows the ethnographer not only to observe but to participate.[21] Thus, Elizabeth Edwards argues that photographs are ethnographic objects which through museum and archival practices shape how histories are interpreted and how peoples are perceived.[22] It is within the framework of ethnographic gaze and domination that photography's relation to colonialism is understood. We are prompted to ask what happens to these questions if we take them out of the analogue domain and pose them in relation to the digital. Social media activism is a cultural production into which ethnographic method allows us to gain critical insight. This approach as demonstrated in this study is called "virtual ethnography" or "netnography" and involves observing while participating in the online interaction around photographs on Facebook. The difference between earlier ethnography and the kind I have undertaken is located in the relation with power. While the former is employed for domination (in the colonial context for instance), the latter is about challenging the dominant power that became established after colonialism in Nigeria.

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[20] Christopher Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography," in *Anthropology and Photography*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992), 74.

[21] Richard Vokes, ed., *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012).

[22] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001).

The colonial question constitutes one of the earliest important perspectives in the debates around photography in Africa. This has been extensively explored by a number of scholars whose work is based on the Southern African colonial experience. For instance, drawing on the Namibian example, *The Colonising Camera* edited by Jeremy Silvester, Patricia Hayes, and Wolfram Hartmann examines how photography served the colonial project in different capacities. With its performative elements, photography was at the heart of the ethnographic investigations through which the coloniser came to know the colonies, to be able to dominate them.[23] It is in this context of domination that Paul Landau argues that as "photography became a concrete tool of empire," images drove colonial administrations.[24] Drawing on Sontag, Landau also has a useful formulation about the camera and the gun, which becomes relevant in this study in relation to the tactics of Boko Haram. The image for the insurgents assumes significance as a means of and in fact perpetrator of violence.

Elsewhere, Hayes as well as other scholars has explored portraiture and documentary photography in relation to the African colonial encounter, anticolonial movements, and other issues in the postcolonies. In relation to anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, Hayes draws attention to how one can view documentary and photojournalism outside the stable, realist notion of exposing brutality. She writes about Santu Mofokeng whose documentary photographic work in the 1980s did not conform to the dominant tradition of showing apartheid violence by activist photographers. Insisting that "the violence is in the knowing, not in the seeing,"[25] he pursued the mundane, the spiritual, and to use his words, "shadows" – "something that refuses to be photographed."[26] The way this literature engages questions of violence is suggestive for postcolonial political violence.

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[23] Jeremy Silvester, Patricia Hayes and Wolfram Hartmann, eds., *The Colonising Camera* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998).

[24] Paul S. Landau, "Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin (California: University of California Press, Ltd., 2002), 142.

[25] Patricia Hayes, "Santu Mofokeng, Photographs: 'The Violence Is in the Knowing,'" *History and Theory* 48 (2009): 34.

[26] Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album," in *Anthropology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, ed. Revue Noire (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1999), 74.

Some of the injustices challenged by photographers in colonial times are still pertinent after independence, except that the perpetrators are constituted differently. Besides, the colonial powers controlled the means of photographic representation in their time while the Nigerian post-independent leadership has no control over the digital visual regime that challenges its legitimacy.

Portraiture which comes up in unexpected ways in my reading of protest photography in Nigeria is particularly crucial to the history of photography in Africa. In much of the writing on particularly West and East Africa, portraiture serves the purposes of self-presentation, harming and healing, social belonging, and much more. Both Corinne Kratz and Heike Behrend deployed ethnographic methods to conduct research in East Africa. About studio photography, Behrend writes that studio backdrop painting allowed Likoni photographers in Kenya in the 1990s to produce an imagined space for their customers to inhabit "a world from which in actuality they are excluded."[27] On the other hand, Kratz is concerned with the stereotype against Okiek people in Kenya by their fellow Kenyans. The Okiek are portrayed as poor, uncivilised people who share a habitat and physical attributes with beasts. Kratz undertook prolonged ethnographic photographic research that allowed her to use portrait exhibitions and scholarly writings to challenge the Okiek stereotype.[28] She also developed a model of how audiences relate to the photographic image. There are two ends to the audiencing, each associated with responses that are directly opposite to those of the other. On the one side, we have objectification, othering, alienation, and disconnect. On the other, we have identification, affiliation, and connection.[29] That model formulated within the analogue framework is still pertinent but has also shifted with the digital turn. The distance between the photographer and the photographed and between the image and the audience has to some extent been bridged. Nigerians now have

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[27] Heike Behrend, "Imagined Journeys: The Likoni Ferry Photographers of Mombasa, Kenya," in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[28] Corinne Kratz, "Okiek Portraits: Representation, Mediation, and Interpretation in a Photographic Exhibition," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 36, no 141/142 (1996).

[29] Corinne Kratz, *The Ones that Are Wanted* (California: University of California Press, 2002).

access to technologies of visual production and distribution. They have a stake in the use and construction of the meaning of the image on the digital platforms.

To return to the analogue discourse, this time in the West African context, the literature on photography is among other things about illusory presentation of the self. It is associated with socio-cultural identity, social status, solidarity and friendship. In the 1970s, Stephen Sprague used Ila-Orangun town as an example to explicate local aesthetics of photographic self-presentation among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria. He brought to the fore the ways in which the visual medium shaped and was shaped by Yoruba political and cultural experience. The Yoruba used the medium to construct their identity and how they wanted to be perceived. On the reverse side, the cultural sensibilities impacted on the conventions of posing, camera angle and symbolic signification that became integrated into the frame.[30]

Liam Buckley's study of studio photography in Gambia reveals something of inserting the self into an imagined world as explored by Behrend. But in Gambia, the utopia is created not only with painted backdrops but with accessories – imported props "associated with fashionable living."[31] In this way, there is a fashioning of the photographic subject into a person far removed from the "real person." In Hudita Mustafa's work on Senegal, women produce themselves as affluent and prestigious by taking photographs in expensive dresses.[32] In Lagos, Nigeria, as studied by Okechukwu Nwafor, dressing in uniform (*aso ebi*) during social functions serves as a means of solidarity and belonging that enters the circuit of photographic production.[33] Nwafor's work further brings the question of the digital into the discourse of representation in Nigeria and in ways that show how the ideas explored by Sprague, Buckley and Mustafa have changed. In fact,

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[30] Stephen F. Sprague, Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves, *African Arts* 12, no.1 (1978).

[31] Liam Buckley, "Self and Accessory in Gambian Studio Photography," *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 2 (2000): 71.

[32] Hudita Nura Mustafa, "Portraits of Modernity: Fashioning selves in Dakarois Popular Photography," in *Images and Empire: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[33] Okechukwu Charles Nwafor, "Photography and the Spectacle of *Asọ Ebì* in Lagos, 1960-2010" (PhD diss., University of the Western Cape, 2011).

Nwafor is the one whose work has brought me to the research I am doing on digital photography, though my own focus is on the political possibilities produced by that visual digital culture.

To explore the political question, I have worked with some of the above photography theories. But I have drawn more extensively on the work of Ariella Azoulay, WJT Mitchell, Allen Feldman, Allan Sekula, John Tagg, Martin Hand, and new work on digital photography edited by Martin Lister, and by Jonas Larsen and Mette Sandbye.

Creation, circulation, and interpretation of photographs on Facebook constitute a visual practice through which ordinary Nigerian citizens seek to transform the socio-political conditions of the country. This argument finds theoretical grounding in Azoulay's work on civil discourse. Although her approach has been criticised as somewhat antagonistic and long-winded, she has helped to break the divide between aesthetics and politics. Situating photography at the core of the analysis of political upheavals, she draws attention to how the visual practice brings people together in the quest for a better world. In the *Civil Contract of Photography*, she develops the idea of "citizenship of photography" to explain how the visual medium constitutes a citizenry that exists outside the sovereign state.[34] The citizens in this sense may be spatially distanced from one another, but they are brought together to interact on account of the photograph.

The interaction which Azoulay refers to as the "event of photography" results in the construction of the meaning of the image with the involvement of the photographer, the photographed and the viewer.[35] Azoulay's work does not however extend to the digital domain which has reshaped the eventness she theorises. The contribution of my study is therefore to bring the digital into some of her arguments. The digital photograph posted on Facebook becomes a site of

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[34] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books: New York, 2008).

[35] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso 2012). Azoulay offers us two ways to understand photography as an event: "the event of photography" and "the photographed event." The event of photography is the infinite series of encounters that ensue in relation to the image, or the camera (with the mere knowledge or suspicion of its presence, arrival or use). The photographed event is the aspect of the encounter that is caught in the frame.

interaction through commenting, sharing, tagging, and liking, by users of the platform. A large citizenry of photography has emerged on account of the socio-political situations in Nigeria as people from across the world respond in various ways to the country's crisis potrayed through the photographic practices on Facebook. The responses constitute a civil struggle to change the Nigerian condition.

But the political use of photography in Nigeria did not start with the digital turn. I have engaged in political reading of Nigeria's analogue-era art photography, photojournalism and social documentary – the genres with the most outstanding public face in the country. The print media portraits of the Nigerian military heads of state especially Sani Abacha and Ibrahim Babangida in the 1980s and 1990s present the opportunity for a certain way of reading Sekula's engagement with portraiture. Sekula identifies two forms of representation that photographic portraiture allowed in the 19th century. One is "honorific," as in the case of portraying "the bourgeois *self*." The other is "repressive," connected to instrumental applications such as in legal practice and police work with the criminal body as the object of state photographic scrutiny. Even at the height of military dictatorship in Nigeria, the print media represented the heads of state not in an honorific but in a repressive sense as dictators and corrupt officials. In that way, the citizens imaged the representatives of state power as icons of state crime, thus inverting the order of representation in Sekula's formulation.

In the new media age, there are new forms of inversion associated with photographic representation and political violence in a democratic Nigeria. One of them is the inversion of Feldman's idea of close proximity of being seen to being killed, a formulation that emerged from his study of the Northern Ireland conflicts (1960s-1980s). The instrumentality and operationalisation of vision for violent purposes which Allan Sekula has also theorised with his notion of "the instrumental image" created a fear of the camera among the populace in Northern

Ireland.[36] In the case of the deadliest example of violence in Nigeria's recent history – the Boko Haram insurgency – the militants want to be seen. Rather than being killed by their photographic visibility, it allows them to terrorise the viewers and declare the coming of destruction, a declaration that hardly fails. Feldman later offers us another perspective of vision and violence, one that involves politics of the image. In the *Archive of the Insensible*, he reads selected archives and specific events to engage with state concealment, normalisation, and justification of violence. These among other things happen through the constitution of assemblies where memory is manipulated to foist certain narratives of democratic sensibilities while ignoring the violent histories that informed the gatherings in the first place.[37] The fight against Boko Haram is predicated upon the narrative of crushing a rebel group that threatens the Nigerian sovereignty. But the state fails to acknowledge its complicity in the mayhem (chapter 5 discusses this in detail).

Although the foregoing theories are useful to me, none of them deals directly with the digital – the domain in which my work is located. This need is addressed by Mitchell, Hand, and a few other scholars who have written on digital photography. In 2015, Mitchell published *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* which allows him to recapitulate the thrust of his work over the decade. And that is, the call to scritinise the image, its production and use in contemporary life, in a way that collapses the divide between the human and natural sciences. [38] *Cloning Terror* for instance reads into the politics of digital imaging that

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36 Allen Feldman, "Vision and Violence: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997); Allan Sekula, *Photography against the Grain* (Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984).

37 Allen Feldman, *Archive of the Insensible: Of War: Photopolitics and Dead Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

38 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015). The four key elements of the "image science" formulation are "the pictorial turn," the "image/picture" distinction, "metapictures," and "biopictures." Pictorial turn refers to the emergence of the image "as a topic of special urgency in our time, not just in politics and mass culture…but also in the most general reflections on human psychology and social behaviour, as well as in the structure of knowledge itself." For Mictchell, the difference between image and picture is that while "an image is what appears in a picture," "the picture is a material object." As noted earlier, I use the terms interchagably in my work, not in Mitchell's sense. "In a metapicture, "an image in one medium…enframes an image in another." Lastly, biopictures are images that are digitally given the attributes of living organism as exemplified by animations. (see pages 13- 21).

accompanied the War on Terror during the George Bush administration in USA. In the 2010s, the ethical questions around cloning as a biological scientific enterprise was at its height in USA when War on Terror was launched. Mitchell analyses the two as involving digital image creation, mirroring, mutation, multiplication and destruction.[39] Thus, the formulation "cloning terror" is about war to which image production and circulation are central. The same can be said of the Boko Haram insurgency. It is a war, not only of shooting and bombing, but of images where the militancy and the counter efforts are produced in pictorial terms and circulated especially on social media platforms.

In the volume, *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* edited by Martin Lister in 2013, the idea of online image circulation is examined along with a range of other concepts. In the introductory essay, Lister engages with the notion of "network," emphasising how "we…routinely affix 'networked' to 'digital image.'"[40] He is talking about the complex form of sociality performed in various ways and enabled by different elements of digital infrastructure. One such element is the JPEG (the Joint Photographic Experts Group), a file format with a high possibility of image compression. In "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," Daniel Palmer reads JPEG as the structure of the image that allows it into the circuit of networked people and devices, and offers a democratised viewing experience. It is built into camera devices, computers and operating systems, image-viewing and editing applications, online image-sharing platforms, printers and scanners, and even more.[41]

Another element of the digital infrastructure is the hardware – the image-taking devices such as digital cameras, laptops, iPads, tablets, and smart phones. The unprecedented access to these gadgets has prompted what Martin Hand calls "ubiquitous photography." The way the devices are synchronised with the internet reduces the time between the taking of the image and its appearance in the public

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[39] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[40] Martin Lister, "Introduction," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* Second Edition, ed. Martin Lister (New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

[41] Daniel Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* Second Edition, ed. Martin Lister (New York: Routledge, 2013), 149.

domain of the cyber world. Hand's work informed my own use of "ubiquitous camera" as a concept to explore how the pervasive presence of camera devices allows ordinary Nigerians to observe the conduct of the political elites. In *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg writes about how photography in the 19th century got diffused into the infrastructure of state power which Foucault had earlier identified to include for example the school, the hospital and the prison. Disrupting the direction of the gaze produced for instance in the construction of the criminal body, ordinary Nigerians use the ubiquitous camera to observe state officials and to represent them as dubious.

Such photographic practice operates as surveillance, but also as citizen photojournalism. Stuart Allan argues that the line that demarcates the latter from professional photojournalism has been blurred. With reference to particular events such as the South Asian tsunami of 2004, Allan examines how the proliferation of camera devices enables those who are not trained as photojournalists to report eye witness events with the camera.[42] Such photographic reports become so important that they are taken up by the mainsream media in their news productions. Citizen photojournalism in Nigeria operates in an activist context, that is, to bring attention to incidents that expose the failure of the state.

Patricia Hayes evaluates the idea of "exposure" in the context of anti-apartheid struggle. In the 1980s, documentary photography among black South Africans was underpinned by the notion of truth so that most photographers sought to depict the violence of apartheid.[43] The political use of the ubiquitous camera in Nigeria and the online circulation of the resulting images are driven by the similar quest to *expose* the corruption of state officials. But this visual production is everything Sekula says about the realist understanding of documentary, namely the "folklore of photographic truth."[44] "The same picture," he asserts "can convey a variety of

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[42] Stuart Allan, "Blurring Boundaries: Professional and Citizen Photojournalism in a Digital Age," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* Second Edition, ed. Martin Lister (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[43] Hayes, "Santu Mofokeng."

[44] Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (1978): 862.

messages under differing presentational circumstances."[45] On Facebook which is the main site of Nigeria's activist culture investigated in this work, photographs acquire meanings that differ from what they previously had. The presentational circumstances include the editing of the photographs and their multiple recirculation on Facebook where they attract various comments.

These digital dynamics are theorised by Manovich through his five principles of the new media under which digital photography is subsumed: *numerical representation, modularity, automation*, *variability* and *transcoding*. While new media objects are composed of binary codes of ones and zeros (*numerical representation*), they have components with individual identity (such as pixels in images) and can be combined to make larger objects. Manovich describes the combination of the components as *modularity*. The forms can be created automatically, and easily manipulated (*automation*), and exist in different versions (*variability*). *Transcoding* refers to how the media materials influence the way we live and represent ourselves. [46]

Those principles are manifest in the production of digital photography, in the operations of social media, and ultimately in the convergence of the two for civil resistance. It is thus imperative to string these elements (digital photography, social media and activism) together in an intellectual framework. This will give insight into one of the ways contemporary life is affected by photography, an aspect of the new media to which Manovich refers, and whose influence he calls "transcoding." Drawing on the Nigerian example, this project responds to that problem. Some important scholarly writings on the photographic production of sociality on social media ignore the activist dimension. Those that engage with activism overlook either photography or the networked sociality. Consider the following examples. In *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change*, Zachariah Mampilly and Adam Branch examine forms of contemporary unrest on the continent and

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[45] Ibid., 863.
[46] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), 49-64.

their historical and regional underpinnings. [47] The cover of the book shows a flipped and colour-edited copy of Akintunde Akinleye's photograph of protesters in the 2012 Occupy Nigeria movement, where the closest figure to the camera holds a mobile phone.[48] The authors dedicated a chapter of the book to the Occupy Nigeria protest, but overlooked the photographic and social media dimension of the uprising which the cover picture directly indexed.

Other texts dwell on photography and social movements, but leave out the online component. For instance, *Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change* engages with the history and philosophy of photography with attention to how photographic practices have been configured to challenge social inequality. Among other things it shows that activist photographers use their work to mobilise resources to ameliorate the harsh human conditions to which they direct the eyes of the public.[49] Nonetheless, this book published in 2012 – when the world had begun to experience the organisation and enactment of protests on social media – is silent about the networked mobilisation.

In other scholarly work, photography is the overlooked element. Such is the case with *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements* published in 2004. It critically assesses how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) shape civil struggle.[50] While the relevance of ICTs and the internet in democracy is broadly acknowledged, they produce spaces in which world democracies are challenged. Drawing on the study of diverse cases, the essays in the anthology evaluate the deployment of multimedia applications, email, databases and some other websites in the organisation and implementation of protest movements. Towards the end of the 2000s, they argue, the ICTs-social struggle relation found more expression in the use of social networking websites especially Facebook,

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[47] Zachariah Mampilly and Adam Branch, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[48] Akintunde Akinleye is a Nigerian photographer who lives in Lagos, Nigeria, but works for Reuters. His work has activist undertone as it borders on socio-political and economic crisis in Nigeria, such as the attendant environmental devastation of the Nigerian oil economy. Among the many prizes he has won is the 2007 World Press Photo award.

[49] Michelle Bogre, *Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change* (Oxford: Elsevier Inc., 2012).

[50] Van de Donk, *et al*., Loader, *Cyberprotest.*

Twitter and YouTube. These platforms were important in the famous uprising that raged between 2010 and 2011 in parts of North Africa and Middle East. They helped to maintain a structure of communication that surpassed the mainstream media.[51] The literature on this subject offers a new set of descriptive vocabulary and signs – "Twitter revolution," "Facebook revolution," "YouTube war" and hash (#) tag formulations – that underscore the centrality of social media in the new forms of resistance.

The notion of revolution in this context is however contested. Some consider it "overly techno-deterministic" and "techno-utopian," where the counter applications of social media and its failures are downplayed. [52] Albrecht Hofheinz questions the so-called "Twitter revolution" whose origin and popularity connect to the role of Twitter in the upheaval that followed the 2009 Iranian general election. His argument is that Twitter only allowed media users to receive and forward updates of unfolding events. It could not topple the regime, which clung to power and used internet evidence such as YouTube videos and Facebook posts to identify and arrest opposition activists.[53] Apparently, Hofheinz is one of the detractors of social media activism. Others in this camp include Evgeny Morozov and Malcolm Gladwell. They insist that online-based activism is a weak form of mobilisation and does not have any remarkable effect on society.[54] On the opposing side are the supporters such as Clay Shirky and Juris Jeffrey who believe that social media movement has the power to transform society.

Observing as a participant in the #Occupy Boston protest of 2011, Juris Jeffrey notes the contribution of Facebook and other social networking websites "to an emerging logic of aggregation in the more recent #Occupy movements – one that

[51] Simon Cottle, "Media and the Arab Uprisings of 2011: Research Notes," *Journalism* 12, no. 5 (2011).

[52] Christian Christensen, "Discourses of Technology and Liberation: State Aid to Net Activists in an Era of 'Twitter Revolutions,'" *The Communication Review* 14 (2011): 234.

[53] Albrecht Hofheinz, "Netopia? Beyond Revolution 2.0¹," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), 1420

[54] See Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011); Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell

involves the assembling of masses of individuals from diverse backgrounds within physical spaces."[55] That has been the case in Nigeria. For example, as argued in the 6th chapter of this thesis, the above-mention Occupy Nigeria protest was conceived and co-ordinated on Facebook, and involved heavy deployment of photographs. Bringing photography and social media activism together, I diagnose the Nigerian socio-political upheavals in a new kind of way.

The scholarly appraisal of the Nigerian problem began long before the development of digital technology. With a strong sense of trepidation about what had happened to the country within two decades after independence (1960), Chinua Achebe published *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983). The expectation of a great politically independent country was marred by a number of ills. He identified and analysed them: tribalism, poor leadership, false selfhood, lack of patriotism, injustice, mediocrity, indiscipline and corruption.[56] Shortly before his death in 2013, Achebe revisited the Nigerian problem in *There Was a Country* (2012). To do this, he turned to historical interpretation of a personal account woven around the secessionist state of Biafra. The climax of the conflict that developed in Nigeria in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s was the demand for self-rule by a part of the country that felt mistreated and politically marginalised. About the root of the crisis that has dogged Nigeria for more than half a century, Achebe concludes: "Africa's postcolonial disposition is the result of a people who have lost the habit of ruling themselves. We have also had difficulty running the new systems foisted upon us at the dawn of independence by our 'colonial masters.'"[57] That remark suggests that poor leadership is at the core of Nigeria's system failure.

Soyinka corroborates that idea with his critique of General Sani Abacha's regime in *The Open Sore of a Continent.* He gives a critical analysis of the dictatorship of Abacha and his predecessors. With brutality, intimidation, deception, and exploitation, the military rulers thwarted the hope with which Nigerians received

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[55] Jeffrey Juris, "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, and Emerging Logics of Aggregation," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 259.
[56] Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria* (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1983).
[57] Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country* (USA: The Penguin Press, 2012), 2.

the end of colonial rule.[58] The hope which was rekindled following the enthronement of democracy in 1999 was again lost to violent power struggles. Election in Nigeria is marked by fraud and violence.[59] Once the foundation of leadership is flawed, other vices get entrenched in the system. Corruption is the most studied of them.

For some scholars, leadership and corruption in Nigeria are intertwined and cannot be treated separately. For others, corruption is diffuse, practiced by both the rulers and the ruled. It has also been explained with the cause and effect approach. The contributions to the book *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives* (2002) expound these views. Anthropologist P-J Eze argues that "corruption in Nigeria reflects stunted transformation from traditional to the postcolonial metaethnic social system." He likens the failure to efficiently operate the received social and political systems to "mother-tongue interference in second language learning."[60] Hence both military and civilian systems of government have been marked by high-scale corruption which anti-corruption agencies have failed to tackle. For Daniel Jordan Smith, corruption is not exclusively practiced by the political elites. He notes that "ordinary Nigerians can be, paradoxically, active participants in the social production of corruption even as they are also its primary victims and principal critics."[61] This argument is made in the book, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*. The ethnographic study portrays corruption as a condition whose knowledge of its consequences brings the expression of discontent about it. Yet, the citizens are not deterred from taking part in its production. Part of what my research explores is how photography's truth claims (however constructed) are used to challenge political corruption.

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[58] Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (England: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[59] Paul Collier and Vicente Pedro, "Votes and Violence: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria," *The Economic Journal* 124, no. 574 (2014).

[60] P-J Ezeh, "Corruption and Deviant Behaviour in Nigeria: An Anthropological Perspective," in *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives*, ed. C.O. Tagbo Ugwu (Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2002), 153.

[61] Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

Historically, certain genres of photography, such as documentary, emerged from the quest to resist the problem of political deception.

Meanwhile, the effects of corruption in Nigeria are enormous. The most widely researched are poverty, infrastructural failure, and insurgency. Michael Watts has studied Nigerian oil politics, addressing questions of ecology, struggle for resource control, looting and the economy of violence. Drawing on Paul Collier's work – *The Bottom Billion* – he establishes a relation between resource wealth and poor economic performance, bad governance and civil conflict. What emerges is a paradoxical rich-land-poor-people scenario that makes one think of the oil wealth as a "curse."[62] Insurgency as an upshot of corruption and system failure is critiqued by many in terms of how it is precipitated by dissatisfaction with how Nigeria is run. For instance, Ojochenemi, Asuelime and Onapajo argue strongly that Boko Haram is motivated by socio-economic factors. They include a "high level of unemployment, galloping poverty, economic underdevelopment and inequality, and low level of education."[63] Similarly, Don Adeniji uses Ted Robert Gurr's "grievance theory" to argue that Boko Haram was engendered by extended frustrations which at some point could no longer be contained.[64] Thus, they "exploded."

Insurgency, corruption, poor governance and other forms of crisis experienced in Nigeria collectively constitute a threat to national unity. In *Nigeria since Independence: Forever Fragile?* J.N.C. Hill buttresses that point. He argues that some causes – prominent among them, "federalism, oil and the armed forces"[65] – produce conditions that fuel the tendency towards Nigeria's disintegration. Federalism for Hill encompasses the political practices and structure of the state. Oil connotes the wealth of the nation. The power of the armed forces is felt

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[62] Michael Watts, "Oil, Development, and the Politics of the Bottom Billion," *Macalester International* 24 (2009): 79.

[63] Ojochenemi J. David, Lucky E. Asuelime and Hakeem Onapajo, *Boko Haram: The Socio-Economic Drivers* (Cham, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht and London: Springer, 2015), 84.

[64] Don Michael Olalekan Adeniji, *Nigeria: Boko Haram and National Security* (Abuja Garamond Projects Limited, 2014).

[65] J.N.C. Hill, *Nigeria since Independence: Forever Fragile?"* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 5.

through "its operations and activities." [66] Dissatisfaction with the operations and distribution of the three things identified by Hill, and the state's failure to provide for the citizens, contribute significantly to the conflicts in the country. Paradoxically, the same factors combine to counter insurgency and to prevent political disintegration. As Hill puts it, "they are promoting ideas of nationhood and inculcating in the population a loyalty to the nation."[67] The angry citizens are persuaded "that they have more to gain from Nigeria remaining intact than they do from it breaking up."[68]

In the scholarly examination of these tensions, researchers have neglected how they are shaped by digital technology, the internet, and the photographic practices that help to visualise the problems. This project responds to that state of knowledge. Drawing on the Nigerian experience, it brings together photography, digitality and civil resistance. It investigates a new mode of social movement that involves a cyber-based photographic practice where pictures enter the virtual public domain of the Facebook website. The users appropriate the communication potentials of the visual and cyber technologies to articulate their demands in pictorial form.

Theoretical directions

The body of literature reviewed above presents the key debates around photography, social media, civil struggle and socio-political issues in Nigeria. The thoughts that emerge from the debate are synthesised to chart theoretical directions that situate this study in a broader intellectual context. At various points, I draw from different theoretical and conceptual resources. Still, the work is centrally framed with the *civil discourse* theory proposed by Ariella Azoulay. Below is an explanation of how I have worked with the theory while recognising its limitations that prompted the adoption of other (supplementary) approaches. The approaches are evaluated in relation to the research questions they help to address.

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid. 6.
[68] Ibid.

To begin with *civil discourse,* Azoulay challenges the ontological model of reading a photograph in its own terms. For her, such a framework tends to ignore other factors that come into play in constructing the meaning of an image. She opposes the perception of photography as a mere technology of imaging where the photographer uses the camera to photograph what is positioned before the lens and claims a sovereign point of view over the produced image. She considers photography as an event, an encounter that brings many individuals together. A photographic image may result from the event. In some cases, images may not be produced in the end, yet what she terms "the event of photography" continues infinitely. The endless encounter is in relation to the photographer, the photographed, the audience of the produced image and all others who will work with it. All these participants are involved in the construction of the meaning of the image. Azoulay began to pursue this view in *The Civil Contract of Photography* published in 2008. She explains the relations among the individuals involved in the event as regulated by "mutual trust,"[69] "a tacit agreement," [70] not a signed one. She further projects the concept, "citizenship of photography" where through photography, people encounter the living conditions of others. They come "to share a common world"[71] regardless of belonging to different times and spaces. In a later writing, she advances her argument by proposing a political ontology of photography:

> A political ontology… of the many, operating in public…an ontology bound to the manner in which humans exist – look, talk, act – with one another and with objects… an ontology of a certain form of human beings with others in which the camera or the photograph is implicated.[72]

The human and material elements involved in the relations combine to produce the meaning of the image. There is no such thing as singularity in the interpretation of a photograph, neither does a particular individual have a sovereign view about it. It is a transaction.

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[69] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (London: Zone Books, 2008), 89.
[70] Ibid., 109
[71] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination,* 105.
[72] Ibid., 18.

In the digital age in which we live, the transaction is profound. Through the circulation of pictures on Facebook, Nigerians and others from elsewhere who constitute the citizens of photography share the knowledge of socio-political developments in Nigeria. In the online space, the photographer, the photographed, the image and its viewers are brought together to interact. Through the exchange, multiple interpretations of the photographs emerge. We come to understand the concerns that drive the use of the platform, the resulting chain of events and the forms of political communications enabled.

Azoulay's theorisation of photography as an encounter is relevant to the study of visual practices on Facebook. But the impacts of digital and cyber technologies are ignored in the formulation. Yet they govern different facets of the relations made possible with the image. They are central to the production, circulation and display of the photographs. They structure how the grievances that fuel the online activism are represented. They give the image the double status as a tool to perpetrate violence and to counter it. To be able to engage with these technology-related issues, conceptual ideas are drawn from various works on digital media.

To answer the research question of image production and transformation, the concept of digital editing is engaged with here. Editing is most often read in relation to film. Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, popularised the concept *montage* to intellectually articulate the centrality of editing in film production. [73] Even before Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov (one of the pioneers of Soviet cinema) held that film is born with the editing of the shots, but in a way that differs from the theatre performance-oriented method of continuity editing. Montage, for Eisenstein, arises from the collision of independent shots that could even have an oppositional relation with one another. Breaking the confines of space and time, the editing juxtaposes different images to produce new meanings.[74] The photographic practices on Facebook are marked by a wide range of digital editing. More broadly, the anthropology of infrastructure offers a set of resources to help understand how the visuality is produced.

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[73] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).
[74] Ibid.

Regarding the forms of exchange supported by the technology, conceptual resources are taken from the literature on the digital notion of information production, communication, space, textuality, archivisation and so on. Manuel Castells' theory – *space of flows* – explains how these elements are configured to produce social relations. It lays emphasis on connection and interaction. These are made possible by "technological infrastructure" that supports networks operated by "social actors." Castells distinguishes "space of flows" from "space of places" which is defined by "territorial contiguity."[75] Still, he acknowledges the interface between the two. The interface is crucial to our reading of how photographic practices on social media connect with offline enactments.

The public agitation in Nigeria – whether online or offline – is a reaction to harsh living conditions occasioned by failed governance. The failure is most often blamed on the arrogance of the political elites. They have a certain kind of attitude to public resources, policy-making and implementation. The government tends to lose control of certain crucial forces that have direct implications for the economy. A set of ideas are drawn from political theories to explain these circumstances as inscribed in the photographs deployed in online resistance. The issue of "government failure" has in itself been broadly theorised. Scholars are drawn to it because it is historically behind a lot of human conflicts.[76] Tullock, Brady and Seldon interrogate government failure with the notion of *public choice*. Premised on the application of economic models to the explanation of political issues, *public choice* analyses how "collective action is modeled with individual decision-makers using the political process to further their self-interests."[77] It is used along with other relevant concepts to examine the state failure about which Nigerians protest on Facebook. The image is important in the way it enables interaction among the individual protesters despite their geographical dispersion.

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[75] Manuel Castells, "Grassrooting the Space of Flows," in *The Global Resistance Reader*, ed. Louise Amoore (London: Routledge, 2005), 364-365.

[76] William R. Keech and Michael C. Munger, "The Anatomy of Government Failure," *Public Choice* 164 (2015).

[77] P. J. Hill, "Public Choice: A Review," *Faith & Economics* 34 (1999): 1.

These theoretical directions help to set an agenda for engagement with the Nigerian postcolonial struggle in which digital photography plays a key role. They tie together the different elements of the study and frame its pursuit. They are also important to the formulation of the research methodology.

Reflection on method

Netnographic and archival methods were deployed for this study. *Netnography* which also refers to *virtual* or *digital* ethnography, was coined by Robert Kozinets to define "a form of ethnographic research adapted to include the internet's influence on contemporary social worlds."[78] It is suitable for "exploring the relations of mediated interaction,"[79] such that occurs on social media. Participant observation and interviews are the key elements of *netnography* deployed in the course of this research. In 2012, I began to follow the Facebook conversations about the many challenges confronting Nigeria. My interest in Facebook was prompted by its ranking as the most widely used social networking website by Nigerians. Recent statistics show that the number of monthly users is up to 16 million, constituting a segment of the considerably literate population that inhabits mainly urban and semi-urban centres.[80] This number includes students,[81] academics, civil servants, business people and those employed in the informal sector of the economy. Although marked by demographic divergence, this population of users is brought together by the experience of harsh living conditions in Nigeria. It was consequently possible to deploy social media in the organisation of Occupy Nigeria (2012), the largest mass protest in the country since the current democratic dispensation that commenced in 1999.

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[78] Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC: Sage Publications, 2010), 1.

[79] Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2000), 65.

[80] Adedayo Akinwale, "'16m Nigerians Use Facebook Monthly,'" *This Day*, April 22, 2016, https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/04/22/16m-nigerians-use-facebook-monthly/.

[81] 92% of Nigerian university students as at 2012 used Facebook, and the number continues to grow with increased access to smart phones and related devices that support access to the internet. See P.M. Ogedebe, J.A. Emmanuel, and Musa, Y., "A Survey on Facebook and Academic Performance in Nigerian Universities," *International Journal of Engineering Research and Application (IJERA)* 2, no 4 (2012).

As I followed the virtual discussions, I found it difficult to ignore the massive deployment of photographs. The images first appealed to me as visual resources for artistic production. Further, I was drawn to the interface between the visual and digital technology on the one hand, and the ensuing social relations and meaning-making on the other. *Virtual participant observation* allowed me to keep track of the fleeting moments on Facebook and to vent my own frustration with the situation in Nigeria.

I was born a Christian in Nsukka, South-eastern Nigeria where the Biafra-related agitation (that partly led to the civil war in 1967-1970) is ongoing. The religious and ethnic tensions that predated the war continue to intensify the struggle for power, political corruption, insurgency, and dilapidation of public infrastructure that have left majority of Nigerians impoverished. I have been a witness to these circumstances, and have followed the public agitation against them in other media such as music and newsprint. I began to use the internet in 2001, joined Facebook in 2011, and began in 2012 to follow the conversations as digital facilities had structured them. The social media interaction helped me to reflect on my current position as a subject working under poor conditions in a university art department. I studied in ill-equipped educational institutions, and have no access to quality medical care, regular electricity and good roads. Police harassment and extortion, kidnapping, and armed robbery attack are common experiences of which I have been a victim. Given my close proximity to this state of affairs, my research became an activist project in its own right.

I joined two major Facebook protest groups involved in massive deployment of images. The first is the *Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest* initiated in October 2011 by Marian Awolowo. The foundational goal was to mobilise Nigerians from across the world against corruption and state failure in Nigeria. The other is the *Nationwide Anti-Fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategies and Protests* created on 2 January 2012 by Gimba Kakanda, Jeff Unaegbu and Richard Ali. The purpose was to protest against the Nigerian government's removal of fuel subsidy announced on the previous day. These groups were important to me, but my study was not limited to them. Many Nigerians at home and in the diaspora, including

their non-Nigerian online friends, take part in the conversations around the turmoil in Nigeria. I expanded my own network of Facebook friends to access more posts on my timeline, but also studied relevant posts by users outside my network. Nigerian government officials also use Facebook, but I am particularly interested in the users who perceive themselves as outside the circuit of the Nigerian state power and challenge the political elites. I refer to them as "ordinary Nigerians" (when they are Nigerian citizens) and "online protesters or activists." They constitute the geographically unbound population connected to one another through social media and by the common goal of demanding better living conditions in Nigeria via image production and circulation. We cannot make sense of the activists in any homogeneous structures. Some are organised in clusters where the group page is managed by an administrator who ensures that the posts comform to the activist goal of the group. Others are active individual users of the site who are commited to the circulation of politically strong materials. Yet, some other protesters are organisations whose activities on Facebook are the extension of other activist projects. Of course, prior to the emergence of digital media, Nigerians critiqued the state through other means: music, literature, jokes, cartoons, film, print media and its photographic practices. These have not disappeared, and have taken on a digital modality which allows their convergence in certain ways on social media sites.

Where Facebook groups or individual users with Nigeria-related activist undertakings are outside my own network of friends, the search field of Facebook was used to locate their pages. Similarly, Facebook conversations on relevant subjects were found through Google search. In all, I have used visual materials I found political and relevant to this study irrespective of the Facebook pages to which they were posted.

Meanwhile, participation in the online exchange required that I not only follow and comment on the posts of others. I too posted images and comments aimed at initiating conversations. The approach allowed me to elicit the views of the online activists. It was for me a kind of group interview "moderated" with my intermittent comments to chart the direction of the dialogue. In doing this, I had my research

objectives in mind. I took advantage of the extemporaneous attributes of the group interview to which Russell Bernard refers in his *Research Methods in Anthropology*:

> Sometimes, you just find yourself in an interview situation with a lot of people. You're interviewing someone and other people just come up and insert themselves into the conversation. This happens spontaneously all the time in long-term fieldwork ... take advantage of the situation and just let the information flow.[82]

Although Bernard writes with the face-to-face mode of group interview in mind, it was applicable to my virtual approach. As the conversations progressed, the pictures were copied along with their accompanying comments, pasted on the Microsoft Word window and saved on the computer hard disc in Word document format. The files were stored according to the thematic categories of the contents. The retrieval date and URL (Uniform Resource Locator) were indicated in the documents for citation purposes.

Other forms of interview were conducted to retrieve information about the images that were not readily available in their accompanying comments. I use the term "one-on-one" to make it distinct from the group interview described above. I requested the Facebook activists as individuals to comment on the images they circulated in relation to questions of infrastructure and motivation for the civil struggle. Virtual and face-to-face approaches to one-on-one interview were adopted.

The decision to employ virtual interviews was made at the outset, as the project was already entwined with virtuality. Online research itself presents some gains to the contemporary researcher. An aspect of the condition that favours online movement in Nigeria is the anonymity under which the social media users "hide" in order to express themselves with some level of freedom.[83] The virtual interview aligns with this circumstance while taking advantage of the same internet technology that shapes the project, to reach respondents regardless of their spatial

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[82] H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006), 232.
[83] Anonymity in this context can be illustrated with the use of fictitious names and profile information by Facebook users.

distances. Interestingly, the virtual interview is no less an effective method than the face-to-face interview. Knorr, Bronack, Switzer and Medford remark that given how virtual world technology is being increasingly used as a social and communication medium, the virtual interview is emerging as a tool that qualitative researchers may consider, either to supplement or to replace face-to-face interviews. Following the research they conducted to compare the two, they report: "No significant difference in meaning units was found in the coded transcripts of virtual world environment interviews and face-to-face interviews. Results suggest that virtual worlds may offer advantages over face-to-face interviewing in terms of efficiency, without sacrificing reliability, validity, or complexity."[84] Again, it offers flexibility where the interviewee chooses to be interviewed via email or conversed with in the chatroom provided on the Facebook website.

However, the virtual interview has some limitations. Some online activists accepted neither my "friend's request" on Facebook nor to participate in my research even when we were members of the same protest group. It suggests that although social media activism has a lot of influence, it does not often guarantee intimate friendship among the online "friends." Secondly, infrastructural failure (part of what fuels online protest) affected my virtual interviews with Facebook users who live in Nigeria. Interviews conducted in Facebook chatroom were disrupted by electric power cuts and poor internet access. In such a case, I resorted to email communication. But the sense of instant interaction was lost. These circumstances prompted the consideration of face-to-face interviews. In my field trip to Nigeria, I interviewed some active Facebook protesters offline.

Although Facebook is my main research site, images from Twitter, YouTube, blogs, websites of citizen journalism, online television channels and newspapers are examined where they are important to the subject analysed. Besides, given the logic of hypertextuality that governs digital culture, sharing of links to other websites is one of the ways through which media contents find their way to the Facebook page. Most of the links appear in photographic thumbnails which when

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[84] See Ronald Knorr, Stephen Bronack, Deborah Switzer and Lienne Medford, "Methodology of a Novel Virtual Phenomenology Interview Technique," *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 3, no. 3 (2011): 3.

clicked direct the user to the source website. Through this process, I followed media discussions of events as they unfolded in Nigeria as much as I did on Facebook. Relevant videos were also included, but not read as filmic documents. Although subjected to general description, the playing video would be paused to freeze particular frames using the keyboard command, FN+ PRTSC or SHIFT+ PRTSC. Then they would be analysed as still photographs. The freezing of moving images is informed by my treatment of still and moving pictures as components of photography in this project. As stated earlier, the variability of new media objects as theorised by Manovich is in full manifestation in social media activist visuality. The enormous forms of editing undergone by the images circulated on Facebook blur the boundary between still photographs and videos in terms of how they are presented.[85]

The online circulation of the visual materials took place mainly from the late 2000s to 2015. While social media emerged in the beginning of the 2000s, its application in civil movements among Nigerians began towards the end of that decade following the disappointment that came with the formation of democratic government in 1999. The expectation of a better Nigeria never materialised and the 2015 general election brought a new kind of beginning. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) that had been in power since 1999 was overthrown. Once Mohammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) was sworn in as president on 29 May 2015, the intensity of online protest dropped considerably. Many Nigerians "waited" to see the "change" promised by the new administration. The retrieval of online documents for this study stopped at that period of "waiting."[86]

For more insight into the history of the visual materials, secondary literature such as books and journal articles was consulted. The historical dimension was further explored by tracing the activist contours of the evolution of photography in

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[85] Manovich, *The Language of New Media.*

[86] Nonetheless, the "waiting" did not last long. A government sworn in on 29 May 2015 had in the beginning of 2016 come under intense criticism as it increased electricity tariff and completely removed fuel subsidy, resulting in high cost of petroleum products. Insurgency escalated. By the middle of 2016, the Nigerian economy had plunged into recession. The renewed online visual activism would be the subject matter of another project.

Nigeria. This prompted the use of archival research method. Old newspapers, magazines and exhibition catalogues that bore the traces of photographic practices in Nigeria over the decades (from the 1960s) were consulted at archives and libraries. The institutions I visited include Nnamdi Azikiwe library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), the departmental library of Fine and Applied Arts (UNN), the Patrick Ogugua Memorial Centre (POMEC), Nando, Anambra State. Others are the Centre for Contemporary Arts, African Artists' Foundation, and National Museum, all in Lagos.

Once the retrieval of online visual and related contents, as well as the interviews and archival research were completed, the methods of analysis were worked out. The adopted methods include semiology and what I refer to as "audience interpretation," drawn from Gillian Rose's discussion of *audiencing* as important in critical visual methodology. She uses the idea of "critical visual methodology" to explain the research procedure for projects with a heavy reliance on visual documents. She draws attention to three sites at which the meanings of images are made: production, the image itself, and audiencing. She suggests that each of these have three modalities: technological, compositional and social modalities.[87] For the study of the activist use of photography on Facebook, all the sites with their modalities are worth exploring. "Semiology," as Rose puts it, "offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning."[88]

In this study, it is suitable for engagement with the production site and the image itself. It is complete with concepts for analysis of images in terms of how they are composed, the components and what they signify, their technologies of production and display, and their socio-political contexts. On the other hand, as the research is based on social media – a space marked by interpersonal interaction – audiencing draws us to how the users of the platform make sense of and interpret the images. The posting, liking and sharing of photographs, and the making of comments on them are crucial to the audiencing. These are the ways in which Azoulay's concept

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[87] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2001).
[88] Ibid., 69.

of civil discourse manifests in the digital realm. Interpretation of the image shows itself as a process over which no single individual claims absolute power. This is a meeting point between the theoretical framework of this study and its methodology. Meanwhile, as social media research is still in its emergent stage, the methodological issues raise certain other questions such as those associated with ethics.

Ethics issues

Social media culture carries with it a range of concerns including issues associated with privacy and the so-called reliability of information. As a result, the research that relies on the images circulated on the platform is at the frontier of new ethical questions. The process of addressing the ones raised in the course of this study became for me an important facet of the project. As an online-oriented research, the conventional methods of gathering primary documents and the procedures of seeking the consent of research participants were not often appropriate. It was not practicable to treat informed consent as the precondition for collection of contents circulated on Facebook. This is because it is difficult to predetermine the user of the forum who would share materials that would be useful to the study. Given the fleeting nature of content dissemination on Facebook, I resolved to follow and download images and their accompanying comments as the interactions unfolded. At the outset, I proposed the adoption of "retrospective consent" to use the visual materials found relevant to my research after they had been downloaded. This approach raised a number of issues. First, some of the Facebook users gave their consent during interview sessions carried out orally, or via email communication or Facebook chat. But they avoided the formal aspect of signing the consent form. They were sceptical about appending their signatures, as that would undermine the anonymous stance from which they engaged in the online struggle. Others failed to respond to my messages through which I sought to get them involved in the research. For many more, their posts (whether pictorial and typographical) are public materials, the use of which requires no consent. After all, some contents appear on many Facebook pages at the same time so that it is difficult to trace their roots. Considering these circumstances, ethical questions raised by Facebook

research are somewhat tricky. Nevertheless, the issues are considerably resolved by the fact that just like email communication, social media platforms are now cited as "sources" by scholars. To enable me provide adequate citation of any Facebook content used in this work, I noted the username of the one who posted it, the web address of the post, date posted, and date accessed. Each URL is active so that on a mouse click, one is taken to the page from which the material was retrieved.

I lastly remark that other Nigerian activist users of Facebook did not show suspicion about my dual role as a researcher who was also involved in circulating and commenting on photographs on the platform. Interviews with my research participants revealed a broad reception of my work as crucial to the civil struggle to which many Nigerians have contributed in different capacities including literary work, music, cartoons, film, and much more.

Thesis structure

This thesis is structured into six chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction begins with how the research idea grew out of a visual art project that relied on Facebook posts to interpret the socio-political condition of Nigeria. In this study, the central theoretical approach to the engagement with the photographic practices was chosen to treat images as mediated sites of interaction. The research methodology with the attendant ethical issues is shaped by the mediations enabled by digital technology. Through the review of literature on digital photography, activism, and the Nigerian crisis, the contribution made by this study is foregrounded. It shows how digital photographic production on Facebook constitutes a means of civil resistance.

After the introduction, the first chapter turns to the historical development of photography in Nigeria. The intention is to understand how the notion of civil activism drove photographic practices in the country before the advent of digital technology and the internet. The investigation covers between 1960 when Nigeria gained independence and the 1990s that saw the development of the internet. The photography of this period in Nigeria has most often been read within the purview

of art and journalism. No attention is given to its characteristic civil relations. In the chapter, it is argued that there is a civil resistance history of photography in Nigeria. It disturbs the dominant reading based on art for art's sake and print media for news dissemination.

Taking a cue from Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria*, the harsh living conditions of Nigerians as deduced from the photographs circulated on Facebook are examined in chapter 2. Achebe's work published in the beginning of the 1980s is part of the foremost critique of the crisis in the post-independence Nigeria. Much has even changed since then. Some of the issues raised in the book (poor leadership for example) have been intensified. Others, such as insurgency, emerged at later times. The chapter focuses on the photographic representation and interpretation of such concerns.

In chapter 3, it is argued that the political use of photography on social media owes a great deal to technological affordances. The ubiquity that marks the visual medium results from the multiplication of image-taking devices. The gadgets support software applications used to perform various forms of editing on the image. Those who cling to the idea of photography as representation of reality would mistrust editing. But I argue that it rather enables the construction of representations that are relevant to the activist context that informs them. What follows the visual transformation is their circulation on the virtual platforms where they get deeply engaged in transactions of meanings. And internet technology is behind this possibility. Meanwhile, electricity and the internet which constitute the key infrastructure are not in adequate supply in Nigeria. The chapter also examines how the technological odds are addressed. The forms of improvisation and appropriation that sustain cyber activism in Nigeria are themselves treated as activist expressions.

Insight into the impacts of technology on the social movement enacted on Facebook is further gained through the study of the structure of the site itself. The interface of the website supports spectacular modes of content circulation and dialogue among users. The development of Facebook is read as a kind of struggle in its own right. It is a contested virtual space that has evolved into an influential

site of civil resistance. The contents disseminated on Facebook and the ways in which the structure of the site enables their ordering constitute a certain form of archival production that however has its own limitations. The analogue archive is in most cases used as a tool for the exercise of power by dominant constituted authorities. As opposed to that, the Facebook archive gives the ordinary citizens some agency. They get actively involved in documenting and challenging the upheavals in the society in which they live. The scale at which these engagements occur in the digital realm surpasses the possibilities in the analogue archive. Chapter 4 engages with these issues as they specifically connect with Facebook as a structure.

The intercessions of technology have direct implications on the image itself. In a time of violent uprisings – which constitute one key concern Nigerians discuss on Facebook – the image faces a kind of dilemma. It is used for purposes that contradict each other – to perpetrate mayhem and to counter it. The Boko Haram example is used to make this argument. The insurgents circulate still pictures and videos as part of their jihadist agenda. They assault the masses with gruesome depictions of their cruel acts. Apart from the generated feeling of fear, the people become convinced that they live in precarious situations. The paradox is that the state and the virtually connected individuals fight back with images too. The Nigerian government through the military uses images to make claim of victory over militancy. Through the same medium, social media activists challenge the state's attitude to the insurgency. By re-circulating the ghastly images created and disseminated by Boko Haram militants, the protesters seek to return the traumatising gaze to those who produced it. This complex entanglement of vision and violence is the thrust of the 5th chapter.

In chapter 6, the Nigerian experience is put in the context of the growing conviction that virtual activism offers possibilities of socio-political transformation. With the aid of online mobilisation, the forcible overthrow of prominent political figures in Tunisia and Egypt was possible in the early 2010s. Nigeria has not had such a revolutionary case. Nonetheless, online activism has made some difference in the country. It has called international attention to the

social, economic and political crises that plague Nigeria, prompting some interventions from across the world. Although the interventions have their own peculiar problems, they indicate that the cry for social change in Nigeria is heard internationally. On the other hand, certain important decisions and alterations in the structure of power have ultimately been made in the country.

As a way of recapitulation, the conclusion highlights the key issues in understanding how the relation between photography and Facebook inspires a new form of civil resistance. Drawing upon the research findings, the Nigerian example reflects the manner in which visuality and virtuality produce a new way to read the history of the postcolony. To be sure, digital technology that drives the visuality only emerged in the 1990s. But photography, the visual form itself, is much older. The contemporary digital scale helps to make it more obvious that all along, photography in Nigeria has had a close relation to social movements.

CHAPTER ONE
Analogue Practices after 1960: Resistance Reading of the History of Photography in Nigeria

Introduction

Lauri Firstenberg has argued that the most remarkable value of photography is its social and political use. She writes:

> From Europe to Africa to Asia and the Americas, photography introduced a new visual trope that was then put into use in various contexts: advertising, propaganda, social and political documentary, and art. But the most enduring aspect of the uses of photography, rather than the graphic mark of its artistic operation, has been its powerful social and political value.[89]

Firstenberg's assertion finds corroboration in the activist photographic practices among Nigerians on Facebook as explored in this project. But in this chapter, the history of analogue photography in Nigeria is read to explore the political use that has characterised the medium even before the digital turn. Given that I am interested in the Nigerian post-independence history as opposed to the colonial, I look at the period beginning from 1960 when Nigeria became a sovereign state. I draw particularly on art photography and photojournalism, but this is not to suggest that other genres are not important to the history of photography in Nigeria. The earlier cited work of Stephen Sprague on Yoruba photography in the 1970s is an example of portraiture, a genre that dates back to 1880 when the first photography studios were established in Lagos.[90] The medium later spread to other parts of Nigeria. Although I make reference to portraiture, street photography and other genres, I concentrate here on photojournalism and art photography. This is because they have the kind of public face strongly connected to the political, which is the

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[89] Lauri Firstenberg, "Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (New York: Prestel, 2001): 175.

[90] Erika Nimis, "Nigeria: The Photographic Giant," *Africulture*, June 1, 2001, www.africulture.com/php/?nav=article&no=5534.

main thrust of this thesis. Meanwhile, I do not reject the validity of other uses of photography, but wish to draw out new ways of connecting older analogue to the digital through an emphasis on the political. The analogue practices that I examine spanned from 1960 to the 1990s which saw the emergence of internet technology. But they stretched even further to the 21st century as the digital age did not terminate analogue production.

Photographs published in exhibition catalogues, newspapers and magazines sourced from libraries and archives are studied with attention to the periods and the circumstances in which they were produced and circulated. Then, they are subjected to two analytical methods. First, given that the image itself has its own effects, it is examined as an object whose visual composition, content and theme hold important visual clues as to its activist potential. Secondly, the social and economic practices that define the production and dissemination of the photographs are examined in terms of the civil relations they constitute. Certain factors account for the privileging of the image itself, its circulation platform and use, over more intimate methods of eliciting personal information from photographers. The overarching theoretical framework of this study opposes placing the photographer in a privileged position in constructing the meaning of the photograph. In the writings in which Ariella Azoulay presents that model, she draws from the works of prominent scholars such as Benjamin and Arendt, and examines photographic images and their various sites of meaning making. But she gives no attention to individual photographers.[91] That model works well for the kind of history of photography in Nigeria written in this chapter. Some photographers work across genres. They could for instance be practicing as artists, showcasing their photographs as works of art while working with media institutions as photojournalists. Therefore, particular photographs could make multiple appearances on different platforms where they have varied effects and meanings that transcend the creator's intent. With such mobility, the boundaries between certain genres become significantly unstable. For example, in reading the resistance history of photography in Nigeria, the line demarcating art photography

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[91] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination.*

from documentary is so blurred that I collapse the two into one category. Such a move enables me to have a better grasp of the political implications of the blur.

A set of findings emerges from these methodological approaches. The various genres of photography in Nigeria have existed at the same time. But they are associated with different processes, effects, and use of the image, prompting us to read their political impacts as dissimilar. Some photographic practices and projects have obvious activist undertakings defined as such at their inception. For others, the political engagement lies behind the institutional definition of their modes of production, as is the case with photojournalism routinely perceived in the context of news illumination.

The notion of "resistance photography" that forms the first segment of this chapter is employed to weave together the forms of photographic production analysed here. It is a conceptual grounding of how different photographic genres converge to engage with the political. The second part on "the fine art of resistance" examines the historical development of aesthetic practices of artists doing their photographic work, to understand their political directions. At the outset, artists were obsessed with technical experimentation with the medium; so the political attribute of their work has to be carefully drawn out. Later in the beginning of the 20th century, they came to define their work as fundamentally political, making that self-evident in the compositionality of the image. In the last section, we turn to the print media to see how much of the history of civil struggle in Nigeria could be retrieved from what was presented as news. In the guise of news presentation, newspapers and magazines reflect radical ways of challenging the state with photographs. Apart from the logic of selecting certain images for publication and leaving out others, the images could appear unconnected to the body texts they ostensibly illuminate. Thus, they could be read in their own terms. The genre also takes on a documentary mode and follows unpleasant events to any length. The directions pursued in this chapter provide an important dimension overlooked by scholars in writing the history of photography in Nigeria. It demonstrates how to think with Azoulay's argument (which is the approach I adopt in this chapter) that the political element of the image can be drawn out even when it is not self-

evident. As she puts it, "curators and writers motivated to seek out the political in art will indeed do so even in places where it is not obviously apparent." [92]

Resistance photography

"Resistance" as a term readily evokes the notion of liberation movement that dominates anti-colonial discourse. In that context, photography constitutes part of the cultural production that includes prints, graffiti and painting, invested in the struggle. Rather than take that direction, resistance as used in this work denotes activism or civil movement on one level. But beyond that, it suggests the complicated ways of relating with power. It is about how power is overtly or covertly challenged, and at the same time relates to the thought offered by Lila Abu-Lughod who asks: "What are the implications of studies of resistance for our theories of power?" To answer this, she suggests that we do not only think of resistance in terms of challenging the expressions of power. We should consider how acts of resistance can help us to understand the various ways power operates.[93] So, in the context of my study, resistance photography as a formulation is first about the activist use of the photographic image. It is on the other hand about the insight which that *use* allows us into the political history of the sovereign state, Nigeria.

To dwell for a moment on the crucial elements that constitute resistance as a concept, there are questions around the actor, target, intent and recognisability. Conflicting perceptions of these components have marked resistance as a contentious term. In a project that involves the review of a broad range of scholarly writings published on resistance as a social phenomenon, Hollander and Einwohner carefully unpack the debate. While they recognise that the views of various scholars find commonality in "action" and "opposition" as the core elements of resistance, the dissonance is rooted in "whether resistance must be intended by actors and whether it must be recognized by targets and/or

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women,"*America Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41.

observers."[94] For me, to hold the view that resistance *must* be intended and perceptible, is to ignore the variability of its mode and the ensuing multiple relations among its elements.

Despite the critique of his weak-powerful dichotomy as one that ignores the possibility of individuals to be "simultaneously powerful and powerless within different systems,"[95] James Scott has offered us a way to think resistance outside the open, aggressive actions that characterise mass protest and others similar to it. According to him, the "powerless" engage in everyday informal resistance and avoid direct confrontation.[96] Hence, in as much as resistance can be confrontational, it can be subtle. When constituted as a response to a condition perceived as unacceptable, resistance is usually a way to condemn the status quo and demand for change. Individuals and human groups try different strategies to realise this goal, whether they are overt or covert, strident or persuasive, recognisable or unnoticeable. To return to Patricia Hayes, many South African photographers of the 1980s held that the use of the camera to *expose* the cruelty of apartheid was an effective resistance strategy.[97] In this context, the concept of *exposure* helps to expound how the photographic image becomes a site for questioning and rejecting existing power relations, proclaiming as would participants in a mass protest: "This is unacceptable; there must be a change!"

Hence, resistance photography is in this sense photography of denunciation. It is a kind of civil engagement that involves the freezing of sights and moments that reflect injustice, and to show them as things that have to be corrected. [98] Following Robert Gallately's reading of "denunciation as a subject of historical research," the concept operates in an interesting way in relation to photography in Nigeria. Gallately analyses denunciation as a system of surveillance where the citizens

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[94] Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," *Sociological Forum* (2004): 544.

[95] Ibid., 550.

[96] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Every-day Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

[97] Hayes, "Santu Mofokeng."

[98] Michelle Bogre, *Photograph as Activism: Images for Social Change* (Oxford: Elsevier Inc., 2012):

bring deviant behaviours of other citizens to the attention of the state.[99] The complication with the Nigerian context (and in fact other parts of Africa) is that the deviants are the very functionaries of the state. As there is no higher platform to report their misconduct, the masses resort to activism. Following Abu-Lughod, the activism in its photographic form helps us to understand how the Nigerian political elites have handled power since independence from colonial rule.

Meanwhile, I read photographs as a potential call for social change regardless of who created them, the original purpose for which they were produced, and the format and framework in which they are disseminated, consumed and their meanings negotiated. Such concurs with the political reading advocated by Azoulay as noted earlier. It is against this backdrop that the history of photography in Nigeria is traced. In the country, many of the analogue photographic practices with a significant public outlook are located within the realm of visual art and journalism. Thus, construction of a photography history along the grain of civil resistance demands that such purpose guide the engagement with photographs that may have been produced as artworks and print news items. In other words, besides the examination of the referents of specific images, the resistance reading is drawn from "the contexts, practices, institutional forms, within which the work(s are) set."[100]

The fine art of resistance

Photographic practices within the ambit of art are predicated upon firstly, finding in the medium the artistic engagement comparable with those of drawing, painting, sculpture, among others.[101] In the light of this, individuals driven by creative interest take up photography whether they have formal training in art or not. Second, through the notion of display in art exhibitions, galleries, museums and art publications, photographs acquire equal status with other works of mainstream

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[99] Robert Gallately, "Denunciation as a Subject of Historical Research," *Historical Social Research* 26, no. 2/3 (2001).

[100] Derrick Price, "Surveyors and Surveyed: Photography Out and About," in *Photography: A Critical Introduction* Third Edition*, ed. Wells L. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 69.

[101] Paul Spencer Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete: The Legitimization of Photography as Art in America, 1880-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

art.[102] Also important to the definition of art photography is the very idea of institutionalisation. Academic and creative institutions include photography in their programmes and practices. In this segment, photographic practices undertaken in Nigeria within these frameworks are treated as art photography whether they are strictly documentary, arbitrary representation of social experiences or creative experimentation with the medium. Its aesthetic pursuit can be examined to historicise photography in Nigeria as a tool for civil resistance. Thus, there is a fine art of resistance. Art publications that centre on photography, namely magazines, books and exhibition catalogues, provide us with photographs whose compositionality, time and context of production allow for activist readings.

The examination of such publications reveals remarkable interest by photographers to document socio-cultural and political life in Nigeria following independence from colonialism in 1960. Electrified by the euphoria of independence, that mode of photographic practice was invested in the celebration of political freedom and the cultural diversity of the new nation as it were. At the same time, photographers documented the political tensions that climaxed in the first military coup in Nigeria (1966) and later the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970). In the 1970s, the discovery of oil brought with it the hope of economic revival. To address the aftermath of the civil war, the government created art and cultural initiatives which were however problematical in some ways. Again, military rule set up stringent living conditions especially from the 1980s. In these circumstances, resistance photography produced within the paradigm of art as defined in this section was subtle in its approach.

But beginning from the 2000s, an army of photographers sprang up. In an unprecedented manner, they turned aggressively to the state in ways that reflect disappointment with the democracy that returned to Nigeria in 1999. The projects undertaken by many of them address state and infrastructural failure, poverty, environmental chaos and insecurity. It was an extension of the wide social and artistic engagement in Africa in the 1980s – the democratic movement described

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[102] Liz Wells, "On and Beyond the White Walls: Photography as Art," in *Photography: A Critical Introduction* Third Edition, ed. Wells L. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

by Branch and Mampilly as the "second wave" of protest.[103] Lastly, using the camera, photographers who visit Nigeria have lent their voices to the public outcry against injustice and misrule.

In the 1960s, photographic practices informed by the allure of aesthetics, and the quest to document socio-cultural and political life in Nigeria can be viewed within and outside the fine art institutional context. Art photography was not a significant part of the beginning of formal art practice that came to be called "modern Nigerian art," pioneered by Aina Onabolu before independence.[104] But the radical beginning of formal art would later impact on photographic practices within art institutional frameworks. In the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle that made its last push in the 1950s, students of the art schools whose founding began in Nigeria at that time challenged the Western art pedagogy. They argued that it ignored Nigeria's indigenous creative resources over which knowledge from elsewhere was privileged. Ulli Beier puts it thus:

> (In 1958), at the College of Arts, Science and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University) in Zaria, Demas Nwoko and Uche Okeke led a student revolution against the very conventional course in "fine art." Ignoring the life classes, the anatomy classes, and European art history, they derived their inspiration from their own traditions and became the pioneers of modern art movement.[105]

The demand to rather merge the Western and the Nigerian artistic elements articulated in the concept of "natural synthesis" stimulated a vibrant creative experimentation.[106] But none of the exponents of the Zaria resistance concentrated on photography. Their areas of focus were mainly drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and architecture. In 1961, the Mbari club which comprised writers and

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[103] Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

[104] Ola Oloidi, "Growth and Development of Art Education in Nigeria (1900-1960)," *Trans-African Journal of History* 15 (1986). Also see Ola Oloidi, "Defender of African Creativity: Aina Onabolu, Pioneer of Western Art in West Africa," *Africana Research Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1991).

[105] Ulli Beier, "A Moment of Hope: Cultural Developments in Nigeria before the First Military Coup," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (New York: Prestel, 2001), 46.

[106] Chika Okeke-Agulu and John Picton, "Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968," *African Arts* 39, no.1 (2006).

artists including some of the Zaria "rebels" was formed.[107] It became a lively centre for artists of different genres to work together. The Mbari project inspired similar ones in Enugu, Lagos, Benin and Oshogbo. These centres bustled with art activities: workshops, exhibitions, musical and stage drama performances. Incidentally too, photography was rarely part of the movement.

Some of the Zaria graduates took up teaching appointments in the art departments (with photography programmes) established in some of the academic institutions founded after independence. The Zaria-born experimentalist approach to art inspired art schools to pay attention to experimentation with photographic production processes. To illustrate, photography has been part of the graphic design programme of the University of Nigeria Nsukka's Department of Fine and Applied Arts founded in 1961. The studio was equipped with analogue cameras, films, tripods, and a darkroom complete with developers, baths, enlargers, paper amongst other things. Access to these facilities allowed students to take shots, develop the films, print the images and engage in darkroom experiments. Projects assigned to students were articulated to challenge them to apply the possibilities offered by the technology in the production of creative images. In other words, such experimentation is premised on the use of photographic technology to pursue the "ideals associated with the rhetoric of art."[108] The concept of "compositionality" drawn from painting is used to theorise the photographer's making of creative decisions as to what is composed within the frame of the camera lens.[109] Similarly, "pictorialism" which Paul Sternberger replaces with the word "antiphotographic" underlines the production of effects to inscribe in the image the traces of human intervention – the very markers of creativity pursued by

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[107] Ibid. The founding of the group was fostered by the after-Nigerian-independence intervention by Martin Luther King's Congress for Cultural Freedom. In response to that "gesture of goodwill" by the organisation, Ulli Beier suggested a club for creative young literary and visual artists who were already organising themselves for propagation of African art. The "Mbari Club" – a name suggested by Chinua Achebe was inaugurated in Ibadan in 1961. The founding members include Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Frances Ademola, Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, Ezekiel Mphahlele of South Africa and Ulli Beier.

[108] Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete*, xiv.

[109] Ibid. See also Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (USA: Penguin Books, 1974).

fine art.[110] Similarly, Aaron Scharf writes: "Just as some artists were beginning to distort the 'inviolable' image of nature, some photographers were working in the same direction."[111] He alludes to Louis Ducos du Hauron's "transformism" premised on the distortion of photographic form "to enhance its aesthetic character."[112]

It can be argued that the photographic experimentation in art institutions illustrated above was an attempt to understand the medium more holistically. This quest moved some individuals to seek "professional" training in photography even outside Nigeria. For instance, Sunmi Smart-Cole trained in Foothill College, Los Altos, California in the 1970s and became an artist and photographer by formal training.[113] Don Barber completed his photography course in the United Kingdom in 1992. George Osodi studied business administration in Nigeria but later obtained a diploma in documentary media production from the United Kingdom too. With formal or informal training, local and international exposure and networking, a good number of photographers emerged in in the beginning of the 21st century. They radically changed photography in Nigeria into something overtly political. While I will return to this, social documentary practices outside the academic-institutional paradigm in Nigeria have been governed by high aesthetic sensibilities since the 1960s.

Consider the work of J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere. Through informal tutelage, he learnt basic photographic skills after purchasing a camera in 1950 at the age of 20. By 1953, his technical prowess had earned him a job as darkroom assistant in the department of photography, Ministry of Information in the then Midwestern Nigeria. In 1961, he was employed as a television studio photographer and between 1965 and 1975 worked for the Lintas advertising firm. He later opened a personal studio that allowed him to undertake freelance practice.[114] Throughout

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[110] Ibid., 34.

[111] Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (USA: Penguin Books, 1974): 233.

[112] Ibid., 234.

[113] John N. Amifor, "Seeing Sense: New Nigerian Photographers and New Accents, 1980-2000," in *Modern Nigerian Art in Historical Perspectives*, ed. Ola Oloidi (Abuja: Art Historical association of Nigeria, 2004): 109.

[114] Offodu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria*, 156.

those years, he engaged in self-sponsored photographic documentation of women's hairstyles and traditional dances at festivals. He also produced photographs of city architecture and portraits with a profuse constitution of the trappings of traditional dressing. The images which form part of some important collections across the world were taken in the context of documentary with an eye on highly artistic compositional quality. As Offodu-Okeke puts it, Ojeikere had the "drive to collect timeless visual ornaments of crafted African fashion."[115] The term "ornament" with overtones of beauty suggests finding the camera "capable of producing pictures of aesthetic merit" comparable to painting. [116] Yet, they were a careful study and documentation of the socio-political organisations, economic activities, and cultural identities of Nigerians. Ojeikere's work fits into the studio practices, street photography, and portraiture (of the individual, family, and kingdom) that intensified after Nigerian independence.

These forms of photographic representation have a strong feeling of artistic sensibility, construction of social status, admiration of the self and cultural identity. Yet they can be subjected to a political reading. At the time of the debate around the separation of aesthetics from politics, Lisa Bloom edited an anthology in 1999 that offers ways to read works of art outside the controlled disciplinary boundary of art history. In the introductory essay, Bloom talks about the reading of artworks where "a spectator can place herself in a position of agency through a more embodied subjective viewing process that takes into account questions of difference, sexuality, and power."[117]

The photograph in figure 1.1 is an archetype of the photographic convention of self-presentation in the 1960s. A young family presents itself to the camera, wearing middle class appearance suggested by the modern attire and hale and hearty look of the subjects. But the image is more complicated than that. It is loaded with the political upheavals into which Nigeria plunged shortly after

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[115] Ibid.

[116] Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 233.

[117] Lisa Bloom, "Introducing *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*," in *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, ed. Lisa Bloom (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3.

independence, and which have had looping effects up to the present date. The man in the picture is Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun – the commander of the 2nd Brigade, Nigerian Army, Kaduna – in his early forties in the beginning of the 1960s.
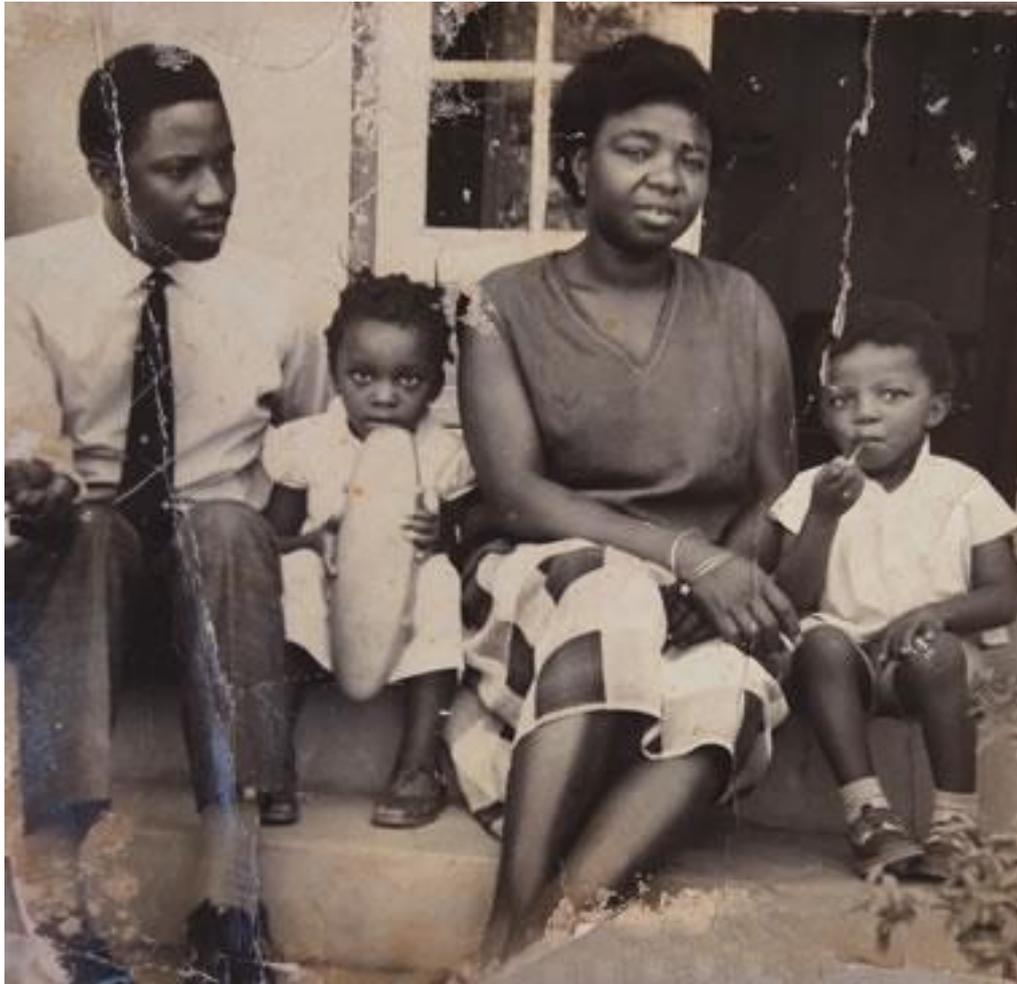
Figure 1.1: Brig. Samuel Ademulegun and his family in the 1960s.
Retrieved from: *Punch*, 16 July 2016, contained in the article, "The First 1966 Coup: Though Painful, I'm Happy I Witnessed the Killing of My Parents – Ademulegun-Agbi."
URL: http://punchng.com/first-1966-coup-though-painful-im-happy-witnessed-killing-parents/
Retrieval date: 17 September 2016

The woman (his wife) was a nurse in her late thirties. In the 15 January 1966 military coup in Nigeria, the man and his spouse were murdered in the presence of their children when the girl (Solape) in the picture was only 6 and the boy (Kole) about 8. In 2016 at the age of 57, Solape (now Mrs. Solape Ademulegun-Agbi) shared the photograph with the *Punch* newspaper to which she granted an interview on the killing of her parents.[118] The gruesome account is a microcosmic representation of the intense struggle for power that has stayed with Nigeria for more than half a century.

The above kind of analysis is important especially when the image is not obviously political. Throughout this thesis, I have worked with the ideas of content, circulation, and socio-political milieu of the production of the image as what offer the understanding of the photograph as political. The three do not always go together for every photographic production or image. For Solape's photograph, circulation – movement from personal archive to online newspaper – is what draws out its political meaning. There is a broad visibility on the online platforms that analogue family archives do not enable. In what follows, I examine a visual production whose political significance consists of the prevailing societal conditions of its time which it fails to include in content.

The art and culture publication, *Nigeria* magazine, constitutes an outstanding example of photographic production whose political elements are not obvious, but which can be read as political. Overseen by the Cultural Division of the Nigerian Ministry of Information, *Nigeria* began in 1933 as *Nigeria Teacher.* It became *Nigeria* in 1936 and kept publishing till 1990.[119] Printed in England, it came heavy with photographs predominantly in black and white. Included in the subject matter of the images were structures such as buildings, mines and railways that tended to show how the imperial expansion had *transformed* the colony. Other subjects were art exhibition events, rituals, religious practices, dances, game, economic activities, performances at festivals, and many more. *Nigeria* was centrally conceived as a

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[118] Tunde Ajaja, "The First 1966 Coup: Though Painful, I'm Happy I Witnessed the Killing of My Parents – Ademulegun-Agbi," *Punch*, July 16, 2016, http://punchng.com/first-1966-coup-though-painful-im-happy-witnessed-killing-parents/.

[119] Pedro Austin Taye, personal communication with the author, June 2016.

surrogate for travel through the art and cultural landscape of Nigeria. An advertisement page in the April 1969 issue of the publication asks readers: "Have you discovered art in Nigeria?" and urges them: "Read 'Nigeria' magazine."[120] Until 1960, the magazine was edited by the expatriate historian Michael Crowder, assisted by L.O. Ukeje and Onuora Nzekwe. The said 'discovery' is nothing more than the colonial representation of Nigeria to the world as a society with an unmediated social order and the infrastructural presence of a benevolent power from elsewhere. *Nigeria* pursued selective representation; it claimed to portray the *beauty* of the colony, but remained silent about colonial violence and political subjectivities.

This was also the case with the creative projects *Nigeria* undertook as an institution. In 1962, it sponsored a photography exhibition entitled *Nigeria and Her Neighbours*. The display featured portraits and photographs of architecture taken by Michael Crowder when he travelled through a number of Francophone West African countries, Sierra Leone and Liberia.[121] *Nigeria* shared Crowder's fascination with the faces of colonial subjects and mud houses he found striking. Crowder relinquished his position as editor of the magazine in 1960, leaving it under the control of Nigerians. Still, it could not break free from romanticisation of the Nigerian experience and the colonial imagination that underpinned the framing of the exotic. No wonder, it was generally silent about Nigeria's political crisis that began on a broad scale with the coup referenced above, reaching its tipping point in the civil war. The turmoil continued throughout the lifespan of *Nigeria* and even beyond. In a sense, identification of such is itself a political reading. Certain events are so crucial that their political attributes ought to be more visually perceptible.

The decade after the war saw a mix of the aftermath of the conflict, the discovery of crude oil, a couple of military coups and the emergence of the second republican government in 1979. These circumstances had a mixed impact on art and photography. The untold hardship resulting from the war especially in the defeated secessionist Biafra constituted the key subjects addressed by certain artists in the

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[120] See *Nigeria*, April 1969, 363.
[121] "Art Reviews,"*Nigeria*, March 1962, 71.

beginning of the decade. Others would not pursue such a politically engaged representation in an overt manner. It is argued that they were careful not to undermine the government's efforts to address the ethnic divisions that had torn the young nation apart.[122] But I suggest that it was more complicated than that. Although the oil boom would later turn out to be problematic, it boosted the economy at the outset and gave Nigeria the resources for ambitious projects aimed at rebuilding the country. In 1977 for instance, the second world Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC) was sponsored by and held in Nigeria. It was an effort towards national cultural harmony and an expression of hope in Nigeria as an entity.[123] So, most artists would not be harsh towards a government perceived to be investing in national integration. In the light of these developments, photography whose mode of representation is much more life-like would implicate artists more directly. But I argue that such caution was rather more importantly motivated by fear of military resistance to criticism. The FESTAC project did not address the ruthlessness of military government of the 1970s. Politically obvious photographic productions during military tyranny became a *risk* in the literal sense of it. It was a "tough" undertaking which only a few could pursue. The next section of this chapter will examine the how and the outcome of such risk-taking in the context of photojournalism.

Meanwhile, the experience of the 1980s shows that the political force of photography can also be found in the socio-economic and political conditions that motivate individuals to take pictures whose compositionality may not be overtly political. This decade saw a major economic downturn in Nigeria. The condition was mainly attributed to the country's over-reliance on oil, resulting in the neglect of other sectors of the economy such as agriculture and industry.[124] Besides, successive military coups, general political instability and obnoxious government policies resulted in inflation, unemployment, job loss, and severe economic

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[122] Offodu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria*.

[123] Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2005).

[124] Eucharia Nwabugo Nwagbara, "The Story of Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria from the Perspective of the Organized Labour," *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research* 1, no.7 (2011).

hardship. Consequently, many unemployed youths took to the street as photographers. Far from the conventional context of the protest march (which other Nigerians did organise), it marked the emergence of a new culture of street photography imbued with a different form of civil resistance. An economic survival strategy of "wait-and-take" portrait (passport) photography became common in city centres.[125] The notion of "survival strategy" underscores the presence of the "grim reality of economic collapse" to which "Nigerians showed great resilience and adjustment."[126] Beyond the entrepreneurial framing, the conversion of the street into open-air studios with all the attendant environmental chaos was a constant reminder of what prompted this turn in the visual economy.

While the commercial survival-street photography flourished, a number of photographers (some of whom had already started working in the 1970s) came into the spotlight in the 1980s. A crop of professional photographers moved into the creative industry of advertising, where photography had weakened the reliance on older modes of hand-drawn illustration.[127] The most notable of the photographers of the period are Sunmi Smart-Cole, Don Barber, Ibi Sofekem, Philip Trimnel, Ginselle Adetona, Ade Idowu, Pat Olear, Demola Odukoya, Jide Adeniyi Jones and Rotimi Fani-Kayode. I use a few of them to explain the forms of photographic civil resistance in the era characterised by a harsh military response to criticism.

First and foremost, in 1984 during his regime as the Nigerian Head of State, General Mohammadu Buhari constituted Decree No. 4 which was severely criticised as a legal articulation against freedom of expression.[128] General Babangida who took over power from Buhari was also hostile to critics of his regime. Thus, the political atmosphere was marked by utter intolerance that made

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[125] The "survival photography" involved the use of "wooden-box cameras and the operator covered with a black cloth." See Nwafor, "Photography and the Spectacle of *Aṣọ Ẹbì*," 204.

[126] Offodu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria*, 332.

[127] Amifor, "Seeing Sense."

[128] The decree states that "any person who publishes in any form, whether written or otherwise, any message, rumour, report or statement which is false in any particular material or which brings or is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government or the Government of a state or public to ridicule or disrepute, shall be guilty of an offence under this Decree." See. Chris Ogbondah and Emmanuel U. Onyedike, "Origins and Interpretation of Nigerian Press Laws," *Africa Media Review* 5, 2. (1991): 61.

open criticism literally deathly. Fela Kuti was one of the fearless few who would not keep silent. He used his music to speak against military brutality. Sunmi Smart-Cole the photographer was Fela's friend. While Smart-Cole did various jobs in different times – running a barber shop, working as a photo editor for *Guardian* newspaper and playing different instruments with musical groups including Fela's – he clung to photography which in turn drew ideas from these experiences. Exploring the aesthetics of visual textuality and play with light, he photographed musicians and musical performances. He engaged in street photography, nature studies and portraiture. He depicted environmental degradation and landmark political events. He displayed his works in solo and group exhibitions, and published them in book form. His broad thematic focus and multiple contexts of practice enabled him to showcase politically charged photographs among a pool of others that were less politically explicit. This for me is a subtle way to speak out at a time of military censorship.

But it is surprising that while the military in the 1980s guarded against the exposure of its brutality, it endorsed the establishment of the National War Museum, Umuahia, in 1985. It was founded in memory of the Nigeria-Biafra war, where photographs are extensively used to relate the horrors and devastating effects of the conflict: hunger, displacement, material loss, disease and death. The museum additionally contains a photographic history of military interventions in Nigerian politics with all the coups and how they connect to the war. However, there are no clues as to the producers of the images or how they were collected. Although museums allow such absences, they intensify the difficulty of writing the history of photography in Nigeria. It is, in the words of Okechukwu Nwafor, a "chequered history" which "is in itself a victim of the institutional dysfunctionalities which have their origin in the political dilemmas of Nigeria, a situation which has engendered the erosion of institutions that might have housed the potential visual archives."[129]

This chapter traces the history of photography in Nigeria as a medium that has been used to challenge the very power relations behind the "chequeredness." In the

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[129] Nwafor, "Photography and the Spectacle of *Aṣọ Ebì*," 178.

first three decades after independence, the activist use of art photography was mainly subtle. But in the 1990s, there was a new breed of photographers prepared to be confrontational in their political use of the camera. The period was a transition between the older subtly activist photographers and the new radical ones. Don Barber is one of the key photographers through whose practice we understand the transition. Between 1987 and 1992, he studied photography in institutions in the United Kingdom. As soon as he returned to Nigeria, he established an independent photography studio. Through photography workshops, public lectures and other forms of training, he taught a number of artists, instilling in them the sense of urgency to address socio-political issues with the medium.[130] As Offodu-Okeke puts it, "his photo documentaries of Nigeria's legacy of economic mismanagement provided a template for these photographers and soon a new group of Nigerian photographers emerged."[131] Kelechi Amadi-Obi and Uche James-Iroha are the most notable ones among them. Other members of the new group, some of who were not directly influenced by Barber, are George Osodi, Adolphus Opara, Kunle Ogunfuyi, Andrew Asiebo, Unoma Numero, Emeka Obanor, George Esiri, Tam Fiofori, Tuoyo Omagba, Aderemi Adegbite, Toyin Sokefun-Bello (Ty Bello) and Afolabi Sotunde. Others such as Akinbode Akinbiyi started their photographic practices earlier but became prominent as they identified with the activist movement of the 21st century. From the 2000s to date, the photographers have intently directed their camera lenses to the state of affairs in Nigeria. They frame everything from acts of negligence by the government to economic hardship, poor infrastructure, environmental degradation, insecurity, urbanisation and its attendant challenges. Enactments of civil resistance against these conditions also constitute important subjects for them. It can be claimed that the eloquence of the photographers derives from the relative freedom allowed by the democracy which returned to the Nigerian polity in 1999, as opposed to the tyranny of military rule. In turn, the aggression with which they use the camera to make politically charged statements is actuated by a feeling of disillusion with the same democracy.

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[130] Offodu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria.*
[131] Ibid., 304.

Most of the photographers live in Lagos, others in different parts of Nigeria. But they have found it important to organise themselves in groups, pull their energies together, and question the state of things in Nigeria and more broadly in Africa. Such organising allows them to collaborate in photographic projects such as exhibitions, publications, workshops, conferences and seminars. In 2001, a set of Nigerian photographers took part in the fourth photography biennale in Mali tagged *The Bamako Encounter*. At the end of the event, some of the Nigerians constituted the Depth of Fields (DOF) collective. The initiator, Uche James Iroha, insists that it is imperative for the photographers who work in the country to interrogate social issues with their work.[132] This position can be illustrated with his butchery series of 2004.[133] The photographs cast light on the neglected economic context of urban Lagos where open-air slaughtering and processing of animals for food constitute environmental and health issues ignored by the government.

Similar concerns have kept driving photographic projects in Nigeria so that their political turn has become somewhat normalised. Whether they are individual, group or institutional creative projects, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the chaotic life lived in Nigeria and the forces that condition it. During Nigeria's golden jubilee (2010), Chukwuemeka Bosah and George Ezozie produced a publication entitled *A Celebration of Modern Nigerian Art: 101 Nigerian Artists.* The development of formal art practice in the county as chronicled in the compilation interfaces with the national history of political independence.[134] But rather than dwell on any romanticised story of freedom from colonial rule, the selection of photographers included in the collection is made to incorporate younger ones whose work is centrally activist.[135] This helps to raise the

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[132] Rosario Jiménez, "Encountering Otherness. Depth of Field: A Collective Approach to Africa," *Index Comunicación* 3, no.2 (2013). Members of DOF include Kelechi Amadi Obi, Amaize Ojeikere, Zynab Odunsi, Emeka Okereke and Toyin Sokefun-Bello (Ty Belo).

[133] Some photographs in the series appeared in the 2012 art publication, *Artists of Nigeria.*

[134] Chukwuemeka Bosah and George Ezozie, *A Celebration of Modern Nigerian Art: 101 Nigerian Artists* (Ohio: Ben Bosah Books, 2010).

[135] There are only rare instances of photographic projects that tell the story of politics and governance in Nigeria without concentration on the state failure narrative. The 2011 presidential inauguration art exhibition – *Nigeria, Our Nigeria* – typifies such exception. As the event was organised to mark the inauguration of Goodluck Jonathan as Nigeria's president, the featuring photographs were selected to project positive ideas about Nigeria.

question of how Nigeria has fared since independence. Selected images include those of photographers who are obsessed with environmental issues in the country. George Osodi is an outstanding example. His photograph entitled "Utorogu Gas Flare" is taken from his "Oil Rich Niger Delta Series" of 2006. Osodi has worked extensively on the region. In 2011, he did the documentary, *Delta Nigeria: The Rape of Paradise*, a project that pictures the Niger Delta oil crisis in an unprecedented and comprehensive manner. It is about "environmental neglect and degradation, neglect of human capital and the emergence of deviant behaviours that they now sponsor."[136]

Like Osodi's Niger Delta projects, a lot of other photographic undertakings were specifically conceived to expose state failure and the resulting conflicts. The 2005 Glendora publication – *Lagos: A City at Work* – was initiated precisely to challenge the government for the degeneration of socio-economic life in Lagos. The project team is upfront in announcing this objective:

> We are searching…for suitable ways of capturing the frenzied energies of survival, intense anxieties, and recalcitrant resilience that pervade the subcultures of this modern metropolis. Our concerns were diverse and disturbing, typical of most conversations about Lagos – the deep frustrations evoked by the general state of neglect and rapid collapse of infrastructure, the corruption of the political class, insecurity, the privatization of public services, religious fanaticism and failing traditions – basically a seeming interminable continuum of problems and contradictions.[137]

They found creative use of photography suitable for the kind of statement they desired to make. Apart from body texts inserted at certain intervals into the pages of the publication, the predominantly photographic production is enhanced through other strategies of image-text layering. To illustrate, figure 1.2 reflects a graphic design approach where descriptive texts constitute another kind of picture laid in as an extension of the image they illuminate. In the black and white photograph, we

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[136] Francis Ugiomoh, "Niger Delta Seen Through George Osodi's Lens," in *Delta Nigeria: The Rape of Paradise*, by George Osodi, (Great Britain: Trolley Limited, 2011): 8.
[137] Glendora Books, *Lagos: A City at Work* (Lagos: Glendora Books, 2005): 10.

see a group of youths who appear as if caught unawares by the camera. Distributed in different poses in a cramped room, each looks lost in thought and seems to be ignorant of the presence of others. As viewers try to figure out the kind of space represented in the photograph, its annex –the seemingly hand-drawn blue texts on yellow background – defines more clearly the picture of a living space. It is typical of the "houses" to which many "city dwellers" "slush through the floods to get to."[138] In the last few years, flooding has been a recurring catastrophe in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria. It is the outcome of poor waste management system and a way in which the engineering problem of the cities and towns respond to the global changing climatic conditions. The environmental and urban crises – the floods, the traffic congestions that last for hours, the teeming hawkers and malnourished homeless beggars along the roads – are issues which "rules and rulemaking could have obviated."[139] In other words, they are indications of failed governance.
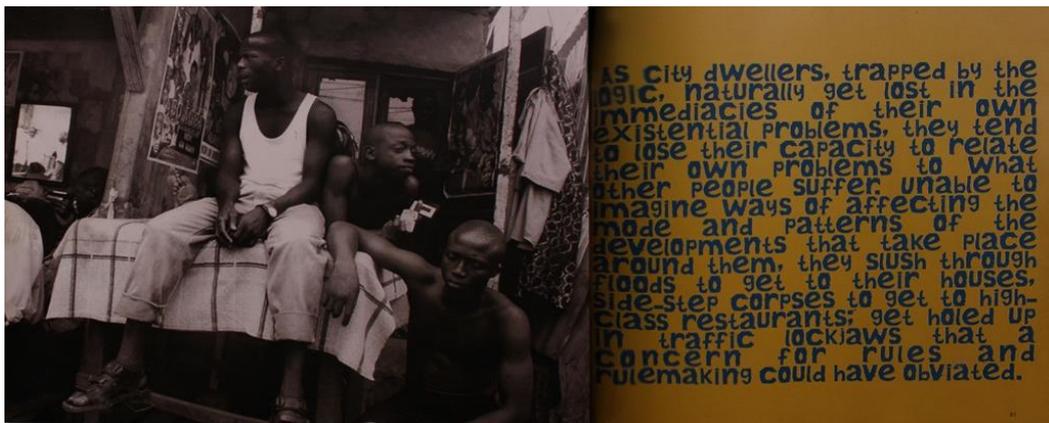
Figure 1.2: City dwellers living in squalor
Reproduced from *Lagos: A City at Work* (pages 90-91)

Unlike the *Lagos: A City at Work* project, other photographic initiatives in Nigeria are conceived as the response to particular socio-political developments. During the 2012 nationwide protests on the removal of fuel subsidy, Aderemi Adegbite – "an angry young man"[140] according to his exhibition catalogue – participated through the use of the camera and documented certain moments in parts of Lagos.

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[138] Ibid., 91.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Aderemi Adegbite, *N62* (Lagos: Goethe Institut-Nigeria, 2012).

The project is said to be the "adventure of an artiste-participant in a struggle."[141] His photographs depict the enactment modes of the protest (such as occupation and burning of tyres), the participating public figures (including well-known activists Femi Kuti and Gani Fawehinmi), the demands of the protesters as inscribed in placards, and other disparate elements in the struggle. It can be claimed that in relation to civil resistance, photography is assigned a double task. While it resists inequality by exposing it, it shows protest movements enacted in real spaces.

At this point, it is important to re-state that in terms of content and framing, the line between documentary, photojournalism and what I have read in this section as art photography is blurred. But I treat them separately in recognition of the differentiation in their practices, institutional configurations, and modes of circulation, which have different effects. The photographic productions discussed so far in this part of the chapter are much like documentary, but created in the context of art.

Similar platforms were set up in an artistic framework with the intention to periodically bring together photographers whose work is politically forceful. Since 2010, the African Artists' Foundation based in Lagos has organised the annual Lagos Photo Festival featuring indoor exhibitions, large-scale outdoor displays, competition, creative design, seminars, conferences, workshops and performances. Yearly, in theme or content, the event has been crafted to enable photographers to engage with a variety of issues in Nigeria and Africa. For instance, in 2011, the theme – "What's Next Africa? The Hidden Stories" – was formulated with balance of representation as its goal. It was intended to direct attention to stories other than the stereotypical portrayal of Africa as ravaged by hunger, disease, poverty, political conflicts and wars. Still, the photographers could not avoid the depiction of issues relating to these, given their anxiety about "where the African continent is going with all its problems."[142] Lagos Photo has to date had an activist underpinning.

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Marc Prüst, "What's Next Africa? The Hidden Stories," in *Lagos Photo 2011: What's Next Africa? The Hidden Stories* (Lagos: African Artist's Foundation, 2011), 9.

Another such politically-packed project is the annual Photo Africa – a subsidiary of the Life in My City Art Festival (LIMCAF) which commenced in 2007 with Enugu as its nerve centre. LIMCAF – one of the most important art events in Nigeria, comprising exhibition, competition and performances – allows artists to share their experiences of living in Nigeria. Photography is one of the preferred media. In 2012, Photo Africa was created to enable exclusive deployment of photography in addressing the LIMCAF theme. Once that was done, the Nigerian participants turned their cameras towards the socio-political questions that have engaged the majority of art photographers in 21st-century Nigeria.

It is also crucial to examine the production of resistance photography in Nigeria in the context of travel. James Clifford theorises travel as a denotation "of spatial practices that produce knowledge, diaries, stories, books and other forms of expression."[143] While photography constitutes a form of knowledge produced in the travel context, it could serve as the sole purpose of organised tours. In either case, Crawshaw and Urry's interrogation of travel photography as a form of resistance applies. Their argument as presented within the broader discourse of tourist marketing is about its disruption of the romanticising effect of tourist imagery.[144] An important aspect of art photography in Nigeria is the notion of the study tour in which the visual medium is used, not to romanticise the story about Nigeria, but to lay bare its internal tensions.

The "Invisible Borders: The Trans-African Photography Project" founded in Nigeria in 2009 was formulated for cross-national movement of photographs in Africa and for picturing the continent under travel conditions. Seeking "to change society by talking about Africa from Africa,"[145] participants in the project are obsessed with the concern about the upheavals in African societies. Within the purview of the tours, Nigerian photographers have shared the stories of the country's distress with the other Africans while learning about theirs. It is also

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[143] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 35.
[144] Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, "Tourism and the Photographic Eye," in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, ed. Chris Rojek and John Urry (London: Routledge, 1997).
[145] Jiménez, "Encountering Otherness," 136.

important to note that the photographers can belong to multiple groups at the same time. Meanwhile, Invisible Borders is not unique in this experience. In a journal article, I have noted that the project was inspired by the Pan-African Circle of Artists (PACA) founded by Krydz Ikwuemesi in Nigeria in 1991.[146] PACA was created for the networking of Artists in Africa. In 2001, it initiated the Overcoming Maps study tour undertaken by road for the understanding and amelioration of African problems. The travelling camera is thus a medium through which Nigerian artists bring the perils of their society into conversation with those of other parts of the continent.

It is important to explain the unified sense in which I use "Nigeria" to examine group projects undertaken in particular locations, especially in Lagos. The photographers live in different parts of Nigeria. But a range of institutional forms provide them with ways of working together. Study tour for example involves the photographers travelling together in person. Exhibitions entail the movement and convergence of not only the individuals but their works. Collective projects are therefore travelling practices in which the camera pictures the sores of the ailing society as it moves.

The travelling camera operates in yet another perspective. In the 21st century marked by intensified resistance photography in Nigeria, individuals from elsewhere contribute to that visual culture. They find it difficult to ignore the markers of socio-economic and political upheaval they witness. So, they frame them with the camera. This can be illustrated with the 2008 project by Victor Politis – a Greek New York-based business traveller and photographer. Between 2005 and 2008, Politis toured some of the Nigeria's major cities – Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Kano, Sokoto, Akure and others. Starting with a point-and-shoot camera to a digital SLR with 16mm to 200mm lenses, he created photographs depicting the struggle by ordinary Nigerians to eke out their daily living.[147] From

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[146] George Agbo, "Forging Trans-national Itineraries of Cultural-artistic Integration and Propagation in Africa: An Example of the *Overcoming Maps* Tours of the Pan- African Circle of Artists (PACA)," *Journal of Liberal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2012).

[147] Victor Politis, *Nigeria Through the Eyes of a Passerby* Volume I (Chicago: Voyager Media, 2008).

24 October to 6 November 2008, the images were exhibited in Didi Museum, Lagos, as works of art and accompanied by a rich catalogue in full colour print.

Figure 1.3: Cover of Victor Politis' photography exhibition catalogue, 2008
Credit: Centre for Contemporary Art library, Lagos

The cover image of the publication (figure 1.3) portrays a candy hawker in his profile view looking into the space in front of him. He carries on his head the commodities stocked in and around the walls of a thick paper box. The photograph is a microcosmic view of the rest in the inside pages. They are mainly images of street hawkers comprising adults and children, squalid precincts peopled by the poor, passengers loaded like fishes into rickety vehicles. The title of the publication, *Nigeria Through the Eyes of a Passerby,* Volume I stands for the euphemistic approach adopted by the photographer in order to throw some punches at the political elites of his host country. Politis is careful not to draw criticism to himself from the high-profile Nigerians and governments with whom he did business. The pathetic images are not titled, which might signal his intent. As if

asking the viewers to draw out the meanings by themselves, he has only indicated the place where each photograph was taken. In the introductory part of the publication, he announces that he is not a professional photographer.

But other sources reveal him as a "Greek photographer" who has won many awards in photography competitions.[148] Inserting the claim to be "nobody" in photography, he adds that he only photographs what strikes him. "The dignity and survival skills of the people of Nigeria"[149] are what fascinated him. He was not thrilled by the "beautiful homes" to which he was invited by "Leaders of Industry and Government," or ostentatious "traditional weddings and executive suites." These would rather present a romanticised image of Nigeria. Politis turned his camera to the street where he found the majority of the Nigerian population. And he produced images that countered the ones that would be shown to him by his elite friends. In my view, the project is that of a documentary activist photography. He took the images over the period of 5 years (beginning from around 2004) during which he "travelled to Nigeria more than fifty times."[150] So he was not a "passerby" after all.

Politis' work and other major art photographic projects undertaken in Nigeria in the past one and a half decades had obvious political force. That was not previously the case. In the first forty years after independence, artists' use of the camera in response to socio-political upheavals in the country was not explicit. I have demonstrated a possible way of analysing photographs as political when they are not obviously so. The approach is to investigate the events that marked the time of producing the image. This way, the living conditions that motivated the taking of the photograph or that eluded depicton in the image are cues to the political reading. From the turn of the 21st century, overt activist photography within the framework of art was intensified and the practice has continued till the present date. Unlike art photography, photojournalism began early to respond openly to

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[148] Tajudeen Sowole, *"Meet Politis, Greek Photo Enthusiast, Who Promotes Nigeria" African Arts with Tag*, December 2, 2011, http://africanartswithtaj.blogspot.com/2011/12/greek-photographer-victor-politis-in.html.
[149] Ibid, 1.
[150] Page 3

political issues in Nigeria and has sustained the intensity of the struggle over many years. The next section sheds light on how it constitutes the nation's resistance history of photography.

Printed news, printed activism

Print journalism is one of the earliest platforms for the public encounter with photographs in Nigeria. The images are normatively understood to operate in special relation to written words, precisely for the illumination of news stories. But beyond that context, photojournalism (as the visual practice is termed) constitutes a fascinating form of civil resistance. Through engagement with the photographic practices in print news media, this section presents a history of photography in Nigeria contextualised as a mode of civil struggle. Images from selected newspapers and magazines published between 1960 and 2000 – *Daily Times*, *Daily Star*, *New Nigerian*, *Newswatch*, *Tell*, and others –are analysed to support the claim. Selection of images from the historical press archive was guided by considerations concerning their semiotic signification in relation to the explanation of the cases for which they are deployed. I considered how each photograph would help me to illustrate analytical points. Attention is also given to the various ways photographs are used beyond news illustration to challenge inequality and injustice. Selection of publications was determined by their operational consistency over long periods, and the chosen time frame is important given that it covers the analogue age preceding online migration of print news outlets. Again, I considered magazines and newspapers known to be at the forefront of the political struggle.

Through the analysis of the images in terms of compositionality and socio-political context of production and circulation, we gain insight into some of the ways photojournalism produces its political effects. First, in certain instances, photographs make political impacts by virtue of their appearance on newspaper and magazine pages, independent of written articles. Secondly, in the mode of documentary photography, the journalistic camera follows crucial societal developments over extended periods to draw attention to and challenge them. Also, state failure is confronted through the use of portraiture to link public upheavals to the political class. These epistemological directions are important

because they allow us to do something different with photojournalism. From this, we retrieve a history not of the genre itself but of the visuality of civil struggle in a postcolony.

In Nigeria, the deployment of the print media and its visual practices in the context of resistance dates back to the colonial era. Rich in cartoon drawings, *The West African Pilot*, a newspaper founded in 1937 by Nnamdi Azikiwe, was at the forefront of anti-colonial struggle. Following the attainment of political independence in 1960, a number of media outlets emerged to frame as news stories the imaginary of an anticipated new Nigeria.[151] The exciting moment that followed the so-called liberation was however short-lived. Nigeria soon manifested the traits that have been argued to be incidental to postcolonial nationalism. Colonies mobilised forces against their dominating powers and secured self-rule for themselves. But once that was achieved, the dreamt-of nationhood became elusive. In *Culture and Imperialism* where Edward Said deals extensively with the paradoxes of nationalism, he argues that the end of colonialism is as much about replacement of its political order as with a new class of leaders. Given that the individuals are themselves products of colonialism, they replicate the structure that produced them.[152] The Nigerian experience is summed up by Said's formulation.

Whereas art photography did not respond immediately to this political overturn in an overt manner, photojournalism did. The anti-colonial visuality of the press gave way to strategic use of gray-scale photographs to call attention to emerging conflicts. That prompt response could also be attributed to the fundamental role of the press as the watchdog of society. *Daily Times* is one of the national dailies whose life spanned the pre- and post-independence periods. It started publishing in 1926 and attained prominence that reached its peak in 1977. That year, the Federal Government took over *Daily Times*. Soon, its reputation waned due to political pressure and mismanagement. Its revitalisation process began in the turn of the 21st century, leading to its online migration in 2011.[153] The collapse of the newspaper under the government is a confirmation of the very culture of

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[151] Offodu-Okeke, *Artists of Nigeria*.

[152] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

[153] See http://dailytimes.com.ng/about/.

unaccountability it began to resist a few years after independence. Photography was central to the resistance. Peter Obe and Akin Adedayo worked with *Daily Times* as photojournalists. Whereas only a few of Adedayo's photographs are found in the publications, Obe's are numerous.[154] Obe became famous and earned a reputation as "the doyen of Nigerian press photographers."[155] Most writings on him make reference to his documentation of the political tensions – ethnic rivalry, massacre, and military coup – that gripped Nigeria in the mid-1960s, climaxing in a civil war (1967-1970).

The historical events as chronicled in *Daily Times* are presented in the journalistic context but in a way that reflects documentary photography and its reformist project.[156] Obe's work – which was not limited to *Daily Times* given that he also worked with Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Reuters – destabilises one major claim of what sets photojournalism apart from documentary. Kratochvil and Persson contend that the images taken by the photojournalist operate in a kind of one-off mode amidst daily deadline requirements to bring together and illuminate news events. In that case, pictures are mainly supplementary to texts. They conclude that this mode of operation does not allow for visual engagement with issues over time in the manner that documentary does.

While I do not suggest that there is no demarcation between the two genres, I argue that Kratochvil and Persson's critique does not apply to Nigeria. Even as *Daily Times* published photographic reports of other issues that did not have to be followed over time, it covered the various dimensions of the war, from start to

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[154] There is no consistency in indicating the names of photographers in the short descriptions of the photographs published in the newspapers and magazines studied in this section. Many of the pictures in *Daily Times* bear the name of Obe as the photographer. A few refer to Adedayo. Many others do not have any clue to the photographer. Such images could have been sourced from elsewhere. Nonetheless, in all these cases, authorship of the image is acquired by the publisher.

[155] "The Picture that Caused a Scramble," *Daily Times*, September 26, 1969, 3.

[156] In the 2oth century literature on photography, there is a common alignment of photography with social reform. Drawing on the American example, Peter Szto writes that before the invention of photography, visual modes of representation (such as drawings and graphs) in the print media were found effective in drawing public attention to social problems and mobilising resources to address them. So, photography emerged as a gain for the reformist project due to its foundational truth claim. See Peter Szto, "Documentary Photography in American Social Welfare History: 1897-1943," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 35, no. 2 (2008).

finish. Images depicting the eruption of political violence in parts of the country had begun to appear on the newspaper pages following the earlier-mentioned first military coup in January 1966. (A counter-coup took place in July same year). When the war broke out the following year, the photographic reporting became a regular facet of published daily news. In the *Daily Times* of 30 December 1967, the photograph below (figure 1.4) appeared alongside the article: "1967 – A Bad Year for Hopes and Dreams."
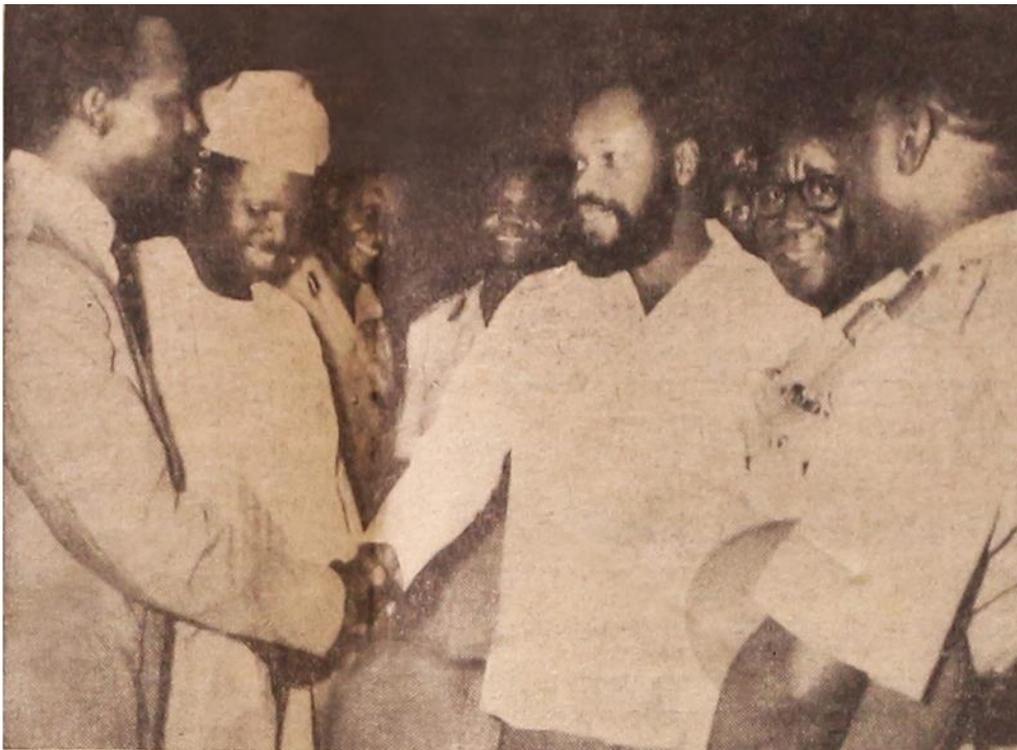
Figure 1.4: Lieutenant Cornel Yakubu Gowon and Lieutenant Cornel Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu
Reproduced from: *Daily Times*, December 30, 1967, pp 6-7.

In the photograph, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon (left) and Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu (right) are depicted in a handshake at the meeting held in Aburi, Ghana, from 4 to 5 January 1967. Since the coups of the previous year, the power tussle between the Northern-controlled Federal Military Government led by Gowon and the Eastern Nigeria governed by Ojukwu had deepened. To settle the conflict and avert an impending war, the members of the

Supreme Military Council met at Aburi, Ghana. Besides the fact that the military leaders were invited to the meeting by the Chairman of the Ghanaian National Liberation Council, Lieutenant General Ankrah, the choice of venue in a foreign country highlights the high level of suspicion that marked the struggle. As the toll of the massacre of easterners in Northern Nigeria was on the increase, Ojukwu and his delegates were concerned about their safety should the meeting be held anywhere within Nigeria.[157] The photograph with all the expressions of friendliness – the handshake and the smile on the faces of the subjects – is a visual irony. What followed the depicted scene were the splitting of the regions into 12 states by Gowon, the declaration of Biafra, and a war that forever changed the history of Nigeria. As Baptiste puts it, these were the outcomes of "conflicting interpretations" of the Aburi accord by Gowon and Ojukwu.[158]

The article accompanying the above image outlines the major conflicts experienced in Nigeria from the 1966 coups to the end of 1967, the first year of the war. Throughout the three-year war period, the unfolding of events was brought to public view in photographic form by the press. The depicted dimensions include armed attacks, protests by civilians, internal displacement and the international movement of Nigerian refugees. The Ghanaian government that sought to prevent the war in 1967 had in 1969 driven away Nigerian refugees and other foreign nationals who did not possess resident permits. Obe followed the repatriation with his camera. His work brought to the pages of *Daily Times* the disturbing images of the horrible journey undertaken homeward by Nigerians, to meet the same situation they had fled. French photographer Gilles Caron also covered the conflict. His work helped to bring the attention of the West to the war. Claude Cookman writes of Caron's project as a call to assist the victims of the strife. His argument is "that his (Caron's) humanistic vision helped persuade Western readers that the Biafrans were not merely pitiable, but deserving of help; that his thorough

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[157] F. A. Baptiste, "Constitutional Conflict in Nigeria: Aburi and After," *The World Today* 23, no. 7 (1967).
[158] Ibid., 301.

approach detailed the multiple dimensions of this complex political and humanitarian crisis…"[159]

An example of the humanitarian assistance received by the victims of the war (although not from the West this time) is portrayed in a photograph published in the *Daily Times* of 4 September 1969. Doctors from Algeria arrived at Lagos airport, carrying their suitcases. They came to replace another medical team that had cared for war casualties for several months. Besides the content of the image itself, its lack of connection with the surrounding body texts is striking. Rather than illustrate any article, it stands alone with its own story. Only guided by a short description, viewers are invited to contemplate the wounded body by watching the photograph of those who came to care for it.

The history of Nigerian print journalism is replete with diverse uses of photographs independent of written essays. Apart from the above example, photographs could be given a full page or even more. They could be used to form a pictorial story on a particular subject or as thumbnails of different issues brought together. The newspapers of the 1970s are filled with these forms of representation. The covered subjects include social events such as weddings, naming ceremonies and birthday parties. Others present a collage of news on political developments gathered from across the country. The picture below was cut out from the "Week-end Events in Pictures" page of the April 1977 *New Nigerian* newspaper. The page is composed of seven photographs on four specific events: installation of the Emir of Fika, Alhaji Muhammadu Ibu Idrissa in Borno State, budget presentation in Anambra State, familiarisation tour of the Military Governor of Bauchi State, and the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the Irolu town hall project in the Ijebu Remo area of Ogun State (figure 1.5). The image is isolated because it stands in for the rest in the interpretation of the political climate of the 1970s.

Following the end of the war in 1970, the Nigerian government took actions intended to produce cathartic results. It initiated the policy of "3Rs"– Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation, and declared "no victor, no

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[159] Claude Cookman, "Gilles Caron's Coverage of the Crisis in Biafra," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 15 (2008): 226.

vanquished, but victory for common sense and the unity of Nigeria."[160] The policy denotes the rebuilding of a destroyed structure of societal life, the improvement or restoration of normal living conditions, and reunification after a broken relationship. Figure 1.5 constitutes a visual symbolisation of that denotation.
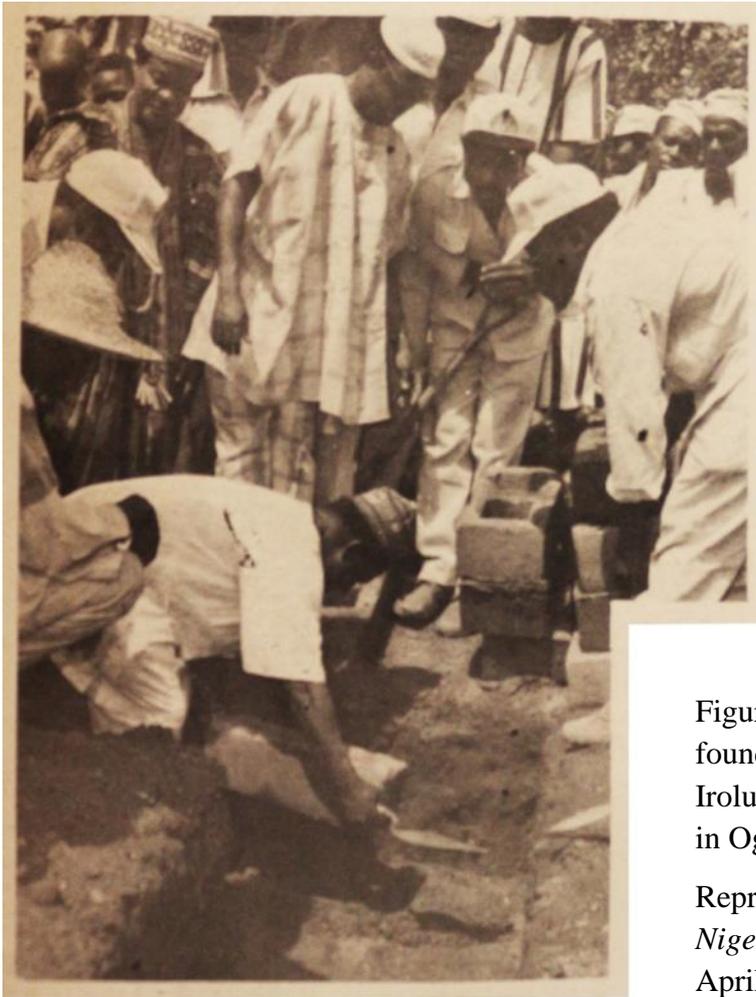
Figure 1.5: Laying the foundation stone of the Irolu town hall project in Ogun State

Reproduced from: *New Nigerian*, April 13, 1977, p3.

A Permanent Secretary – Mr. O.A. Osibogun – on behalf of the Ogun State Military Governor is frozen in a squatting pose. Apparently surrounded by other government functionaries who watch intently, he lays a block in the ground. The evocation of government's commitment to the transformation of Nigeria after the war as found in the picture permeates the photographic imagery of the press in

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[160] Abraham Nabhon Thomas, "Beyond the Platitude of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Nigeria: Revolutionary Pressures in the Niger Delta," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12, no.1 (2010): 55.

the 1970s. Certain depictions of political elites became rampant: signing of contracts for public projects, inspection of ongoing projects, commissioning of completed ones and touring of political constituencies. Photography also became important in the articulation of ethnic reconciliation. The images published on the same page with figure 1.5 fit into this framework. For example, on the Emir of Fika's installation in Northern Nigeria, we are shown among other moments the dance performance by a group from the southern part of the country.

The clear message is that peoples torn apart by ethnic and religious rivalry could now live in harmony. The same is implied in the four full pages of the *Weekly Star* newspaper of 30 January 1977 given to photographic coverage of the FESTAC event. The project and the visual narration of it are all about the same notion of reintegration. Nonetheless, this national ambition was never a complete success.

In *The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and Reintegration in Nigeria*, Olukunle Ojeleye evaluates the reintegration programme, drawing on the policy of 3Rs. He argues that it "was not inclusive as it excluded the Biafran secessionists whose interest was not adequately catered for in the relatively 'winner-takes-all' approach of the federal forces."[161] The government could not create the structure that would lead to sustained peace and development. Through the photographic production of the print media, attention was brought to the sad realities that attended the government's reintegration exercise. Dilapidation of public infrastructure, fuel scarcity, inimical labour relations, educational and industrial backwardness, power tussles and killings became common. The ways these ills were presented through the practices of photojournalism set the genre apart from art photography in the early history of postcolonial Nigeria. In the three decades after independence, the cameras of artists were not used in an obvious manner against the state. As for photojournalism, it began early enough in open resistance against misrule. That is not to say that all media platforms in Nigeria are involved in the civil struggle. Government-controlled outlets are unsurprisingly out of it. They are in constant defence of the state, the very structure they serve. Even under

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[161] Olukunle Ojeleye, *The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and Reintegration in Nigeria* (UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2010): xii.

severely cruel political conditions, the government is challenged not by its own media platforms but those that operate outside its influence. Beginning especially from the 1980s, military dictatorship coupled with political corruption grew to an unprecedented level in Nigeria. As if naturally reacting to the development, press criticism was intensified. Portraiture provides us with visual accounts of the intensified struggle.

The photographic portraits of Nigerian political elites have since independence appeared on the faces of newspapers and magazines. But it can be argued that the disruption of their "honorific" framing, to use Sekula's term again, became most profound beginning from the 1980s.[162] The body especially the face rose to symbolise power struggles, state corruption and brutality. In *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Cynthia Freeland writes: "Artists (and I add, photographers) who create portraits have often tried to convey aspects of their sitters' moral character, emotional life, and personality in their depictions."[163] This ambition is historically rooted in the belief that the inside and the outside of a person operate in close relation. Freeland traces the history from Descartes and Le Brun (16th -17th century) to the birth of phrenology and physiognomy (18th century), the works of Charles Bell and Charles Darwin (19th century) and of the 20th and the 21st centuries psychologists of the face such as Paul Ekman.[164]

The 1980s and 90s saw the most remarkable combination of military tyranny and high-scale corruption in Nigeria. Those who controlled the political space and their exploits made headlines in the print media. Their words were presented in inverted comas to highlight their recklessness in the handling of power. Their portraits appeared for the public observation of Nigeria's doom. The portrayal of the images was striking in the way they were strategically placed on the pages of the magazines and newspapers. They could for instance appear on front pages alongside evocative headlines. Phrenology pioneered by Joseph Gall but popularised by Johann Spurzheim would ask us to read the bumps on the head to

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[162] Sekula, "The Body and the Archive."
[163] Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 119.
[164] Ibid.

gain insight into the behaviour of the represented persons. For Johann Caspar Lavater, the champion of physiognomy, and Descartes and Le Brun who came before him, the face is privileged as the bearer of the semiotic codes.[165] The way these ideas were later dropped motivates us to consider Freeland's concluding coinage, "the paradox of portraiture." She posits that the whole project of portraiture is "strange" and wonders how "a material *object* (could) be used to capture or convey a person, who is a *subject*."[166] In relation to the activist history of photography in Nigeria, my view is that portraiture plays an important role. It enables the making of various forms of connection with regards to *knowing* the represented person. Its portrayal of the inner being hinges on shared awareness of the individual's character. While the serious facial looks of the depicted persons remind viewers of their cruelty and abuse of power, friendly appearances tend to veil the vices.

Consider the portraits of the military heads of state Generals Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Their predominantly serious-looking photographs on the pages of the print news media of their times are constant reminders of their much-criticised regimes. The *Newswatch* magazine – one major platform through which the media resistance is understood – was itself a victim of state violence. In October 1986, the Babangida-led government reacted to its activist journalism by allegedly masterminding the assassination of its first editor-in-chief, Dele Giwa. At the first anniversary of the death, legal practitioner Olu Onagoruwa, himself an activist, remarked: "The police have not found who killed Dele Giwa, because they know who killed Dele Giwa."[167] In a similar inventive use of words, Fela Kuti asked through his music, "Who killed Dele Giwa," and mentioned "Baba," adding that his listeners could use their discretion to make it up with "Ngida," thus Babangida.

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[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid., 291.
[167] Louisa Aguyi-Ironsi, Dare Babarinsa, Kola Ilori and Peter Ishaka, "Dele Giwa's Week of Glory," *Newswatch*, November 2 , 1987, 20.
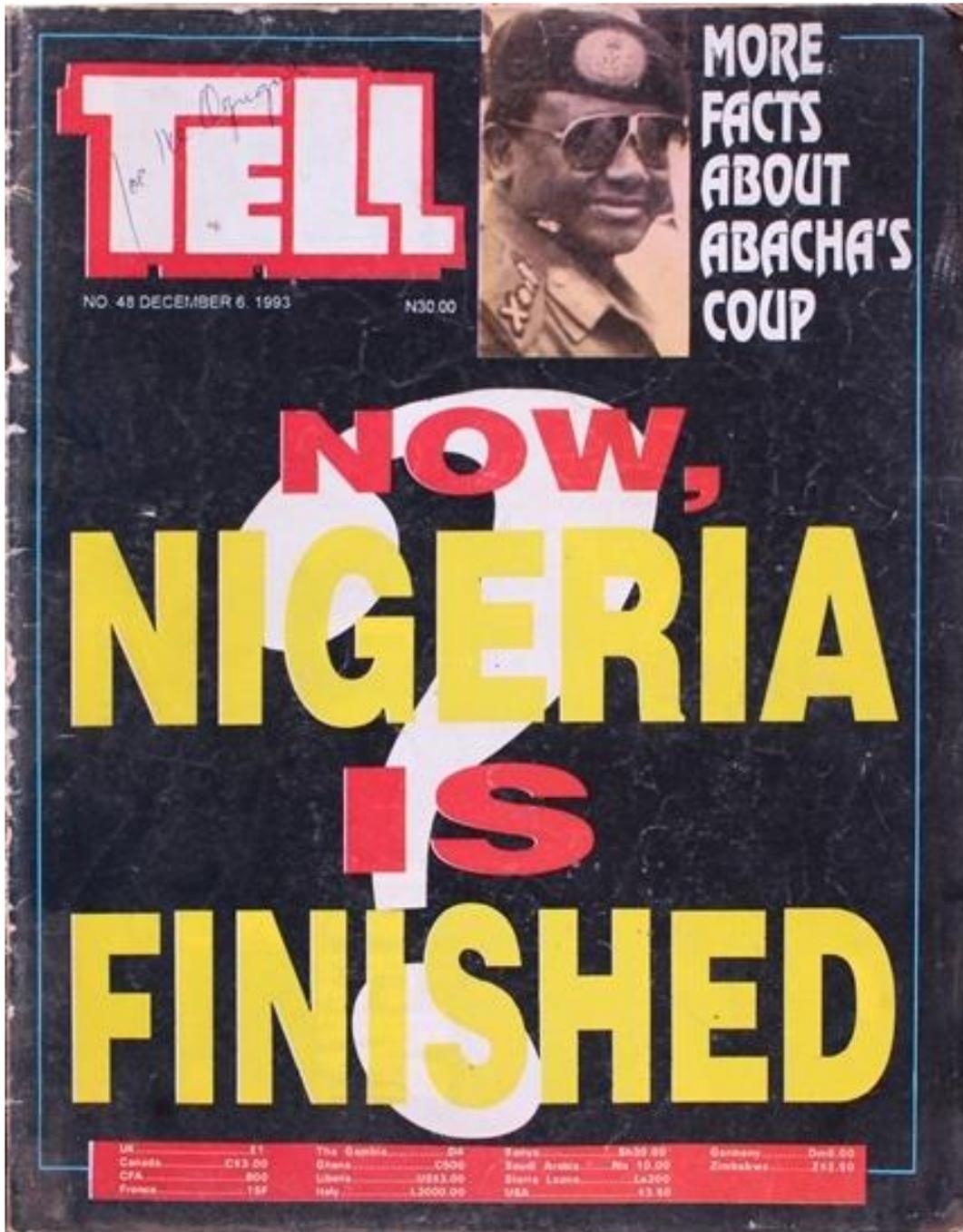
Figure 1.6: Cover page of 6 December 1993 *Tell* magazine
Credit: Joe Ike Ogugua of Patrick Ogugua Memorial Centre (POMEC),
Nando, Anambra State

Abacha took over power in November 1993. A month later, the *Tell* magazine
came out with a cover bearing his portrait with a seemingly feigned smile along
with two striking headings: "More Facts about Abacha's Coup" and "Now Nigeria

is Finished" (figure 1.6). The proclamation made in the second line is reinforced by the general's image on the 10th page of the magazine. Pictured in a standing pose apparently delivering an address, he is said to be playing to Babangida's script. The description is an apt articulation of the commonality between Babangida and Abacha's regime. Both were marked by dictatorship and an unprecedented scale of looting.
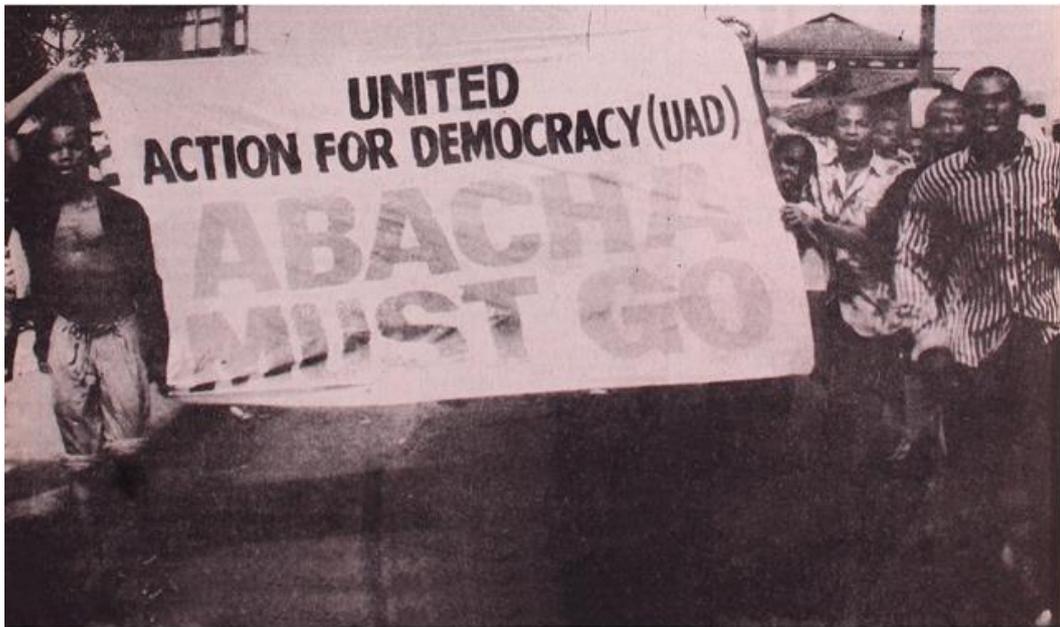
Figure 1.7: Protest against Abacha's regime
Culled from: *New Nigerian*, 23 March 1998, p. 12.
Credit: Joe Ike Ogugua of Patrick Ogugua Memorial Centre (POMEC), Nando, Anambra State

Undeterred by Abacha's demeanour, the protest against his government was intense on the pages of print media and in public spaces. In figure 1.7, a group of protesters hold up a banner demanding the dictator's overthrow. The individuals organised themselves as the United Action for Democracy group. The 23 March 1998 issue of *Tell* magazine in which the photograph was published came with a page in the "Graffiti" cartoon series that conveys the concerns of the masses: "No work, no school, no sleep, no water, no light, no fuel, no road, no money, no

life."[168] The sense of frustration elicited by these "nos" took on a normalised association with Abacha's portrait. In other words, his image became a reminder of the crimes against the citizenry committed by his regime.

To refer to phrenology and physiognomy once again, Allan Sekula connects them with photography and crime in the 19th century. Phrenological science aided by photography was deployed by the French penal system. Portraits of prison inmates were documented along with the descriptions of their criminal behaviour and phrenological analyses. Through this method, the state had insight into the characters of those who constituted a security threat to other citizens.[169] There has never been such a system in Nigerian history and phrenology ultimately failed. Yet a certain element of what is described by Sekula applies to Nigeria in reverse. The portrait photograph of Sani Abacha acquired an indexical signification of state crime. With the wide circulation of the image and those of other political figures in Nigeria, the masses contemplate the criminalities of their leaders.

The death of Abacha in June 1998 ended the protest against his regime and led to the developments that climaxed in the constitution of a democratic government in 1999. The emergence of the new political order coincided with the advent of the internet which changed journalism, as well as its photographic and activist practices. But as shown in this section, the four decades after independence constitute an era during which photojournalism flourished within the bounds of analogue technology. The genre is important in understanding the history of photography as a mode of civil protest in Nigeria. It began very early to respond to political upheavals in the country. The photojournalists might not have seen their work as political protest. But I have argued that we see it as such. Through the appropriation of documentary and portraiture within the paradigm of news production, their practice brought attention to injustice.

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[168] Franklin Oyekusibe was the cartoonist for *Tell*. A lot of other cartoons created by him were published in the magazine along with the "Graffiti" which became a regular feature.
[169] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the history of photography in Nigeria from the activist perspective. I have drawn on what I broadly categorised as art photography and photojournalism to account for the relatedness on the one hand and institutional differences on the other between various practices. Within the paradigm of analogue production (which is our concern here), the two genres have coexisted. But they constitute different modes of engagement with the camera, producing diverse effects. For some decades following Nigerian independence, the photographic practices which I have read as art were not overtly activist. They were dominated mainly by technical questions of experimenting with the medium and documentation of socio-cultural life while paying attention to the aesthetic qualities of the image. The central idea of this chapter is framed by the understanding that aesthetics cannot be separated from politics. The political attributes of the photograph can be searched out even when they are not apparent. My approach in this regard is to examine the socio-political circumstances at the time of the creation of the photograph, to see how they connect. The point of connection could be the content of the image or its underlying production practices. Beginning from the 2000s, artists' photographic engagement with the political became more obvious. The considerable level of freedom of expression that came with democracy, and its failure to meet the expectations of the people, moved artists to aggressively face the state with the camera.

Photojournalism on the other hand was forceful from the outset. Considering the strategic use of photographs on the newspaper and magazine pages, we come to the conclusion that beyond the notion of illumination of body text, they make strong political statements. In some instances, they carry with them their own stories, detached from those written in words. In other cases, they take on the documentary mode that is in itself rooted in the reformist pursuit of a subject with the camera over time. The idea of resistance photography encompasses these various relations of the image with politics. Insight into the history of socio-political tensions in Nigeria can be gained through the examination of photographs and their production practices. I have deliberately concentrated on analogue practices to assert that

photographic activism (which is the core of this study) did not start with the emergence of digital technology and the internet. But the new media supports intriguing practices that command our attention. The sociality, the amorphous nature of the cultural production and the sense of inclusion that underlines the practices are fascinating. These are explored in the remaining chapters of this thesis. We begin with how Nigerians visually and digitally define their frustrations with living as a nation in trouble.

CHAPTER TWO
The Digital Trouble with Nigeria[*]

Introduction

Despite its slim volume, Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) is one
of the earliest and boldest intellectual attempts to confront the afflictions of post-
independence Nigeria. Each chapter is dedicated to a particular national question
and how it impedes socio-political and economic advancement. The issues include
corruption, poor leadership, tribalism, lack of patriotism, indiscipline,
marginalisation, social injustice and mediocrity.[170] Three decades later, Achebe's
book can be said to have given us only a glimpse of still greater *troubles* to befall
Nigeria. In a project like this one invested in the analysis of photographs from
social media, the idea of "digital trouble" suggests that the digital domain allows a
broader engagement with Nigeria's distress as a sovereign state. The chapter
argues that as digitality reshapes our understanding of civil struggle, digital
photographs bear the semiotic codes of the challenges confronting Nigeria.

The images are used in an evidentiary context, that is, as a means to establish the
existence of injustice and inequality. This is rooted in the foundational notion of
photography as "mute testimony" [171] to use Talbot's formulation, or as Sekula puts
it, "a silence that silences."[172] It is a witness that lacks the capacity to talk, yet it
implicates the criminal body when presented in the court. Facebook is not a court,
but similar to it in the way it constitutes a space for the use of the image to bear
witness to the unaccountable manner in which the Nigerian state is run. But this
does not imply the use of photography in an unmediated sense. While Facebook is
a presentational space which allows interactions and contestations around the

[*] Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1983).
[170] Ibid.
[171] Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, 19.
[172] Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 6.

image, the image itself is a constructed representation. But these conditions help to tease out the complexities of the trouble with Nigeria.

Drawing on the debates around the evidentiary claims of photography, the chapter covers five key examples of the troubles as Nigerians engage with them on Facebook: corruption, insecurity, poverty, infrastructural failure and power tussles. These themes were selected because they are the most prevalent concerns discussed by Nigerians on Facebook. Again, I worked with themes that account for the focus of my study on the critique of state functionaries by those they represent, and not the other way round. From the pool of images retrieved from Facebook, I have examined those that illuminate the selected themes well not only in content but in the comments they generate.

Political corruption in the country is sustained by impunity and affected by ethnic sentiment, making the vice difficult to be combated. In the second section, the enormity of insecurity is said to be located not only in the weak response of the country's security officials to crime, but in their participation in it. Criminals frame their acts, first, as resistance against the general duplicity of government officials, and second, as a means of sustenance in a society with limited economic opportunities. While I do not support such forms of rationalisation, they help us to make sense of the depth of the mess in Nigeria. There is also agitation about poverty, which is considered a paradox, given the huge revenue Nigeria has generated over the decades from oil. Poverty is created and maintained by the political elites through diversion of public funds to personal use and investment in white elephant projects. Programmes designed to combat poverty are rather used by the privileged few to further enrich themselves and to defraud the poor for whom the programmes are supposedly created. In the section on "infrastructural failure," social amenities are examined as sites of politics. As a result of corruption, public facilities are left unattended; they are ill-equipped. Projects are awarded but abandoned uncompleted. The political elites are accused of contributing to the dilapidation, but they deny it and fruitlessly try not to be affected by the unpleasant outcomes. In the last section of the chapter, the struggle for power is examined as one of the ways that failure of leadership in Nigeria

manifests itself. It reveals the egotism of government officials who express animosity against one another on the basis of belonging to different political groups. In their inordinate power tussles, they act irrationally, violently, and literally engage in physical combat. The Nigerian activists consequently liken their leaders to beasts.

The issues addressed in this chapter are not in themselves new. But the deployment of photography and online-related approach offers a new way to understand the socio-political problems. Let us start with corruption.

Corruption

The literature review in the introductory part of this work highlights the directions of the research centred on corruption in Nigeria. Daniel Smith for instance takes us through the various modes of the phenomenon: internet scams, fraud in development work, in the judiciary, among the political class and the ordinary citizens. He concludes that corruption is diffused across the different social strata of Nigerian society.[173] In a sense, he re-echoes Jean-François Bayart's words that "contrary to the popular image of the innocent masses, corruption and predatoriness are not found exclusively among the powerful."[174] I do not dispute that position, but in the context of civil resistance as explored in this study, the corruption of the masses is not part of the focus. I am rather interested in the reactions of the ordinary people to high-profile corruption. Again, it is crucial to explore how else to think about corruption by deploying a different method of inquiry, namely the reading of photographs and the dialogues they produce on Facebook. This methodological strategy brings three important issues to the fore. First, the networked Nigerians use images to historicise corruption. This historicist approach allows them to read corruption as an infectious social problem transmitted from one generation to another. Secondly, they argue that there is a sense in which corruption is officially celebrated, producing some kind of

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[173] Smith, *A Culture of Corruption.*
[174] Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (New York: Longman, 1993), 238

immunity for its culprits.[175] Lastly, the Facebook conversations reveal what can be termed "ethnicisation of corruption" – the understanding of social ills based on ethnic sentiments.

Figure 2.1: Portraits of 3 past Nigerian leaders: Alhaji Shehu Shagari (left), General Ibrahim Babangida (middle), and General Sani Abacha (right). Retrieved from: Facebook, 19 November 2014, posted by George Agbo with the text, "Some of the progenitors of the Nigerian political philosophy…"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=740330899382094&set=a.190034861078370.47852.100002155738514&type=1&theater.
Retrieval date: 20 November 2014.

The images analysed to understand the issues raised above were circulated recently (in the 2010s), but delineate a long-standing history of political fraud. Figure 2.1 appeared on Facebook in 2014 at the height of the political corruption that brought severe criticism of the Goodluck Jonathan administration. There were cases of missing funds from government coffers, embezzlement of counter-insurgency funds, and private jet scandals among state functionaries. In the set of photographs, we see portraits of Shehu Shagari in civilian attire (left) and Ibrahim Babangida (middle) and Sani Abacha (right) in military uniforms. These modes of dressing are indexical to the individuals' political status. Babangida and Abacha were army

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[175] Corruption alongside the question of impunity is currently being addressed by the Mohammadu Buhari administration, but this is being criticised for being selective. In any case, this research only covers what occurred before Buhari came on board.

generals and served as heads of state at different times, while Shagari was a civilian president. Even as they served under different forms of government, the inscription – "the portraits of corruption" – at the bottom of the image suggests a shared trait. This more broadly implies that various systems of government in Nigeria have failed to tackle political corruption. Nigerian Facebook protesters deploy photographs within the evidentiary framework to demonstrate a clear understanding of the trajectory of corruption in Nigeria. Thus, they can take an informed position that any effort to tackle corruption should begin with investigating the factors that have sustained it over the years.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari was the president in the second republic from 1979 to 1983. General Ibrahim Babangida assumed office as the head of state following the 1985 coup and remained in the position till 1993 during which Ernest Shonekan became the interim civilian president. In November same year, another army general, Sani Abacha took over power from Shonekan. The collective story told by these men is of the advancement of state robbery whose foundation was laid even before them. After independence in 1960, the very first republican government under Nnamdi Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa (1960 and 1966) was replete with cases of financial mismanagement. The first military coup of 1966 that dethroned Azikiwe and Balewa was claimed to be a benevolent attempt to take power from "corrupt" and "incompetent" civilians and to restore "accountability" and "transparency" in the nation's politics.[176] Yakubu Gowon took over power, but did not dethrone corruption.

Shagari's government in the second republic (1979 to 1983) was marked by financial unaccountability, electoral violence and international money laundering. It was to be probed by the Muhammadu Buhari military regime which took over power in 1984. But Buhari was overthrown by the coup that installed Babangida as head of state in 1985.[177] Apart from grand-scale looting, a lot of other crimes were

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[176] Daniel Agbiboa, "Between Corruption and Development: The Political Economy of State Robbery in Nigeria," *Journal of Business Ethics,* no. 108 (2012): 331.

[177] During Buhari's short regime as the head of state from 1984 to 1985, he tackled corruption head on. So when he was deposed, many Nigerians viewed it as a lost opportunity for Nigeria to "eradicate" corruption. This is part of why he commanded enormous support in the 2015 election

associated with Babangida's regime: bribery, deceit, drug trafficking, assassination and "godfatherism."[178] In 1993, he annulled the election won by Moshood Abiola and ensured the continuation of military rule. When General Sani Abacha took over power in 1993, he maintained the high level of corruption till he died in 1998. He looted an estimated sum of 2 to 5 billion dollars.[179] Since the death of Abacha, his legacy as a former Nigerian leader is marked by the struggle to recover his loot. The recovery efforts go *pari passu* with more looting and give an impression of political corruption in Nigeria as a viral infection transferred from the body of one regime to another. Impunity is the key factor that helps to sustain the phenomenon. It is tied to other circumstances such as disruption and prolongation of trials, ineffective prosecution of culprits, [180] and what can be referred to as "forgiving and forgetting." These ideas are explained below. Let us begin with the scam that greeted the fourth republic during the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007).

Diepreye Alamieyeseigha became the governor of Bayelsa State in 1999. Against the Nigerian law prohibiting public officers from ownership of assets abroad (of which many top politicians have been found guilty), he had accounts with banks in the United Kingdom. He claimed that the moneys were donations made by his well-wishers towards the education of his children.[181] In September 2005, he was

that brought him back to power as a "civilian" president. One of his campaign promises was to tackle corruption and in keeping with that, the fight is ongoing. Its accomplishments and failures are broad and can better be investigated in a further research project.

[178] In the Nigerian context, "godfatherism" is a political ideological concept rooted in the fraudulent exercise of influence. It describes the power wielded by an individual to affect important political processes such as elections and appointments to elevated positions. Babangida used state resources to acquire his status as a godfather, offering "generous" gifts in the form of cars, literal cash and other material things.

[179] Scott Pegg, "Introduction: On the 20th Anniversary of the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa," *The Executive Industries and Society* 2 (2015): 612. It is difficult to keep track of the exchange rate between naira (the Nigerian currency) and the United States dollar (the currency with which many internationally can relate). The rate is always on the increase. Due to the economic recession that struck Nigeria in 2016, the rate as I write is up to 300 naira to a dollar. In this work, I have used that rate to give my reader a sense of what the amounts of money quoted in naira would mean. Hence, Abacha looted between 600 billion and 1.5 trillion naira.

[180] Agbiboa, "Between Corruption and Development," 332.

[181] Emile van Does de Willebois et al., *The Puppet Master: How the Corrupt Use Legal Structures to Hide Stolen Assets and What to Do About It* (Washington DC: The International Bank of Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2011).

arrested at Heathrow Airport, London, on allegations of money laundering and detained for a few weeks by the police. He was granted bail on a number of conditions: to provide surety in monetary form and to appear daily before the Metropolitan Police in whose custody he would also leave his passport.

Figure 2.2: Portraits of Diepreye Alamieyeseigha.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 22 November 2014, posted by George Agbo with the text, "Do you remember who this couple is?"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/occupy.naija/permalink/845268662184501/.
Retrieval date: 24 November 2014.

Alamieyeseigha forged identity documents, disguised himself and fled to Nigeria. In his portraits posted on Facebook a couple of months before his death in 2015, we see him in two sets of attire (figure 2.2). The one on the left shows Alamieyeseigha the man in his regular mode of dressing with a hat on his head. In the other photograph, he appears disguised, wearing women's headgear, necklace, earrings and upper garments made of lace material. As the world pondered that dramatisation of corruption, the Bayelsa State House of Assembly responded

quickly by impeaching the fraudulent governor. This action was lauded as it signaled the promise of confronting corruption in the new democracy. But not only was it a rare example of action against high-profile corruption for the next 15 years, Alamieyeseigha was granted a state pardon in 2014 by the Jonathan-led administration to facilitate his return to the country's politics. The majority of the comments elicited by Alamieyaseigha's portraits on Facebook reflect a sense of disappointment with the government for making that move. For example, Simon Akhaine comments: "An embodiment of corruption and deceit. Yet he aspires to become a Senator of the Fed. Rep. of Nigeria because values have become elusive and impunity thrives."[182]

The pardon that prompted Alamieyeseigha's aspiration to rejoin politics fits into the larger frame of what can be regarded as a "celebration of corruption." It connotes how criminal records get suppressed in the Nigerian political memory. Not only are culprits of corruption let off the hook, the way they are subsequently allowed to take part in national politics suggests a form of "forgiving and forgetting." The late General Sani Abacha who defrauded Nigeria of billions of dollars received the Centenary Award posthumously from the Goodluck administration in 2014. It was said to be in recognition of his "patriotism and promotion of unity and national development." In defense of the action, the government claimed that the "award was not a test of sainthood" and should not be taken as complicity in official crime.[183]

As the controversy surrounding the award raged on Facebook, the online protesters brought up a related case. Jonathan's People's Democratic Party had nominated the son of Sani Abacha – Mohammed Abacha – to contest for the gubernatorial position in Kano State in the 2015 general elections. The Sani Abacha looting scandal is a family story in which his wife and son are implicated. Mohammed's case was in the court for 446.3 billion Naira (some 1.48 billion dollars)

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[182] Simon Akhaine, November 23, 2014 (12:41 a.m.), comment on George Agbo, "Do you remember who this couple is?" *Facebook*, November 22, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/occupy.naija/permalink/845268662184501/.

[183] Scott Pegg, "Introduction: On the 20th Anniversary of the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa1," *The Executive Industries and Society* 2 (2015): 612.

embezzlement charges connected to his father's regime. In June 2014, the Federal Government ordered that the case be withdrawn.[184] Such a legal decision and the presentation of a man with crooked antecedents as a governorship candidate suggest a kind of celebration of corruption, entrenchment of impunity, and another example of forgiving and forgetting.

From the foregoing, the photographs, the comments that accompany them to Facebook and those made by other users corroborate the public knowledge of the historical evolution of corruption in Nigeria. The image is in this sense a means of affirming historical sensibilities. Christopher Pinney may argue that the understanding of the image should not be reduced to mere validation of knowledge gained "by other means" – an idea he traces to Carlo Ginzburg.[185] His position is that the work of the image is more complicated than that. As a full-fledged means of knowing, it can be torn apart with a set of methodological tools to produce knowledge that transcends the mere validation of what is already known.[186] I agree with Pinney, but also argue that the corroborative level of meaning making is important in some contexts. It is crucial in the evidentiary framework of photographic production on Facebook where Nigerians use the image to assert their knowledge of how the socio-political upheavals in Nigeria have evolved and the individuals involved. In any case, this paradigm does not make affirmation for photographic truth claims. The Facebook site is a space of photographic mediations as exemplified by the possibilities of commenting on images, reorganising, recirculating and retrieving them for some other kinds of use. Besides, the images are edited in various ways to heighten their effects and expressiveness. For instance, the feminine attire of Alamieyeseigha in the above set of portraits (figure 2.2) is only but one of the various depictions of the disguised dressing. In another picture, he is dressed in a different headgear, and

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[184] Nicholas Ibekwe and Bassey Udo, "Nigerian Government Acted Right in Dropping Corruption Charges Against Abacha – Adoke,"*Premium Times*, June 27, 2014, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/163976-nigerian-government-acted-right-dropping-corruption-charges-abacha-adoke.html.
[185] Christopher Pinney, "Things Happen: Or, from which Moment Does that Object Come?" in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 260.
[186] See Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography" and Edwards, *Raw Histories.*

elsewhere in hijab. The editing practices of images circulated on Facebook are addressed more fully in chapter 3.

Meanwhile, the interactions photographs create around corruption prompt us to ask what it means in the Nigerian context. We can no longer claim that there is a homogeneous understanding of corruption as a repudiated social condition. Among politicians, political interest forecloses proactive agenda against corruption. On the other hand, ethnic sentiment shapes how it is perceived by many other Nigerians. Individuals tend to be sympathetic of culprits of corruption with whom they share family or ethnic identity. In this case, the protest against corruption even among the users of social media becomes contested.

In 2014 Lamido Sanusi, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, raised alarm about 20 billion dollars (some 6 trillion naira) missing from the state account. It was due to non-remittances by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). The accusation implicated the Minister of Petroleum Resources Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke. Rather than investigate the allegation, the then President Jonathan sacked Sanusi. On the page of a prominent Facebook protest group,[187] Sanusi's portrait (accompanied by a long comment) appeared as the thumbnail of Adam Nossiter's article on the saga published online by the *New York Times*. The comments elicited by the post illustrate the ethnicisation of corruption in Nigeria. Some are sympathetic to Alison-Madueke's Niger Delta and Igbo identity, and ask us to dismiss the claim made by Sanusi – "the *Fulani-Hausa* man (who) has his (own) load of sins…"[188] That statement suggests that ethnic background matters in the way acts of corruption in Nigeria are perceived. People tend to defend corrupt politicians with whom they have a family or ethnic relationship. It is claimed that Jonathan defended Alison-Madueke due to their common ethnic identity. Both were born in the Niger Delta region while Alison-Madueke is Igbo by marriage.

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[187] Named Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest, the group as mentioned in the methodology section is crucial for this research. Many of the images analysed in the chapters were retrieved from the group's page.

[188] Akinwumi Komolafe, February 21, 2014 (06:15 p.m.), comment on Marian Awolowo, "The Reality that Will Befall Ordinary Poor Nigerians," *Facebook*, February 21, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/7334640033397 61/.

Buhari's current fight against corruption is criticised as guided by the same kind of ethnic motivation. He has been challenged for defining the Abacha loot, not as such, but as money "illegally taken from Nigeria" during Abacha's regime.[189] This defense is interpreted by many Nigerians as prompted by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic connection between Buhari and Abacha. The renowned Niger Delta ex-militant, Asari Dokubo demonstrated the same attitude before the 2015 general election.

Dokubo threatened to cause chaos if Jonathan did not return to power for a second tenure. In a television interview, he is asked what would happen should Jonathan refuse to contest the election. In a threatening tone, he replies that he dare not refuse, stressing that Jonathan is the first Ijaw man (from Niger Delta) to serve as Nigeria's president. It is an opportunity that must be fully exploited. [190] Dokubo ignores the criticism of the administration of his clansman as one with a high level of corruption. His sentiment is explained by the fact that politics in Nigeria is "based less on reason and more on communal solidarity, less on principle and more on affiliation."[191] These sentiments also organise the understanding of corruption in the country. P-J Ezeh likens the political entity, Nigeria, to game in the sense of unregulated hunting activities. Political positions are perceived as the opportunity to hunt down the animals in the wilderness called "Nigeria" and take them *home*, in this case, one's clan or ethnic group.[192] This is precisely what Garrett Hardin articulates in his theory, "the tragedy of the commons." Hardin asks us to "picture a pasture open to all… (where) each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain."[193] The egotistic desire for maximum exploitation by the many users of the shared resources (the commons) leads to a tragic situation: depletion of the resources.

In the foregoing, political corruption has been examined as itself a tragedy with which Nigeria has lived for more than half a century. There is something

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[189] Nnanna Ochereome, "Abacha Never Stole," *Vanguard*, May 9, 2016, www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/abacha-never-stole/.

[190] Silverbird Television, "Asari Dokudo Dares President Goodluck Jonathan Not to Contest in 2015," YouTube video, 1: 59, April 25, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxHAUAnLOmk.

[191] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 5, no 1 (1997): 1.

[192] P-J Ezeh, personal communication with the author, January 2016.

[193] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162, no 3859 (1968): 1244.

significant about the analysis made through the lens of photographs on Facebook. As a site of civil struggle, Facebook allows for the divergent interpretation of the image as proposed by Ariella Azoulay. No single individual has the sovereign power to dictate the meaning of the photograph. Through the interaction around pictorial Facebook contents, we understand the evolution of corruption in Nigeria. Hence, photographs serve an evidentiary purpose of a kind. They are used to affirm that the online protest is informed by the people's broader awareness of the histories and intricacies of the conditions they challenge. Through the dissemination of images and the interaction around them, the protesters insist that the tendency to celebrate rather than punish perpetrators of corruption sustains the social crime. Again, corruption is ethnicised. The conversation it engenders on Facebook is also ethnicised. This affirms that there are contestations even among the individuals organised on Facebook against social ills. Still, through the same logic of interaction that produces the controversy, the online activists strive not to reproduce the human condition against which they protest. They insist on a perception of corruption from which sentiments are divorced.

Precarious spaces

Life in Nigeria is marked by continually evolving precariousness, despite the existence of different security forces, as well as paramilitary and law enforcement agencies.[194] Various forms of harassment and ways of dying, including robbery, kidnapping, and bombing, evolve in different organisational structures. The visual depictions and conversations around these predicaments on Facebook bring out fascinating insights into the failure of the Nigerian state. The term "failure" is not only about how the inefficiency of security institutions is foregrounded. It is also about the complicity or outright involvement of the security personnel and the state in crime. From another perspective, crime presents itself as a mode of protest against the state for the injustices it perpetrates. For some individuals, armed criminality is somewhat the last resort for survival in an economically disenfranchising society. Generally, the users of social media direct their

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[194] The security institutions include the army, the air force, the navy, the police, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC).

frustration about these conditions to the political elites for their complicity and the failed leadership that fuel them. The activists remind them that they do not live outside the precarious space. They are directly affected by the insecurity.

Figure 2.3: Portraits of sleeping Nigerian police officers.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 30 May 2014, posted by Ifeyinwa Asogwa with the text, "Tiii." While the texts suggests a kind of laughter, the photograph was circulated at the start of the #BringBackOurGirls movement.
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=765366646827883&set=a.2153637084
94849.58822.100000636643021&type=1&theater.
Retrieval date: 31 May 2014.

The above photograph (figure 2.3) contains visual cues to the security situation in Nigeria, and how the public relates to the attitude of the security personnel. Three members of the Nigerian Police Force are caught in sleeping poses by the camera. Above the portraits is the inscription: "Looking for the abducted school girls." Then, "NRi" and "www.nigerianfm.com" appear in watermark underneath, and further down we see, "Nigerian Police – una well done." On the denotative level,

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the security officials can be said to be sleeping due to fatigue following long working hours. But the evidentiary use of photography for activism on Facebook is not premised on objective picturing of the world. It rather has much to do with what Sekula calls "presentational circumstances" in his explanation of how photographs produce diverse meanings in different contexts.[195] The circumstance in which the picture of police officers was presented is indicated in "Looking for the abducted school girls?" It was circulated on Facebook in the wake of the April 2014 abduction of schoolgirls by Boko Haram insurgents at Chibok, Borno State (the incident is more fully examined in chapter 5). In this circumstance, the photograph's possible meaning as security workers resting or taking a nap during break is flipped to portray them as sleeping on duty. Hence, the inscription, "Nigeria Police - una well done" is sarcastic. At a time of serious security challenges, sleep is visually articulated to portray the unpreparedness of the state to protect its citizens. Through the photograph and the comments it generates, we gain insight into the rot in the Nigerian police force: the harassment, extortion, bribery and corruption. In the essay, "The Dialectic of Police Reform in Nigeria," Alice Hills notes that the reform efforts initiated in the mid-2000s was an attempt to sanitise what had emerged as the most corrupt institution in the country. But the effort failed, producing only organisational change. The concept of "community policing" which signaled the enhancement of police services through community-based collaborations ended as a mere adaptation of the international language of police work. The public abhorrence of the police rather continued to grow due to the persistence of power abuse, maltreatment, illegal apprehension, dishonesty, unlawful tolls and extortion by the police personnel.[196]

The picture that emerges here is that of the state as complicit with crime. The complicity manifests in the way security agents themselves perpetrate crime through connivance with criminals. The criminal career of Lawrence Anini in the 1980s and the Boko Haram insurgency can be used to buttress this point. Anini the criminal gang leader became an iconic figure of armed robbery, car hijacking and

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[195] Sekula, "Reinventing Documentary," 683.
[196] Alice Hills, "The Dialectic of Police Reform in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 46, no. 2 (2008).

rape in Edo State (known then as Bendel State). In 1986, more than 80 police officers were accused of colluding with Anini's group. The only *punishment* they received was relocation from Bendel to other locations in Nigeria. Otwin Marenin argues that Anini's collision with the police was the key factor that aided his reign of terror. He opposes the popular belief that Anini had the magical power to disappear and reappear.[197] The mystification merely created the impression that it was impossible to arrest him so that the police feared him too. It could be reasoned that the police took advantage of the propaganda and allowed more time for his reign and therefore more opportunities for the transactions with him.

In the case of Boko Haram, state complicity in the militancy is found in different ways. The army has been accused of harassing and killing members of the civilian population in the course of counter-insurgency. While the soldiers complain about the inadequacy of ammunitions, there are high-profile cases of embezzlement of funds earmarked to address the problem. For example, there is an ongoing trial of Bambo Dasuki, the security adviser to former President Jonathan in connection with misappropriations in an arms deal involving billions of dollars. Boko Haram developed in the first place with different forms of support from members of the Nigerian political elites. A member of the group served in the cabinet of Ali Modu Sheriff's administration (in Borno State) in 2003. The appointment was part of the deal between the two parties although they would later break up.[198] The subsequent strain on the relationship made the militant sect to turn to Sheriff's government and more broadly the Nigerian state as its enemies, accusing them of corruption. The accusation became the organising principle for the war against Nigeria by Boko Haram. This development offers us a different way to read the issue of insecurity in Nigeria: the framing of crime as a mode of resistance against the state. For more than a decade, Boko Haram has presented itself as a group that resists official injustice through violence that feeds on jihadist ambition.

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[197] Otwin Marenin, "The Anini Saga: Armed Robbery and the Reproduction of Ideology in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 2 (1987)..

[198] Freedom Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014).

Many decades earlier, Anini had similarly described his attack on the police as resistance against their exploitation and that of political class in general.[199] What he called exploitation ironically grew out of his collaboration with the security personnel. He perceived it as deceit when his gang members were prosecuted after he had bribed the police not to do so. The police could have interpreted it as patriotism, for failing to allow their acceptance of a bribe to interfere with their civic duties. But for Anini, it was betrayal. The police officers consequently became the targets of his bullets. This framing of crime as protest can further be illustrated with the Niger Delta militancy which began in the context of struggle against marginalisation.

The discovery of oil in the region brought with it environmental devastation in the form of oil spillages, gas flares, and so on. While these disable economic activities such as fishing, grazing and growing of crops, the region is neglected in terms of infrastructure – health care services, electricity, schools and roads. In the 1960s, the people of the region began to peacefully agitate to have "all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership abrogated," to exercise control over the oil resources, and to pressure for a solution to the "developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration" in the Niger Delta. [200] The peaceful protests later developed into guerilla war against the government, such as the one led by Isaac Adaka Boro in February 1966. As the group defeated the police in the fighting, the military intervened and conquered the militants. The encounter which was tagged the "twelve-day revolution" marked the beginning of militancy in the oil struggle and the government's use of force to suppress it. Following the failure

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[199] Marenin, "The Anini Saga."

[200] Nseabasi Akpan, "Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Social Science* 24, no. 1 (2010): 37. The Niger Delta struggle has been led in different times and capacities by people like Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tompolo (also called Government Ekpemupolo), and Asari Dokubo. The militants have organised themselves under such organisations as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). During the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration in 2009, the Nigerian government granted the militants amnesty. The programme has been hit by maladministration and mismanagement of funds. In 2016, a new militant group called Niger Delta Avengers emerged in the aftermath of total removal of fuel subsidy by the Buhari administration. The organisation primarily demands for a secession of the Niger Delta region, maintaining that its people have been denied of adequate benefits from the wealth in their land.

of the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies to amicably address the issue, the Niger Delta people "opted for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers and the demand of ransom, and the repeated invasion and blockading of oil installations."[201]

The Niger Delta popularised kidnapping with its economic underpinning typified by the idea of ransom that was conceived to fund the struggle. This mode of crime also developed in other parts of Nigeria as an alternative form of employment in a country with a high rate of joblessness. What Nigerians coined as "kidnap-worthiness" became applicable to everyone including low-income earners and children. The sum demanded as ransom would depend on the economic status of the kidnapped or their families. In that case, the wealthy public officers become even more vulnerable. They are more kidnap-worthy and many are angry with them for their failure to bring good governance. Following the kidnapping of the former Petroleum Minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke's sister in October 2014, the central reaction of the Facebook activists was that the family deserved no sympathy. The users of the platform vented their anger on the then minister for the allegations of corruption against her, such as the 20 billion dollars scandal discussed in the previous section. The vulnerability of the political elites becomes even more evident when they themselves fall victim to violent crime. For example, when Chris Ngige was governor of Anambra State, he was abducted in July 2003. However, his case gives further credence to the criminal tendency of the security system and its use by the state to fight against itself. The Ngige kidnapping was an attempt to oust him from office when he fell out with his political *godfather*, Chris Uba. Uba had sought to control the setting up of Ngige's cabinet and demanded 2.5 billion naira as the reward for funding the governor's political career.[202] The central involvement of the Nigerian Police – a state institution – in a crime against a government functionary has a two-fold implication. The state is not only involved in violent crime, it does so at times against itself.

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[201] Ibid.

[202] O. Akinola Adeoye, "Godfatherism and the Future of Nigerian Democracy," *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3, no. 6 (2009).

The angry Nigerians connected on Facebook ask the people of the country, both the leaders and the led, to understand insecurity as a condition that affects them all. That is the starting point for transforming the precarious space into a safer one. Before arriving at that conclusion, the photograph of sleeping policemen has been used to think about the insecurity in Nigeria. The country's security agencies are weak, but active in their complicity in crime. The criminals outside the echelons of state power define their acts in two distinct ways, first, as protest against misrule, and second, as a means of economic sustenance. While these are no justification for crime, they open up the wider question of state failure. In this chapter, that question is examined through the lens of the five key concerns of the Nigerian Facebook activists. The next to be analysed is poverty.

The paradox of oil riches

In a painting class, an art student of the University of Nigeria creates a striking representation of the theme, "rich land, poor people." In the piece executed in gouache on paper, we see a body of water with predominantly parched surrounding vegetation and scanty green pastures. In an oral presentation of the artwork, its maker asserts that he has painted Nigeria. Even at the peak of dry season in West Africa when the vegetation dries up and becomes vulnerable to bush burning, plants beside fresh waters remain ever lush. The painting is thus a visual paradox. It is an effective way to depict Nigeria, a rich country by virtue of its oil wealth, but simultaneously among the "bottom billion"[203] – the poorest of the world. The artist goes on to say that while the dry vegetation in his painting symbolises the teeming majority of Nigerians living in poverty, the few plants with lush green foliage stand for the small privileged class. This disparity fuels the anger of the Nigerian Facebook activists. Circulating photographs online to protest against the inequality, they contend that the political elites create and sustain poverty in the country. These happen through the mismanagement of public funds. The lack of genuine concern for the poor also manifests in the ways public officials use their

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[203] Paul Collier uses the concept of "bottom billion" to describe the poor people and nations that constitute the major percentage of the world's population. See Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

positions to rather extort money from desperate job seekers. Hence, many live in poverty in an oil-rich Nigeria.

Let us first examine the idea of "rich Nigeria." The 1970s saw what came to be known as the "oil boom." In a world where oil rose to remarkable economic importance, the term came with the signification of "blessing" – immense wealth – for the countries to which "nature" had given the resource. Nigeria is one of such "blessed" countries. By the 1950s, oil exploration had begun in commercial quantities. So, when the boom came, Nigeria was already disposed to make a fortune from oil. The oil economy recently began to decline, beginning especially from 2014. But before the downturn, Nigeria had generated astounding revenue from the commodity since the oil boom. It is estimated that more than 600 million barrels were produced between 1960 and 1973, amounting to about 128,205 daily.[204] The production capacity rose continually and by the mid-2010s, the peak of 1.46 million barrels daily was reached at the average price of about 100 dollars per barrel.[205] Hence, some 146 million dollars (4.38 trillion naira) was realised daily from oil in Nigeria in the second quarter of 2014 alone. It was on this account that the country hit the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 510 billion dollars (1.5 quadrillion naira), emerging then as the largest economy in Africa. It was a giant stride which was however reported with some doubt by leading media organisations such as the London-based newspaper, *The Economist*.[206]

The skepticism is rooted in the age-long co-existence of the oil riches with poverty in Nigeria. Incidentally, that accomplishment however contested it was could not be sustained beyond 2015. This is because while the Nigerian economy depends heavily on oil, the price has continued to depreciate in the international market. Besides, there is a resurgence of militancy accompanied by the bombing of oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta region. So, Nigeria's status as a rich nation by

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[204] Michael Watts, "Oil, Development, and the Politics of the Bottom Billion," *Macalester International* 24, no. 1 (2009).

[205] "External Sector Development Report, Volume 5 Issue 2," *Central Bank of Nigeria*, http://www.cenbank.org/documents/quarterlyreports.asp.

[206] "Nigeria: Africa's New Number One," *The Economist,* April 12, 2014, http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21600685-nigerias-suddenly-supersized-economy-indeed-wonder-so-are-its-still-huge.

virtue of what it earns from oil is now in question. But what remains unquestionable is that majority of the Nigerian population has remained poor during the decades of large earnings from oil.

That paradox has been theorised by Paul Collier in the book, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It.* He argues that most countries that are rich in mineral resources are usually poverty-stricken. So, the "blessing" rather turns into a "curse." This "resource-rich poverty"[207] is caused by first, concentration on certain resources while others are neglected. Second, the abundant wealth is easily caught up in financial mismanagement by the ruling elites. And third, the "natural resource trap" consequently develops into the "conflict trap."[208] These principles play out perfectly in Nigeria. The first section of this chapter has examined how the country's oil wealth is looted by the powerful while the rest of the citizens live in poverty. Oil exploration breeds conflict as the people of the oil-rich Niger Delta take to insurgency to protest against their marginalisation. Over-dependence on oil has hindered the development of other sectors of the economy so that employment opportunities are too meagre for the population. These are major issues which can further be broken down to understand how the Nigerian state keeps its citizens impoverished.

Let us begin with Collier's observation that "resource-rich democracies … (undertake) too many white-elephant projects."[209] Robinson and Torvik have proposed "white elephants" as a theory that explains government's "investment (in) projects with negative social surplus."[210] The projects are initiated for the selfish end of building political prestige rather than adding value to the economic life of the people.

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[207] Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, 39.
[208] Ibid., x. "The conflict trap…shows how certain economic conditions make a country prone to civil war, and how, once conflict has started, the cycle of violence becomes a trap from which it is difficult to escape." The Niger Delta region of Nigeria where the majority of the oil wells are located has been a site of conflict.
[209] Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, 44.
[210] James A. Robinson and Ragnar Torvik, "White Elephants," *Journal of Public Economics* 89 (2005): 197.

Figure 2.4: The commissioning of a governor's office in Kaduna State (2014).
Retrieved from: Facebook, 29 October 2014, posted by Marian Awolowo with the text, "24 hours after medical students protest against lack of teaching hospital, Jonathan commissions 9 billion naira governor's office."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/marianiyabode.awolowo/posts/10202658692535259.
Retrieval date: 30 October 2014.

The Nigerian government at various levels finds it fashionable to undertake such white elephant projects. Figure 2.4 depicts the meeting of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Kaduna State Government in 2014 to celebrate a project conceived with no regard for the interest of the common people. In the bottom right image, we see former President Goodluck Jonathan (left), Governor Mukhtar Yero of Kaduna State (middle), Alhaji Shehu Idris, the Emir of Zazzau (right) and

others. As shown in the top image, they are gathered for the commissioning of a governor's office (bottom left photograph) claimed to be constructed with more than 9 billion naira (about 30 million dollars) in Kaduna State. The social media activists who commented on the set of photographs offer us a "Nigerianised" perspective to the white elephant theory.

Robinson and Torvik conclude that the underlying "political motivation behind white elephants" is mainly to win the loyalty of electorates for success in elections.[211] Due to electoral crimes, the people's votes do not necessarily determine election results in Nigeria. So, former Governor Yero could not have undertaken the project to win the 2015 election. The Facebook users insist that from at least a cursory view of the building, it is not commensurate with the amount claimed to be spent on it. They imply that white elephants in Nigeria are driven by the embezzlement opportunities they offer. This view is elaborated by establishing a link between the governor's office project and the condition of the Kaduna State University medical school.

The group of photographs analysed above were posted on Facebook with the comment: "24 hours after medical students protest against lack of teaching hospital, Jonathan commissions 9 billion naira governor's office."[212] The medical students were agitating for the establishment of a functional medical school in the institution. The state government had earlier sent a set of 29 students to Uganda for three-year clinical courses at the cost of 255 million Naira. The protesting students argued that the sum would have been enough to raise the school to an operational status. Much more would be achieved should the money spent on the Governor's office project be put into the medical school. This kind of dialectical engagement with issues on Facebook is common among Nigerians. As fully examined in chapter 3, images taken in different times and locations are brought together to produce particular ways of seeing and challenging socio-political realities.

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[211] Ibid., 209.

[212] Marian Awolowo, "24 hours after medical students protest against lack of teaching hospital, Jonathan commissions 9 billion naira governor's office," *Facebook*, October 29, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/marianiyabode.awolowo/posts/10202658692535259.

The connection between corruption and white elephant projects in Nigeria can be explored further. It is possible to argue that even when the government initiates programmes to combat poverty, misguided spending exposes the underlying insincerity of such initiatives. Since the 1960s, the Nigerian government has introduced one programme after another to address the menace of poverty.[213] But the implementation is usually marred by mismanagement of funds, preferentialism, and sectionalism. They offer public officers more money to throw about at the expense of the target poor masses. As Governor of Bayelsa State in 2006, Goodluck Jonathan spent 150 million naira (equivalent to .5 million dollars but 1 million dollars at that time) from the state's poverty alleviation fund to host Jay-Z and Beyoncé in a music festival in Lagos. In his report in *Mail Online*, Alex Ward cites a blogger's description of the frivolous act as "an example of the country's economic elite 'blowing its money on bling puffery while most of the country suffers.'"[214] It also illustrates how the political class helps to maintain the poverty it claims to address.

While the above illustrates the diversion of resources meant to assist the poor, the story behind the image in figure 2.5 is partly of extortion from the poor citizens by a government agency. At times, employment vacancies in state institutions become an avenue to "rob" desperate job seekers. The photograph was circulated online after the job recruitment exercise organised on 15 March 2014 by the Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS). The event depicted in the photograph is one of desperation, extortion, and tragedy. The description with which it appeared online

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[213] Some of the programmes include the Farm Settlement Scheme (1960s), Operation Feed the Nation and Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (1970s), the Green Revolution (1980s), Structural Adjustment Programme (1986), the Agricultural Credit Guarantees Scheme (ACGS), The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA) 1997, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) 1997, Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P).

[214] Alex Ward, "Nigerian President 'Spent $1million of Aid Money Meant for Poverty-stricken Country on Star-studded Festival Featuring Beyoncé and Jay-Z,'" *Mail Online*, February 23, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2283453/Nigerian-president-spent-1million-aid-money-meant-poverty-stricken-country-star-studded-festival-featuring-Beyonc-Jay-Z.html.

identifies it as the National Stadium Abuja, one of the four venues for the recruitment test. The space took more than its 60,000 seating capacity. The failure to properly co-ordinate the crowd resulted in a stampede that led to loss of lives and left many injured. In all four venues across the country, there was a similar uncontrollable movement of people and collective death toll that numbered nearly twenty.
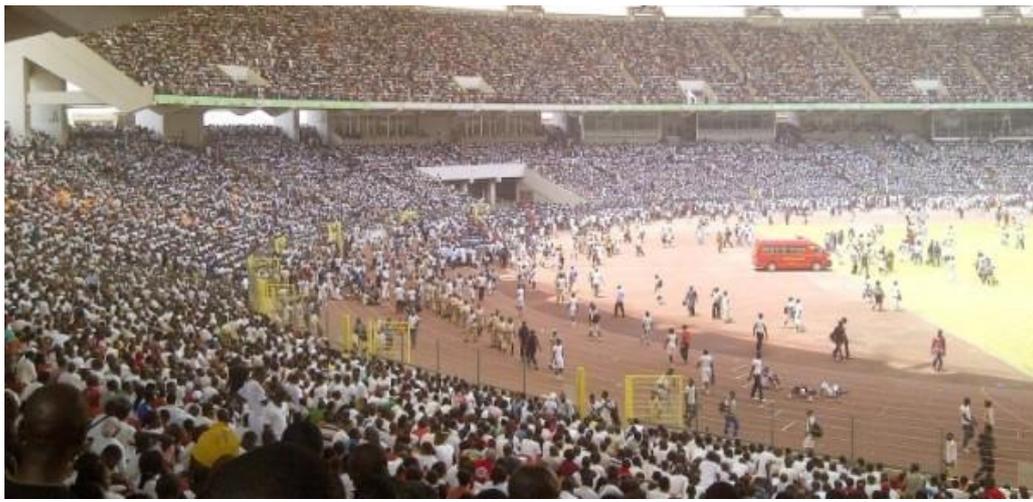
Figure 2.5: National Stadium Abuja at the job recruitment exercise by the Nigerian Immigration Services, 15 March 2014.
Retrieved from: Bella Naija (blog), 16 March 2014, published in the article entitled: "Which Way Nigeria? Tragedy Strikes As Stampede at the Nigerian Immigration Service Recruitment Test Centres Claims More than 10 Lives | Minister Reportedly States 'Impatience' as Cause."
URL: https://www.bellanaija.com/2014/03/which-way-nigeria-tragedy-strikes-as-stampede-at-the-nigerian-immigration-service-recruitment-test-centres-claims-more-than-10-lives-minister-reportedly-states-impatience-as-cause/.
Retrieval date: 6 January, 2015.

The evidentiary role of photography in the above account returns us to my earlier argument. In some instances, we should take seriously how the image functions at the level of validating what is already known. The validation transcends the mere establishment of the actuality of the event depicted in the photograph. Instead, it helps to accentuate the failure and tragedy that have brought the event into scrutiny on an online activist platform. While the picture helps us to make sense of the crowd that attended the NIS exercise, it elicits something else about the event. It is

something we come to know through the experience of those with more intimate relation to the incident. The comments on the image by some participants in the exercise reveal eyewitness accounts of the stampede, the death, and the causative acts of negligence on part of the NIS authorities. Further, they make an unequivocal claim that the Nigerian government "toyed" with the lives of youths and "extorted" money from them. About 520,000 applicants were cramped in 4 venues with no adequate preparation for crowd management. The Nigerian Immigration Services, a para-military organisation entrusted with the control of movement of people at the country's borders could not adequately co-ordinate its recruitment exercise to avert catastrophe.

Some of the Nigerian online activists insist that the poor organisation of the exercise suggests that the immigration agency was not keen about any actual recruitment.[215] It was apparently more interested in the monetary returns from the exercise. For only about 5000 job vacancies, the immigration agency tapped into the desperation of un(under)employed Nigerians to make 520 million naira (about 1.7 million dollars). The applicants paid 1000 naira (equivalent to 3.3 dollars) each as a registration fee. The federal government through the lower chamber of the parliament claimed to have warned the agency of the illegality of charging job applicants.[216] Still, neither the authorities of the Nigerian Immigration Services nor the Ministry of Interior were sanctioned by the then government of Goodluck Jonathan.[217] This gives one room to argue that the recruitment scam was state-endorsed.

It can be concluded that Nigeria is a conflation of paradoxical realities. One of the world's richest in oil production is among the poorest of the nations. Although the oil economy has in recent times experienced a downturn, the resource has over the

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[215] Indeed, actual recruitment did not eventually take place. The federal government cancelled the exercise.

[216] Andrew Ajijah and Ibanga Isine, "Nigeria: Immigration Pockets N520 Million from Job Seekers, as Interior Minister Blames Applicants for Deaths at Recruitment Centres," *Premium Times*, March 16, 2014, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/156824-nigeria-immigration-pockets-n520-million-job-seekers-interior-minister-blames-applicants-deaths-recruitment-centres.html.

[217] The Minister of Interior Patrick Abba Moro was only arrested after his tenure during the Mohammadu Buhari administration.

years generated enough revenue to sustain Nigeria through a long period of economic depression. But the mismanagement of the wealth has enriched few and left the majority of the citizens impoverished. Heavy dependence on oil inhibits the development of other sectors of the economy, resulting in a high rate of unemployment. It is also a paradox that the government officials take advantage of the poor under the pretext of providing employment opportunities. The policies formulated to address poverty do not always benefit the poor. They rather enrich the political elites further. The networked Nigerians argue that in these ways, poverty is produced and maintained by the Nigerian state. Photography is used within the evidentiary framework to challenge these paradoxes. The image becomes a means through which the online protesters demonstrate their knowledge of the duplicities that underline the government's so-called efforts to tackle poverty.

Infrastructural failure

The state of infrastructure in Nigeria is pitiable. To help bring out the depth of the dilapidation, I delimit my use of the term "infrastructure" to basic amenities such as electricity, transport, and health facilities. The photographic practices and Facebook conversations around these facilities reveal them as sites of intense politics. The centrality of the question of infrastructure in election manifestos affords us a way to begin the thinking about the politics. The promise of basic amenities is perpetually the core of political campaigns because the lack itself tends to be perpetual. Politicians present themselves as agents of change by painting pictures of utopian hope, citing the failure of their predecessors to provide infrastructure. But they inherit the failure, subsequently bequeath it to their successors and re-inherit it in a political culture marked by the recycling of leaders. A set of images retrieved from Facebook are analysed to understand the nature, scope, and effects of infrastructural failure in Nigeria. Then we examine how the condition is challenged, the response of the political elites and what these forms of exchange reveal about politics in Nigeria.

The infrastructural failure in Nigeria is self-evident. It is discernible in the electricity supply that is in Nigerian parlance "epileptic"– irregular and

unpredictable like the medical condition associated with epilepsy. Pipe-born water system is virtually a bygone engineering. The phrase, "Nigerian road" bears the understanding of the road network in the country as generally deteriorated. It conjures up the imageries of potholes, poor drainage, waterlogging, and flooding, especially in high rainfall regions. In most rural areas, the Nigerian road is not tarred; so, the villagers seem to be disconnected from the rest of the world. Airports, public hospitals, academic institutions, and other government facilities are replete with obsolete and non-functional equipment. Nigeria is in Collier's words one of "the countries at the bottom (that) coexist with the twenty-first century, but their reality is the fourteenth century."[218] In the civil exchange involving the use of images by Nigerians on Facebook, the feeling of living behind time is a recurring theme. The activists bemoan what they call "backwardness."

The health sector reflects the backwardness in a way that brings out very important issues. First, the nonchalance of public officials towards infrastructural development in Nigeria is precipitated by the thinking that they can afford the amenities at the personal level. They can afford generators for regular electricity, private jets for travel, overseas education and medical care. But for a certainty, and this is the second point, it is difficult to live absolutely outside the unpleasant realities occasioned by the infrastructural deterioration. In 2014, the Indian Ambassador to Nigeria announced the plan to establish Indian hospitals across Nigeria, to reduce the rate at which Nigerians travel to India for medical care. A newspaper article on the subject shared on a Facebook protest group page sparked a conversation centred on corruption and infrastructural decay in Nigeria. India is a developing economy like Nigeria. But its status as a medical tourist destination for Nigerians suggests that Nigeria has been left behind. It is estimated that every year, Nigerians (the majority of them public officials) spend 1 billion dollars (300 billion naira) on medical treatment in India.[219] Rather than invest the funds in the local health system, it is put into the economies of India and other countries in Europe, America and the Middle East.

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[218] Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, 3.
[219] R. Srivastava, "Indian Society for Apheresis and Apheresis Tourism in India – Is There a Future," *Transfusion and Apheresis Science* 34 (2006)142.

Ironically, that the Nigerian government functionaries can afford medical treatment abroad does not exempt them from the frustrations associated with poor local medical infrastructure. Immediacy and proximity to clinical facilities are crucial to health care. When the former Nigerian president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua took ill in 2010, he was flown to Saudi Arabia. His long absence from office and eventual death abroad generated a lot of tensions. Nigerians felt deceived by the concealment of the demise so that for some time, Yar'Adua officially retained his political position at death. Although there was no indication that he died in transit, it is not out of place to think that immediate quality medical attention would have made a difference. At the time of Nelson Mandela's failing health, his proximity to good medical facilities in South Africa ensured that he was regularly checked on medically until his death in December 2013. So, in whatever facet of life, infrastructural failure goes with a price which all Nigerians pay irrespective of status.

Figure 2.6: The Port Harcourt International Airport.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 11 June 2014, posted by Marian Awolowo with the text, "Of course Jonathan and their latest recruits have changed tone."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/798985113454316/?comment_id=798894036786757&offset=0&total_comments=2.
Retrieval date: 3 July, 2014.

Reading the group of photographs in figure 2.6, we notice the same evocation of backwardness, but other themes also emerge. In the first two images (top), we see a similar architectural structure in the background. But the one on the left is fenced off, and the foreground occupied by cars. In the other, the image of a plane is shown. The lower pictures are close shots in which one shows non-functional toilet facilities (signalled by the covered urinary basin and the inscription "PLEASE DO NOT USE") and the other a dilapidated exterior of a building. The airplane and the tarmac on which it rests are signs that the photographs are different views of an airport. It is the Port Harcourt International Airport as further deciphered from the comments with which the images appeared on Facebook. The user who posted them writes from a first-hand position. When she arrived in Port Harcourt by Arik Air Boeing B737-200 (apparently shown partly in one of the pictures) in mid-2014, she was shocked at the look of the airport. The immediate response was to use the camera, an act that foregrounds the photographic evidentiary impulse which has been useful to us in this chapter. There is an unprecedented alertness among Nigerians to take photographs tendered on Facebook as evidence of the poor state of infrastructure in the country. This camera-readiness operates in a kind of forensic mode. Thomas Keenan has told us that "forensics is not simply about science in the service of law or the police but is, much more broadly, about objects as they become evidence, things submitted for interpretation in an effort to persuade."[220]

Facebook is a site where photographs are presented and interpreted as indexical signs of Nigerian state failure that manifests in various facets of national life including infrastructure. Differentiation is one outstanding interpretive approach in this regard. In the accompanying comment of the above set of images, the Port Harcourt International Airport is compared with Heathrow London to highlight its level of backwardness. It is on the other hand likened to the "Lungi International Airport in war-torn Sierra Leone."[221] War is a fitting context that would explain the

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[220] Thomas Keenan, "Counter-forensics and Photography," *Grey Room* 55 (2014): 68.

[221] Marian Awolowo, "Of course Jonathan and their latest recruits have changed tone," *Facebook*, June 11, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/798985113454316/?comment_id=798994036786757&offset=0&total_comments=2.

nature and scale of infrastructural collapse in Nigeria. The abundance of moribund facilities, the poor maintenance culture, the level of disrepair, and the abandonment of projects halfway are better imagined in war conditions than in peace. The photographs under analysis reflect these elements, and give us clues as to the broader politics with which the question of infrastructure is intertwined in Nigeria.

In the first image (upper left), the fence made of corrugated sheets suggests that some reconstruction is ongoing. The absence of the fence in the adjoining photograph could imply a completion of the repair work in that part of the airport. But reading the two lower pictures along with the comment accompanying the post, we conclude that the reconstruction work has been stopped. The site has become one of the countless abandoned projects that dot the Nigerian landscape. The idea of "abandoned projects" speaks of a conflation of lobbying, contract breaking, kickbacks, and embezzlement as the factors behind infrastructural dilapidation in Nigeria. Related to these are poor execution and finishing, and lack of maintenance *if* the project is ever completed. Brian Larkin explains the politics that frames these practices. Drawing on Mbembe, he writes:

> …often the function of awarding infrastructural projects has far more to do with gaining access to government contract and rewarding patron-client networks than it has to do with their technical function. This is why roads disappear, factories are built but never operated, and bridges go to nowhere.[222]

To fit more appropriately into the Nigeria context, I would add that this is why projects are abandoned uncompleted but declared completed in the state-controlled media. And the contractor is not brought to book, because the contract could be a deal between the client and the contractor. At times, the public officials award contracts to their personal or nonexistent companies. The use of media deceit as a cover-up is an attempt to claim that campaign promises are fulfilled. The Port Harcourt airport photographs were posted on Facebook to remind the networked activists of the "transformation agenda" of the Jonathan administration. The promise to remodel the airport as included in that policy was never fulfilled. Hence

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[222] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 334.

photography with its transactional meaning on Facebook constitutes a way in which the citizens evaluate their leaders' attitude to infrastructure-related electoral manifestos. The practices also help us to understand how the politicians respond to the criticism against their stewardship. The Facebook user who posted the set of photographs analysed above made the comment that she had the opportunity to meet the then governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi. She asked him why the airport in the capital city of his state was in that condition:

> For answer, he pointed at my friend, Ross seated across the table, who happens to be a member of the PDP; and said: 'Ask him, he knows better.' The Governor then went on to say that the airport is even better now than it used to be. He accused the Federal Government of deliberately thwarting his development efforts because of politics.[223]

Two major issues arise from these lines. First, they open up a larger question of infrastructure as a site of politics in Nigeria. The dilapidation of the Port Harcourt airport exposes the inter-party power tussle that became intense in Nigeria in the mid-2010s.[224] As the 2015 general election drew near, Amaechi's All Progressives Congress (APC), the then opposition party, was at loggerheads with President Jonathan's ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). The struggle between the parties affected a lot of things in the country including infrastructural development and the response to insurgency. Secondly, we come to understand how the political elites respond to the criticism against them. Ameachi's reaction suggests self-exoneration strongly connected to a sense of self-promotion. He asks us to acknowledge the efforts he has made to transform the airport before the disruption by more influential powers. It is crucial to ponder how power struggle translates into infrastructural deterioration. But the self-exoneration through which the individual government functionaries seek the sympathy of the masses implicates them all the more. Consider the second image in figure 2.7 which first appeared alone on Facebook.[225]

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[223] Awolowo, "Of course Jonathan and their latest recruits have changed tone."

[224] The next section examined power tussle in detail.

[225] Chidi Ugwu, "O Dinno Egwu," *Facebook*, September 10, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/chidi.ugwu.7/posts/10201412150784871.

Figure 2.7: 2015 election campaign bill board and a flooded road at Nsukka in Enugu State.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 13 September 2014, posted by Chris Onyishi with the text, "ANYI EJEBE NSUKKA (Part 1)?"
URL: https://www.facebook.com/chris.onyishi/posts/10203472362827664.
Retrieval date: 3 July, 2014.

The photograph was taken from the interior of a vehicle, the bonnet of which occupies the picture's foreground. We see other vehicles (a minibus and a car), motorcyclists and pedestrians trying to negotiate their way through a flooded road. It is a major road at Nsukka where the University of Nigeria is located. The flooding depicted in the photograph is a yearly experience during the heavily rainy period of July to September. It reflects the failure of urban engineering and the laissez-faire attitude of those in power. The administrator of the Nsukka Local Government is the one to whom the people would direct their concern about the state of public infrastructure in the municipality. But when the image was shared on Facebook, he quickly made a comment, asking what the University of Nigeria was doing about the road.[226] He also stressed how indiscriminate waste disposal affects the roads.[227] His own approach to self-exoneration is to shift the government responsibility under his jurisdiction to an academic institution. Besides, he has the power to enforce a healthy culture of environmental sanitation in that part of the country under his oversight. But a sarcastic comment directed to

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[226] Anthony Ugwu, September 10, 2014 (03:47 p.m.), comment on Chidi Ugwu, "O Dinno Egwu," *Facebook*, September 10, 2014,
https://www.facebook.com/chidi.ugwu.7/posts/10201412150784871.
[227] Ibid., September 10, 2014 (03:50 p.m.).

him remarks that the local government authority does not pay attention to such. Its power is registered more in its revenue collection mechanism (which include acts of extortion) than in the maintenance of public infrastructure.

These conversations are relevant to one of the crucial questions posed by this research, and that is whether the political elites care about the online protest against them. The answer has begun to emerge. They care. They really care in the way they join in the dialogues and strive to exonerate themselves. The interactions and the broader activist framework in which we read them have a lot to tell us about the form of politics in Nigeria. Here we return to Abu-Lughod. Following her study of the Ali Bedouin women's resistance in Egypt in the late 1980s, she asks us to think in reverse the famous Foucauldian formulation that "where there is power, there is resistance." Her proposition is that we consider what resistance reveals about the operations of power.[228] A few days after the image of the flooded road was posted on Facebook, it was reposted in juxtaposition with a photograph of an election campaign billboard.[229] Such assembling of different photographs illustrates Sekula's earlier-cited argument that documentary (and in fact any realist mode of photographic representation) constitute a "folklore of photographic truth."[230] My position all along is that the use of photographs by Nigerians as evidence in the activist movement on Facebook does not adhere to any realist convention. Instead, it is much about visual construction achieved through editing (as will be fully examined in chapter 3). Such construction enables the creation of relationships between visual codes taken from different times and locations, but which when combined produced activist effects.

In the campaign billboard photograph, we see the then Nigerian President Jonathan (left) and Sullivan Chime, the governor of Enugu State standing on the right. The smaller portrait on bottom right is that of Dan Anike, the chairman of the Enugu State chapter of the National Coalition for Jonathan and Sambo Presidency (NCJSP). NCJSP was a major PDP campaign organisation with branches across

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[228] Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance."

[229] Chris Onyishi, "Anyi Ejebe Nsukka (Part 1)?" *Facebook*, September 13, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/chris.onyishi/posts/10203472362827664.

[230] Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 862.

the country. Its goal was to win support for the second tenure of Jonathan, and for PDP at the state level. Billboards were crucial in the diffusion of the party's message to the grassroots through the visual production of the hierarchy of power. The inscriptions on the centre of the design elucidate the hierarchicisation. And the social media activists understand its import. The images were posted online with a long comment whose title – "Anyi ejebe Nsukka (Part 1)" – repeats part of the inscription on the bill board. The interaction with the post on Facebook reveals a lot about politics in Nigeria.

First, the sectionalism in the Nigerian politics transcends ethnicity. It is underpinned by interest restricted to even narrower spheres like the kindred group or village. "Anyi ejebe Nsukka," meaning "we are moving to Nsukka" reverberates with the promise of Chime to install a man from the Nsukka province as the next governor of Enugu State.[231] Although elections are organised and the politicians spend a fortune on campaigns, Nigerian democracy is not necessarily about elections. It is about the capacity of the powerful few to *install* leaders based on certain party-informed considerations that are closely connected to place. The hierarchicisation of power depicted on the billboard is a means of soliciting support by appealing to place-related sentiment. The next governor would be *picked* from Nsukka, but the people would reciprocate by endorsing Jonathan's continuation as president. This is outrightly a political game, entangled in some ways with the agitation for improved infrastructure. The juxtaposition of the campaign image with that of a flooded road helps to draw out the question of infrastructure. In his 8 years as governor of the state, Sullivan Chime is said to have ignored the Nsukka people, only to remember them when the 2015 election campaign began. He is accused of concentrating infrastructural projects in Udi, his own community. Such skewed distribution of infrastructure is part of the Nigeria political culture. The deteriorating condition of the infrastructure stimulates civil agitations that expose the intricacies of the politics.

The deplorable state of infrastructure in Nigeria is an outcome of political corruption. Ordinary Nigerians challenge the condition through the circulation of

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[231] He had completed his two tenures as the governor of Enugu State.

and interaction with photographs on Facebook. They bewail what they regard as living behind time and the adversity resulting from the circumstances they challenge. Involved in these conversations, the political elites respond to the protest by exonerating themselves. At another level, they strive to evade the consequential conditions of the infrastructural failure, but that is difficult. While health issues have been used to illustrate that, images associated with transportation are analysed to understand what the question of infrastructure reveals about politics in Nigeria. It opens up the broader discourse of sectarianism as the bane of Nigerian democracy.

Competition for power

The 16-17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes notes that power struggle is a product of human egotism, the innate tendency to strive for new forms of satisfaction.[232] Although Hobbes has been criticised for his defensive relation to the absolutist political philosophy he expounds, this aspect of his thought explains the state of politics in Nigeria. The Nigerian democracy is characterised by acrimonious controversies among individuals, groups and institutions with different political ideologies and ambitions. The power tussles offer us another way to view the failure of leadership in Nigeria. The visual practices produced on Facebook bring to light the various ways political friction plays out in the country: exchange of verbal abuse, physical combat, militarisation of political processes, and other forms of violence. The social media activists insist that the Nigerian public officials are lawbreakers who have lost their "humanness" and taken on the attributes of beasts. The fracas in the National House of Representatives and the River State House of Assembly in 2014 and 2013 respectively inspired fascinating visual productions disseminated across the mainstream and social media. A selection of the images are examined to understand the form of the power tussle.

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[232] William Molesworth, ed., *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: C. Richards Printers: 1969).

Figure 2.8: Chaos in the Nigerian parliament, 20 November 2014 (video still).
Retrieved from: Facebook, 20 November 2014, posted by Abiyamọ with the text,
"Oga Ade, well played. You have done it. You done did it. Kontunu."
URL: https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=638551976255389
Retrieval date: 20 November, 2014.

On 20 November 2014, videos of men climbing over a tall metal gate went viral on
the internet. They were first brought to public view by television stations from
which they were shared on social media. Figure 2.8 is a video still of the one
produced by Channels Television Lagos whose logo is shown on the top left. We
see three men climbing the gate to scale over it, and others clasping parts of the
metal structure to do the same. They are richly and formally dressed, an indication
that they are far from being athletes in physical training or children on a
playground. The inscriptions, "National Assembly Fracas/House Members Scale
Fence to Access Building" signal who they are. They are Nigerian
parliamentarians in 2014, particularly members of the House of Representatives.[233]
They are to meet for the then President Goodluck Jonathan's request for the

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[233] At that period, Senator David Mark of then ruling People's Democratic Party was the leader of
the upper chamber of the parliament (House of Senate). Aminu Tambuwal of the then opposition
party – All Progressives Congress – was the Speaker of the lower House (of Representatives).

extension of emergency rule on the three northeastern states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) hit most by the Boko Haram insurgency.

The video is somewhat like a movie. Tambuwal, the speaker of the house arrives at the entrance of the National Assembly complex along with a group of people including other lawmakers and finds the gate locked and guarded by the police. As their attempt to break the gate fails, they climb over it and scurry into the parliament, undeterred by the tear gas released by the police. The solidarity song echoing as they gain entrance into the parliament indicates that majority of the stranded parliamentarians are members of APC. They begin to gather signatures to impeach Jonathan. But the move along with the plenary session over which Tambuwal is to preside is disrupted as the Senate President shuts down the parliament.

What is played out here is the power tussle between the two major political parties – the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC). Inter-party acrimony in Nigeria has a long history. Apart from the ethnic formation of political parties that began even before the Nigerian independence of 1960, inter-party relations have been marked by bitterness and violence. In the second republic (1979-1983), instances of thuggery, arson, and clashes involving the use of dangerous weapons were common between parties.[234] That trend has continued till date. The antecedence of the event in the above-described video exposes the egocentric underpinnings of the power struggle. The police defended their action at the National Assembly complex as a response to intelligence warnings against the likely invasion of the parliament by unknown persons. Tambuwal had in the previous month defected to APC from PDP. In a couple of days, the PDP-led federal government withdrew his security aides. The "unknown person" mentioned by the police would be the thugs recruited by Tambuwal as bodyguards. The actions of the key protagonists of the National Assembly incident can be argued to be motivated by self-centredness.

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[234] Ugbana Okpu, "Inter-Party Political Relations in Nigeria 1979-1983," *Africa Spectrum* 20, no. 2 (1985).

Bringing the idea of "public choice" into the domain of governance, Tullock, Brady and Seldon analyse the general conduct of government functionaries. Invoking the Hobbesian egocentrism and Machiavellian duplicity, they argue that the decisions made by state officials are hardly guided by public interest.[235] The event at the parliament as shown in the video reveals the egoistic interests of the Nigerian political elites. The fury of the PDP-led federal government that withdrew Tambuwal's security guards was prompted by the speaker's defection to a rival party. This happened when the 2015 general election had drawn near, and when Tambuwal would be important to PDP and Jonathan's bid for a second term. Defection, which became rampant in 2014, cannot be divorced from the question of selfish choice and rancorous politics. It automatically turns an individual into an enemy for the relinquished party and a hero in the other. On the other hand, its underlying purpose is more of egotism than the attraction to a better political ideology (if there is any such thing). Tambuwal's interest in APC was the opportunity it offered him to contest for the governorship position in his home state, Sokoto. As I write, he is the governor of that state.

From the foregoing, we see how the power struggle in Nigeria exposes the self-centeredness of government officials. But there are yet other significant dimensions that emerge especially with the reactions of the social media activists to the video under discussion. Some commented on the video by posting other pictures. So in the context of Facebook protest, the photographic image doubles as the original post and the comment it elicits. Out of the sixty comments generated by the aforesaid video on the popular Facebook page, Abiyamọ,[236] five are photographs. One of them offers a completely different way to read the competitive behaviour of the Nigerian politicians. Different moments in the episode at the parliament were frozen, organised in four panels and labelled "now."

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[235] Gordon Tullock, Arthur Seldon and Gordon L. Brady, *Government Failure: A Primer in Public Choice* (Washington: Cato Institute, 2002).

[236] Abiyamọ is a conglomerate of online platforms – blog, Facebook, Twitter, and so on – that rely heavily on circulation of visual contents to bring attention to topical issues in Nigeria. It is one of the Facebook pages on which the National Assembly video first appeared with more than 13350 views and shared by up to 420 users.

Figure 2.9: Pictorial comment on the Channels Television video on the chaos in the Nigerian parliament (20 November 2014) shared on Facebook by Abiyamọ
Retrieved from: Facebook, 20 November 2014, posted by Muyinat Babatunde, with no additional text.
URL: https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=638551976255389
Retrieval date: 20 November, 2014.

They are placed as a group in juxtaposition with the photograph of uniformed school children climbing a high wall (figure 2.9). Despite the poor resolution of the image (which is not necessarily a downside as argued in chapter 3), it resonates with a striking parallelism. As an element of rhetorics in philosophy, parallelism supports an argument by searching out similar semiotic codes and threading them together. If there is "parallelism of sound, syntax, and semantics (that) can epitomize an arguer's claim that multiple instances belong to the same grouping,"

then there is visual parallelism.[237] It is clearly inscribed in the composite photograph in figure 2.9: the inscriptions, "before" and "now," adults and children climbing, the similarity of figural pose between the two groups of images. This visual rendering allows a particular critique of power frictions in Nigeria. In the inordinate quest for power, the Nigerian government officials can be childish in their conduct. They make thoughtless decisions that have devastating effects on the socio-political and economic life of millions of Nigerians.

As the conversation unfolds, there emerges another reading, one that expresses frustration more strongly than the question of childishness. A comment on the video reads: "Nigeria is a disgrace, some times I am ashamed to say I am from dat country a place where d leaders behave like animals [sic]."[238] A lot of ordinary Nigerians have lost their sense of pride in the country due to the ignoble behaviour of the political elites. Government functionaries in Nigeria and indeed in other parts of Africa display the loss of humanness, and act like beasts. Reading *Matter and Memory*, Suzanne Guerlac analysises Bergson's definition of the difference between voluntary and involuntary actions: "The more complex the sensory system of an organism, the greater the zone of indeterminacy that surrounds the incipient action…This indeterminacy delays the automatic response, thereby opening up a horizon of choice."[239] In the struggle for power, the Nigerian political elites display the attributes of organisms with non-complex sensory systems. They are inclined to act automatically and irrationally in the parliament, exchanging verbal abuse, punches, slaps and engaging in outright fighting. In figure 2.10, the animalistic conduct is represented in the crudest possible sense.

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[237] Jeanne Fahnestock, "Verbal and Visual Parallelism," *Written Communication* 20, no. 123 (2003): 125.

[238] Mary Nosa Iyamu, November 20, 2014 (10:37 p.m.), comment on Abiyamọ, "Oga Ade, well played. You have done it. You done did it. Kontunu," *Facebook*, November 20, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=638551976255389.

[239] Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 108.
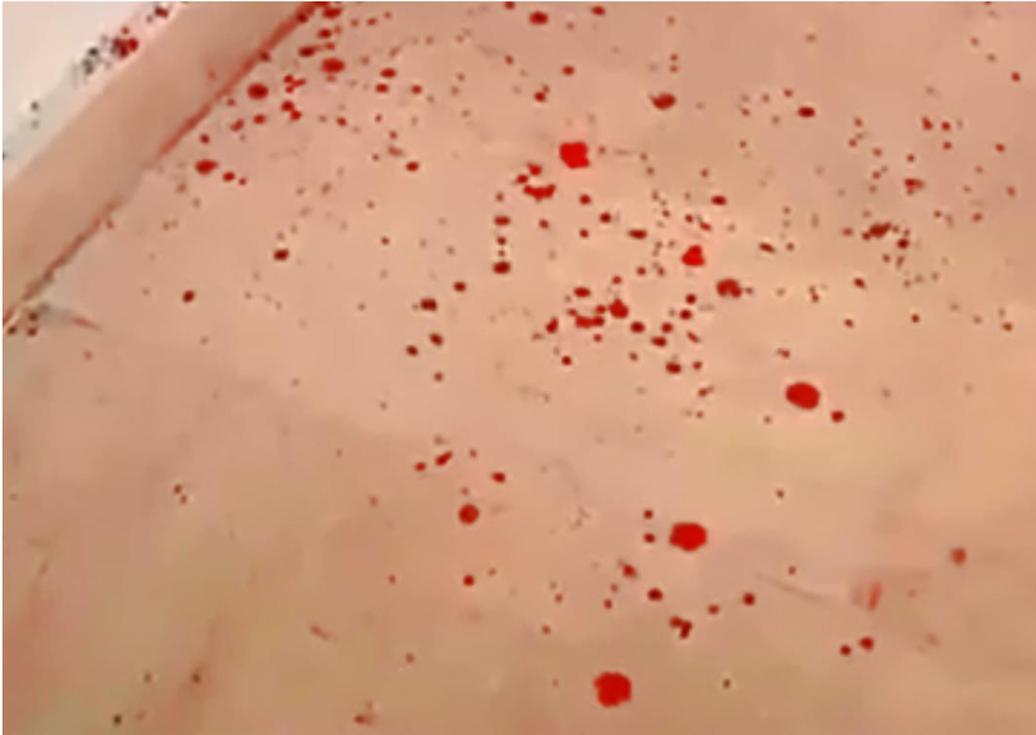
Figure 2.10: Blood spill on the floor of the Rivers State House of Assembly (video still) in July 2013.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 11 July 2013, posted by Dada Olaniyi with the text, "I can't believe dis!."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10151774551931495&comment_id=296 61932&offset=0&total_comments=27
Retrieval date: 27 November 2014.

The image is a screenshot from a video on the scuffle at the River State House of Assembly in July 2013. Rotimi Amaechi of APC was then the governor of the state. What we see in red colour are droplets of blood, human blood that leaves the imprint of acrimonious politics in a democratic setup. The rancour between PDP and APC divided the parliament into two – the pro-Amaechi (APC) and anti-Amaechi (PDP) factions. The five-person PDP group impeached the Speaker of the House and found a replacement from amongst themselves. Amaechi's supporters composed of twenty-seven members responded with violence. One of them hit a member of the rival faction several times with the mace, breaking it on his head. A police official joined in the battering. The above image depicts the splash of blood from the wounded lawmaker. The use of the symbol of power in democracy – the

123

mace – by a legislator to inflict physical injury on a fellow civilian is incongruous, an extreme demonstration of brutality. The participation of a security official in the beastly act rather than quelling it, and the failure to discipline the parliamentarians, demonstrate a normalisation of violence in Nigerian politics. Drawing on Foucault in his analysis of violence in contemporary politics, Allen Feldman demonstrates a "linkage between violence and democracy."[240] He uses the concept, "photopolitics" to explain the instrumentality of light, visibility and also photography in the political violence he theorises. Aside from the violence meted out by the state against its citizens, the conflict in the Rivers State Parliament is an example of extreme form of violence by public officials against themselves. And photography helps us to visualise the brutality.

Tussles for power are one of the ways the Nigerian state failure is produced. It is motivated by the self-centred ambitions of government officials. Inter-party bitterness becomes a political culture that breeds violence which includes thuggery and physical combat among the functionaries. Disappointed, the Nigerians connected on social media view themselves as hapless people ruled by hooligans who behave like beasts, having lost their sense of dignity.

Conclusion

In a general sense, this project is about the *how* of the social movement enacted on Facebook through photographic productions. This chapter has however focused on the *what*. It has examined the principal concerns of the online activists as presented in pictorial form. It can be likened to looking at the placards held up by conventional protesters to see what the protest is about. High-scale corruption can be seen from a vantage point. Through a systematic institution of impunity, corruption tends to have been established as a code of conduct among the privileged citizens who run the country. It destabilises every facet of life in Nigeria. It is linked to insecurity and explains why the political elites are at times complicit in violent crime. Other citizens also take to crime in reaction to the corruption of the leaders. The corrupt officials create conditions that leave the rest of the Nigerian population in poverty even when the country is officially rich.

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[240] Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible*, 70.

They run down the infrastructure and strive to live without being affected by the impact of the dilapidation. They are constantly in an aggressive struggle for power, to maintain their privileged positions. In so doing, they have lost the human sense of dignity and put on the attributes of beasts. In the rest of this work, I will pick up on the key elements discussed in this chapter as they apply in particular instances. This is to enable me explain the workings of photography in the context of civil struggle. In the next chapter, the technologies of the camera and of image editing and circulation are brought into conversation with those of electricity and the internet. These will be anchored in specific manifestations of the trouble with Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE
The Technology of Visual-Digital Activism: Applications, Mediations and Appropriations

Introduction

Digital technology has altered the modes of photographic image production, transformation, display, circulation and use. In Nigeria where digital photographic practices have assumed political importance, the above processes are caught in complicated technological relations. This chapter explores how Nigerians negotiate the imperative of deploying digital infrastructure in social media activism in relation to the availability and inadequacies of the required facilities. A number of issues emerge from the forms of technological mediation and appropriation that come into play in the civil struggle. First, the civil movement is driven by the proliferation of and unprecedented access to user-friendly digital camera devices (that is, gadgets that have the capacity to take photographs). Secondly, the produced images undergo different forms of editing that transform them into unique activist expressions. In that context of activism, such expressiveness takes precedence over insistence on realistic representation. Lastly, Nigerians take these issues so seriously that they are given to various forms of improvisation to overcome the infrastructural paucity that impedes the visual-virtual struggle.

To develop the argument, I examine a set of photographs and videos retrieved from Facebook, YouTube, and other online media platforms such as newspapers and television channels. They are analysed alongside their accompanying comments and interviews with the social media activists involved in the social relations they constitute. Attention is given to what we make of the workings of technology from the compositionality of the image, its production and circulation, and other associated infrastructural elements connected to these. The analysis is situated within the framework of writings on the ontological conceptualisation of technology as it relates to the debates that trouble the realist understanding of photography. Clive Lawson thinks of technology as a constitution of the material

126

and the social.[241] In relation to social movement in Nigeria, this dualism allows us to think through the human activities made possible by digital infrastructure without subscribing to technical determinism. The dialogue between technological ontology and photography will provide theoretical grounding for the idea that protest digital photography operates beyond the act of pressing the shutter button of the camera to take photos. It further casts light on the evidentiary impulse and its constructedness that organise Nigerians' activist use of photographs on social media as I began to show in chapter 2.

This chapter is structured into three parts to allow for close engagement with the issues it raises. First, "the ubiquitous camera" explains that the emergence of the digital mechanism of cameras combined with the mass access to them account for the traffic of images in social media spaces. These are also incidental to the use of the devices for purposes of civil resistance. The ubiquitous camera operates as a spy tool deployed by the citizens to expose the frivolities and duplicities of the holders of state power. It helps to destabilise the hegemonisation of knowledge and enables the ordinary people to reject the deceits of governance in Nigeria. The images taken with the ubiquitous camera are validated through their acceptance as news images by reputable agencies. The processes of editing the photographs are analysed in the second section. The working of images to create new representations is a product of technical configuration of hardware (the physical devices) and software (the immaterial applications). Rather than treat photographic editing with suspicion, it ought to be received as what allows the social media activists to articulate their messages in the way they want them presented. The different approaches to the visual alteration are evaluated in relation to the forms of expressions they enable. Lastly, "techno-appropriations" engages with how the infrastructural limitations that impede the preceding processes are addressed. The key impediments include unstable electricity supply and poor internet connectivity. These conditions do not hinder the cause of civil resistance. Instead, they stimulate

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[241] Clive Lawson, "An Ontology of Technology: Artefacts, Relations and Functions," *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 1, no. 12 (2008), https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/SPT/v12n1/lawson.html.

a fascinating economy of technological appropriations that sustain the online struggle despite all odds.

The ideas advanced in this chapter are important at this time. They point to a new direction in the debate which the advent of digital technology has provoked around photography. We are asked to do something else with the disruption of the indexicality and evidentiality of the image.

The ubiquitous camera

If visuality is central to social media activism – which is part of the overarching thesis of this project – the camera is a crucial aspect of its technology. The contemporary time is marked by unprecedented public access to camera devices. But that is not the only condition upon which the notion of ubiquity is predicated. Important too is the digital mechanism of the camera and its link with the infrastructure of dissemination, itself also digital. In Nigeria, the camera is used surreptitiously or overtly to expose the failure of the state. In certain instances, the produced image may be of poor quality due to technical, human or situational circumstances. Yet, it does not detract from its force as a means of civil resistance. There are three ways in which the ubiquitous camera operates. First, it produces counter-propagandist images. The state's claim of accountable governance is dislodged and shown as deceit. Secondly, the people use the camera devices to bear witness to events that portray acts of injustice. The ensuing photographs get validated through their appropriation as news content by the mainstream media. Lastly, the ubiquitous camera is deployed as a tool of surveillance, but in a way that interrupts our understanding of the concept. The Nigerian citizens use it to observe and police the political figures, framing them as deviants in relation to the laws of the state they ought to protect. Once the images enter cyberspace, those depicted in them are plunged into serious crises.

To understand the workings of the possibilities outlined above, we have to examine the technological factors that constitute the very notion of ubiquity. In the 1990s, digital cameras were developed. What followed was a continued refinement of the technology so that besides taking still pictures, the device could record motion and

sound, and even transmit audio-visual impulses in real time. It came with user-friendliness embedded in the automation of "many conventions of photography that were previously expected to be learned."[242] With the automatic control system, the digital camera offers itself to as many hands as possible. By the 2000s, more cameras had appeared in the form of laptops, iPads, mobile phones, and similar devices into which amazing forms of multifunctionality were built. Martin Hand notes that these devices constitute "*interconnected technical artifacts*"[243] that are staggeringly pervasive. They are interconnected in many ways: through the logic of compatibility, sharing of software technology, and modes of taking, reading, storing, retrieving and sharing photographs. The camera devices are on the one hand interlinked, and on the other, connected to the global system of communication: telecommunication, social media, electronic news media, and other related outlets. We need to ponder the complexity of the interconnectedness. The proliferation of the camera phone, and the launching of Flickr and Facebook did not merely happen in the same period (mid-2000s). [244] Beyond telephony services, the camera phone would subsequently become the gateway to internet access and therefore to image hosting and sharing websites exemplified by Flickr and Facebook. In the words of Shanks and Svabo, to possess a networked device such as a mobile phone is to "carry a phone-cum-camera-cum-computer" that is linked to the internet.[245]

Once the technological configuration comprising camera devices and the internet became accessible to the Nigerian public, a new social practice emerged. It is a digital-visual culture predicated upon sharing the daily anxieties of living in the postcolony. However, there are contentions about the practice, mostly associated with the quality of the image produced with the ubiquitous camera. It is described as "amateur," "blurry," or "grainy." But this does not imply that ubiquitous

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[242] Martin Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012): 98.

[243] Ibid., 96.

[244] Martin Lister, "Overlooking, Rarely Looking and Not Looking,[1]" in *Digital Snaps: The New Face of Photography*, ed. Jonas Larsen and Mette Sandbye (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014): 3.

[245] Michael Shanks and Connie Svabo, "Mobile-Media Photography: New Modes of Engagement," in *Digital Snaps: The New Face of Photography*, ed. Jonas Larsen and Mette Sandbye (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014): 234.

photography can only produce images of low quality. After all, "professional" practices (such as photojournalism and documentary) which are conventionally associated with high-quality photographic productions also fit into the ubiquitous paradigm. The idea of poor visual quality marks outs the conditions in which the pictures are taken. These include technical limitations of the camera device and the level of prowess or the disposition of the individual who handled it. Trained photographers usually worry that the availability of the camera to everyone and its simplicity of use rather trivialise the photographic medium.[246] But such concerns are not new. The history of photography encompasses the anxiety about a perceived threat to its technical and professional attributes. For example, Walter Benjamin was critical of the very notion of mass production in the beginning of the 20th century. The introduction of the dry-plate photographic process in the 19th century, the point-and-shoot camera in the 1970s, and the digital camera in the 1990s are crucial developments that also came with anxiety.[247]

In the present time, that concern is intensified by how the image itself gets implicated in the digital process of transformation necessary to meet certain technical demands. Daniel Palmer describes the JPEG image format as "the default mode by which we currently experience photographic images on-screen, from computer monitors to mobile devices."[248] So, JPEG – which took the name after its creator, the Joint Photographic Expert Group – is itself a ubiquitous file type. But it entails image compression that results in loss of quality.[249] Yet, it is necessary for

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[246] Ibid.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Daniel Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," in *The Photographic Image in Digital* Culture, ed. Martin Lister (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013): 151.

[249] Ibid., 154. Palmers' treatment of the idea of "loss of visual quality" in relation to his "rhetoric" concept needs further explanation, lest it would be perceived as misleading. He remarks that "the rhetoric of the JPEG" (which happens to be the title of his essay), "is that of reducing an image's size to the minimum while magically suppressing attention to that loss." It sounds as if there is a singular size to which the process of compression reduces every image. And no matter how the compressed picture is viewed, the loss is not readily perceptible. My take is that the perceptibility of the effect of compression is dependent on the size in which the compressed image is viewed and the screen resolution of the viewing device. Take for instance a photograph compressed to 448 X 336 px to make it lighter and faster for online upload from a low-capacity mobile phone. When viewed in full screen mode on a high-resolution 15-inch computer monitor, the image is bound to appear blurry.

immediacy and speedy upload on the internet, and for its compatibility with a range of devices, software and virtual platforms. Besides, reduction in the resolution of the image does not undermine the force of its political use examined below.[250]

First, the image plays a counter-propagandist role. At the outset, the term "propaganda" was used in a neutral sense to suggest the persuasive ways of influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and views of others. However, beginning from the 20th century, the concept acquired a negative connotation as it was deployed as a tactic in the First World War. Colin Moore writes: "Now, it is a word with a poor image. Its message is unreliable. It calls up hidden persuasion, half-truths and distortions. The people who produce it are untrustworthy and unaccountable. Its ends are used to justify its dubious means."[251] The way constituted authorities in Nigeria strive to win the loyalty of the people fits into the tainted signification of propaganda described above. The government deploys different mediums to persuade the masses into accepting that their lives are being transformed through false or incomplete socio-economic facilities. The ubiquitous camera is an important means through which such claims are challenged. Analysis of photographs relating to the recent claim of educational transformation in Nigeria would be useful here.

The Goodluck Jonathan administration (2010-2015) vigorously projected the idea of having overhauled the education sector. The claim was made with reference to the establishment of 12 universities sited across the country and 150 Almajiri schools in the north. [252] During the 2015 general election campaign, Jonathan's party (People's Democratic Party) held on to this as a great accomplishment that should be rewarded by voting it in for the second tenure. Previously, in 2013, the

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[250] However, JPEG's continual deterioration is something structurally counter to the archival and historical value of the digital image. So, digital infrastructure has not solved the preservation problem confronting the archive.

[251] Colin Moore, *Propaganda Prints: A History of Art in the Service of Social and Political Change* (London: A&C Black Publishers Limited, 2010): 8.

[252] The Almajiri are male Qur'anic school children who roam the streets of Northern Nigeria, begging for food. As students, they leave their families to live under the care of their teachers who unfortunately do not provide them with food. Therefore they live on begging.

university lecturers across the country had embarked on a six-month strike in protest against the rotten state of infrastructure and poor funding of research in the universities.

Figure 3.1: School children in the classroom.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 1 August 2014, posted by Rotimi Aberuagba
with the text, "Can you imagine a country that shares over 700 billion to its three tiers of Govt every month."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/831435550209272/
Retrieval date: 8 September 2014.

Following a series of negotiations between the government and the staff union, the industrial action was called off. With the substantial resolution of the controversy and the establishment of the said new universities and schools, the Nigerian federal government dwelt on the propaganda that it had revamped the educational system. But with the new media, propaganda increasingly shows itself as a form of exchange, a "reciprocal activity;" that does not have to be received passively. [253] The ubiquitous camera produced counter-propagandist photographs to expose the continued decay in the Nigerian education sector.

To illustrate the dilapidation using the state of infrastructure in the institutions, let us examine the picture of school children in an ill-equipped classroom (figure 3.1). The pupils use makeshift desks made of cement blocks. The room is poorly illuminated and the open section of the wall exposes the children to harsh weather conditions. The atmosphere is evidently that of physical discomfort which impedes learning. The pupils' poses and the different directions of their faces indicate lack of concentration. The one in the foreground has a pen positioned on his book as one who intends to write but is distracted. The other pupil in the background folds his book with his arms resting on the block-made desk and gazes at the camera.

The image was posted on the Facebook page of the Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest group. It came with a comment whose tone is that of frustration about the poor state of academic institutions in oil-rich Nigeria. From the conversation around the image we learn that the said school is a public institution located in Abuja the country's capital. The state of the school contrasts with that of its privately-owned counterparts in the same city to which the children of state functionaries are enrolled, and which the common citizens cannot afford. This illustrates how the neoliberal logic of privatisation impacts on the education sector in Nigeria.

Failure in electricity supply and internet connectivity, environmental unsanitariness, ill-equipped libraries, laboratories, studios and workshops are some of the conditions that plague Nigerian schools and universities, especially the

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[253] Moore, *Propaganda Prints*, 8.

public ones. The situation does not have much to do with lack of funding but its embezzlement. The fraud at times involves connivance between the same government that provides the funding and the authorities of the benefitting institutions.[254] These indicate that the state's claim of educational reformation is a mere deceit. As the older schools and universities cannot be maintained, the establishment of new ones for which Jonathan's government sought to be extolled, is but propaganda with an underlying political interest. The ubiquitous camera destabilises the propaganda.

Meanwhile, it must be acknowledged that apart from issues related to image quality, there are expressions of doubt about the *validity* of the photographs taken in the ubiquitous context. But that question is addressed by the contexts in which the images are circulated. Aside from social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, they are appropriated as news photographs by reputable mainstream media organisations. That way, the images get validated as bearers of witness to acts of injustice perpetrated by the political elites. The idea of bearing witness is at the heart of current debates in journalism. Those who were present when the devastating tsunami of 2004 struck in South Asia provided visual "eye witness" accounts of the tragedy. The mainstream media turned to the images in reporting the event. This form of practice came to be described with the concept of "citizen journalism." Related terms such as "citizen photojournalism" and "citizen photography" were also formulated.[255] These ideas mark the placement of ordinary people in a position as news reporters, photojournalists or photographers. Consequently, the line between the professional and amateur categories is increasingly being blurred. But akin to the case in photography, the binary is a contentious issue in journalism.

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[254] Such fraudulent deals charaterised the so-called infrastructural expansion of the University of Nigeria in the first half of the 2010s for instance. See "Contract Splitting Fraud and Cover Up in University Of Nigeria Nsukka," *Sahara Reporters*, August 22, 2011, http://saharareporters.com/2011/08/22/contract-splitting-fraud-and-cover-university-nigeria-nsukka.

[255] Stuart Allan, "Introduction: Photojournalism and Citizen Journalism," *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 4 (2015).

Working with the term "citizen witnessing," Stuart Allan makes a useful contribution to the debates. He argues that the production of "firsthand" accounts by people who experience or who are present at the times of crisis constitutes an outstanding form of journalism. He considers it a robust practice, suitable for challenging the frivolities of democracy.[256] Allan's view is taken seriously in Nigeria. While some media outlets would incorporate "citizen witnessing" in their news production, others were primarily founded to deploy citizen journalism in civil resistance. Sahara Reporters is a case in point here. It is an online news platform based in USA, but founded by a Nigerian activist, Sowore Omoyele, and with Nigeria as one of its key targets. Disappointed with the failure of democracy that returned to Nigeria in 1999, Sahara Reporters began operations with a massive deployment of photography to challenge corruption and the abuse of power in the country and other parts of Africa. It thrives on eye-witness accounts of individuals concerned about the Nigerian and African conditions.[257] Omoyele demonstrates awareness of how the ubiquitous camera is expanding the limits of journalism. It has the capacity to record significant events that may have eluded the trained photojournalist.

Many of the publicly accessible images that expose the violence and failure of the 2015 general election in Nigeria were taken by ordinary voters, not necessarily practising photojournalists. The images were broadly disseminated across social media and appropriated in the context of "citizen witnessing" by television channels, newspapers, and other news outlets.

Citizen photographic reportage is common among news television channels in Nigeria. For instance, the "Eyewitness" of Channels Television, Lagos, asks members of the public to report events as they happen around them. They can do this by installing the Channels TV App on their smartphones. With the device, they can send in pictures and videos with title, description and location. Once they are received, the images become testimonial to the events they reference and are to be

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[256] Stuart Allan, *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2013).

[257] Farooq Kperogi, "Webs of Resistance: The Citizen Online Journalism of the Nigerian Digital Diaspora" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2011).

reported as news items.[258] Through the "Eyewitness," the snatching of an electoral ballot box in Zamfara State was reported in the 2015 elections (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: "Eyewitness" image of the snatching of ballot box in Zamfara State (Nigeria) in the 2015 gubernatorial election.
Retrieved from: Channels Television online streaming on
www.channelstv.com/live.
Retrieval date: 11 April 2015.

A shaky video of what followed was also circulated on Facebook. INEC officials and other individuals, some of them armed, are found in the bush with the electoral materials. They open the ballot box, pull out the ballot papers and apparently do some doctoring and recording of figures. Once the job is done, they ride away on bikes. The subsequent announcement of the election result by the electoral body regardless of the widely circulated visual "evidence" of electoral crime sparked a

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[258] This reportorial model began to gain currency in the 2000s. In the aftermath of the earlier-mentioned South Asian tsunami, the media dependence on eye witness reports of the event prompted BBC to reconsider its participatory modes of operation. It "launched a user-generated content hub as a three-month pilot project, recognizing…the pressing need to expand reportorial boundaries to find new ways to facilitate citizen involvement in newsmaking." See Allan, "Introduction," 468.

protest. Security forces however cracked down on this.[259] All these adversely affect the attitude of numerous Nigerians to the nation's electoral process, a point to which I will shortly return.

While Channels Television received eyewitness photographs directly from their creators, *Vanguard* newspaper would go through social media. It retrieved images posted to Twitter by ordinary people who monitored the election with their cameras. By turning to Twitter, *Vanguard* affirms the assertion that the social media site is a quick place "to find first-hand news directly from the event as it happens.''[260] The images about the gubernatorial elections retrieved from the site were published online by *Vanguard* on 11 April 2015. The subjects depicted include the ethnic tensions underlining the exercise; thuggery; the carting away of ballot boxes; and the low turn-out of voters in some parts of the country. On the reverse side, other photographs suggest satisfaction with what is perceived as the smooth running of the election in some polling units.[261] Foregrounded here is the ambivalence that frames the attitude of Nigerians to electoral matters. Many are so disappointed with the high rate of electoral malpractices in the country that they have stopped participating in elections. For others, self-alienation is not rational either.

Outside thematic analysis which relates to the 2015 elections in Nigeria, there is something fascinating about technological interrelations that come into play above. The intersections between the ubiquitous camera, social media and news platforms illustrate how the "infrastructures of representation"[262] evoked by Gürsel Zeynep get reconstituted in a digital age. Led into the depth of wire service photographic practices, we encounter the politics of news image brokering. We see the infrastructural setup through which people and agencies decide for the world the

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[259] "Gov. Yari of APC Re-elected in Zamfara," *Premium Times*, April 13, 2015, 2015, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/181396-gov-yari-of-apc-re-elected-in-zamfara.html.

[260] Shanks and Svabo, "Mobile-Media Photography," 238.

[261] See Abiodun Alade, "Citizen Reports on Governorship Elections," *Vanguard*, April 11, 2015, www.vanguardngr.com/2015/04/citizen-report-on-governorship-elections-in-nigeria/.

[262] Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, "The Politics of Wire Service Photography: Infrastructures of Representation in a Digital Newsroom," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 71.

images viewed as news. But digital technology has raised a new set of brokers, namely the members of the public who are armed with internet-ready cameras. They produce photographs and distribute them so that even the reputable news organisations on which we once relied for such visual feeds rather turn to them in their own work. A similar form of reversal arises with the use of the camera as a surveillance tool. The Nigerian citizens now haunt their leaders with picturing devices to expose their dubious lifestyles.

According to Michel Foucault, the relations of state power filter through institutional mechanisms such as found in the prison, hospital, school, and asylum. The power exercised by the state in these set-ups is in turn produced through the act of *seeing*. As Foucault puts it: "Surveillance…becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power."[263] Photography is important in this discourse of surveillance. It applies in a broad range of contexts: in legal practice, police work, official registration and identification, and related areas.[264] The emergence of digital technology has also enhanced the workings of surveillance. We have become used to security cameras mounted by the state to monitor the movements and conduct of citizens in certain spaces.[265] But the same technology that has intensified the state's observation of the public has also enabled a reversal of the gaze. In the Nigerian context of public uprising against the government, the ubiquitous camera has made the observer the observed. It is used surreptitiously and tactfully to monitor the actions of the political elites, to expose their abuse of power, and to challenge it. The corrupt officials are consequently thrown into disarray. In that condition, they express some feeling of insecurity, the very emotional state experienced by the subjects of their failed government. These lines

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[263] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 175.

[264] See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Tagg takes on the multiple applications of photography as "documents, evidence, and records." Through semiotic engaging with images and the institutional agencies that produce them, he pursues the questions about how the above status is acquired.

[265] Private organisations and individuals are also involved in the practice of securitisation by means of photography. But our interest here is limited to that which involves the state's relation with the citizens.

of thought can be illustrated with the experiences of Ali Modu Sheriff, the former governor of Borno State, Nigeria and the son of the country's late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

In 2008, Sheriff was caught in a video and shown dancing with a female musician in Dubai, holding her and spraying cash on her.[266] Although it is not a still photograph, it is possible to view the video through the prism of paparazzi photography. According to Jerslev and Mortensen, this kind of photographic practice "is characterized by an aesthetics and discourse of ordinariness: celebrities apparently caught unawares while engaged in everyday routines such as walking along the street carrying a cup of coffee, shopping, exiting the gym, passing through an airport, picking up their children from school, and so on."[267] The problem with that point of view is that it tends to excuse the image from being subjected to political reading. It also causes us to ignore the effect it would have on the photographed when they see themselves depicted in certain ways and published for public view.

Carol Squiers is evidently mindful of these critical elements of paparazzi by thinking of it as an intersection of photojournalism, documentary, celebrity photography and surveillance photography.[268] Jerslev and Mortensen disagree with that position and argue that surveillance photography should be removed from the list and street photography added to it.[269] In my understanding, Sheriff's video can be read as paparazzi and citizen photography from which the notion of surveillance cannot therefore be detached. It is a paparazzi economy against the excesses of the powerful. Ordinariness – the organising principle of paparazzi – underlines the depiction of Sheriff having fun like the human being that he is. On the other hand,

[266] Saharatv, "Borno Governor, Senator Ali Modu Sherriff Dance," *YouTube video*, 03:37, November 5, 2008,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRCuvQZPlgw.

[267] Anne Jerslev and Mette Mortensen, "Paparazzi Photography, Seriality and the Digital Photo Archive," in *Digital Snaps: The New Face of Photography*, ed. Jonas Larsen and Mette Sandbye (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014), 156.

[268] Carol Squiers, "Class Struggle: The Invention of Paparazzi Photography and the Death of Diana, Princess of Wales," in *Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary* Photographs, ed. Carol Squiers (New York: The New Press, 1999).

[269] Ibid., 167.

the understanding of the video in terms of surveillance is informed by the context in which it is produced and disseminated. Through its description on YouTube where it is circulated, the video calls public attention to the frivolous life for which the political class is largely known in Nigeria. Consider the two key components of Sheriff's conduct in the video.

First, he dances with a woman, an act prohibited by the Sharia Law. As at the time of the event, he was the governor of Borno State, one of the Northern Nigerian states which following the return of democracy in 1999 began to institute Sharia law. Against the threat it posed for Nigerian unity and the ethnic and religious tensions it generated, the Northern elites (Sheriff apparently inclusive) argued strongly in favour of the law as the panacea for the corruption brought by democracy[270] (chapter 5 shows how this rationalisation bred the Boko Haram insurgency). The ubiquitous camera caught Sheriff undermining the laws to which he had sworn allegiance. Secondly, he sprays cash on his dance partner, against the Nigerian regulation for the handling of currency passed into law in June 2007.[271] Meanwhile, due to the blurry quality of Sheriff's video, the particular currency in question is not visually intelligible. But the short accompanying description identifies it as dollars. In my view, the fact that Sheriff sprayed dollars rather than naira does not exonerate him. It should be perceived as cross-border misconduct to which the ubiquitous camera has drawn our attention.

Like Sheriff, those implicated by this visual production perceive their "unknown" colleagues as traitors for clandestinely taking their images and publishing them. But for the citizens involved in resistance against the power mongers, they are pleased to have among the political elites individuals who are in surreptitious opposition to the excesses of their colleagues. It is reasonable to trace the exposure of major scandals among Nigerian politicians to this mode of revealing.

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[270] Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008).

[271] See "Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette," *Central Bank of Nigeria*, http://www.cenbank.org/OUT/PUBLICATIONS/BSD/2007/CBNACT.PDF.

Sheriff's example has been used to illustrate the surreptitious way the camera is deployed to observe the behaviour of the Nigerian political elites. But the surveillance operates in yet another manner. In some settings, the photographed voluntarily offer themselves to the camera, oblivious of the possible scandalous results. Consider the pictures of Musa, the son of former Nigeria's President Musa Yar'Adua (figures 3.3 and 3.4).

Figure 3.3: Musa Yar'Adua's son playing with money and rifle.
Retrieved from: Nairaland, 6 August 2008, posted by Nvmei with the text, "The era of a new celebrity. What are the morals in the picture, Musa Yar'Adua. Son of Umaru Yar'Adua."
URL: http://www.nairaland.com/157667/era-new-celebrity-musa-yar.
Retrieval date: 10 March 2015.

In figure 3.3, we see, as vividly described by Kperogi, "exclusive pictures of the president's son bathing in a pile of cash and brandishing brand new guns."[272] Given the different effects generated by the photographs on YouTube and Nairaland,[273] their message transcends the exuberance of a wannabe. On YouTube the images along with others in the series appear in video format, displayed in the likeness of slide presentation with typographical and musical accompaniments.[274]

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[272] Kperogi, "Webs of Resistance,"38.

[273] Nairaland is a social networking site commonly used by Nigerians. It allows for the posting of images and sharing of comments on them.

[274] Nigerianvideos, "Musa Yar' Adua Son," *YouTube video*, 02:00, November 26, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--9-tk0VF1w&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Figure 3.4: Musa Yar'Adua's son in juxtaposition with an indigent man.
Retrieved from: Nairaland, 6 August 2008, posted by Nvmei with the text, "Musa posing for a short while the other is waiting for his pension underneath a bridge after working 35 years in government."
URL: http://www.nairaland.com/157667/era-new-celebrity-musa-yar.
Retrieval date: 10 March 2015.

This well illuminates Manovich's earlier-cited notion of "variability," one of the concepts with which he theorises the logic of new media. By "variability," he means that "a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions."[275] The flexibility of media contents enabled by digital technology favours the mobilisation of civil resistance.

It allows users to construct their messages the way they want them to be presented. The rendering of the still photographs of young Musa in audiovisual form allows for a critique of the ex-president's conduct as a public figure. The text describes the young man as an irresponsible child whose character suggests poor parental upbringing. That implied failure at the micro level challenges Yar'Adua's capability as the leader of a populous nation like Nigeria. The background tune taken from the work of the activist musician Fela Kuti rehashes "thief," "rogue," "robber," and related expressions with which he described the military government of the 1980s. The music prompts us to query the stockpile of cash by Yar'Adua and the rationale behind making it (including the rifle) accessible to his apparently teenage child.

From another perspective, young Yar'Adua, supposedly a minor and dependant, has access to such a large amount of cash. But many of his counterparts live in hunger with their indigent parents. This is one of the issues raised in the conversation around the images on Nairaland. In figure 3.4, Musa poses self-confidently before the camera, dressed luxuriantly and relaxing in the comfort of a well-furnished house. Considering Musa's pose and the way he looks into the camera, the photograph and the ones in figure 3.3 can be said to follow studio portrait conventions. But here, it intersects with activist use, especially given the context of circulation of the images. Again, they are juxtaposed with others that depict the reverse of Musa's ostentatious life.

For example, in the one that comes below Musa's in figure 3.4, people living in poverty are shown. The man in the foreground looks lost in thought, in a posture that echoes Musa's pose. One of the comments on the picture is striking: "Musa

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[275] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 56.

posing for a shot while the other is waiting for his pension underneath a bridge after working 35 years in government."[276] It cannot be guaranteed that the man in the photograph has actually worked as a civil servant. But it gives us a sense of how images and their accompanying comments on social media constitute a means through which Nigerians articulate their discontent. The images are used in the likeness of film editing where independent shots are integrated irrespective of where and when they were taken. Through such linking of photographs on social media, the public is made to contemplate how the harsh experiences of living in Nigeria connect with the follies of those in power.

The use of the ubiquitous camera as examined in the foregoing has an enormous effect on politicians. It produces anxiety among them. To illustrate, Yar'Adua was amazed at the evolution of the scandal around his son's photographs, from their production and appropriation in various contexts to their viral online circulation. His reaction was that of "anxiety about visual intrusion." [277] The anxiety is apparently connected to the oath of secrecy he administered the same year (2008) to the staff of the People's Democratic Party, the presidency and the National Assembly working directly under him. However, the move was severely criticised as a restriction on free circulation of information in a democracy. [278] This chain of events began with the application of the ubiquitous camera as a means of surveillance. With the picturing apparatus the public has been empowered to observe the representatives of state power and to challenge them.

In the study of digital culture as a mode of civil activism, it is difficult to overlook the centrality of the camera and the visual production it enables. This argument aids our understanding of how digital technology has radicalised the way ordinary citizens express their discontent about the failure of the postcolony in Africa. The camera is ubiquitous not only in the sense of its availability to the masses, but the mechanism of production and circulation of images made possible by digital

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[276] Nvmei, "The Era of a New Celebrity Musa Yar' Adua (Yar' Adua's Son), *Nairaland*, August 6, 2008, http://www.nairaland.com/157667/era-new-celebrity-musa-yar.
[277] Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography*, 11.
[278] R.O. Oji, Emmanuel C. Nwachukwu and Okechukwu Innocent Eme, "Oath of Secrecy in the Nigerian Public Service," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Nigerian Chapter)* 2, no. 8 (2014).

technology and the internet. Some of the photographs may lack good visual quality, yet they are powerful in their activist undertaking. At times, other media outlets rely on them to report as news the indices of inequality, asking us to take the images seriously. The state deploys various media to persuade the public into accepting that they are cared for. But the ubiquitous camera helps to counteract this propaganda by showing images that picture the reverse of the claims. The masses have become so suspicious of the political figures that they subject them to surveillance. This reversal interrupts our top-down understanding of surveillance as a means of power. The publishing of the resulting images on the internet and the ensuing processes of interpretation create chaotic moments for the individuals they criticise. So the leaders indirectly share in the anxiety produced by their dubious style of governance. These issues open up other critical questions around the political use of photography. It would be fascinating to further study how image editing impacts on digital-visual activism.

Editing and the making of unique statements

Photography is associated with a longstanding question of authenticity. This is informed by the initial reception of the medium as an innocent representation of "truth." Daguerre and Talbot declared the photographic image as nature's inscription, and early scholarship on the medium dwelt along that line of thought. For instance, in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes invents an elaborate vocabulary to argue for an unmediated link between the photograph and reality. For him, the two are like "laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both."[279] He adds that "the photograph always carries its referent with itself."[280] Although this realist understanding would later be challenged, many cling to it today. In the digital age when alteration of the image has become more pervasive than ever, the adherents of realism worry that the photograph is robbed of its quality as a "teller of truth." On the contrary, such anxiety is uncalled for. In the context of activism, what may be perceived as "uncanny" digital mutilations and suturing of the images circulated on Facebook should be read as a

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[279] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.
[280] Ibid., 5.

"visuatechnical" language for the making of inimitable statements about human conditions. Rather than distort the "truth," the integration of visual elements from different photographs helps to generate new representations of socio-political realities.

There are three major forms of editing undergone by the politically charged images Nigerians circulate on Facebook: collage, photomontage and poster. The processes require appropriate hardware and software selection. Computers, tablets, iPads and smartphones which constitute the hardware for editing are driven by image-transforming applications designed in various modes to suit different devices. Deploying the technologies, images are edited to make three major kinds of representation: narrative, satirical, and comparative. We are drawn to these technological questions because they indicate the possibility of transforming the idea of image manipulation (as an object of anxiety) into a distinct visual language. The language is useful for the purpose of civil resistance.

The image transformation techniques deployed in the photographic practices examined in this study produce spectacular effects. The first approach – collage – involves the layering of different images to make a unified whole. The juxtaposition is not arbitrary, but governed by aesthetic and semantic principles. It is imbued with the multiple-exposure-kind-of effect, reflecting symmetrical or asymmetrical organisation. The images are either shown in uniform sizes so that none is visually dominant, or in varying sizes to have emphasis placed on some photographs. As opposed to collage which involves the juxtaposition of multiple pictures, "photomontage" results in a composite image. Elements from different photographs are cut out and combined seamlessly to create a new image. Photomontage is traced back to the 19th century analogue photographic practice where the cuttings are put together, photographed as a single shot, developed and printed. But the term was coined later by the Berlin Dada artists during World War 1.[281] With digital devices, the whole editing process can be executed within the workspace provided by the software. The last mode of editing which I term

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[281] The artists include John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, George Grosz, and Raoul Hausmann deployed photomontage to critique the political condition occasioned by World War 1 in Germany. See Ades Dawn, *Photomontage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976).

"poster" relates to the two-dimensional graphic genre where design solutions are provided through the layering of images and types. Posters, handbills and editorials are examples of designs intended to communicate through this format. Once the pictorial and typographical forms are worked into unified whole, the resulting design is "rasterised" to take on the digital status of the image. Rasterisation turns the types in the design into pictorial signs to be read as such, and as an element that can no longer be separated from the photograph.

There is a set of digital infrastructures that feed this photographic enterprise. Computers, which predate mobile gadgets as digital image editing devices, possess custom applications (such as Paint in Windows) that come with the operating system. They allow for editing of photographs and require "no training beyond the instructions that come with the software."[282] Besides the basic applications, more professional software has flooded the market. Adobe Photoshop for example is complete with tools that perform a broad range of tasks: cropping, stitching, blending, colour adjustment and many more. It was deployed in the execution of complex forms of editing (such as photomontage) analysed in this study.

The scope of image transformation expands even more with the proliferation of mobile devices which emerged with new kinds of operating system and app technology. Gerard Goggin suggests that apps are central to the transformation of the cultural landscape brought by mobile media and the internet. "An app," as he puts it, "can make it possible to imagine and do things with a mobile phone that were previously never associated with the technology."[283] To illustrate with the Facebook app, once installed on a smartphone, both instant upload of photos and receipt of notifications of ongoing conversations on the site are possible as long as the device is connected to the internet.

Other apps, some of which are free on the internet and accessible on platforms like Apple Store and Google Play (Store), were built exclusively for the purpose of

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[282] Cori E. Dauber, *Youtube War: Fighting in a World of Cameras in Every Cell Phone and Photoshop on Every Computer* (United States: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009): vii.

[283] Gerard Goggin, "Ubiquitous Apps: Politics of Openness in Global Mobile Cultures, *Digital Creativity* 22, no. 3 (2011): 151.

picture editing. Some of the ones employed by the Facebook users in Nigeria include Photo Grid, Pic Frame, PicsArt, and PicMix. They have a similar set of layouts that "prescribe" to users how to create compositions by giving them options beyond which they however, cannot go. This setting of boundaries can be explicated with the concept of *affordances*. James Gibson, a psychologist of visual perception uses it to explain the form of action-based relationship between an object or organism and its environment: "The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal." "The composition and layout of surfaces," Gibson continues, "constitute what they afford." [284] The virtual environments of the picture collage apps offer the layouts in which images can be organised by users. The Facebook timeline has been redesigned to automatically organise photographs in similar layouts. The photographs analysed in this study which reflect "juxtapositional editing" (collage) were organised in the layouts illustrated in figure 3.5. They reflect the workspaces of the apps and the ways Facebook displays group images.
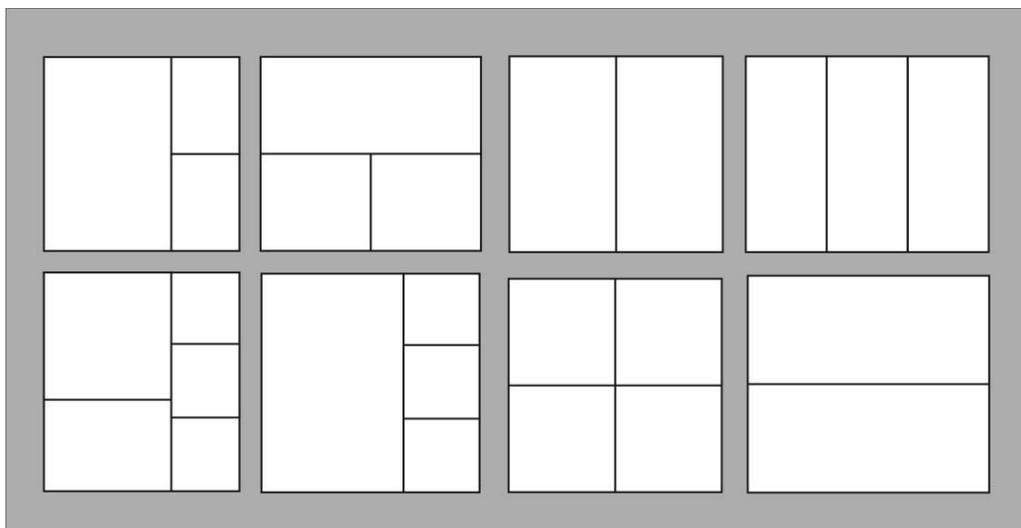
Figure 3.5: Major collage layouts as afforded by picture collage applications

The various forms of editing discussed above allow those engaged in them to make unique visual statements. Rather than read this visual culture as a distortion of

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[284] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 1986): 127.

reality, we ought to appreciate how it helps us to better understand socio-political realities in society. Pedro Meyer the documentary photographer who works with digital images would argue that it is the editing of photographs that brings out the real reality.[285] This point can be traced back to Benjamin's rumination on Brecht's remark "that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality."[286] Indeed, we learn a great deal of the harsh realities in Nigeria by studying the practice of photo editing among Nigerian Facebook users.

FORMS OF EDITING		
Collage	Photomontage	Poster

KINDS OF STATEMENTS MADE WITH THE EDITED IMAGES		
Narrative	Satirical	Comparative
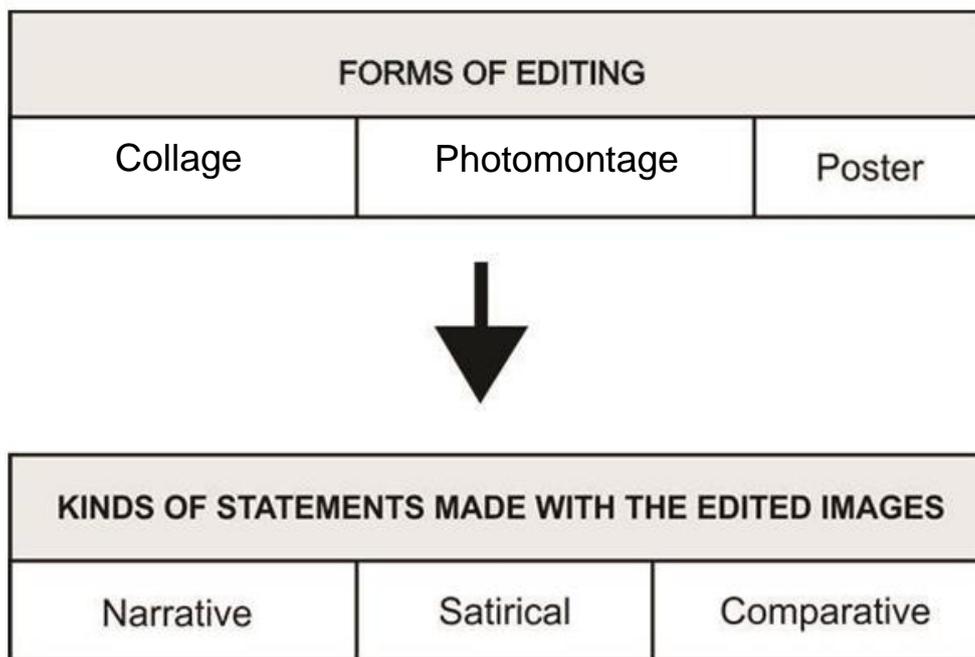
Figure 3.6: The image editing techniques and the resulting visual statements

I have categorised the kinds of expression made with the editing techniques into three, according to their visual effects and semantic patterns. They include narrative, satirical and comparative themes. Nevertheless, there are no clear-cut demarcations among both the editing methods and the thematic categories. The

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[285] Pedro Meyer, *Truths and Fictions: A Journey from Documentary to Digital Photography* (New York: Aperture, 1995). Also see Kevin Robin, "The Virtual Unconscious in Post-photography," *Science as Culture* 3, no. 1 (1992). He suggests that we think of the image as a piece of information from which we can draw "more information" and "new meanings" through the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction.

[286] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 526.

boundaries are fluid, but needed to be carefully delineated where possible to enable us make sense of how virtual activists speak in subtly different ways through the visual practice. The diagram in figure 3.6 illustrates the nexus of the visual statements and the forms of the digital photographic editing. For each of the thematic categories, there is a set of editing techniques with which it is most often produced. In what follows, each theme is examined in relation to the effect it creates in the context of the civil struggle.

Consider the narrative statement first. It is a visual story relayed mainly through two editing techniques: collage (of images only) and poster (combination of pictorial and typographical forms). The narrative theme draws from either a singular incident or various events that occurred in different times and locations. In both cases, the photographs are meant to call attention to the injustice that lies underneath. What I find remarkable is the approach which brings together incidents that are unrelated in time. It takes on the Eisensteinian technique of film editing that breaks the confines of space and time to create new representation. Consider for instance the collage in figure 3.7. It appeared on Facebook on 8 November 2014, after a bomb explosion in Adamawa State allegedly attributed to Boko Haram. It was also a time during which the political campaigns for the 2015 election were intense. The top image depicts one such rally by Nigeria's ex-President Goodluck Jonathan in Akwa-Ibom State.

Jonathan is flanked by his Deputy, Namadi Sambo (left) and the then Akwa-Ibom State Governor, Godswill Akpabio (right). The other two photographs show people fleeing from the site of the Adamawa bombing. This juxtaposition of disparate events enables a politically forceful conversation set in motion by the comment accompanying the set of pictures: "In the same week…in the same country."[287] The political rally led by Jonathan is criticised as an event with wrong timing. It speaks of the then president as insensitive to the plight of his followers. He is at a safe distance, campaigning for a second term as president, while many of the citizens in his first tenure have fallen into the hands of insurgents.

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[287] Emman Shehu, "In the same week…in the same country," *Facebook*, November 8, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/emman.shehu/posts/10152603498849317.

Figure 3.7: Political rally and people fleeing Boko Haram attack.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 8 November 2014, posted by Emman Shehu with the
text, "In the same week…in the same country."
URL: https://www.facebook.com/emman.shehu/posts/10152603498849317
Retrieval date: 20 November 2014.

Incidentally, I found out that these images were not taken at the same time. The

campaign picture was produced three years earlier (that is 2011) before the general

election that brought Jonathan to power. But in the juxtaposition, the events

separated by time and space have been successfully strung together to make a

striking statement. It illustrates James Monaco's reflection on the idea of film

montage. He asserts that its emergence in Russia in the early 20th century was

predicated upon the desire for social transformation through the alteration of the

so-called reality, to produce new realities.[288] The activist practice of picture editing among Nigerians is governed by this idea.

Satire is the second form of expression produced through photo editing. It can be achieved with all the three techniques – collage, photomontage and poster. Visual satire is predicated upon the quest for social change through derision and humour. This understanding is affirmed by Henri Bergson's work on laughter or the comic. He argues that whether in relation to performing art, visual art, photography or language, the comic has important social function. With corrective intent sought through humiliation, it highlights human follies, making "a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed."[289]

Pioneered by Akinola Lasekan, visual satire in Nigeria began with political cartooning that flourished in the light of anticolonial struggle.[290] Once independence was achieved, a new form of domination was instituted by the post-independence political elites. Their abuse of power produced a sense of disillusionment among the Nigerian masses who expected rapid transformation to come with the end of colonial rule. In the last five decades, visual caricature which remains integral to print media production has had the fraudulent political group as its key target. While it continues to flourish in the journalistic context, digital technology has expanded its scope, incorporating everything from computer-generated cartoons to digital photographic montage, animations and filmed puppets. These forms of humorous, yet politically charged representation are widely circulated on Facebook to ridicule the political class.

For example, the photomontage showing a mutilated portrait of former President Jonathan (figure 3.8) depicts him as coconut-headed.[291] Through public criticism

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[288] James Monaco, *How to Read a Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[289] Heni Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (n.p.: Temple of Earth Publishing, 1911): 60a.

[290] Oyin Medubi, "Cartooning in Nigeria: Large Canvas, Little Movement," in *Cartooning in Africa*, ed. Lent A. John (Cresskill, New Jersy: Hampton Press, 2009).

[291] The large tropical nut, coconut, has a hard shell that protects a white edible soft substance which in turn forms an inner cavity. Given that the cavity has only but a liquid content which is at times lost in the process of breaking the nut, coconut in the Nigerian parlance suggests emptiness. To have a "coconut head" therefore implies lack of wisdom.

of his government, Jonathan was reduced to a tropical nut of low value. His failure to tackle insurgency, corruption and impunity which escalated during his administration combined to give him the image of a leader bereft of the skills of governance. He and many other public figures in Nigeria became objects of derision articulated in different formats and disseminated on various online platforms.
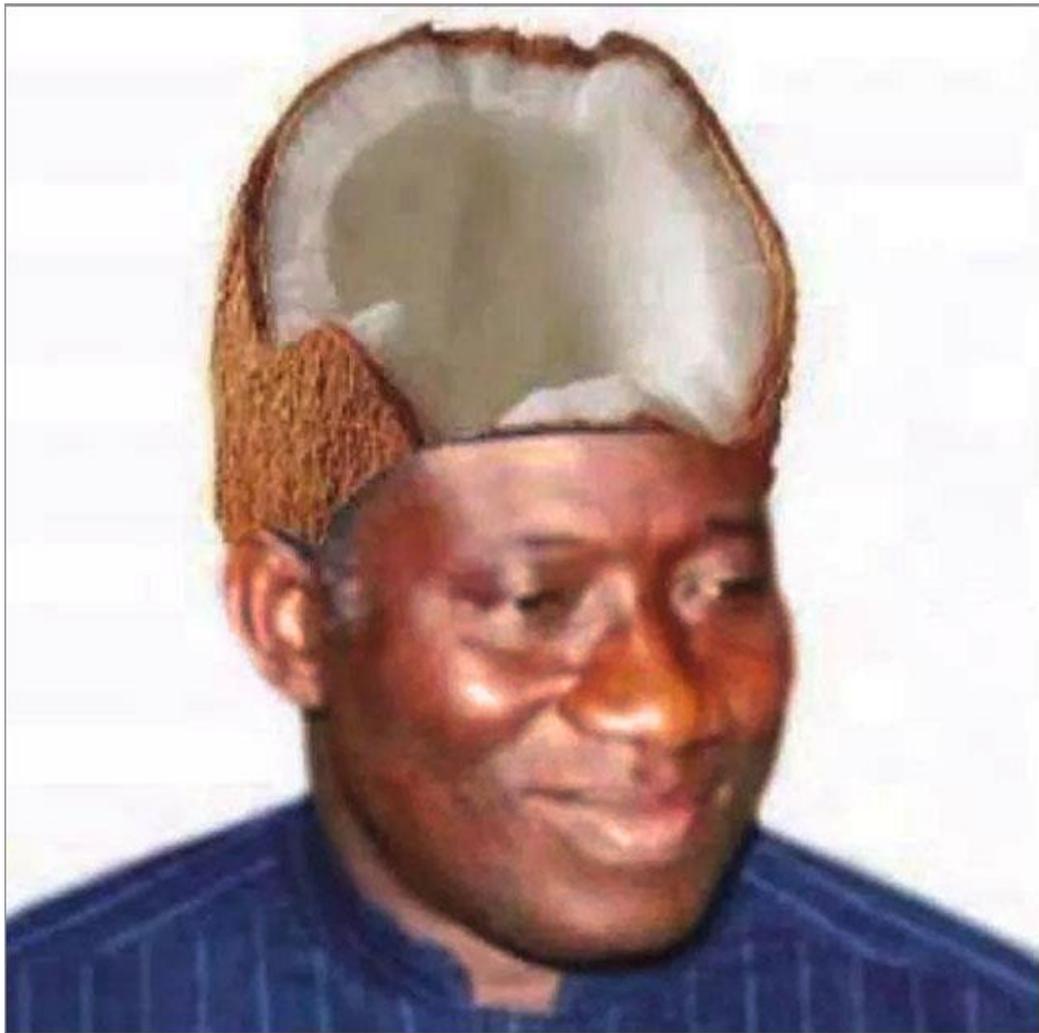
Figure 3.8: Mutilated portrait of Goodluck Jonathan.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 20 September 2014, posted by Marian Awolowo with the text, "RE: 'Why PDP adopted Jonathan for 2015 election.'"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1020242614636175045&set=a.10487511 45803.2008091.1436453705&type
Retrieval date: 28 September 2014.

Figure 3.9: Portraits of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Abubakar Shekau and Goodluck
Jonathan
Retrieved from: Facebook, 13 March 2015, posted by Yakub Aliyu with the text,
"Something is wrong, somewhere."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/
956718901014269/.
Retrieval date: 15 May 2015.

Whereas visual satire is grounded in humour and ridicule, comparative statements
seek to establish the relations or shared attributes between different conditions.
Harsh socio-political situations are criticised by tracing their connection with
similar circumstances elsewhere or highlighting how they contrast with the ideal.

In figure 3.9, the portraits of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (top: Islamic State leader), Abubakar Shekau (bottom left: leader of Boko Haram) and Goodluck Jonathan (bottom right: then Nigerian President) are laid out in a striking juxtaposition characterised by uniformity of pose. Here, two rebel groups are brought into conversation with a sovereign state to claim a relationship of purpose among them.

Boko Haram's declaration of allegiance to Islamic State in the first quarter of 2015 raised public concern about the promise of strength it held for the Nigerian militant group. Whether in terms of funds, weaponry or intelligence, additional support for Boko Haram would mean a greater threat to Nigerian sovereignty. The dialogue around the image on Facebook indicates that the activists who use the platform are suspicious of the president's attitude to the Islamic State-Boko Haram co-operation. They make connections between contradictory statements he made in different times. One is an earlier acknowledgement of possible financial and military relations between the rebel groups. The other is a later disavowal of the influence of Islamic State in Nigeria. The conclusion which the image helps to draw is that insurgency serves the interest of the Nigerian government in some ways. And actually, as shown in chapter 5 Boko Haram has had certain forms of friendship with Nigerian public officials.

Digital transformation of images has been analysed above as a practice that is part and parcel of social media resistance. The way it operates aids our understanding of why the obsession for the "integrity" of the image as a representation of "truth" is pointless. Photographs are treated as structures of visual language which allow for generation of new meanings. The key editing techniques have been examined in relation to the digital technologies that enable them, and the kinds of visual statement enabled. At any rate, it must be acknowledged that in Nigeria, the digital cultural practice is hampered by infrastructural inadequacy. The next section examines how this situation is addressed.

Techno-appropriations

Besides the electronic gadgets deployed for photographic productions and internet access, electricity and internet connectivity constitute other crucial technological

requirements for the virtual activist practices. Sadly, these are problematical in Nigeria. But the ways Nigerians address the challenges are fascinating. The technological odds stimulate an economy of resourcefulness considered crucial in challenging the broader state failure under which the infrastructural crisis is subsumed. A close study of the photographs retrieved from their online platforms of civil engagement reveals the creative sensibilities of the public in negotiating the inadequacies of electricity supply and internet connectivity. Through interviews, we learn that individuals power their devices with inverters, generators and backup batteries. They also appropriate the car cigarette lighter socket system and use mobile phone chargers while on the move. For internet connection, some rely on institutional provisions to which they have access. For instance, school wifi, although not usually efficient, can be accessed by students in some institutions in Nigeria. Internet services provided by GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication) operators are also appropriated through subscription to data plans and utilisation of bonuses. These technological issues are deserving of attention as the emergent study of cyber culture has already rated Nigeria high among African countries in the use of the internet. We come to understand what accounts for this possibility amidst infrastructural failure.

In their evaluation of the possibility of socio-political transformation in Africa through social media resistance, Bohler-Muller and Van der Merwe dwell at length on how the promise is however underpinned by infrastructural variables especially internet connectivity. They remark that in spite of the daunting technological challenges, there is a record of high usage of the internet and social media (with Facebook as a case in point) in some of the African countries, Nigeria inclusive.[292] What they have failed to expound is how the individuals engaged in the online struggle manage to operate in the face of the technological odds. Granted, digital devices such as camera phones, iPads, tablets and computers are accessible to many Nigerians, but the use of the technology is confronted by a crisis that emanates from its heavy reliance on other technologies. The most crucial among them are electricity and internet connectivity. Brain Larkin describes the "ontology

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[292] Narnia Bohler-Muller and Charl Van der Merwe, "The Potential of Social Media to Influence Socio-political Change on the African Continent," *AISA Policy Brief* 44 (2011).

of infrastructures," by referring to them as "matter that enable the movement of other matter, for they operate on differing levels simultaneously, generating multiple forms of address." "Electricity is the infrastructure of the computer," he argues, and "the computer is the infrastructure of electricity supply…"[293] So, technology operates as heterogeneous network. It is that technological interdependence that compounds the task of the social media activists in Nigeria. Still, it is the same connectedness of infrastructural operations that enables the appropriations without which the practices would not thrive.

AbdouMaliq Simone has told us that creative infrastructural improvisations, appropriations and informal economic mobilisations are central to the urban social development of contemporary Africa. [294] Technology draws people together, to assemble their ingenuities, to transform their lives, and in Nigeria's case, to challenge the power structure that impedes that transformation. Let us begin with the question of electricity. There is a sense in which its production has been "alternativised" in Nigeria. The state-managed power has become so unreliable that Nigerians search for ways to power their various forms of equipment, home and office appliances, including electronic devices. The alternative sources include inverters and generators, direct powering of mobile electronic gadgets with mobile chargers, the use of car cigarette lighter sockets, and possession of multiple batteries for devices.

Inverters operate on the basis of energy conversion and storage where power from solar cells or public grid is tapped, stored in batteries and utilised in later times. The typology of inverters is mainly located in their variety in capacity, ranging from tens of watts to hundreds of kilowatts. Although they are available in different capacities and prices, they are used only by a few Nigerians. This is partly due to their connection with public power that is in itself unreliable. In various locations in Nigeria, the duration of what is more broadly known as "load shedding" is so long that the energy stored in the battery gets exhausted before the

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[293] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 329.
[294] AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University: Press, 2004).

next electricity supply. Also, some houses are entirely disconnected from the public grid so that there is no source from which to tap. The solar system is not common either. The alternative sources of power that take care of these conditions are generating sets.

Figure 3.10: Generator-powered informal economy.
Retrieved from: PlusNaija (blog), October 24, 2014.
URL: http://www.plusnaija.com/nigerians-spend-n796-4bn-annually-fuel-power-generators.
Retrieval date: 15 May 2015.

Generators have emerged as the most common way of sourcing electricity in Nigeria. As they come in various brands, sizes and costs, they are available to people and organisations of different economic status, to power their residential houses, small- and large-scale business establishments and other institutions. In the above photograph (figure 3.10), we see a number of generators with the wires through which they supply electricity to business outlets. Besides the group of tailors who apparently power their machines with the generators, other shops likely connected to the alternative power sources are suggested by the stairs leading up to them in the background, and the individuals who seem to have gone for shopping. The photograph reflects the pervasive presence of generators in Nigeria. It is rare

to find a household or organisation both in urban and suburban centres that does not possess at least one machine. Rural areas are also increasingly being penetrated.

But it is difficult to ignore "the infrastructure of noise," to borrow from Larkin, constituted by generator technology.[295] Larkin studied the media, comprising radio, cinema, and video in Kano (Nigeria) to understand the forms of social and cultural relations they enabled in colonial and postcolonial Nigerian contexts. The noise associated with the said media – in the street and mobile music and video shops, in the cinema viewing and prayer centres, in passing vehicles and residential houses – is a painful reality.[296] Larkin however does not say how the noise connects to the crisis of electricity in Nigeria. It is mainly through generators with their own inherent noise that the media are powered to produce their own noise.
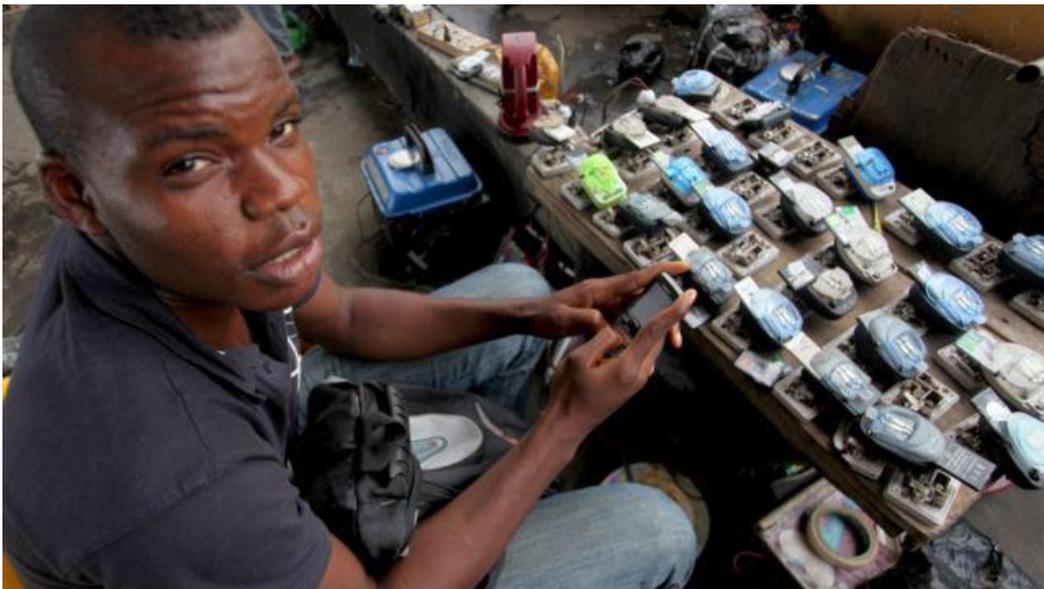
Figure 3.11: A commercial mobile phone charging centre.
Retrieved from: *PM News*, April 14, 2014, part of an article entitled, "In Nsukka, Power Outage Makes Phone Battery Chargers Smile to Bank."
URL: http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/04/14/in-nsukka-power-outage-makes-phone-battery-chargers-smile-to-bank/.
Retrieval date: 15 May 2015.

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[295] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).
[296] Ibid.

Whereas generators are used at homes and offices to power appliances including electronic devices, they have enabled a distinctive economy of commercial charging of cell phones in public places. So, while away from home or the office, one can charge one's mobile phone in the manner in which drivers drive into fill-in stations to fuel their automobiles. With a generator and a plank to which sockets are nailed as pictured in figure 3.11, the business is set up. The entrepreneurial innovativeness does not only suggest the turning of infrastructural failure into a means of economic sustenance. The patronage it enjoys is an indication of people's desire to stay in the world connected by the circuit of telecommunication on the one hand, and to maintain their presence in cyberspace on the other, given that it is the telecom technology that provides access to the internet on mobile devices. The charging of the batteries while they are detached from the devices as shown in the photograph is a pointer to another strategy of managing the power crisis. A lot of mobile phone owners have spare batteries so that while one is in use, the other is charged and kept as backup. The cigarette lighter sockets found in cars are also used with charging plugs while individuals are on the move. Mobile chargers are gaining popularity as well. Operating in the likeness of the inverter, it is charged with electricity, and the stored energy is used for charging of cell phones. The portability and mobile status of these accessories reduce the chances of people's disconnection from the communication networks while in transit.

Irrespective of the enormous impact of the facilities discussed in the foregoing, including others outside the concern of this project, the upsurge in their distribution in Nigeria is severely criticised. "Dumping ground" – an expression coined by Nigerians to describe the importation of "all" sorts of commodities into the country especially from China – is used by Olukoya Ogen to ask us think about China-Nigeria economic relations beyond the notion of mutuality. While Chinese manufactured goods are perceived to be lower in standard specifically for the Nigerian market, he argues that their proliferation in the country "has (wreaked) havoc on Nigeria's infant industries and stifled the development of the Nigeria's

indigenous enterprise."[297] That argument opens our minds to how neoliberalism in certain instances takes on an imperialist outlook so that infrastructures which constitute major part of the traded commodities become the terrain of politics. Drawing on the Soviet experience while working around the concepts of post-socialism, neoliberalism and biopolitics, Stephen Collier too asks us to think what infrastructure can reveal about governance.[298]

In Nigeria, the technopolitics are intense as already suggested in chapter 2. It is commonly believed that the failure to fix public electricity is partly a consequence of grand forms of lobbying by the few affluent merchants who deal in the importation of generators. For such ones, the stabilisation of power supply would collapse their business. The basic right of the rest of the masses is thus overridden by the self-interest of a select few. Yet the failure is turned around by politicians as a tool for the acquisition of public loyalty. Provision of infrastructure is treated not as the responsibility of the state but as a marker of the public-spiritedness of individuals or groups of politicians. The labelling of an electrical installation as what is offered by the PDP (People's Democratic Party) is a case in point here (figure 3.12).

The transformer is presented as a "gift" to the people by a magnanimous party. The presentation is usually a momentous event. The members of the community organise a grand reception for one of them representing them in the government and who has proven to be mindful of their needs. For the social media activists, this is an act of obsequiousness. It implies complicity in irresponsible governance or ignorance of what the state owes the citizenry. In my view, it suggests how else to understand the level of infrastructural failure in Nigeria. The masses have become so used to it that every simple gesture by the government comes as a surprise with commendation following it as a spontaneous response. But

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[297] Olukoya Ogen, "Contemporary China-Nigeria Economic Relations: Chinese Imperialism or South-South Mutual Partnership?" *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs-China aktuell* 37, no. 3 (2008): 78.

[298] Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

ultimately, installation and celebration of transformers do not translate into the stable power which the online public demands.

Figure 3.12: Electrical installations by PDP (People's Democratic Party).
Retrieved from: Facebook, 16 March 2015, posted by Abiyamọ with the text,
"PDP is using transformer to campaign in Cross River State, what do we call this?"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/Abiyamo/photos/a.371316862978903.1073741827.370
495769727679/698908856886367/?type=3.
Retrieval date: 18 March 2015.

Online activism manages to thrive in Nigeria in spite the technological crisis examined in the foregoing. Internet connectivity – the other aspect of infrastructure crucial in the media practice – is also poor, but handled with considerable acuity. In the beginning of the 1990s when the internet began to be accessed in Nigeria, it was according to Adomi limited to an e-mail communication system, and telnet and gopher.[299] The services were offered by a few technology industrialists including the Regional Information Network for Africa[300] and Rose Clayton Nigeria Limited, both of which worked in collaboration with the Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST).[301] The period between 1996 and 1998 saw the emergence of the World Wide Web. A number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) obtained licenses to operate in the country, providing forms of internet access like dial-up connections and Wireless Fidelity (Wifi). What followed was the growth in the number of cybercafés where individuals could pay to use the internet for tens of minutes or hours.[302] By early 2000s, media and business organisations, academic and financial institutions, and many other establishments had begun to use the internet in their operations.

This is not to say that the internet became a "common commodity." Many could not afford the cybercafé services and only used them sparingly. Again, only a small proportion of the Nigerian population had access to the internet in their workplaces and rural communities were completely out of question. Nonetheless, 2001 saw the advent of a technology that would in few years make internet access more affordable and accessible. It is the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) whose original service was to provide voice telephony. That year, three operators were licensed by the Nigerian Communications Commission: Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), ECONET Wireless (now Airtel) and NITEL Plc.[303] In

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[299] Telnet and gopher are the precursors of computer Operating System and Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) respectively.

[300] It was a UNESCO-initiated computer connectivity project.

[301] Esharenana E. Adomi, "Internet Development and Connectivity in Nigeria," *Program* 39, no.3 (2005).

[302] Some cybercafés offered special services where the internet users would pay a little more to surf through the night, to the early morning hours. Such service was commonly known as "all-night browsing."

[303] Adomi, "Internet Development and Connectivity in Nigeria," 262.

2002, Globacom (Glo) got its own license. Once they commenced operation, ownership of mobile phones began to grow in Nigeria.

Before the end of the 2000s, GSM operators had begun to offer internet services. So, in addition to voice call and text messaging, subscribers could access the internet if their cell phones had the supporting features. The phones were internet-ready once they had some minutes of talk time. Later, the concept of "data plan" was initiated where the "time" meant by default for voice call could be converted into bytes to allow for internet access. Ownership of cell phones with internet features is on the increase in Nigeria. So the number of GSM subscribers running into nearly 187 millions implies that a large population accesses the internet via mobile phone. They take advantage of the competition in the telecommunications industry that has made data bundles affordable, to subscribe for internet connectivity according to their financial status at any given time. A lot of the Facebook activists in Nigeria studied in this project rely on this technological provision. Each of the four GSM operators currently in Nigeria – MTN, Glo, Airtel and Etisalat – has its own data plans. Considering that Airtel[304] has the lowest entry cost – 50 naira – for internet subscription, I use it to illustrate how telecommunications technology has to a certain level democratised internet access and in turn sustained the tempo of online activism among Nigerians. By dialling *141*11*9#, 50 naira airtime is converted into 4 MB of data which can allow one to quickly log on to Facebook to share some comments or images depending on the size.

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[304] The history of Econet from which Airtel derived helps us to read telecommunication technology in Africa beyond the idea of that which has come to leverage digital activism. It has in its own terms a history of political activism. From 1993 to 1998, Strive Masiyiwa was refused a license by the Zimbabwean government (under Robert Mugabe) to operate Econet. The refusal was linked to fear of the threat posed by the technology against the state and the longing to have its capital directed into the government's coffers. Masiyiwa won the case against the government, and Econet was established. But Zimbabwe became politically tense following the loss of the referendum for constitutional reform by Mugabe's government. The authoritarian atmosphere drove Masiyiwa away from Zimbabwe. Econet too expanded to other parts of Africa. See Jerry Goodstein and Ramakrishna Velamuri, "States, Power, Legitimacy, and Maintaining Institutional Control: The Battle for Private Sector Telecommunication Services in Zimbabwe," *Organization Studies* 30, no. 5 (2009); Sam Takavarasha and John Makumbe, "The Effect of Politics on ICT4D: A Case of Econet Wireless's Struggle for a License in Zimbabwe," *International Journal of E-Politics (IJEP)* 3, no. 3 (2012).

Despite these possibilities, internet access in Nigeria has a lot of limitations as stated at the outset. There is periodical fluctuation of connectivity even on active data plan. Besides, the retail of data bundles at such a low price as 50 naira does not imply that the internet is inexpensive. Granted, 4MB can take one on a brief visit to Facebook, but it cannot allow for the upload of a picture or video that exceeds that size. Therefore, active participation in the online civil struggle entails material sacrifice. In the Airtel data plans, a bundle of considerable size (1GB for example) is retailed at 2000 naira (6.6 dollars). In spite of these conditions, the online struggle has been sustained in Nigeria. For many, it is worth investing in, both financially and in terms of appropriating available, but inefficient technological facilities. The staff and students of a certain university grapple with Wifi connectivity. The signal is found only in specific locations as against the promise by the university administration that it would reach all departments, offices and residences on campus. All through the day, they are found in groups with laptops, tablets and smart phones around the administrative block of the institution and a few other places where the internet signal is strong. There, they share their time between school work and virtual protest against injustice including the politics that bring them the discomfort of working outdoors, perching on car bonnets and motorbike seats. Other internet users exploit the bonuses offered by the telecom service providers. One shared his experience with the Glo Bounce tariff plan when it used to come with the bonus of 30 MB on every recharge of 200 naira. As he usually recharged three times in a week, he received free 90 MB to do some work online, and participate in the virtual movement.

Nigeria provides an example of how inefficient infrastructure is appropriated to challenge the broader state failure of which it is a major aspect. As the public supply of electricity is inadequate in the country, Nigerians source alternative means to power the electronic devices deployed in the online protest. For internet access, the various possibilities offered by the telecommunication technology are explored while the voiced telephony services are simultaneously put to use.

Conclusion

Virtual activism stands in a convoluted relation with technology. It relies on technology for its production and effects. On the reverse side, the social practice is impeded by technological deficiencies. Yet, through innovative improvisation, the inadequacies are addressed. The visuality of social movements on Facebook can first be perceived as related to the ubiquitous presence of digital camera devices, infrastructural setups for alteration of the images and the virtual platforms for their distribution. The ubiquitous camera operates in a propagandist framework, to counter the false claim of accountable governance by the Nigerian state. It also functions as a means of surveillance on the political class by ordinary citizens. Through the infrastructure of circulation and appropriation by respectable media organisations, the images produced with the camera gain validation as testimonial to state violence and injustice. Meanwhile, to effectively carry out these functions, the images undergo a series of transformations, producing new representations. The idea of editing is challenged by those obsessed with the realist notion of photography. But I have argued that the integrity of the image is irrelevant in the context of civil struggle. Social movement is everything that Ariella Azoulay says of revolution. It is "a language… (and) is made of statements, practices, gestures, rules and civil grammar, grammar that precludes exclusion." If photographs are as she adds "one type of this language's component," then their manipulation is part of the use of the language.[305] Ahearn has theorised language as being immutable and mutable at the same time.[306] The mutability of the photographic image allows it to make civil statements. The gadgets deployed for the photographic production and dissemination are technologies that are dependent on other technologies, namely electricity and the internet. Given that these are inefficient in Nigeria, a lot of improvisation is made to keep the visual-digital resistance sustained. Besides hardware devices, and the immaterial technologies of electricity and the internet, it is crucial to examine the online image display and circulation platform itself, that

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[305] The New School, "The Photographic Universe: Can Photographs Claim Rights? with Thomas Keenan and Ariella Azoulay," *YouTube video*, 01:00:04, April 13, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2FQi45Fwbs.
[306] Laura Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001).

is, Facebook. It constitutes a different kind of infrastructure that operates in a fascinating way.

CHAPTER FOUR
On the Structure of Facebook

Introduction

The structure of Facebook is worthy of critical examination. It is in structure that the power of the website as a technological space of social interaction is embedded. The emergent relation of Facebook to politics – everything in-between elections and uprisings – are enabled by the affordances of its User Interface (UI).[307] This chapter analyses the structural elements of Facebook in relation to how they support the political use of media contents among Nigerians. The history of Facebook – which is itself fraught with narratives of resistance – is also read to understand how the platform evolved as a site of politics. Facebook activists in Nigeria were interviewed to ascertain how they make sense of the space provided by the website. With these and my own participant observation of the activist use of the forum, I read the Facebook timeline, the wall, the emoticons, the messaging system, the chatroom and other components as political tools. They support different modes of construction and presentation of civil expressions. To analyse these issues, I draw on the debates around the media with attention to the communicative possibilities and the political actions they enable. Effort is made to establish how digitality helps to reconstitute the conventional notions of media communication and broadens the scope of its relation to politics. The civil interactions in turn constitute a certain kind of archival production. We are thus prompted to read Facebook as archive. This is done by revisiting Achille

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[307] See Jessica Vitak *et al.*, "It's Complicated: Facebook Users' Political Participation in the 2008 Election," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 14, no. 3 (2011); Okoro and Nwafor, "Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria During the 2011 General Elections;" Ogundimu*, "Facebook and Digital Activism;" and* Ibrahim, "Nigerian Usage of Facebook During 2012 *Occupy* Nigeria Protest." These essays, some of which have been cited in the introductory chapter of this work show how Facebook is increasingly being used to construct political relations in Nigeria.

Mbembe's work on the organising principles of the archive on the one hand, and its workings as a means of power on the other.

Identified in the first segment of the chapter are the various ways contents are circulated on Facebook and the forms of interaction that take place around them. Contents arrive on the site through the initial appearance, that is, where they have not been previously seen on the internet. In the second instance, the posts could be shared by other Facebook users, a process I refer to as "re-posting." Lastly, links to websites other than Facebook are shared on the platform. In the Nigerian context, these avenues allow the voices of the citizens to be publicly heard, uncensored, and with a high level of immediacy. With Facebook, it has also become possible for people to demand accountability from the political elites by communicating directly with them. Thus, the conversations on the platform could either be a public or two-user interaction, each of which produces distinct effects.

In the second section, the history of Facebook is read in the context of its application in civil struggle. This political reading begins with the examination of the criticism with which Facebook has had to contend. The founder grappled with the accusation of breaking security encryptions and of "plagiarism" of programming codes in the early days of his invention. After it had jumped these hurdles, Facebook was criticised for the way it treated users' privacy and used their profile pages as sites of advertisement. Despite these crises, the space became an important medium of civil movement as exemplified by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt which had an impact in North Africa and the Middle East (known broadly as the Arab spring). There were also instances from Nigeria. The specific history of the use of Facebook in Nigeria is mainly in relation to the political. Given that the effectiveness of the medium is no longer in doubt, it is censored by some repressive regimes and fraudulent democracies. Still, part of the whole discourse of online activism is the persistence of the practice through technological manipulations even in the event of crackdown.

In the last part, the site is analysed as archive. The archival system of Facebook in some ways borrows from the conventional notion of the archive and challenges it in other instances. In terms of language, concepts, structure, and the documents its

holds, Facebook resembles the analogue archive except for a few differences. The User Interface constitutes the digital architectural structure of the site where the contents circulated by the online protesters are archived. The activists may not necessarily use the language of the archive to define their activities. But in my view, they are involved in the archivisation of collective memory born out of the resistance against harsh living experiences. The appearance and interpretation of the documents on the virtual archive are beyond the control of the state. In this case, Facebook archivisation reconfigures the conventional notion of the archive as a mechanism of power. However, the archival production on Facebook has its limits, with implications on digital photography as a means of civil struggle. Instances like the removal of photos from Facebook also prompt us to ponder the condition of the archive and its documents in the digital realm. The epistemological directions charted in this chapter allow me to reflect more generally upon the methodology of this study. As social media offers itself for intellectual examination, it is important to think about how its structural configurations shape the research process.

Content circulation and conversation practices

In developing their thesis, Katz and Lazarsfeld argue that mass media brings change through transmission of ideas and construction of opinions based on the ideas.[308] Drawing on that argument, Clay Shirky identifies the processes behind the power of social media. He writes: "The internet spreads not just media consumption but media production as well."[309] This way, Shirky articulates the processes that give social media its force as an activist tool. It enables not only "access to information," but "access to conversation."[310] The ways in which Facebook supports these processes have been identified through a close reading of the communicative features of the site and by "returning" to the pages from where I took the images and texts analysed in this study. Circulation of information on Facebook takes three key patterns – "standard posting," "re-posting" and "sharing

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[308] Ibid.

[309] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media.

[310] Ibid.

of links to other websites." These concepts have been coined with consideration for the language of Facebook whose semantic patterns take certain terms away from their dictionary meanings. Conversations on the platform occur mainly through the interactive relations of "liking," "commenting," "inboxing" and "chatting." These processes have a lot of implications for photographic activism on Facebook and for research. As scholars are turning to social media to understand its construction of histories and social relations, it is crucial to closely examine how the virtual space of Facebook facilitates the process and at the same time places certain forms of restriction on it.
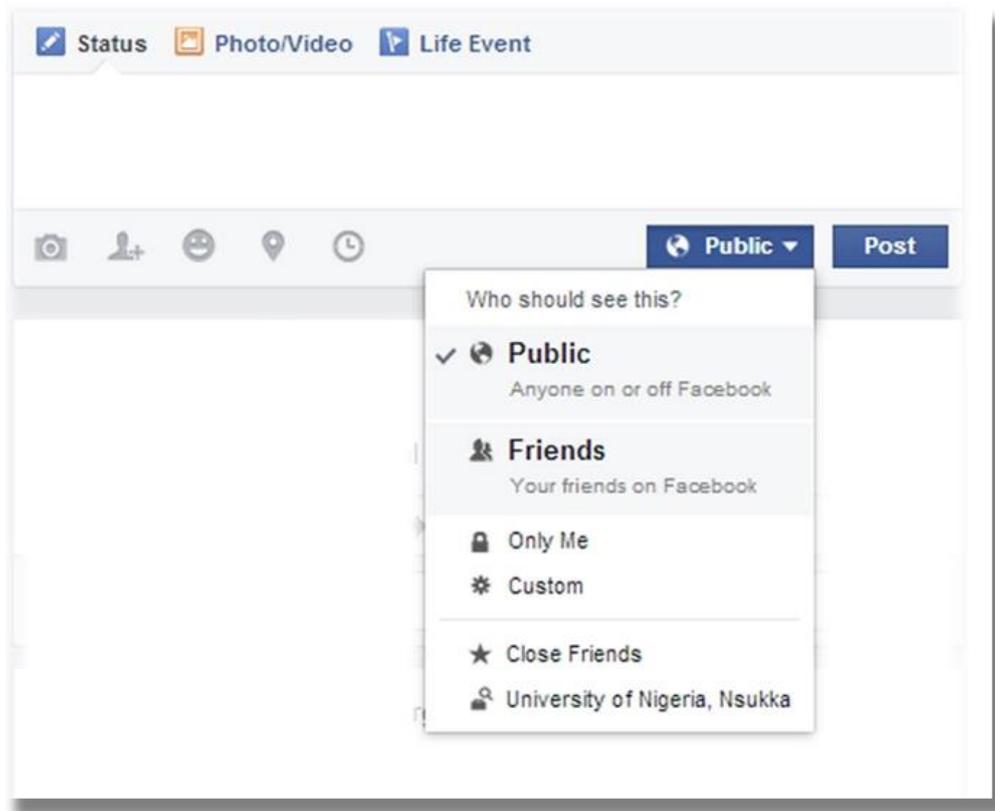
Figure 4.1: Spatial setting for Facebook posting

The idea of access to information on Facebook draws attention to how texts, photographs, videos and other forms of documents find their way on to the social networking website. Facebook is complete with buttons that bring contents into public view with a few clicks. The illustration in figure 4.1 depicts the spatial

configuration of the site that supports the inputting of thoughts by users. A click on "Status" or "Update status" as the case may be, activates the input field underneath. A blinking cursor prompts one to type in what is on one's mind. If the "Photo/Video" button is hit, folders and files stored on the memory of the device are thrown up for the user to search through and locate the photograph or video to post. Once the "Post" button is clicked, the document enters the public domain of the cyber world. [311] Yet, the blue button labelled "Public" suggests a different way of thinking the concept, but within the confines of the website. The button presents the choice of who views the post – "Anyone on or off Facebook," "Your friends on Facebook," and so on. In this sense therefore, "Public" implies that the posted material is searchable on search engines such as Google Search.

Although a lot of Facebook users give no attention to the button, most of the posts with activist undertones, and which were relevant to this research, targeted the public. The idea of "public" is a technological affordance that enables one's voice to be heard by as many individuals as possible. If "public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates – ideally in an unfettered manner,"[312] then, with Facebook and other social media platforms, it has been reconfigured. Consideration of nuanced forms of motivation to use the "post" button on Facebook will help us make sense of that assertion.

Although Facebook is censored in different societies especially by repressive regimes, it provides space for freedom of expression in Nigeria. A certain regular user of the site works with a radio station where he hosts a programme on social-political developments in Nigeria. The activist undertone of his analytical strategies has attracted certain forms of confrontation. He is criticised off-air by high-profile listeners as being too critical of the government. The situation is even aggravated by "various degrees of regulations from the editors and other concerned

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[311] It is important to note that Facebook does not have a homogeneous User Interface. It varies slightly from one form of user to another. For example, personal page is usually different from group page. Still, they have similar communicative features.
[312] Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 148.

staff especially when it (the broadcasting house) is state owned/sponsored."[313] He consequently turns to Facebook to express himself without being censored. The scenario gives a sense of him burning with the desire to pour out the feelings associated with living in a chaotic society. It can be "sickening" to bottle up such emotions.[314] The cathartic motivation is even more pronounced with the posting of images. Equipped with image-taking devices such as smartphones, many Nigerians take photographs and videos of incidents that reflect how the world should not be. Through the act of posting them on Facebook, they relieve themselves of their emotional burdens while demanding change.

Media dissemination on Facebook also calls attention to what can be termed "collision of immediacy." Like other social networking platforms, Facebook "grants access to unfiltered information related by *any person* affected by an event who chooses to share the story" [315] as it happens. The production of photographs which constitute one of the key media contents disseminated on Facebook is itself understood in terms of immediacy. It involves the freezing of the world in a matter of a split-second. The collision of the immediacy of social media and of photography rocks the Nigerian political sphere. Electoral fraud for instance has in recent years been strongly challenged with instantaneous uploading of related photographs and of figures from different polling units following voting and vote counting. The public can thus follow the development of the exercise and make informed projections as to what the overall election results would be.

With the reconfiguration of the public sphere as illustrated in the foregoing, the communication between citizens and the state has been reconstituted. Let us dwell for a moment on the notion of the Facebook "wall" and see how the communication reflects activist resonance. The social networking site allows users to post on their own walls or on those of others. There is something spectacular about these options. To post on someone else's wall is to confront them while

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[313] Nnaemeka Amadi, online interview (Facebook inboxing) by the author, August 2015.
[314] Chidi Ugwu, face-to-face interview by the author, Nsukka, August 2015.
[315] Sarah Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights," Boston College International and Comparative Law Review 35, no. 1 (2012): 153-154.

portraying oneself as "an aggressive social crusader."[316] I interviewed an active Facebook user who related the experience of his interaction with a senator representing his constituency. The construction of a road connecting the senator's town with others had begun but was abandoned once it reached his house. In a post, the senator asked Nigerians to pray for the country. Rather than comment on the post, my interviewee posted on the senator's wall. He remarked that the most effective prayer would be to complete the aforementioned road – a project sited in a part of the country under his oversight. That approach substituted for a physical march with placards, or the execution of protest inscriptions and graffiti on the actual walls of the senator's house. After the above incident, the road construction was resumed, but later suspended again. The activist believes that while other factors could be responsible for the resumption of work, his "confrontation" with the senator might have had some impact.

Besides what I have termed "standard posting" whose related practices have been examined above, sharing the posts of others is an important method of information circulation on Facebook. The spectacular way in which the process supports public access to media materials is rooted in the vastness and amorphous shape of user networking on Facebook. Users are usually connected to multiple networks of virtual friends. Standard posting enables the circulation of a post among the individuals in the network of the user who originally posted it. When the post is re-posted or shared by a member of the network, it is circulated among friends who have other friends among whom they could share it. This way, the document goes viral. A good number of photographs and videos analysed in this project came to my Facebook timeline through this cyclical movement. I accepted a lot of friends' requests and reached out to many others so that through the complex networking, I could have access to numerous images and conversations associated with civil resistance in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, within the boundaries of the analysis made in this part of the chapter, the interchangeable use of "posting" and "sharing" (which the standard use of the English Language could have allowed) is avoided. It should be acknowledged that

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[316] Ugwu, face-to-face interview.

cyber technology has not only introduced to us new practices, but new forms of language. On Facebook, to post is to hit the button labelled as such, in the case of which the document makes it initial appearance on the public domain of the website. Once it is posted, three buttons – "Like," "Comment" and "Share" – appear below it. From the initial application as a way to "endorse," the "Like" button as graphically represented with the thumb-up icon has evolved into a means of expressing a range of emotions.[317] If you click "Comment," you are taken to the field where you can type in your thought on the posted material. If you "share" it, you have "re-posted" it in the likeness of retweeting on Twitter. To share another's post on Facebook is to take part in its wider dissemination. Further, in the activist context, it is an act of drawing the attention of others to socio-political issues considered important. As this project is also about the comments that accompany relevant photographs to the virtual platform, I was drawn into tracing the various Facebook pages where a particular image or set of images had appeared. This offered me more user comments to think with while doing the visual analysis.

It is a rather different undertaking when the content shared on Facebook is a link to another website. While different organisations have Facebook accounts, their websites are linked to this and other social media outlets. So, when they have web contents intended for free public consumption, they typically appear with social media icons. Visitors to the sites are prompted to share the contents with the social networking websites of their choice by clicking the appropriate icons. The links shared on Facebook include contents from other social networking sites and online news outlets. Social media has been broadly acknowledged as an alternative means of news broadcasting, not only through the notion of news feed but of sharing of links by users.[318] As Nigerians use Facebook for activist purposes, they share links to news contents that support the struggle. A lot of YouTube videos, articles, and photographs from activist platforms such as *Sahara Reporters*, are shared. The contents from these and other sources are taken as "facts" that should be relied on

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[317] I will return to this transformation and read it in relation to civil struggle.

[318] Alfred Hermida, *et al.*, "Share, Like, Recommend: Decoding the Social Media News Consumer," *Journalism Studies* 13, no. 5-6 (2012).

to understand the failure of the Nigerian state. Although the sharing is underpinned by selective approach, reliance on them is rooted in the users' ascription of evidentiary power to the image. The activists also leverage the fact that lots of the online outlets (whose contents are shared on Facebook) are themselves mediums of resistance fundamentally designed for that purpose. To share links to them is akin to direct quotation of text by a writer rather than paraphrasing it. It is through this practice that activists validate their claim about the existence of unfavourable socio-political conditions in Nigeria.

On the Facebook timeline, a shared link most often appears as a thumbnail (photograph) or as a keyframe with a "play" button for video contents. Below it is the URL (Universal Resource Locator) which when clicked takes the user to the website where the content is originally published. In this study, I have followed such links to read the full-length articles, watch the videos or view the images. After I have got the gist, I return to the conversation around the content on Facebook. In what follows, the fundamental modes of conversation on the platform are discussed in two categories. They include more public forms of interaction ("liking" and "commenting") and more closed modes that involve two individuals ("chatting" and "inboxing").[319]

Consider "liking" first. As noted earlier, the "Like" button is one of the visible features of every Facebook post and the comment it generates. Liking does not involve the typing of thoughts. The button is a statement prepared in a preset mode, ready to be released through the act of clicking the button. It evolved with a controversy that makes us appreciate how powerful it is within the conversational framework of Facebook. Previously a singular button symbolised with the thumb-up icon, "Like" was taken by some Facebook users as exclusively a means of expressing admiration or approval. As a result, they found it repugnant when a photograph depicting disaster was liked on Facebook. The liking of the image of

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[319] Writing on the social capital of Facebook, Yoder and Stutzman adopted a similar classificatory approach – "third-party visible interactions" and "one-to-one communication." But they avoided creating a distinction between what I have in this section mapped as modes of "content circulation" on the one hand, and of "conversation" on the other. For them, everything from dissemination of information on Facebook to the conversation about them is a form of interaction. See Christian Yoder and Fred Stutzman, "Identifying Social Capital in the Facebook Interface, *CHI* (2011): 585.

an accident scene once generated a heated conversation. Some argued that it suggested lack of sympathy for the victims of mishap. For others, the idea of circulating the image was liked, not the image itself or the misfortune it portrayed. With the dissemination of the sad news, people could reach out to the victims with relief aid.[320] Towards the end of 2014, Zuckerberg the founder of Facebook responded to the debate. He acknowledged users' uneasiness with "pressing the 'like' button in response to sad news." He expressed the intention to do something about it.[321] By the beginning of 2015, Facebook had welcomed users with a group of six buttons labelled "Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry" (figure 4.2). Readily visible among them is the "Like" button which retains the thumb-up symbol with which we are already familiar. It can be said to be the key button, not only due to that visibility but because the rest of the buttons are revealed and used only when the mouse pointer is allowed to hover over it.
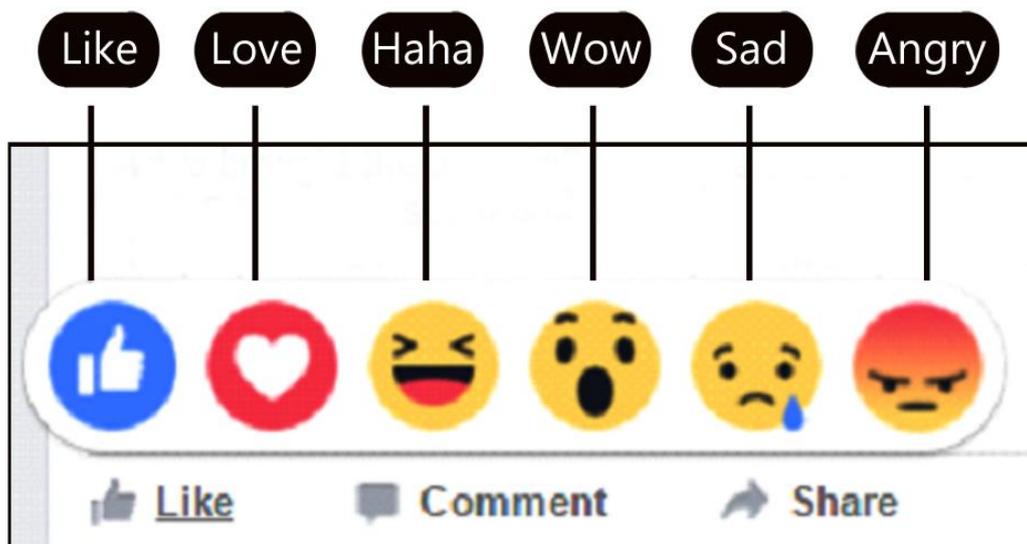
Figure 4.2: The Facebook emoticons

Furthermore, "liking" entails prompt and effortless communication that likely awakens the broader debate about social media activism and the possibility of

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[320] May Okafor, personal communication with the author, August 2015.

[321] Andrew Griffin, "Facebook Dislike Button Might Be on Its Way, Says Zuckerberg," *The Independent*, December 12, 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/facebook-dislike-button-might-be-on-its-way-says-zuckerberg-9920955.html.

political transformation. The position of the skeptics (prominent among them, Malcolm Gladwell who gave us the concept, "slacktivism") is that social media rather weakens the force of activism. For him, "real" activism such as led by Martin Luther King, Jr in the United States of America in the 1950s requires the willingness to take risks and to make sacrifices. He asserts that "Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice."[322] His argument suggests "that liking something on Facebook…requires no effort," [323] and is therefore not forceful enough to bring socio-political change. In my view, Gladwell's position indicates a refusal to ponder how social media has contributed to the mobilisation of mass protests in different parts of the world (as more deeply examined in the next section). Regardless of the so-called effortlessness associated with Facebook liking, it is an important means of communication in virtual activism. It helps to notify the activists that their posts and the comments made on them have been seen by other users of the platform, and reacted to in particular ways. With the addition of more emoticons to the like button as illustrated in figure 4.2, the response can be represented in diverse ways.

Meanwhile, commenting on posts is most widely understood as a mode of public conversation on Facebook. The practice – which is a "third-party visible interaction" just like "liking" – supports the formation of political opinions through negotiations around posts.[324] Facebook allows visual contents to be posted simultaneously with comments. In this case, users are privileged to initiate the conversations around their own posts thereby setting their directions. The implication is that a photograph for instance shared on Facebook from another website may not maintain the context in which it is originally published online. This again illustrates Sekula's idea that a photograph is bound to take on different meanings in different "presentational circumstances."[325] Commenting is an actant

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[322] Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell.

[323] Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights," 150.

[324] Yoder and Stutzman, "Identifying social capital in the Facebook interface."

[325] Sekula, "Reinventing Documentary," 683.

in recontextualising the meaning of images on Facebook. To illustrate, the photograph below (figure 4.3) is a thumbnail of an article that appeared on the online news outlet, *Premium Times*. It is the report of a road traffic accident in which a soldier was knocked down in July 2014 by the BRT[326] bus in Lagos. In spite of the plea by the passengers and by-standers, the soldier called on his colleagues who out of irritation for their wounded fellow set six BRT buses ablaze.[327]

Figure 4.3: BRT buses allegedly set ablaze in Lagos by the military in 2014
Retrieved from: Facebook, 4 July 2015, posted by Moshood Emeka with the text, "They can destroy tax payers sweat but can't fight insurgents."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/812264545459706/
Retrieval date: 6 July 2014

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[326] BRT which stands for Bus Rapid Transit is a bus transport system with dedicated lane, conceived by the state government to surmount road traffic congestion in Lagos, Nigeria.
[327] **"**Nigerian Army Says Soldiers Caught on Camera Vandalizing Lagos Buses Are 'Area Boys,'" *Premium Times* (n.d.), *http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/164366-breaking-rampaging-soldiers-destroy-lagos-brt-buses.html*.

A member of the Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest group shared the photograph with a comment that altered its meaning: "They can destroy tax payers' sweat but can't fight insurgents nor find our girls ... Shame on you soldiers and you garrison commanders."[328] With these words, the conversation around the image shifted to the question of insurgency which at that time seemed to have gone beyond the power of the Nigerian army. The soldiers were ridiculed in the comments for having directed their aggressive energies towards the civilian population while they had failed to conquer Boko Haram militants.

While the practice of making comments on Facebook posts reflects the expression of personal views that shape collective opinions, online activists use images in the process to illuminate the existence of the injustice they challenge. As the Nigerian army denied the allegation of setting fire to BRT buses, a Facebook comment on the story came as an edited image. A red circle is inscribed on the photograph to enclose and draw attention to a soldier throwing something at one of the buses. Although the image is not clear, it is a visual comment intended to support the thrust of a conversation that re-interprets a military expression of rage towards civilians as a demonstration of weakness. It can thus be argued that opinions are formed on Facebook through active interpersonal exchange. There is a sense in which Katz and Lazarsfeld's notion of media influence is reconfigured. They identify a group called "opinion leaders" whose knowledgeability allows them to influence others. In the network of communication, these ones constitute a channel in their own right, and through it, media information is filtered and received by others. [329] In a social media age, the "opinion leadership" is diffuse. The users of the platform shape one another's political view through commenting, in the context of which Hand writes: "Images become vehicles for often elaborate conversations

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[328] Moshood Emeka, "They Can Destroy Tax Payers Sweat," *Facebook*, July 4, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/8122645454597
06/.
[329] Elihu Katz and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

about their meaning, their significance and, most interestingly, their contested nature as a reflection or representation of a person or event."[330]

As opposed to commenting, direct messaging and chatting are "one-to-one" modes of communication on Facebook,[331] but they have their own distinct implications to virtual resistance and to research. If mobile phone text messaging is important in the mobilisation of protests, then Facebook direct messaging and chatting are pertinent as well. Through these more private forms of interaction, online friends raise each other's consciousness and draw them to support the online civil resistance.

However, the key drawback of this mode of communication in the Nigerian context is related to infrastructure. Disruptions in internet connectivity and electric power supply can interrupt chatting. A similar situation applies to the context of research. Some of the interviews I conducted with Facebook activists in Nigeria via the chatroom instant messaging were disrupted by the failure of internet access and the running down of the battery power of devices. Alternatively, "inboxing,"[332] was used to send interview questions in the likeness of an email attachment. The response was returned through the same means by the research participant. In a study like this one that involved semi-structured interviews, the limitation of inboxing is that it gives no room for prompts and probes. As a research method, interview is premised on the researcher's anticipation of certain directions in the interviewee's response to questions. It is through prompting that the interviewee is reminded of certain important things that seem to be missed out. Similarly, probing is used to elicit more information about a subject. Although it does not support prompts and probes, inboxing allows research participants some convenience in responding to interview questions. It can as well serve as a means to reach Facebook users who are not the researcher's friends on the platform, but whose activities are relevant to the research. However, the response from such ones is usually problematical. The founder (a London-based Nigerian) of the Nigerian

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[330] Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography*, 180.

[331] Yoder, and Stutzman, "Identifying social capital in the Facebook interface."

[332] "Inboxing" is a term used here to describe the kind of email communication that Facebook supports

Global Awakening Day Protest group (whose activities were important to this research) declined my friend's request in spite of my membership of the organisation. Several attempts to track her for interview through inboxing were also futile.

The experience motivates us to ponder the concept of friendship on Facebook. "Facebook members can … join virtual groups based on common interests,"[333] but that does not always translate into the kind of intimate relationship obtainable in real world situations or between individuals who already have offline ties. The more public forms of communication such as liking and commenting are more likely to be sustained among members than the two-person interaction which includes chatting and inboxing. Nonetheless I argue that virtual activism should not for this reason be perceived as weak. It is rather fascinating that relationships governed by immateriality have had the capacity to materialise the ambition of oppressed citizens to demand improved socio-political conditions.

It has been argued above that the influence of Facebook as a medium of civil resistance draws from its structure that supports public dissemination of information and the discussion of it. The practices of content circulation are driven by the yearning for freedom of expression to challenge harsh social conditions. They are also motivated by cathartic desires against bottling up frustrations about tough socio-political realities. Once the contents are released into the virtual space of the social networking site, what follows is the exchange of thoughts about them. Each of the modes of circulation and negotiation has its peculiarities and impacts on the public culture of virtual resistance, on the production of meaning and on research through which a clearer understanding of them is sought. These complex transactions can be studied more carefully by historicising Facebook as a political tool.

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[333] Nicole B. Ellison, Charles Steinfield and Cliff Lampe, "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007): 1143. Danah Boyd also interrogates the meaning of friendship on social media and its related practices. As virtual friendship for him is constructed by technological affordances, he in a sense warns that it could be misleading. See Danah Boyd, "Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites," *First Monday* 11, no. 12 (2006), http://www.firstmonday.org/ ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1418/1336.

Historical development of Facebook

The historicisation of Facebook from the activist standpoint has not received much intellectual attention. Available historical writings are mostly blog articles that sketch out the founding of the platform and the key technological evolutions it has undergone. But there is more to the history of Facebook than these. This segment is about its historical reading as a political tool. I argue that the development in the technology, structure and application of Facebook portrays it as a contested space which, through resistance to political and public pressure, became in itself a medium of civil struggle. Here I review a range of disparate sources associated with Facebook, from its birthing to its confrontation with publics and constituted authorities and to its application in civil protests. 2011 saw the world's most momentous wave of uprising since the advent of social media that had enormous influence on it. Examples are taken from the 2011 events and the periods before and after it, to argue for a historical development of Facebook in the context of civil movement. The various ways the virtual outlet has been deployed by dissidents are examined, as well as the reactions of the challenged authorities and the impact of the movements. It is crucial to understand how a forum conceived for social interaction among university students evolved into a powerful tool that has shaped momentous world political events.

To begin with the origin of Facebook, it was created as "Thefacebook" in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg while he was a student at Harvard University. Earlier in 2003, Zuckerberg had written the software "Facemash…with the purpose of figuring out who was the most attractive person on campus."[334] It only supported the college network so that its use was dependent on possession of a Harvard University email account. When "Thefacebook" was launched, it maintained the restriction of use to an institutional connection to Harvard.

The site was consequently criticised as "an intimate, private community."[335] However by mid-2004, it began to be accessed by other universities in the United

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[334] Marcia Amidon Lusted, *Mark Zuckerberg: Facebook Creator* (Minnesota: ABDO, 2012): 28.
[335] Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 218.

States of America. The expansion took place in phases. Figure 4.4 shows the welcome page of the site when certain institutions became connected to it and users were prompted to check if theirs were included. On the internet, there are many such images indicating the institutions (later including those outside the United States) that got linked up at particular periods. The expansion accounts for the rise in the number of users to up to one million by the end of 2004. In 2005, Thefacebook became known as Facebook. The modification in name was accompanied by the introduction of picture display on the page. Reminiscent of the photographic practice that underpinned Facemash, the visual possibility would later evolve into a large-scale use of images in various contexts including the political.

Figure 4.4: Thefacebook welcome page in 2004
Retrieved from: *Make Me Social*, 17 February 2011
URL: http://makemesocial.net/2011/02/17/where-were-you/
Retrieval date: 23 August 2015

Meanwhile, 2006 was a remarkable year for Facebook. Most of what made it a possible research platform and a site for civil mobilisation began to appear that year. It became globally accessible. So, anyone who had a functional email address and was over the age of 13 could open a Facebook account.[336] The features that allowed the circulation of contents through posting and sharing of other posts and external links were created. Creation of groups and events became possible. It is difficult to make sense of the emergence of these features in their sequential order. They are numerous and emerged in quick succession. Tagging, chatting, friend search, request and listing, photo album, video call, timeline and a myriad other features were created on Facebook and were fine-tuned with time. Rather than go into the detail of when each of the buttons was added, I trace the evolution of the use of the features in various places for civil purposes. The sociological history so to speak aids our understanding of how a platform which only supported college networks at the outset grew into a global phenomenon and began to shape the politics of societies.

It would be fitting to begin the historical survey by considering the internal crises experienced by Facebook. The platform that has impacted immensely on the political evolution of the world through the sustenance of civil unrest has itself grappled with user discontent and in fact outright protest against it. The first resistance against Facebook was the closure of its precursor – Facemash – by the Harvard University executives in 2003. As predominantly a photographic image viewing website that showcased the portraits of Harvard students, Zuckerberg hacked into the university security network to enable him copy students' ID pictures. As he was accused of breaking the security network and violating copyright and students' privacy, Facemash was shut down by the authorities of Harvard University. It was later re-opened as the charges against Zuckerberg were dropped. After the launching of Thefacebook in 2004, another accusation came from Divya Narendra and the Winklevoss brothers – Cameron and Tyler. They alleged that Zuckerberg who once worked for them as a computer programmer had

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[336] Todd Kelsey, *Social Networking Spaces: From Facebook to Twitter and Everything In Between* (United States of America: Apress, 2010)

stolen their ideas and coding system. Like the one preceding it, the case was later dropped.[337]

The next remarkable crises experienced by Facebook were in connection with "third-party partnership" that raised concerns about privacy. Yasamine Hashemi discusses "public search," "social ads" and "beacon" as features that emerged on Facebook in 2007 which led to public protest against the social networking website.[338] Public search entails the availability of user information including posts, comments, images and videos to others who are not connected to Facebook. This feature is in contrast with the original mode of "public availability" of information where it was only accessible to those who had account with the site. In this case, while the user is logged on to Facebook, typing a word in the search field brings up a pull-down list of related names from which the item being searched for can be chosen. The notion of third-party partnership comes in with the availability of the listings (users and the information about them) on search engines such as Google and Yahoo. One key reaction to the process is that users were not appropriately notified that the public could now have access to their information.[339]

Another concern was in relation to advertising or "social ads." It was conceived to enable users to connect to products, services and celebrities. It also provided the possibility to share with friends on Facebook the activities of the user on third-party websites. Although advertisers had no access to the viewers of the ads, Hashemi once again draws attention to Facebook's failure to communicate with users via email that their profile pages would be used as advert spaces.[340] Moreover, beacon is used to describe the process whereby Facebook tracks the activities of users of other websites (on concession with Facebook) and shares them with the friends of the users as news stories. In a general sense, the controversy generated by these features was associated with concerns about the public access to user information and activities. Such apprehensions have even

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[337] Sarah Philips, "A Brief History of Facebook," *The Guardian*, July 25, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul/25/media.newmedia.

[338] Yasamine Hashemi, "Facebook's Privacy Policy and Its Third-party Partnerships: Lucrativity and Liability," *Boston University Journal of Science and Technology Law* 15, no. 1 (2009).

[339] Ibid.

[340] Ibid.

prompted the reading of Facebook as a "surveillance tool."[341] The outcomes include media agitation and virtual protest by users. The political group – MoveOn.org – for example provided a forum for the aggrieved to sign petitions against beacon and request "the ability to opt-out of the program completely with no more than one click of a mouse which the original version…did not allow for."[342]

Zuckerberg's reaction was to issue public apologies to users.[343] But given the importance of such products as sources of funds for Facebook, they were not withdrawn. Instead, modifications in privacy settings were made to enable users to opt-out at will. The issue with this is that users may be ignorant of such provisions. They may not always make time to get acquainted with the technicalities set out in the website's settings. While users bear the responsibility for such an attitude, it can be argued that the "privacy setting politics" allowed Facebook to retain the features that would make it a site for activities subject to research and that in turn aid the scholarly process.

To illustrate, the public search feature was useful in this study. The Facebook search field was used to locate pages especially the ones belonging to groups. It was found out that several groups could simultaneously bear a particular profile name. For instance, as will be shown in more detail in the next chapter, numerous groups are known by the profile name "Occupy Nigeria." On the other hand, the Google search engine was useful for access to the Facebook discussions on certain subjects. A key word would be typed in the search field of the search engine, then followed by the word "Facebook." From the list thrown up, the items relating to the subject and emanating from the Facebook website would be selected. Another form of public search I did was in relation to the background information about certain images circulated on Facebook. In the event when clues to the root source of a photograph were not readily available on the display space of Facebook, words relating to the context in which it was shared on the social networking site

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[341] Ekaterina Netchitailova, "Facebook as a Surveillance Tool: From the Perspective of the User," *Triple C* 10, no.2 (2012): 683.
[342] Hashemi, "Facebook's Privacy Policy."
[343] Ibid.

were tried one after another on the Google image search field. Through this process, the website on which the picture was originally published would be located.

Although these practices are useful to intellectual work, they have close association with the issue of privacy. Grappling with the public dissidence about this and generally how user information is managed has rather "toughened" Facebook. The site has been able to maintain the features that have to do with public access to information and networking possibilities. This way, Facebook has established itself as a contested space where other forms of contestation are enacted. In what follows, the activist reading of the history of Facebook is advanced with selected important world revolutionary events involving the use of the medium.

The use of Facebook in the context of civil struggle emerged not so long after access to the site became universal in 2006. The power to connect individuals for civil actions that was found earlier in text messaging[344] came to be manifested in more diverse ways on Facebook and other social media sites. Inspired by the use of Facebook by tens of thousands of fans to support a football team in Egypt in 2007, Ahmed Maher began to consider applying the medium in the sense of a political movement. The following year (2008), he collaborated with Israa Abdel-Fattah to create "April 6 Youth" – a Facebook page dedicated to the mobilisation of an industrial action in Egypt. Following the offline projection of the virtual movement, the strike gave way to larger protests. But it later met with a crackdown as President Hosni Mubarak censored the activities of the group. [345]

In neighbouring Tunisia, President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali also sought to control Facebook in 2008 but the site was accessed through "proxy sites."[346] It was one of the tools deployed in the country to release information in the form of documents

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[344] Before the creation of Facebook and other social networking sites, text messaging was effectively used to organize protests. The protest that led to the ouster of President Joseph Estrada of Philippine in 2001 and Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of Spain in 2004 were co-ordinated through text messaging. See Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Change." Text messaging has continued to be used in combination with other tools.

[345] Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights."

[346] Ibid., 159.

and visuals to expose his tyrannical and corrupt government. The corruption and its connection with the Western world were brought to the limelight through the release of documents relating to dubious transactions between Ali and the United States government.[347] The saga of the "European shopping junkets" of Ali's wife was brought to public attention through the online monitoring of the First Lady's use of her husband's jet.[348] It is no surprise that individuals whose governments are challenged on social media become apprehensive of the increasing public access to their actions. Engaging with Brigg's concept of "conservative dilemma," Shirky writes that "with the spread of such media, whether photocopiers or web browsers, a state accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech finds itself called to account for anomalies between its view of events and the public."[349] What usually follows the dilemma is censorship.

The notion of censorship has been partly analysed with Ethan Zuckerman's "cute cat" theory. "Popular sites where majority of the people engage in trivial activities" are hardly shut down by state authorities, but those used by dissidents to express discontent about the running of governments are usually under the threat of closure.[350] In relation to social media activism, state control of the sites is one of the key factors responsible for what is usually regarded as "failed revolution." But I suggest that we avoid the use of "failure" in the evaluation of the impact of cyber civil movement. A protest organised online should not be taken to have failed merely for the reason that there is no grandiose outcome such as the deposition of a tyrant. Everything from publicity to psychological effects exemplified by the "conservative dilemma" ought to be viewed as accomplishments, thus "success." Three years after the so-called "failed" protest of 2008 in Egypt, the leader referred to it as a remarkable achievement. This is because the government not only recognised the existence of the online group behind it, but realised that it was a threat to its legitimacy and resisted it.[351] Accordingly, in historicising Facebook in

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[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."
[350] Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights," 156.
[351] Ibid.

relation to civil movement, I am interested in the deployment of the tool whatever the level of its impact.

In April 2009, what came to be recognised as the first *major* civil movement enacted on Facebook was in connection with the protest that took place in Moldova. Thousands of young citizens attacked state establishments and clashed with the police, poised to pull down the Communist Party that won a parliamentary election allegedly through rigging of votes.[352] The goal was achieved in the end. Given that most cases of cyber protest involving the use of Facebook are usually in combination with other tools, the platform was deployed along with Twitter and mobile telephone text messaging in the organisation of the Moldova action. The virtual spaces became important for the formation and dissemination of political opinions among Moldovans. The condition that led to the protest – dissatisfaction with the electoral process – aroused the pent up anger about poverty with which the population was grappling. In search of better living conditions, the rate of migration had skyrocketed in Moldova. Shirky's conclusion about social media activism comes to mind: that such practice "is more likely to emerge in a society as a result of dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance."[353]

Such dissatisfaction precipitated the world's most recent historic civil movement – what many have called the "Arab spring" of 2011 – to which Facebook and other social networking sites were central. Prominent among the affected countries are Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Although marked by certain country-by-country specificities, it was a collective experience for North Africa and parts of Middle East. It occurred in a seemingly linear succession, connecting one state after another. Joseph puts it thus:

> Just as the iconic #jan14 and #sidibouzid hashtags for Tunisia led to #jan25 trending for Egypt, Twitter hashtags for planned "days of rage" in other

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[352] Allen Barry, "Protests in Moldova Explode, With Help of Twitter," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?page wanted=all&_r=1

[353] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Change," 6.

States also began trending: #jan30 in Sudan, #feb3 in Yemen, #feb5 in Syria, #feb12 in Algeria, #feb14 in Bahrain, and #feb17 in Libya.[354]

Hashtag is more associated with Twitter, but the platform was in most cases used alongside Facebook. So the trajectory of events drawn with the hashtag formulation is by extension of the application of Facebook in the protests. I use the social movement as enacted in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya to demonstrate the underlying patterns of the "Arab uprising" in terms of mobilisation, state responses and outcome. Other examples are taken from Nigeria and Uganda where the virtual practices on Facebook have cast light on the paradoxes of democracy.

The civil struggle started in Tunisia. The aforementioned 2008 monitoring of and information leakage about Ben Ali's deeds, and the videos of derision circulated about him gathered the clouds of anger among the Tunisian population. The downpour was to be triggered by a little more provocation that came with the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010. Bouazizi sought the intervention of the government following the illegal closure of his business in Sidi Bou Zid town by local authorities.[355] The incident threw Sidi Bou Zid into mass protest whose photographs and videos were circulated on Facebook.[356] Twitter hashtags and Facebook groups were created to facilitate the circulation and the mobilisation of broader protests. In fact, social media constituted the key platforms on which information about the Tunisian uprising was propagated. The unrest climaxed in the flight of Ben Ali from Tunisia. The world turned to Tunisia in contemplating the power of protest articulated on social media to overthrow autocratic and corrupt rulers.

Neighbouring states were motivated by the Tunisian experience. As Sarah Joseph puts it, "a feeling of 'we can do it too' became immediately apparent."[357] That attitude coupled with the call on social media to awaken the consciousness of the region suggests some connectedness. Among other things it indicates that the countries had in common certain socio-political conditions that motivated the

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[354] Joseph, "Social Media, Political Change and Human Rights," 162.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid., 160

uprising. In Egypt, the protests that usually marked the Police Day (January 25) escalated into larger events in 2011. Facebook and Twitter were at the core of the galvanisation of the public in favour of the demonstrations. They were as important as the mainstream media in the coverage of the civil movement.[358] The platforms also turned to photography to enable the visual rendering of the historic moments. Joseph mentions the turning of the "cameras – which had not been allowed into prerevolution Tunisia – on Tahrir Square, the iconic site of the main protests, for the entire protest period" of more than two weeks.[359] The reaction of the Egyptian government was severe. The media was not just censored; internet communication was disrupted for some days. But rather than deter the activists, the extreme measure fanned the flames of anger that translated into their perseverance. In the end, Hosni Mubarak was deposed.

The fact that offline enactment of the Arab protest was prearranged on social media enabled some governments to prevent the actions from taking place. In Sudan for instance, the protests planned to start on 30 January 2011 never happened as they were prevented by President Al-Bashir. Shirky is right in his claim that not only the activists who employ social media in civil movement are convinced of its effectiveness. Governments are too.[360] So, they make efforts to stop it, even before its commencement.

Unlike in Sudan where the planned protest could not be carried out at all, in Syria, it started on 15 March 2011 as against the intended date – 5 February. Yet, the Syrian experience was unique. Both the activists and the repressive regime deployed social media differently in the revolution. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Skype and mobile telephone technology were the most effectively used platforms. The deployment was marked by compelling forms of technological manipulation. The uprising started with a peaceful demonstration in Darra, the southern part of Syria and later spread to Homs in the north. The Syrian government responded by shooting into the crowd of protesters, killing tens, including 13-year old Hamzeh

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[358] Ibid.

[359] Ibid., 162.

[360] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."

Al-Khateeb.[361] The spectacle of his brutalised body was harnessed to portray the violence of the Syrian government. Through the publishing of the video on YouTube and the creation of Facebook group pages such as "We are all Hamzeh Al-Khateeb,"[362] the subjects of the Syrian regime were invited to see themselves as potential victims of its brutality. The social media dissemination of information about the uprising not only gave the world updates of what Syria was going through, it brought multitudes of people to join in the movement.

Apprehensive of the overwhelming impact of social media on the protests, Bashar al-Assad's government shut down mobile telephone and internet connections in Darra and Homs. The activists found alternative means of communication. They used modems and mobile phone sim cards smuggled into the country from elsewhere. Apparently as it became difficult for the state to defeat the activists' technological appropriations, it considered withdrawing the crackdown and using the same social media platforms to track protest participants. Social media therefore became important to both the activists and the state. Ahmad Shehabat reads it as a virtual war in which "social media cyber-attacks, disinformation, propaganda and surveillance" were used by both the dissidents and the repressive regime "to win the online front line – an operation that (impacted) on the offline battle."[363]

The wave of protests also spread to other parts of the North Africa and the nearby Middles East, but Tunisia, Egypt and Syria provide the most intriguing examples of the application of Facebook in the uprising. While the experience of the two regions remains the most remarkable in Facebook and (more generally social media) activism, the year 2011 during which it occurred saw other instances in different parts of the world, including Nigeria. And this is where the history of the use of Facebook in Nigeria comes into focus.

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[361] Ahmad Shehabat, "The Social Media Cyber-war: The Unfolding Events in the Syrian Revolution 2011," *Global Media Journal* (2013).
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.

It began between 2006 and 2007, but mainly for the purpose of socialising with friends. By 2008, the number of users had risen to 400,000. [364] By the end of that decade, the use of Facebook in relation to election had been demonstrated elsewhere as exemplified by the 2008 U.S election. Nigeria followed suit. In the 2011 general election, Facebook along with other social media tools was used by politicians for declaration of interest in political positions and for campaigns. Goodluck Jonathan who took the seat as president through the election publicised his intention to run for the post on Facebook.[365] While the cyber-based campaign was marked by acrimony between opponents, the political engagement engendered on the platform during and after the election took on activist dimensions. Smart phone applications and online platforms connected to Facebook were created to enable "citizens to report election-related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail."[366] The activist underpinnings of these practices are expressed in the naming of the virtual platforms and the uses to which the circulated images were to be put. "Enough is Enough" and "ReclaimNaija" for instance encapsulate feelings of frustration about the country's long history of political failure. Social media came to be conceptualised as a space that would be used to demand for change.

Meanwhile, as Jonathan took up power in 2010, he continued to use the medium to communicate with Nigerian citizens. However, as mentioned earlier, the interaction was taken as an opportunity to critique his administration. Between 2011 and 2015, strong public opinions were formed and expressed against Jonathan on Facebook. In the next chapter, it is argued that the practice facilitated his defeat in the 2015 general election.

Unlike Nigeria where Facebook has enjoyed considerable freedom so that it is heavily put to political use including during elections, it is censored in some other democracies. During Uganda's general election in February 2011, the Ugandan Communication Commission (UCC) ordered the closure of "a DemGroup text

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[364] Ogundimu, "Facebook and Digital Activism."

[365] Nnanyelugo Okoro and Kenneth Adibe Nwafor, "Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria During the 2011 General Elections."

[366] Ibid., 36.

message relaying election-related reports." Two months later, Facebook and Twitter were shut down for 24 hours, disrupting the post-election protest against the high cost of living.[367] In the guise of forestalling violence, the UCC which was expected to promote freedom of expression in a democratic setup was used by the state to silence the citizens. The so-called democracies – and not only authoritarian regimes – demonstrate hostility to Facebook given that it exposes their failures.

While the foregoing is a historical reading of how virtual protest on Facebook developed, it can be claimed that the medium can no longer be separated from the world's day-to-day politics. There is hardly a media discussion of political issues that ignores how Facebook and other social media platforms come into play. It is interesting that as examined above, Facebook was not at the outset designed for the civil use in which it later began to be deployed. The medium has been historicised here as an activist tool which struggled its way through different forms of crises and became established as a means of civil resistance. It is used in various ways for information circulation. Users organise themselves through the medium for offline protests and disseminate real time coverage of the events. The circulated contents and the conversations around them constitute some kind of threat to the target authorities in both repressive regimes and democracies. The usual reaction is a crackdown which in some instances suppresses the uprising. In other cases, the dissidents devise alternative ways to sustain the civil movement. In yet other circumstances, there are extreme outcomes such as the reversal of situations and deposition of leaders. While these elements constitute an activist history of Facebook, some of them can be read further to argue for the site as archive.

Facebook as archive

The question of colonial experience is one of the key areas of intellectual enquiry in African historiography. Ann Laura Stoler has extensively explored the archive as a means of power in the colonial project. She argues that archives are not "sites of knowledge retrieval, but of knowledge production … the supreme technology of

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[367] Human Rights Network for Journalists, Uganda, "ISPs Harassed, Told to Shut Down Facebook and Twitter for 24 Hours," *Ifex*, April 25, 2011, https://www.ifex.org/uganda/2011/04/25/social_media pressure/.

the late nineteenth-century imperial state."[368] With the 21st century digital technology, new archival practices have emerged in more compelling ways than merely the appropriation of digital facilities by the analogue archive. Facebook is used here to demonstrate new archival possibilities and at the same time explore their limitations.

The social media site simultaneously borrows from and alters the established formulations of the archive, and enables political dissention. Colonial archives helped to facilitate colonialism. But with reference to Nigeria, the Facebook archive aids in the mobilisation against the dubious politics that emerged in Nigeria after the end of colonialism. As a site of civil struggle, it is a space in which the history of a society in turmoil is being continuously documented in pictures and written words by the aggrieved citizens. The social networking site is analysed as an archive whose structure is akin to the physical architecture of the analogue archive, although digitally constituted. It holds in digital form the documents for which the analogue archive is known. In the context of activism, the power to accord value to the documents lies in the hands of the public and not the state. Accordingly, rather than allow itself to be used by the state for its own ends, the archive (Facebook) is deployed by the public to document the atrocities of the state against its citizens. Yet, at some levels, Facebook operates like the personal archive in the conventional archival practice (in parts of Africa) from which broader political narratives emerge. These reflections are crucial as they help us to understand why scholars are turning to Facebook and other social media sites for research materials, just as they use the analogue archive.

Mbembe's essay, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits" greets readers with the photograph of the Cape Archives Repository in South Africa. The image is in a sense a pointer to the materiality of the archive where the "documents" are put on a par with the "building" that houses them. "There cannot … be a definition of archives," Mbembe asserts, "that does not encompass both the building itself and

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[368] Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87. See also Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

the documents stored there."[369] The assertion highlights the importance of space in the configuration of the archive. It is conventionally conceived as an architectural space complete with other built spaces such as cabinets and shelves. They are structured to accommodate documents organised in files and in other ways depending on the nature of the documents.

One of the likely reactions to Mbembe's presentation of architecture as crucial to the formation of the archive is that it has been overtaken by time. His writing appeared when the concept of the archive was restricted to materiality. Today, the idea of "vitual archive" has come with digital technology to disturb the notion of physical architecture. Yet, the virtuality of the archive does not suggest absolute loss of physicality. The devices (such as computers) on which digital documents are viewed and interacted with, the servers, cables, and other equipment through which internet signals are transmitted are material things that have to be located in actual space. On the other hand, Facebook is structured as architectural space, although a virtual variant. The configuration of the space is akin to the physical building that houses records of important human experiences. It also has a filing system and ways of managing the presence of visitors and recording their activities. In fact, the terms such as "file" and "document" which constitute the digital lexicon in which we read Facebook indicate that it borrows the language, concepts and structure of the analogue archive. The key difference is that while one is rooted in materiality, the other is immaterial and in "motion."

While I will return to the idea of "motion," let us dwell for a moment on the immateriality of the "document," which is the second component of the archive. Digital technology has afforded photography and film a dual position. They constitute archival documents in their own right and serve as the means through which other kinds of material documents are transformed into the form that makes them archivable in the digital archive. The analogue documents include textual materials (on paper and similar surfaces), two-dimensional images (such as photographs, drawings, prints and paintings), filmic materials, audio recordings

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[369] Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Reconfiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, et al (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 19.

and three-dimensional artefacts. Similarly, Facebook as an archiving space is a repository of these forms of materials, but differently constituted. As a virtual space, only that which is digital is held in it. Derrida reminds us that "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content."[370] Documents which are originally in hard format are digitised through such processes as scanning, photographic documentation and filming, to get them archived on Facebook. Thus, in addition to written words, the site renders time and events into digital photographs and films, and archives them as fundamentally visual impulses. So if "every photograph, every film is *a priori* an archival object,"[371] then it is a two-fold document in the context of the new archival practice which Facebook demonstrates.

On the other hand, the idea of "archive in motion" is the thrust of a volume edited by Eivind Røssaak in 2010. Digital technology and the internet are said to have enabled a condition "where constant and updating functions as well as 'live' communication and interaction redefine the temporality of the archival document itself."[372] That movement is experienced in everything including posting, re-posting, sharing of links and chatting as examined in the earlier section. However, one key critique of Røssaak's idea is his reading of the analogue archive as static.[373] Jerslev and Mortensen argue that "the archive has always been dynamic and open-ended within the framework of an overall policy of collecting and organizing items according to different logistical, professional, political and ideological concerns and constraints."[374] They add that "the digital archive (rather) emphasizes and significantly intensifies the interactivity and flexibility that has always been an affordance of the archive."[375] The mobility of the digital archive is

[370] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1995): 17.
[371] Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument," in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008), 12.
[372] Eivind Røssaak, "Introduction," in *The Archive in Motion: New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices* (Oslo: National Library of Norway), 1.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Jerslev and Mortensen, "Paparazzi Photography," 159.
[375] Ibid.

so intense that not only are the documents in motion, the architecture is, after all it is accessed through devices that are themselves mobile.
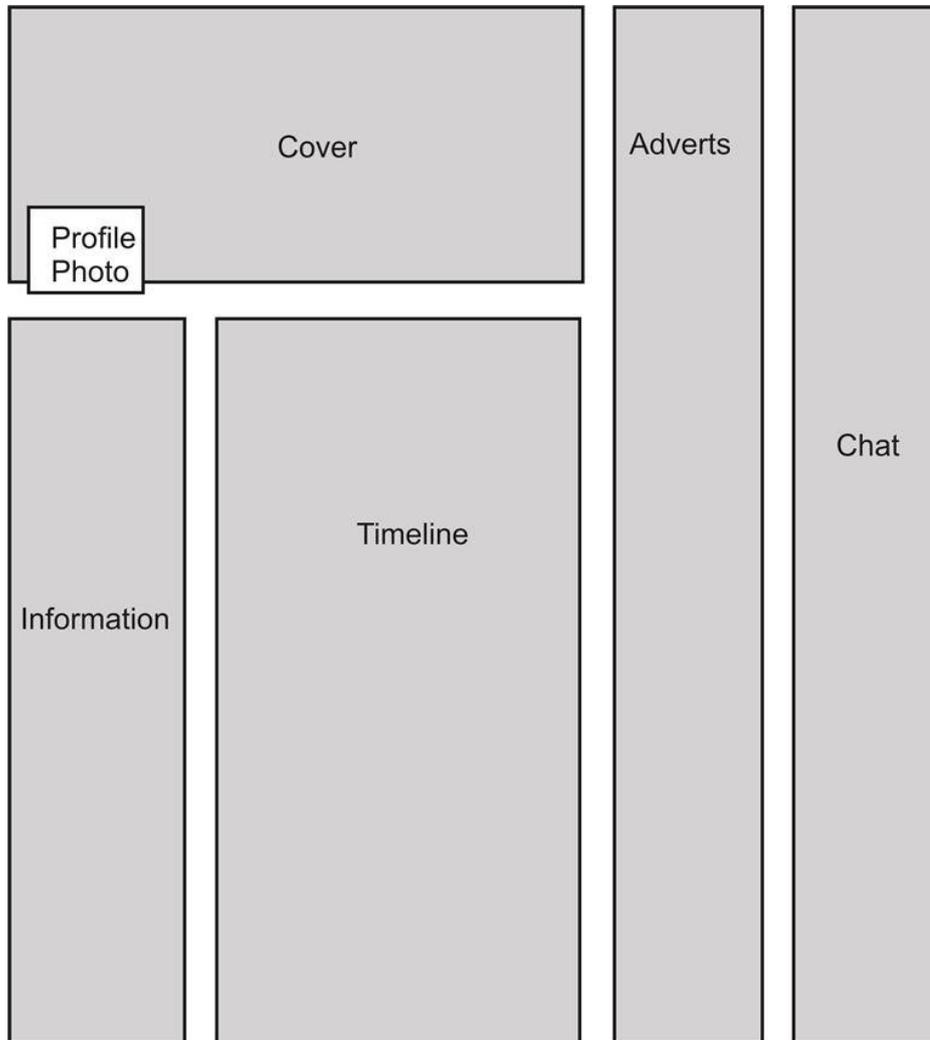
Figure 4.5: Spatial configuration of Facebook (for an individual page)

While the analogue archive is situated is the geographical space, Facebook is located in the vast network of World Wide Web (WWW) from which pages are fetched through the technology of Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP). To transport oneself to a Facebook archive, one is required to input in the address field, "https://www.facebook.com/" followed by the name in which the "repository" is constituted. Through that entrance, one enters the virtual space whose architectural structure is constituted in its User Interface (UI) as shown in figure 4.5 loosely labelled to show the key structure of a personal Facebook page.

The UI of Facebook has undergone a lot of modifications over time but has maintained the key components – the page cover, the profile information and the timeline also known as wall. The cover is so much like a banner on the façade of the building on which the name of the archive is conspicuously inscribed and which welcomes the visitor. It is designed as a space for presentation of photographic signs – cover and profile pictures – that are changeable according to the image desired to be projected of the archive at a given period. There is something of archival production that we can begin to explore with the photographic image here.

A click on the cover or profile picture displays navigation buttons through which one chronologically flips through the images archived over time within the particular section. Facebook also supports the conscious creation of albums. I use the word "conscious" to establish a distinction between other forms of image organisation and the use of "Create Album" button on the website. Located under the "Photo" menu, "Create Album" allows for deliberate upload of photographs to Facebook for storage and public viewing purposes. Other albums are not created consciously. They are rather the outcome of the algorithmic actions of the website. A click on the "Albums" button under the "Photos" menu reveals photographs organised in sub-albums such as "Timeline Photos," "Profile Pictures," "Cover Photos" and "Mobile Uploads." This archival ordering affirms Martin Hand's observation that the device deployed and the websites involved in the online photo dissemination "are at the same time modes of storage and classification."[376]

Just like the cover and profile picture sections of the Facebook page, the "timeline" (where the user's posts appear) is associated with a particular mode of archivisation. The most recent posts are displayed atop those preceding them. Through the mechanism of scrolling, one walks down the path of time to view the documents in the archive. That linearity of movement reminds us of the Heraclitean notion of time "as an unfolding sequence of events, as continuous like

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[376] Martin Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography* (UK and USA: Polity Press, 2012), 144.

a flowing river."[377] In keeping with that model, the documents on the timeline are archived chronologically. However, the chronology is only in relation to the time of the materials' arrival to the virtual archive. In the manner in which photography as argued by Baer destabilised the Heraclitean idea of time, there is a different ordering of time within the documents archived on Facebook. The events they depict are splinters of different times and spaces difficult to make sense of in linear order.

We can as well begin to think about the limits of Facebook as archive by reading the timeline in a more critical way. It is possible to access the posts of non-friends on the timeline, but not their activity log which is the repository of all that happens on and outside the timeline.[378] Documents can also be lost from the timeline and other sections of Facebook. Given that the comments made on the photographs I downloaded from Facebook were important to my research, I returned to the URL of some of them to look up the newer comments on them. But some had disappeared with their accompanying comments. The deletion is connected to user action or the algorithmic processes of Facebook. But the loss does not occur is an absolute sense. Lost photographs have what I refer to as "after-loss existence." By this I mean that images may disappear from the public domain of Facebook, but continue to exist in other digital spaces, such as private digital archives or the data bank of Facebook as a corporation.

Both the loss and the after-loss have some implications. The loss creates what Martin Hand describes as "archive anxiety." [379] Part of the anxiety is the devastation of losing one's visual documents in the digital age which many embraced as a permanent solution to our quest to get our memory preserved. On the other hand, given the intrinsic cyclical circulation of new media contents, the lost photograph has the tendency to make an online reappearance, perhaps in different contexts that produce new meanings that could be politically charged. In

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[377] Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: The IMT Press, 2002): 3.

[378] The activity log shows not only what you have posted but other things you have done, including liking other users' posts, commenting on them, poking, and so on. To view these, you click the "Activity Log" button which can only be found on the page you manage.

[379] Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography*, 154.

the context of civil resistance, the political force of photographs are important. And certain other features of Facebook communication produce political effects in nuanced ways.

Consider the area I labelled "information section" in figure 4.5. It shows the descriptions of what the archive (the Facebook page) is about, the bio data, list of friends and other disparate items about the user. Where the page belongs to an individual, these pieces of information are as personal as date of birth, schools attended, places visited and romantic relationships. If it is a group page, the section shows a list of its members, the circumstances behind its formation, the goal and the group events scheduled to take place online or offline. There is a tendency to perceive the idea of personal information on Facebook pages as insignificant in the context of political mobilisation as investigated in this project. But I contend that while some materials presented on individual pages may be so personal that they are best understood in terms of self-presentation, others fit into the frame of civil engagement. Personal information could have its nuances that are utterly political.

To illustrate, in May 2015, a young Nigerian university lecturer travelled to the United Kingdom for a two-week programme. He used the "Life Event" feature (with which Facebook users share their travel experiences) to make a political statement. His travel report transcended mere pronouncement of "being to a place." It was a sarcastic foregrounding of the poor infrastructure in Nigeria as opposed to what he saw in the United Kingdom. He wrote: "I am happy to be getting back in a couple of hours. I miss Nigeria a lot." Then followed a list of what he missed, moving from the personal to the politically forceful: "my beloved family," "palm wine," "potholes and bad roads," "fuel scarcity," "noise of generators," "the stupidity of many Nigerian public officials."[380]

Such political nuances connect to the theorisation of archive as a means of power as championed by such scholars such as Foucault and Derrida. While the former views it as "the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique

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[380] Chidi Ugwu, "It Is just Two Weeks Away," *Facebook*, May 23, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/chidi.ugwu.7/posts/10202661641221351.

events,"[381] the latter in his *Archive Fever* establishes that the state and the archive are intertwined.[382] Colonialism is the first key African experience in which the configuration of power through archival production is quite tremendous. Stoler explores the archive as "a process" and as "epistemological experiment" and (especially the colonial archive) as "technologies of rule."[383] As a process, the archive does not house documents to be retrieved as value-free knowledge of the world, but for the production of it. In the context of imperialism, the produced knowledge is essentially about social categorisation, stereotypical representations and domination. Following political independence in parts of Africa, the imperial archive is inherited as state institution. It is accorded recognition as repository of the historical record of domination from which the state has been set "free." But the inheritance presents the challenge of how to use collections set up in the colonial context without reproducing the epistemological politics that formed them. Besides the relations with colonialism, the archive becomes for many African states the means to tell the story of nation and its "glory." It is in this sense that the archive is deemed a "status" – "a matter of discrimination and selection, which…results in the granting of a privileged status to certain…documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'inarchivable.'"[384] The "archivable" are so-called because they portray the state in a good light. They are "coded," "classified" and "distributed according to chronological, thematic or geographical criteria."[385] Others are discarded when they do not fit into the frame.

The archival production of Facebook is a reversal of that status. The state in this case lacks the power to determine the "archivability" of documents. What it considers "unarchivable" about its activities are deemed "archivable" by the citizens whose living conditions are shaped by such activities. The emergence of Facebook as an archiving space in which the public has a stake has a lot of

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[381] Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972): 129.

[382] Derrida, *Archive Fever.*

[383] Stoler, "Colonial archives and the Art of Governance," 83.

[384] Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," 20. The scholar uses the word "archivability" to articulate the power of the state to determine what goes into the archive and what does not.

[385] Ibid.

implications for Nigeria. To begin, it can be argued that the conventional state archive over which the state has absolute power (as it is usually about its own work) is being overtaken. [386] It is everything Enwezor says about "the standard view of the archive" – "a dim musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves laden with old documents"[387] open to all but oftentimes visited by select groups doing their research. In contrast, Facebook is a vibrant space regularly visited by lots of Nigerians. The visitors are actively engaged in the contestation of power that mark the space. As shown in this research, one key issue about the use of Facebook by Nigerians is the obsession with socio-political issues in the country. The political elites are confronted through the exposure of their excesses and the demand for more accountability from them. This way, a contemporary history of Nigeria is being documented. The process is opposed to the version of "glorification" constructed by the state to anaesthetise harsh human experiences. Hence, if "an archive is, among other things, a repository of things that a culture deems valuable,"[388] then Facebook is one. It is a space where the subjects of an activist digital culture deposit the documents they accord value, namely the depictions of their existence under failed governance.

Although Facebook is located in the public domain, it operates at some level as personal archive in the way individuals make it particular to themselves, largely manage their own accounts, circulate, and store what they personally accord value.[389] But the personal archive turns into something public, not only because of their location in the public platform, but due to how the personal posts connect to broader narratives of societal conditions. The personal-public link is characteristic of the analogue archival practice in African postcolonies as broadly explored in the book, *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies* edited by Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury. In the chapter by Richard Vokes, he examines the personal photo archive of Mr. Grace Bwire, the chairman

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[386] That is not to say that all archives in Nigeria are set up and run by the state. There are archives that belong to individuals, families or organisations.

[387] Enwezor, "Archive Fever," 11.

[388] Nina Lager Vestberg, "The Photographic Image in Digital Archives," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, ed. Martin Lister (New York: Routledge, 2013): 117-118.

[389] Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

of the Bugamba Local Council in Uganda in the 1990s. Vokes analyses how the personal collection constructs wider visual narrative of postcolonial politics in South-western Uganda. Through the archive, Bwire sought to assert his "network of political influence," but inadvertently revealed some of the socio-political tensions in postcolonial Uganda.[390] Like Bwire's personal archive, the individual Facebook pages of numerous Nigerians contain photographic documents through which the Nigerian postcolonial condition is read.

Meanwhile, just as it operates in Nigeria beyond the power of the state, the archival production of Facebook dislodges the aura of archivists in the conventional sense in which they are known. Archivists are perceived as important "preservationists" – professional custodians of records who "rescue, restore and conserve them." Terry Cook thinks of that characterisation as a "stereotype" apparently because archivists do more than those functions. They exert enormous power in the ways they mediate the organisation and production of knowledge in which the archive engages. But in the world driven by digital technology, their power is on the wane. Neither can archivists any longer "afford to be, nor be perceived as custodians."[391] To buttress that argument, Cook adds that "society's collective memory" has been revolutionised in the electronic age during which

> we have business officers and professionals creating and storing their own records rather than relying on an army of secretaries, file clerks, and records managers to do this work for them. Most important, for the first time, we are not producing, managing, and saving physical things or artifacts, but rather trying to understand and preserve logical and virtual patterns that give electronic information its structure, content, and context, and thus its meaning as a "record" or as evidence of acts and transactions.[392]

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[390] Richard Vokes, "The Chairman's Photographs: Political and Visual Economies in South-Western Uganda," in *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies*, ed. Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[391] Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives & Social Studies: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1, no. 0 (2007): 400.

[392] Ibid., 401-402.

The issues raised by Cook affect how we think about photography in connection with Facebook and its related archival practices. First, there is no longer a stable figure of the archivist. The use of digital devices (such as computers, mobile phones, tablets, and memory discs) and online platforms (including Facebook, Google Drive, Dropbox, blogs and websites) constitutes all-inclusive forms of archival production. One takes up the role of the archivist by means of access to the necessary hardware, software and internet infrastructures, and knowledge of how to operate them. Cook also talks about evidence and how digital technology structures our perception of it. The earliest understanding of the archive is predicated upon the evidentiary drive to establish connection between record and event. Following the introduction and reception of photography as innocent representation of the world, the photographic image was taken in as an important archival document. Its life-likeness would help to make unequivocal connection with the past.[393]

However, evidence as truth claim and photography as innocent form of evidence would later be challenged. This is not only due to the possibilities of altering the visual contents of photos, but because they get subjected to varying interpretive contexts. [394] What is spectacular about the new media age is the grand scale of the content- and meaning-related alterations of the photograph where certain technologies are specifically invented for that purpose. And they are made user-friendly so that as many as possible would use them. This burning desire to get everyone to create, edit, disseminate, and archive photographs must be given attention by researchers who work with the medium. The scope of their work is really expanding.

In the foregoing, I have argued for Facebook as archive. It has in digital form all the elements of conventional archive. But the virtuality also inverts some of the components. The architectural structure of Facebook is observable in its User Interface. Akin to the spatial configuration of the conventional archive, Facebook

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[393] Walter Rundell Jr., "Photographs as Historical Evidence: Early Texas Oil," *The American Archivist* 41, no. 4 (1978).

[394] Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (1978): 862.

is organised in different sections, each of which is important in the multiple relations it generates. The documents circulated on Facebook are similar to those in the analogue archive. But there are some marked differences. First, the virtual archive demands that documents be rendered in digital formats. Three-dimensional artefacts are digitally flattened into still photographs or animated in filmic form. Secondly, Facebook introduces different genres that did not really exist in the analogue archive. The posts are not reports, not letters, not diary, but their own genre. As regards the archive as an agent of power, there is a reversal in the authority of the state to determine what goes into the collection and to control how it is interpreted and used. The space affords the masses some agency and places them in a position to write a version of history that exposes the failure of the state rather than romanticising it. At any rate, the archival status of Facebook has its own problems. It loses its documents that take on another life, raising various concerns about the kind of archive Facebook is.

Conclusion

The structural configuration of Facebook has been argued as the force that governs the use of the platform as a political tool. The features of the site support public and more closed modes of content circulation and interaction among users. Through some of the communicative affordances of Facebook, the inaccessibility of the political elites by the citizens has been broken. The site becomes a meeting point for the two groups, affording the masses the opportunity to directly challenge their leaders and demand accountability from them. The history of Facebook is steeped in such political engagements. Since 2011, it has played significant roles in important civil uprisings in Africa. This political force is sequel to Facebook's containment of its own crises in the formative years. So, its story is of the development of features which through the attraction of public and institutional confrontation became in themselves means of civil resistance. Given that Facebook was designed to hold the traces of the activities that take place on it, it constitutes a particular kind of archival production. It allows Nigerians to document their frustrations in an inclement political atmosphere. In this way, dissident citizens write a history that detracts from the state-constructed narratives of self-

aggrandisement. In other words, a new form of archive has emerged, one which also gives agency to the ordinary people. These engagements as addressed in the chapter are important because they allow for reflection on Facebook as a space through which scholars try to understand how new media is shaping society. In the world of political turmoil in which we live, the image – one of the media objects circulated on social media including Facebook – is used to advance violence. Paradoxically, it is also deployed to counter the violence. The next chapter explores this precarious state of the image.

CHAPTER FIVE
The Dilemma of the Image

Introduction

Insurgency constitutes a principal aspect of the insecurity examined in chapter 2 as one of the major concerns that drives online activism in Nigeria. Boko Haram, the most dreaded militant group in the country is associated with a culture of violence that has a complicated visual dimension. Dissemination of images is adopted as a major mode of operation by the insurgents. At the same time, soldiers and civilians fight back with images. Thus, the image is caught in a state of dilemma. This chapter argues that photographic imaging, whose circulation, re-circulation and nexus of meaning-making are defined by cyber technology, plays a simultaneous and oppositional role to advance violence, and to counter it. To develop this argument, I analyse the images associated with insurgency as circulated on the internet by Boko Haram, the Nigerian army, activist online platforms and virtually-connected individuals. The pictures are read alongside their accompanying comments. Through the analysis, it is established that Boko Haram's visual attacks launched through virtual photographic imaging, and the ensuing visual counter-attack, result in a new mode of war. It is a war in which the image is played as a weapon, but in different ways in the hands of the insurgents, the state and the citizens. At another level, pictures play an evidentiary role in the claim of state complicity in the insurgency and the violation of human rights perpetrated in the guise of counter-insurgency. The image that portrays Boko Haram violence is also used as a magical object whose destruction or online re-circulation has the capacity to subdue the militants.

I draw on the writings that have explored the instrumentality of the visual image and the apparatuses of seeing in political violence. Allen Feldman and WJT Mitchell for instance have made important contributions to these debates. Feldman worked on the Northern Ireland conflict of the late 1960s to the 1980s. He

establishes that the optical surveillance set up by the state for the purpose of counter-insurgency produces visual realism that has devastating effects. It generates anxiety and fear of falling victim to violence, as vision and death become closely linked.[395] In a more recent publication, Feldman critically explores what he calls "photopolitics" to theorise the violence of warfare in a more complicated way. Drawing on specific examples of political conflict, he shows that photography and new forensic technologies have taken precedence over conventional ethical witnessing such as "spoken testimony of eye- or earwitness."[396] They are deployed by the powerful individuals and constituted authorities to disavow, conceal, normalise, or justify violence.[397] Mitchell for his part uses the concept "war of images" to describe "war on terror," where images constitute the weapons, the targets and the victims of violence.[398] With attention to the mediation of the internet, this visual economy of political violence is examined in relation to Nigeria. The Nigerian context is important because the digital culture is produced amidst a deficiency of the infrastructure required for the practice.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first is a concise account of the contested genesis of Boko Haram. The sect is widely believed to be founded by Mohammed Yusuf in the beginning of the 2000s. But it also connects to a longer history of intersection of religion and politics in Northern Nigeria. Challenging the political corruption in Nigeria and violently presenting Islamism as its recipe, Boko Haram attracted state hostility. The group reacted with violence and radicalised itself, attacking security personnel and state infrastructure. Once the militants affirmed their capacity to confront the army and the police, the rest of the Nigerian population became easy prey. The strategies of destruction developed in a quick succession, encompassing shooting, kidnapping, and diverse forms of bombing. In the second segment, visual production is interrogated as another kind of weapon. The deployment of images by Boko Haram insurgents gives a sense of the image terrorising viewers, threating to attack them and eventually doing so.

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[395] Allen Feldman, "Vision and Violence: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997).

[396] Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible*, 81.

[397] Ibid.

[398] Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*.

Hence in the context of insurgency, the image is not only a representation of violence but its producer. Lastly, the reaction of the Nigerian state to Boko Haram's visual culture of violence is to also fight with images. The visual counter-attack is used to assert the power of the army to curtail the insurgency. But relying on images too, civilians destabilise this claim. Their position is that the state itself is an ally of Boko Haram that can only be defeated if the co-operation is severed. They also believe that destroying or showing the insurgents the ghastly images of their violent acts has the capacity to weaken their power. These complex visual relations indicate that in the context of insurgency, the image is in a precarious and volatile situation. It both precipitates violence and is asked to undo the destruction it produces.

The emergence of Boko Haram

The origin of Boko Haram is contentious. There is no harmonious account of its founder, the time, the place, and the reason for its formation. Simeon Alozieuwa tries to give a sense of that controversy by rendering it into two broad categories. The first includes "internal forces (comprising) socio-economic factors, as well as deep-seated political, religious differences in the Nigerian society." Others are "external forces" that derive from the international jihadist movement, but which locally play out to undermine the Nigerian sovereignty.[399] Alozieuwa has tried to be comprehensive in his analysis, yet there are additional important accounts he fails to acknowledge.

For instance, consider J.N.C. Hill's perspective which in my view rather deepens the mystery of Boko Haram's beginning. He writes that the group was founded as a "peaceful" organisation in 2002, with *no* "ambition…to impose their politico-religious view on everyone else." Its members would "live quietly and piously…removed from the rest of society," and "they recreated the Prophet's *hijara*, or flight from Mecca to Medina (by withdrawing) to a remote corner of Niger State in the north-west of the country."[400] Hill's claim creates a certain kind

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[399] Simeon Alozieuwa, "Contending Theories on Nigeria's Security Challenge in the Era of Boko Haram Insurgency," *The Peace and Conflict Review* 7, no 1 (2012): 1.
[400] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, 26.

of curiosity. The declaration of what the organisation's intent was *not* tends to suggest a knowledge of what it *was* that transcended the religious practices of seclusion and meditation, and that changed only with time. But as Boko Haram has concealed what its goal was at the time of its formation, no research has made any definite claim in that regard. Researchers have only made deductions based on the transformation of the group over time and its later declaration of the move to Islamise Nigeria. Hill's position is important because it prompts us to begin the examination of Boko Haram by thinking about the popular perspectives that foreclose deeper readings. For example, to settle with Mohammed Yusuf as the founder, and the early 2000s as the founding date of Boko Haram is to take the insurgency as a recent phenomenon.

Some scholars argue that the sect is located within the broader Islamic movement of the second half of the 20th century that accounted for different organisations that were nonetheless linked together. Thus, Yusuf only cued into a long-standing framework. For instance, the Maitatsine group of the 1980s named after its founder Alhaji Marwa Maitatsine gave way to the Shabaab Muslim Youth Organization founded in 1995.[401] Ajayi argues that the Shabaab "maintained a shadowy existence until around 1999 when… Mohammed Yusuf assumed the leadership of the group" and transformed it into what came to be called Boko Haram.[402] Another account recognises 1995 as the actual founding date, but claims that it was established by Lawan Abubakar who handed it over to Yusuf before traveling to Saudi Arabia for higher education.[403] Yusuf then radicalised the group in the beginning of the 2000s.

In developing these perspectives, it is acknowledged that Yusuf was inspired by the Islamic revolutionist, Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817).[404] In a way that resonates

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[401] A.I. Ajayi, 'Boko Haram' and Terrorism in Nigeria: Exploratory and Explanatory Notes," *Global Advanced Research Journal of History, Political Science and International Relations* 1, no. 5 (2012).

[402] Ibid.

[403] Simeon Alozieuwa, "Contending Theories on Nigeria's Security Challenge in the Era of Boko Haram Insurgency," *The Peace and Conflict Review* 7, no 1 (2012).

[404] Usman dan Fodio was a descendant of Toronkawa, a Senegalese Fulani group that migrated to Hausa land (present day northwestern Nigeria) in the 15th century.

with Alozieuwa's notion of "internal forces," Virginia Comolli begins her historical account of Boko Haram with the Fodio story. She states: "To better understand the evolution and maturation of Boko Haram's insurgency, one has to look back at how the history of Islamist fundamentalism, anti-establishment revivalism, and religious identity in Northern Nigeria has influenced the emergence of violent contestation and insurgency."[405] Fodio was critical of the Islamic practices in the Hausa kingdom of his time and argued that the kings were false Muslims and oppressors of the poor. He described them as "apostates," who allowed the persistence of "high level of taxation…oppression of the peasants, enslavement (of Muslims), the practice of cults, and the permissive environment where alcohol could be consumed freely and women were not required to wear the veil."[406]

Fodio created what he regarded as an ideal Islamic community where he preached and taught his followers. He sought to project his strict enforcement of the Sharia law to the larger Hausa kingdom. Given his radical views and actions, he was perceived as a threat that must be confronted. That confrontation which Fodio viewed as "persecution" drove him and his followers away. What followed was their mobilisation for a "holy war" (jihad).[407] It was a war driven by the mix of religious sentiments and the argument for social justice. Fodio and his Fulani people came out victorious in 1809, deposing the Hausa kings to establish "the Sokoto Caliphate of which he became the first Sultan."[408] As the empire expanded to incorporate people from other parts of what later came to be known as Nigeria, Islam became a bonding agent that held them together. The bonding was fragile given its ethnic definition that privileged the Fulani Muslims over their non-Fulani counterparts.[409] Still, the religious commonality ultimately managed to bring the Fulani and the Hausa into one group that today constitutes one of the largest in Nigeria.

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[405] Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamic Insurgency* (United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2015): 12.
[406] Ibid., 15.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid.

I have dwelt on Comolli's historical reading here because in its evolution, motivation and ideology, the Boko Haram insurgency has parallel relations with Usman dan Fodio's jihad. Like Fodio, Yusuf accused the Nigerian political elites of fraud and disobedience to the Quran. Presenting himself as a preacher and advocate of fairness, he set up his own mosque in Maiduguri and galvanised public support through preaching.[410] His evocation of state failure appealed to the common people: school dropouts, unemployed youths, poor women, and so on. They were persuaded to blame their indigent life on the exploitation by those in power. It does not however imply that only those in the margin of society were recruited into the sect. Others including the rich and intellectuals also joined the cause.[411] Boko Haram marked the constituted authorities, and later, Christianity as its persecutors. In keeping with Fodio's ideology, Yusuf conceived of jihad as the answer to the problem of state failure that he challenged. Hence, the group was known as *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad).[412] This would later be affirmed in 2012 by Abubakar Shekau, the second leader of Boko Haram. The name "Boko Haram" is rather a sobriquet that came to describe the group's hostility to secularism rooted in westernisation.[413] It does not etymologically mean "Western education is forbidden," as popularly believed.

Apprehensive of Yusuf's radicalism, state authorities became hostile to his group. The group withdrew to Yobe State where they prepared for the violence that they unleashed on state establishments including police stations between December 2003 and early January 2004. For the rest of 2004, the military and the police engaged the militants in a struggle that led to the death of many of the insurgents

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[410] Ibid.

[411] Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014).

[412] NNTV-Africa, "Boko Haram leader 'Imam Abubakar Shekau' Message to President Jonathan 1," YouTube video, 14:57, January 12, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umkj50SUzck.

[413] Andrea Brigaglia, "Jaʿfar Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the *Boko Haram* Phenomenon in Nigeria," *AnnualReview of Islam in Africa* 11(2012): 38.

and the abduction of a dozen policemen.[414] After that major face-off, Boko Haram went silent from 2005 until the first quarter of 2007. The group used the period to strengthen itself, "recruiting new members and shoring up its resources."[415] The combat resumed in April 2007 and in mid-2009, and a number of the militants were killed. Yusuf released a video in which he threatened to deal with the Nigerian government. In the fight that followed, Yusuf was arrested along with others. In July 2009, he was executed.[416] While his death intensified the anger of the group, his use of video to address the state marked the entrance of visual production into the narrative of Boko Haram insurgency. Abubakar Shekau who took over the leadership of the group clung to the photographic weapon and committed Nigeria to a visual war.

As shown above, there are different views about the beginning of Boko Haram and the organisation has failed to clearly state its founding goal. Researchers are therefore left with deductive readings based on the group's evolution and quest to Islamise Nigeria. It sought to realise the goal through violence that has evolved strategically. It began with attacks on security personnel, as if to weigh the efficacy of its tactics against the "expertise" of trained military and police officers. Once it established the capacity to confront security agents, attacks on market places, schools, religious centres and other public spaces became rampant. The group was further emboldened by the improved weaponry that came with its military training programme and the production of improvised explosives.[417] These possibilities were also believed to be aided by the sect's link to international rebel organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).[418] With this expansion, the weaponry of Boko Haram advanced from abduction and the use of firearms to detonation of bombs. The bombing quickly diversified in form to

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[414] Manuel Reinert and Lou Garçonaz, "Boko Haram: A chronology," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014).

[415] Ibid., 238.

[416] Ibid.

[417] Ajayi, "'Boko Haram' and Terrorism in Nigeria."

[418] Ibid. In its messages, Boko Haram references the international militant organisations and their leaders as part of its sources of inspiration. In 2015, it made news headlines that it had declared allegiance to ISIS.

include suicide bombing that involves the use of allegedly conscripted women and children. Finally, there is another weapon that has hitherto been neglected by researchers: the photographic image.

The image as perpetrator

From the outset, Boko Haram has disseminated its messages through a variety of channels. Mohammed Yusuf's sermons of the early 2000s (whose threatening tone was found disturbing by the Borno state government) were circulated as audio recordings, communiqués, videos and one undated book.[419] After his death, Abubakar Shekau held on to the visual medium that he found highly effective as a weapon of violence. Emenike Ezedani brings the visual narrative to us through the book, *Foto Haram: A Chronologic Pictorial of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria 2009-2015*.[420] It covers different facets of the militancy: the exploits of the group's leaders, the encounter with the Nigerian state, the destruction, the displacements and the international interventions. However, the book is basically a photo album with no critical engagement with the images. In this section, the visual dimension of the Boko Haram movement is assessed. I explore the photographic image as simultaneously a weapon and a perpetrator of violence. Not only is it deployed to terrify viewers, it addresses them, and proclaims the coming of destruction. Therefore, the image does not merely depict violence; it causes it. These ideas are elucidated with Abubakar Shekau's photographic performances.

One of the earliest examples of Boko Haram's use of images after Yusuf's death is the video released at the beginning of January 2012 by Shekau.[421] Although presented as a message to the then President Goodluck Jonathan, it raises a broad range of issues directed to a wider audience. It also gives us a glimpse of the militants' grievances and demands, and how Boko Haram mirrors Usman dan Fodio's jihad. Sitting between the camera and two rifles positioned behind him,

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[419] The book entitled, *This Is Our Faith and Our Da'wa* was published in Maiduguri by Al Farba. See Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Introduction and Overview," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014).

[420] Emenike Ezedani, *Foto Haram: A Chronologic Pictorial of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria 2009-2015* (n.p: printed by author, 2015).

[421] NNTV-Africa, "Boko Haram leader."

Shekau speaks in the likeness of an Imam delivering a sermon, but to an unseen audience. He deploys the camera to present himself as a preacher, as both Fodio and Yusuf were said to have done through writing and teaching actual audiences. The jihadist ambition of the sect begins to reveal itself more clearly with Shekau's reiteration of his commitment to Mohammed's teaching. In the video, he restates his repudiation of Western influences including education, democracy and Christianity. He threatens to avenge the murder of Yusuf, his predecessor, and what he regards generally as the mistreatment of Muslims by the state and Christian subjects. In this initial visual presentation, Boko Haram portrays itself as a body founded to peacefully advance the cause of Islam and to challenge the corruption of democracy, but which for no reason became the target of state security agents. This claim returns us to Usman dan Fodio's logic of persecution in the 19th century.[422] We are also prompted to ponder the political decadence in Nigeria that led to the call for jihad in the first place. Then, we need to examine the centrality of the image in these developments.

The return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999 was accompanied by fraudulent practices such as financial and electoral crimes. Consequently, some Northern Nigerian elites proposed the institution of Sharia Law in the country. The move succeeded at various levels in the Northern states.[423] But this intercourse between politics and religion is itself a dubious act. Firstly, aware of the force exerted by religion in Nigeria (but insensitive to its diversity), the Northern politicians drew on it to present themselves as vanguards of justice. Secondly, rather than helping to check the corruption of the political class, Sharia Law seemed to be constituted to oppress the common people. For instance, many helpless citizens had their limbs amputated for stealing as stipulated by the law.[424] But state functionaries who looted the public treasury were not punished. When Boko Haram emerged, it challenged such hypocrisy and the corruption of the politicians generally. As a point to which I will later return, this move had the potential to win the sect wider

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[422] Comolli, *Boko Haram.*

[423] Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008).

[424] Ibid.

public support. But it fell back on the same religious framing (Islamisation) adopted by the Northern Nigerian politicians.

Boko Haram's attack on the political elites began in form of verbal abuse. In 2009, Ali Modu Sheriff granted one journalist a full-length interview, explaining how Mohammed Yusuf in an audio tape threatened him and the federal government of Nigeria:

> …I saw the tape of Yusuf's sermon where he dared me and the Nigerian state, as well as the Commander-in-Chief of this country. He was daring every leader… He threatened that they knew where we slept, our route to the offices and therefore they would deal with us. He specifically mentioned my name and said I was the biggest Kafir, unbeliever who must be dealt with. [425]

Between 2003 and 2011, Sheriff was the governor of Borno State where Boko Haram had a base. Concern about the threat posed by Yusuf led to the state intervention that climaxed in his killing, which Abubakar Shekau threatened to avenge. The latter's warning of vengeance was a photographic act that alters our understanding of the camera in relation to power. Reading Mary Ann Doane, Feldman speaks of the "politics of pose" in his description of "the camera/subject nexus (as one that) mobilizes relations of power, the authority of the distanced observer, or the offscreen or out-of-frame voice who commands and frames the scene, staging and molding the depicted."[426] The formulation contexualises the dictation of poses for bodies that never out of their own volition offered themselves to be photographed. Here, being photographed means to be subdued. But in the case of Boko Haram's video, there is an inversion of Feldman's articulation. The speaking subject – the sitter who posed before the camera – has actualised the camera/subject nexus in a deliberate way, and becomes an embodiment of power exercised over the viewer,

Abubakar Shekau produced himself as an iconic image that also became the personification of Boko Haram. In its initial appearance in early January 2012, the

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[425] Ikechukwu Amaechi, "Boko Haram Worse Than Maitasine – Gov Sheriff," *Ikechukwu* (blog), August 28, 2009, http://ikechukwu.wordpress.com/category/daily-independent.
[426] Feldman, "Vision and Violence," 44.

image revealed its intention to bring destruction upon Nigeria. A few days later (January 20), the actualisation of the violence began with the bombing of the Kano central police station, and sporadic shooting in parts of the city. Many died. Many more sustained injuries. A week later, Boko Haram released a video in which Shekau's voice was heard over his still photograph. The image claimed responsibility for the act. This capacity of the image to proclaim mayhem in advance and then actualise it left many Nigerians with a fear of Shekau's picture. For instance, one Facebook user posted the photograph of a piece of newspaper with which her meal of roast chicken called "suya" was wrapped (figure 5.1). As she started eating, she recoiled in horror when she noticed the image of Shekau on the paper.[427] To rephrase Feldman, Shekau has transformed "being seen" into a performance that produces fear and "empowers the act of violence."[428]

The visual performance does not only involve the perpetrator of destruction. The victims are incorporated into it. This can be illustrated with the abduction that marked an important moment in the history of Boko Haram. The insurgents invaded a high school in Chibok, Borno State and kidnapped hundreds of female students in April 2014. Shortly after, the sect brought out a video through which it presented to the world the images of the kidnapped girls (Figure 5.2). They are seen in their number sitting and reciting passages from the Quran as moderated by their abductor. Here Shekau's assumption of the role of a preacher and fighter of jihad is increasingly manifest. In a cut in the video, he says that the girls have been liberated, for the non-Muslims among them have been converted to Islam. Yet he threatens to keep them captive until his imprisoned colleagues are released, or to sell them off, if the government fails to co-operate.

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[427] Maie Okafor, "Wow...! What suya!" *Facebook*, August 12, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=890290194353042&set=rpd.100001162104387&type=3&theater.
[428] Ibid., 40.

Figure 5.1: "Suya" wrapped with a piece of newspaper that has the pictures
of Abubakar Shekau and his fellow militants.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 13 August 2015, posted by Maie Okafor with the
text, "Wow...! What suya!"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=890290194353042&set=rpd.10000116
2104387&type=3&theater
Retrieval date: 15 August 2015

Figure 5.2: The abducted Chibok school girls.
Retrieved from: YouTube, 12 May 2014, "Boko Haram Video Claims to Show Missing Nigerian Schoolgirls" by AFP News Agency (video still).
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9sJnldKRg8.
Retrieval date: 11 March 2015.

Figure 5.3: The Boko Haram logo.
Retrieved from: Wikipedia.
URL:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram#/media/File:Logo_of_Boko_Haram.svg.
Retrieval date: 11 May 2015.

Shekau attempts to make us accept liberation as a condition attained through acts of violence and captivity. We are prompted to ask what liberation means in the light of insurgency. In this regard, it would be insightful to examine the stamp mark that came with the cited video and would appear in subsequent clips as the logo of Boko Haram (Figure 5.3). Two AK-47 rifles facing opposite directions are positioned as if in use by imaginary hands. Above them are an open book (apparently the Quran) and a flag with Arabic inscriptions of the declaration, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the messenger of Allah." The two graphic elements help to further define the Islamic identity Boko Haram has constructed of itself. It becomes logical to believe, as Shekau has made known in his video messages that the core objective of the sect is to Islamise Nigeria. On the other side of the Islamisation move is the corrupt democratic government it seeks to depose.

For Boko Haram, the deposition will mean liberation for the Nigerian citizens who live in poor socio-economic conditions occasioned by the duplicity of state functionaries. And indeed, if Boko Haram had distanced its ambition from religious framework and had exclusively gone after the fraudulent politicians, it would have garnered more support from many Nigerians. As noted earlier, many joined the group in its early days because it challenged the corrupt government that left them impoverished. I have interacted with individuals who confessed their willingness to back the uprising in various capacities but were dismayed that it was far from the revolution they thought it heralded. The abduction, killing and displacement of innocent citizens who are outside the echelons of power demonstrate either that the state is not its primary target, or that the sect has no distinctively clear goal.

The Christian religion that was presented as the enemy did not remain its only target religious group. It also attacks mosques and Muslims, so that if it is really the Islamist movement it claims to be, it has turned against itself. One possible reading here is that the targets of the jihadists are not just non-Muslims but those they perceive as non-conformists to Quranic injunctions, whether they profess Islam or not. That has been the modus operandi of some major Islamic movements

222

in Nigeria, beginning with Fodio who is seen as a model by Shekau. However, one wonders whether the non-conformists are the only targets when the jihadists bomb a shopping mall in the country's capital city Abuja. As the answer to this question is beyond the scope of this project, I return to the issue of liberation and consider how it is articulated through the visual language constructed by Boko Haram.

The AK-47 rifles in the logo (Figure 5.3) are emblematic of the liberation question. There are two aspects to the iconography of the form. First, it borrows visually from one of the initial videos released by the group as cited earlier, in which Shekau sits before two AK-47 firearms in a kind of tableau, one to his left and the other to his right. On the other hand, the AK-47 historically enjoys a specific liberatory iconicity in Africa. When the Russian General Mikhail Kalashnikov invented the firearm between the Second World War and the Cold War, he could not have imagined the dynamic uses to which it would be put across the world and especially in the African continent.

In the 20th century, African nationalists used it in the struggle against colonial rule.[429] The adoption of the AK-47 in the flag of Mozambique and in the coat of arms of Burkina Faso and Zimbabwe is therefore not a surprise. In the case of Boko Haram, the notion of liberation historically connects anti-colonial struggles with the Cold War which according to Mavhungu favoured the shipping of the rifle to parts of Africa, including Nigeria. The Soviet Union invented the weapon and offered it to Africa to fight the West – their colonisers and the "cold enemy" of the Soviet bloc. Today, Boko Haram lifts the same gun against democracy and the Christian religion – the legacies left in Nigeria by the West. The sect also challenges the United Nations, the United States of America, Britain and other significant Western powers that have continued to exert an influence on the country. The logo with its graphic representational thread weaves together religion, questions of state failure and international politics. At another level, it is a symbolic reminder of the destruction that derives from this complex tapestry. Again, it indicates the importance of the technology of visual production in

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[429] Clapperton Mavhunga, "The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe's Cyber-Guerrilla Warfare," *Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 2 (2009).

insurgency. But the Islamic identity of the organisation raises questions about its use of the image.

Islam stands in a certain relation to pictorial representation. The attitude as articulated in the concept of *aniconism* draws from the monotheist faith that considers it forbidden to associate divinity with any form through visual depiction.[430] Drawing on the review of a broad range of literature on the subject, Ismail Soganci identifies the variation in the position of Islam in relation to images. The import of his analysis is that Islam permits the use of figural pictures in contexts not connected to divinity.[431] Since Boko Haram presents itself as an Islamic organisation, its attitude to figural representation produces what can be called "aniconic paradox." A sect engaged in Jihad, a *divine* cause as it were, is immersed in the production and circulation of not only still photographs of figures, but motions that bring the handiwork of Allah to a second life. While this issue requires a deeper interrogation which cannot be addressed here, it must be acknowledged that Boko Haram has transformed our understanding of vision and violence.

In the context of insurgency, the image has become as powerful as other means of mass destruction. It does more than record acts of violence. It causes it. So we are consumed by fear of attack before it is unleashed. In this sense, the image is a perpetrator. In spite of the fear generated by this visual relation, disparate groups in Nigeria feel challenged to draw closer to it. In what seems like a return of the gaze, they respond to the violence with the same image that produces it.

Fighting back

As photographic imaging is fashioned into a weapon of rebellion in Nigeria, the same is used to fight back. Soldiers and civilians alike came to the realisation that the insurgency had taken a visual turn and had to be confronted as such. The use of the image by the Nigerian army is located within the frame of what it calls

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[430] Titus Burckhardt, "The Void in Islamic Art," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (1970).

[431] Ismail Ozgur Soganci,"Islamic Aniconism: Making Sense of a Messy Literature." *Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education*, no. 1 (2004).

"counter-terrorism." Photography became the means through which the state security institutions sought to regain the confidence the masses had lost in them. So, through images, they made claims to victory over Boko Haram. But the visuality of the so-called counter-terrorist efforts produced the Nigerian army as another perpetrator of violence. Then, to complicate things further, the networked public has found two ways to fight back. First, they challenge the state as complicit in the insurgency by visually articulating its connection with the militants. Thus, they insist that the solution lies in understanding and cutting that tie. Secondly, the horrible images produced and circulated by and in relation to Boko Haram are believed to possess some power that can weaken the group when re-circulated or destroyed. The dilemma of the image comes into full view here: it also has to destroy the violence it produces. Let us begin with the exploits of the Nigerian army to understand this quest to "destroy destruction."

Nigeria launched its own "war on terror" – a mimicry of the international "counter-terrorist" operations initiated by the George W. Bush administration in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in the United States. Just as the policy occasioned the emergence of a new kind of war described by W.J.T. Mitchell as "the war of images,"[432] the fight against Boko Haram took on a visual turn. The image war between the rebel group and the Nigerian military was ignited by the report published by the *Cameroon Concord* claiming that Abubakar Shekau had been killed by the Cameroonian army.[433] A set of two portraits of Shekau were tendered as "evidence" (Figure 5.4). One shows him alive while the other purportedly presents him as dead. The claim which the Nigerian army denied seemed to affirm the growing public doubt in the capacity of the Nigerian troop to defeat Boko Haram.

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[432] Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*.

[433] "Cameroon Military Announces the Killing Of Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau," *Cameroon Concord*, September 21, 2014, http://cameroon-concord.com/news/item/765-cameroon-military-announces-the-killing-of-boko-haram-leader-abubakar-shekau.

Figure 5.4: Portrait of Abubakar Shekau in life and in death 1released by the Cameroonian army.

Retrieved from: *Cameroon Concord*, September 2014, contained in the article, "Cameroon Military Announces the Killing of Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau."

URL: http://cameroon-concord.com/news/item/765-cameroon-military-announces-the-killing-of-boko-haram-leader-abubakar-shekau.

Retrieval date: 15 November 2014.

Given the trans-national expansion of the insurgency, the armies of neighbouring countries such as Cameroon and Chad joined in the counter-insurgency operations. At one point, the rate at which the Cameroonian soldiers were killing the insurgents dominated the news and created the impression that they were more proactive than their Nigerian counterparts. The Nigerian military also had some internal crises to grapple with. For instance, in 2014, there were allegations of

mutiny that led to convictions and death sentences for soldiers.[434] These were even preceded by alleged hesitancy to take part in certain military operations. That attitude was in turn prompted by the complaint that soldiers were supplied with ammunition inferior to that of the insurgents. The political corruption behind this claim was later exposed in 2015, when Retired Colonel Sambo Dasuki, the National Security Adviser during the Jonathan administration, was indicted for mismanagement of 2.1 billion dollars (630 billion naira). The sum was earmarked for purchase of arms for the so-called counter-terrorist operations.[435]
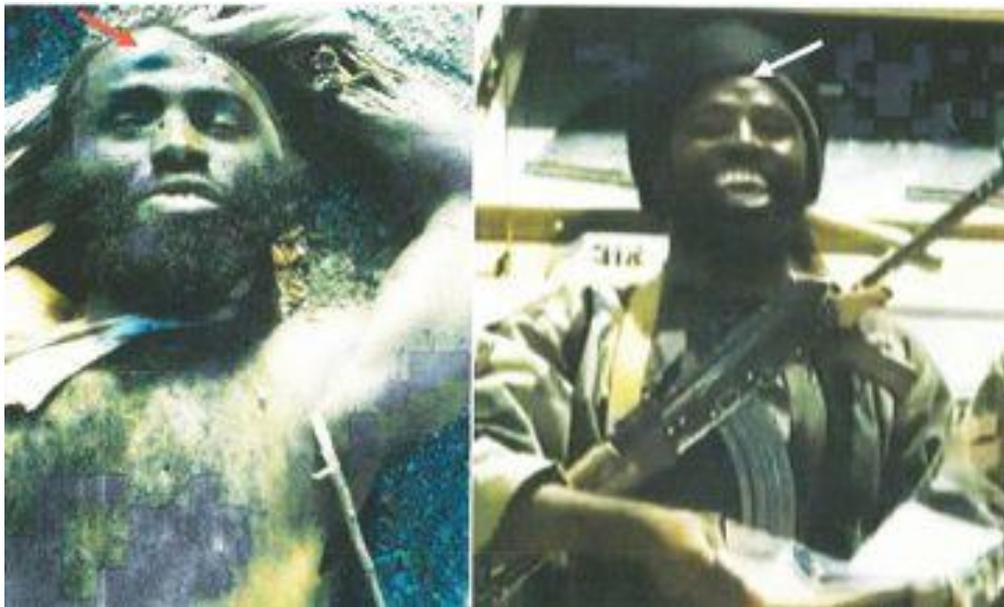
Figure 5.5: Portrait of Abubakar Shekau in life and in death II released by the Nigerian army.
Retrieved from: *Punch*, September 2014, contained in the article, "Military kills Abubakar Shekau 'again.'"
URL: http://www.punchng.com/news/military-kills-abubakar-shekau-again.
Retrieval date: 15 November 2014.

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[434] "Nigerian Soldiers Fighting Boko Haram Sentenced to Death for Mutiny," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/16/nigerian-soldiers-boko-haram-sentenced-death-mutiny.
[435] "Buhari Orders Arrest of Ex-NSA Dasuki, Others Indicted in Arms Contract Report," *Premium Times*, November 17, 2015, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/193398-%E2%80%8Bbuhari-orders-arrest-of-ex-nsa-dasuki-others-indicted-in-arms-contract-report.html.

In the midst of these issues, the purported killing of the leader of Boko Haram was proclaimed. The Nigerian military dismissed the declaration, but released videos and still photographs a few days later, also claiming to have killed Shekau. The still pictures (Figure 5.5) mirror the mode of presentation by the Cameroonian security personnel. In both instances, the images of "dead" Shekau share similarities: the exposed teeth, the hand position and the strip of cloth around the neck. The difference between them is mainly in the camera angle. What the Nigerian army has done differently is to introduce arrows into their images, inviting viewers to contemplate the facial features of the "dead" rebel leader. In this way, they can compare the image with the face that they have seen in his pictorial posts on the internet. There is no doubt about the difference between the depiction of the "living" Shekau in both groups of images. But the striking similarities tempt us to take the images as produced from the same source. Both sets of pictures reflect a similar visual quality and approach to presentation, namely the portrait format and arrangement in pairs.

What is significantly foregrounded here is the status of the photographic image as a site for claims of success in counter-insurgency. John Tagg argues that the capacity of the image or the camera to perform such task is predicated upon on "the power of the apparatuses of the local state which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the image…to stand as evidence or register a truth"[436] The power of the Nigerian army to declare victory over Boko Haram by means of Shekau's portraits complicated the counter-insurgency programme. Even if the rebel leader was killed in actual sense, it would not translate into the extermination of Boko Haram, just as the death of Mohammed Yusuf had failed to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, Shekau responded by releasing a video in which he claimed to be alive.[437] The video opens with what I describe as the "pageantry of militancy" that had become a paramount element of the group's multimedia production. Islamic background tunes, the chanting of the *Takbir* (Allahu Akbar) and waving of the Boko Haram flag are accompanied by Shekau's theatrical manipulation of heavy

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[436] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 246.
[437] That was not Shekau's only appearance in videos after his purpoted killing. Even in September 2016, the rebel leader released a video of himself which further supported his claim to be alive.

ammunition. In the spatial configuration which also became emblematic of his video addresses, Shekau is surrounded by his armed colleagues, all in military attire. He talks to the viewer, with a pamphlet in his hand from which he occasionally reads.[438] He brags that he is an invincible slayer. With the video, Boko Haram had committed the Nigerian army to intensive scrutiny of pictures as articulated in what Azoulay calls "professional gaze." It is the kind of gaze that "allows the viewer to organize the visible world and to control it by means of knowledge." It is "fundamental to…the regulation of certain kinds of action and to the analysis of situations and events." [439] On its website, the army announced that it had embarked on a special task of visual analysis to understand the claim made by Shekau, thus advancing the war that had turned visual:

> The Defence Headquarters is studying the claims made in the video purportedly released by the terrorists showing their leader Abubakar Shekau as dismissing his death. From immediate observation and what some online news outlets claimed to have seen, the video did not indicate when it was shot neither did it show any proof of life or currency such as screen time or date. The video also did not make any reference to anything that has happened since the impostor's reported death. It is also noteworthy that the air plane said to be mentioned in the video had been missing before he was killed. It should not surprise anybody if the terrorists decide to manipulate pictures, clone another Shekau or upload a pre-recorded video all in a bid to prove invincible. As far as we are concerned, the individual who was appearing in video and claiming to be the leader of the terrorist group was killed in the Kondunga battle in September. The resemblance of the corpse and that of the eccentric character was incontrovertible. His identity was equally corroborated by people who knew him before we announced his death.[440]

The passage evokes the Derridan notion of "artifactuality," and "actuvirtuality," which are concerned with the artificiality of "teletechnology."[441] The army reminds us that technologies of vision produce "naturalising effects" that seduce us into

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[438] Saharatv, "Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau Says He Is Alive and Well," *YouTube* video, 14.35, October 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zC0GJtoTttM.

[439] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 68.

[440] "The Purported Shekau Video in Circulation," *Nigerian Defence Headquarters*, October 2, 2014, http://defenceinfo.mil.ng/the-purported-shekau-video-in-circulation-2.

[441] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television Filmed Interview,* trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

accepting a simulacrum as an actual event. This mode of rejection of the image differs from that of Radovan Karadžić in the case of the Bosnia violence of 1994.[442] The Markele market explosion in Sarajevo that killed and injured many in February that year was dismissed by Karadžić (leader of the Bosnian Serbs who was later accused of war crimes) as a theatrical display conceived for the camera. His claim is a picture editing of another kind. It involves the manipulation of the *narrative* of the image. Digital technology enables even easier mutilation of both the narratives and the visual elements on an image. These possibilities appear to inform the Nigerian army's refutation of a medium which it also deploys in its operations and in the declaration of victory over Boko Haram.

The refutation points to a surge of anxiety heightened by the expansion of the visual war. The military was already grappling with the complexity of the visual exchange with Boko Haram and with the question of whether it was winning the war or not. But beyond this, the army and the state-endorsed Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) were accused of the brutalisation and gruesome murder of innocent civilians based on allegations of their connection with Boko Haram. Amnesty International produced filmic documentaries to corroborate this claim. For instance, the video entitled *Nigeria: Gruesome Footage Implicates Military in War Crimes* shows disturbing scenes of whipping, beheading and mass burial of victims.[443]

The comments attracted by the video on YouTube show it as contentious. For some people, it is the same Boko Haram rebels acting in military attire. They argue that the use of pictures to traumatise is fundamental to contemporary insurgency. The circulation of beheading videos is integral to the operations of Al-Qaeda and ISIS to which Boko Haram claimed to be affiliated.[444] Adoption of a similar mode of violence by the Nigerian sect would therefore not be unexpected. But on the other side of the debate, the military also perpetrates such atrocities. During the US

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[442] Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible*, 117. Karadžić is the former "head of the Bosnian Serb Republic" convicted of war crime.

[443] Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Gruesome Footage Implicates Military in War Crimes," YouTube video, 5.08, August 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA7SIbvEO64.

[444] Jay Sekulow, *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore* (New York: Howard Books, 2014).

military occupation of Iraq in 2003, the soldiers committed gruesome acts (including torture and rape) against the Iraqis in the Abu Ghraib prison. The perpetrators photographed themselves in self-congratulatory gestures, thus heightening the sadistic effect of their horrific acts. The visual framing has sometimes been analysed in the light of using photography as "an integral part of torture" by the military.[445] The Abu Ghraib scandal was not the last of its sort. Even a more gruesome incident took place in the Maywand district in 2010 during the war in Afghanistan. The US soldiers engaged in killing of unarmed civilians and tried to cover up the crime. Writing about this, Feldman concludes that counter-insurgency is associated with the tendency of turning unarmed citizens into terrorists through "a photopolitics of forensic phantasms."[446] Going by the negotiation around the video under discussion, Feldman's conclusion applies to the Nigerian army although it denied the atrocity. Yet, many accepted it as testimonial to the replication of violence by the state security institution that has failed to combat insurgency.

Photography also became a way to expand the narrative of complicity of the Nigerian political elites in the militancy. In Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff employed the insurgents as thugs during the 2003 governorship election that he eventually won. As previously agreed with the group, he appointed one of them (Alhaji Buji Foi) as Commissioner of Religious Affairs, but only allowed *partial*, rather than *full* implementation of the Sharia Law in Borno. Sheriff consequently fell out with Boko Haram which then withdrew Foi from the state cabinet.[447] As Sheriff's image became symbolic of the intercourse between Boko Haram and the Nigerian state, the members of the civilian population questioned the friendship between Sheriff and the then President Jonathan. Consider the photograph in Figure 5.6.

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[445] Kari Anden-Papadopoulos, "The Abu Ghraib Torture Photographs: New Frames, Visual Culture, and the Power of Images," *Journalism* 9, no. 1 (2008), 13.

[446] Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible*, 86.

[447] Freedom Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014).

Figure 5.6: Sheriff at the meeting between the presidents of Nigeria (Goodluck Jonathan) and Chad (Idriss Deby) in 2014.
Retrieved from: *Sahara Reporters*, 9 September 2014, contained in the article, "President Jonathan "Meeting Haram" With Alleged Boko Haram Financier, Former Borno Gov. Ali Modu Sheriff in Chad."
URL: http://saharareporters.com/2014/09/09/president-jonathan-meeting-haram-alleged-boko-haram-financier-former-borno-gov-ali-modu.
Retrieval date: 15 September 2014.

In 2014, Jonathan (third figure from the left in the picture) met with the Chadian President Idriss Deby (figure on right) to discuss the Boko Haram menace. Although he was not a serving functionary in the Jonathan administration, Sheriff travelled to Chad to receive the then president and to attend the meeting. His appearance in the foreground of the photograph taken in the event is a visual parallel of the public attention and criticism brought by his participation in the session. Wole Soyinka wonders why Sheriff "had the confidence to smuggle himself into the welcoming committee of another nation," and made himself "a co-host with the president of that nation."[448] Jonathan's relationship with Sheriff

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[448] "Soyinka Flays Jonathan on #BringBackJonathan Campaign, Modu Sheriff," *Vanguard,* September 13, 2014, http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/09/soyinka-explodes-flays-jonathan-bringbackjonathan-modu-sherrif/#sthash.dcwxvISJ.dpuf.

corroborated the public suspicion of his administration as complicit in the Boko Haram insurgency.

Meanwhile, the meeting also implicated Idriss Deby as commentators drew attention to links between his administration and Boko Haram. Pérouse de Montclos notes that "before 2008 …Chadian ministers of Finance and Transports, Abbas Mahamat Tolli (Deby's nephew) and Abdelkerim Souleyman Terio, were said to attend Friday prayers at the Boko Haram mosque in Maiduguri and allegedly gave alms to Mohammed Yusuf."[449] In essence, those who interact with the images circulated in relation to insurgency in Nigeria bring their knowledge of these narratives to bear on how they interpret the photographs. Their position is that Boko Haram can only be defeated if the political elites cut their ties with the movement.

The users of the online platform deploy the image to challenge Boko Haram in yet another way. They believe that the photographs with gory contents can be re-circulated to return the horrible gaze back to those who produced it. Again, the destruction of the pictures would weaken the insurgents. On Facebook, a photograph of bullet-ridden bodies suspected to be victims of a Boko Haram attack was shared and accompanied by the following lines:

> It's time these sort of pics are viral for a change...it's time we
> psychologically terrorise the terrorists and showcase them for what they are,
> as despicable barbarians, rather than boost their misplaced disgusting ego
> and infamous profile with pics of their exploits and murdered innocent
> victims.[450]

These words reflect the conviction that to maintain a receiving stance in relation to the "visual terror" from Boko Haram is gratifying to the rebels. But if the gaze is returned through re-circulation of the images, the "terrorists" become the "terrorised." The Facebook activist who posted the image told me that insurgents can be likened to the mythological vampires that cringe at the sight of their reflection in the mirror. They can be defeated with the same psychological

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[449] Pérouse de Montclos, "Boko Haram and politics," 141.

[450] William-West Onye, "It's Time These Sort of Pics Are Viral for a Change," *Facebook*, July 5, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/onye.williamwest/posts/10152579982009357.

devastation they bring upon people through the use of the image.[451] A similar mode of thinking comes with the comments on the earlier cited picture of roast chicken packaged with a piece of newspaper bearing Shekau's image. The Facebook user who posted the photograph is asked to eat both the chicken and Shekau's picture. This would make the rebel leader fall into the hands of the military.[452] Although laced with humour, there is something of photography working "as a fetish" here.[453] Heike Behrend argues that both in the West and in Africa, photography is historically associated with magical practices of "healing" and "harming."[454] Drawing on her field research in Uganda and Kenya, what she calls "photo magic" drives witchcraft and certain Christian practices in Africa. As the image can act as a substitute for its referent, certain procedures involving the use of a photograph can heal the individual pictured in it. The mutilation or destruction of the image can hurt the photographed as well. The harming aspect of Behrend's argument applies in some ways to the question of insurgency in Nigeria. The "destruction," and "re-circulation" of Boko Haram-related images, to return the gaze to the producer of the depicted violence, constitute a form of photographic power or magic. The unarmed ordinary citizens are armed with "photo magic" with which they confront the "vampire" of Boko Haram.

These instances indicate that the response to insurgency in Nigeria is pictorially constituted. Photography enables a kind of warfare in which both soldiers and civilians are privileged to fight. But each party is guided by a different purpose. The image is a site where the army strives to complete the unfinished war against militancy and declares itself triumphant. For the virtually networked civilians, they argue that the political elites and the army are complicit in the mayhem they claim to challenge. Thus, they demand that all ties with Boko Haram be cut. On the other

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[451] William-West, Onye, face-to-face interview with the author, Nsukka, October 2015.

[452] Chinedu Chukwurah, August 12, 2015 (11:22 p.m.), comment on Maie Okafor, "Wow...! What Suya!," *Facebook*, August 12, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=890290194353042&set=rpd.100001162104387&type=3&theater

[453] Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (1985): 81.

[454] Heike Behrend, "Photo Magic: Photographs in Practices of Healing and Harming in East Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no 2 (2003).

hand, they ascribe to the gruesome image the capacity to weaken its producer (the militants) when the image is destroyed or re-circulated.

Conclusion

The Boko Haram movement in Nigeria demonstrates how digital infrastructure shapes photography's relation to political violence. The insurgents, the state, and the ordinary citizens enter a complex form of interaction through photographic production and dissemination. The interaction as argued in this chapter constitutes a new mode of war in which the image plays conflicting roles. It is deployed by the rebels to horrify the masses and to call down destruction upon them. The Nigerian military embarks on counter operations using the image as well, which also serves as the battleground where victory is declared against the militants. The rest of other digitally networked "fighters" perceive both the insurgents and the state as one entity that should be disentangled to defeat the militancy. That perception is informed by the narratives of patronage and complicity of politicians, and is visually articulated. The photograph is also treated as a fetish, imbued with the power to destroy Boko Haram. Considering these varied forms of deployment, I conclude that in the context of insurgency, the image is in a state of dilemma.

This idea is an important new perspective in the debate around vision and violence in Africa. As contemporary political conflicts become intertwined with digital culture, it is important to examine how photography is implicated. It is no longer about the domination of visual production by few, such as the 20th century colonial authorities and the heads and military forces of embattled post-independence states. The democratisation of image production and dissemination brings dissident groups, the state and ordinary people together in warfare. The enactment of a visual war of such magnitude amidst chronically poor infrastructure as discussed in chapter 2 is emblematic of the belief that the image can change the Nigerian situation. The next chapter examines the kind of change photographic and social media activism has brought to Nigeria.

CHAPTER SIX
The Shapes of Transformation

Introduction

The preceding chapters have dwelt on the various ways photography is used on Facebook and other social media sites to challenge injustice in Nigeria. A number of examples have also shown the reactions of the political elites who constitute the targets of the civil movement. Their most obvious response is to take part in the online conversations mainly to exonerate themselves. This chapter addresses the bigger question of whether the online activism has changed anything in Nigeria. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of the 2010s, the organisation of which depended profoundly on social media, provide us with examples of "extreme" possibilities. The presidents of both countries lost their positions in the course of the struggle.[455] Nigeria has not had a revolutionary experience in the explosive sense it occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. But that does not suggest that online resistance has not had effects. This chapter establishes a "Nigerian revolution" founded on disparate examples of socio-political transformation that have direct links to social media mobilisations.

To begin, the concept of civil struggle itself has been transformed. As found elsewhere, Nigerians can be sensitised online about injustice, and they organise themselves in geographical spaces to resist it. When the civil movement receives international support, it serves to reinforce the efforts of the activists. Possible interventions are brokered to address the unfavourable conditions behind the public agitation. These have collectively contributed to some shift in the structure of power in Nigeria. These possibilities speak to the debates around the convergence of collective action theory and the technologies of information and communication. In an age during which digital and internet-based practices mediate the enactment

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[455] The deposed president of Tunisia is Ben Ali Dégage and that of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak.

of civil protest, we are drawn to the examination of how differently collective goals get actualised.

Structured into four parts, the chapter begins with a section on "virtual public conscientisation." It contextualises Facebook as a site of public enlightenment where individuals are made conscious of the inequalities to which they are subjected. Personal encounters of injustice are brought together to form a collage of experiences evaluated through conversation around them. The shared awareness of injustice shapes the understanding of what has to be resisted and what the protesters expect of the public officials. In the second section, it is argued that with its visuality, Facebook as a site of civil struggle aids social movement constituted in physically-enacted human actions. So, protests conceived in digital and photographic form materialise into real world events. In terms of articulating the driving force of the movement, understanding its expansion and addressing issues of crackdown, the organising is sustained through a digital structure of information flow. Next, the use of photographs on social media helps to bring the attention of the world to the challenges facing Nigerians. The image becomes a site in which individuals and institutions distanced from the site of conflict share the distress of the afflicted. As the image circulates on the internet, it mobilises different kinds of intervention. The humanitarian gestures have their own shortcomings, but they assure the Nigerian activists that their voice is heard. Lastly, the section on "disturbing the structures of power" accounts for the capacity of online protest to affect actual change on the Nigerian political landscape. Goodluck Jonathan's failure in the 2015 election is used to illustrate this point. The issues addressed in this chapter are crucial because they help us to place the Nigerian experience in the larger picture of how social media impacts on contemporary politics. Again, the centrality of photography in the investigation adds to the scarce literature on online activism in Africa.

Virtual public conscientisation

Travelling in 2015 by a public bus along the Enugu-Onitsha high way, I witnessed a heated debate reflecting the diverseness of people's perception of the Nigerian state failure. The argument was ignited by a passenger's expression of frustration

for the terrible state of the road. While some supported him, others argued that it was not bad as such, a shocking view I must say. They remarked that some roads in other parts of Nigeria are even worse. Since it was in the dry season, we could travel on this one if the driver drove carefully. We would only have to content with dust and prolonged travel time. There are two possible explanations for the position of those on the defensive side. First, like the dubious politicians, it could be that they benefit from the pitiable state of the nation's infrastructure. Second, perhaps born and brought up in an infrastructurally dilapidated Nigeria, they grew up with no idea of how else the world works.

This anecdote is important to our diagnosis of the workings of social movement in Nigeria. It allows us to understand how the masses arrive at the collective decision to embark on protest. While many are consumed by agitation for a total revolution against the failed state, others do not show such concern. They tend to take the Nigerian situation as a model of how the world is organised. One significant impact of Facebook activism is that it helps to awaken the consciousness of the people to the need to demand change. The social networking site is a space where discontent about the state of the nation is made contagious. The networked public sensitises its members by first, sharing personal experiences of injustice articulated in photographic form. Second, they draw attention to how other societies are run and insist that the Nigerian political elites borrow a leaf from their book. Again, notable citizens who display attributes of integrity are identified and used to project the idea of what it means to be a public servant.

In thinking about conscientisation, the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is an effective point to start with. He coined the term "critical consciousness" in the course of his intellectual advocacy work on education as a revolutionary tool. He believes that education enables "a new awareness" of self and inspires individuals "to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves." Then, they are moved to act, to challenge the forms of denial in the society and to transform

it.[456] Although Freire's theory is epistemologically located in the field of education, it applies to a broad range of areas – including online resistance.

Consider first the sharing of personal experiences. Facebook has emerged in Nigeria as a platform where individual encounters with acts of subjugation are brought into public discussion. Reading Arendt, Azoulay explores in the civil context the relationship between the private and the public. It is through one's private space in the world that one enters the public domain.[457] Accordingly, civil movement with its public face is partly a collection of personal agitations. I substitute the word "private" with "personal" to suggest how an event that may involve many and enacted not necessarily behind closed doors, is brought on to Facebook as an individual experience. On the virtual space, the reported events interact among themselves to produce a collective desire for revolt. If they originally occurred in public spaces, their enactment on Facebook becomes a movement from one form of public sphere to another. Further, as illustrated with figure 6.1, there is a complex connection between these forms of spaces. The image portrays a personal encounter (an act of harassment) in a public place that found its way to the public domain of Facebook.

The photograph in which we see a long queue of cars at a fuel station relates an incident that occurred before the image was taken. The use of the picture to tell a story of what rather happened outside of its frame calls to mind Ariella Azoulay's concept of "untaken photographs." She argues that despite the ubiquitous presence of the camera to frame even fleeting events such as volcanic eruptions, certain atrocities committed by oppressive regimes are never photographed. The image available to the public could be that taken after the calamity. Thus, it is only through reconstruction that we get a glimpse of what actually occurred.[458]

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[456] Paul Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1993): 11.

[457] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 139.

[458] "Untaken Photographs" was the title of the award-winning exhibition curated by Azoulay in 2010 in Galeria Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Displayed were the archival photographs of six photographers that drew from the "regime-made" catastrophe in the 1948 Palestine. See "Untaken Photographs" *Cargocollective*, May 25, 2015, http://cargocollective.com/AriellaAzoulay/Untaken-Photographs.

Figure 6.1: Queuing for fuel at the Oando Filling Station (Nsukka, Enugu State). Retrieved from: Facebook, 1 May 2014, posted by George Agbo with the text, "This photo was taken yesterday after I was accused of taking a shot at the Oando Filling Station, Nsukka, Enugu State Nigeria."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=636598166422035&set=a.6081210059 36418.1073741825.100002155738514&type=1.
Retrieval date: 20 May 2014.

The concept was further developed in her later work. To reconstruct the story of a "photograph not taken," "we would…have to practice *civil imagination*," in addition to using "other visual and textual materials." [459] The above photograph is about another which if taken would have shown us a personal experience associated with the crisis in the Nigerian oil economy.

Fuel scarcity which has evolved into a perpetual crisis in the country struck in April 2014. It created pandemonium at a filling station at Nsukka in the South-east of Nigeria. The chaos and the act of injustice that produced it constitute the photograph that I could not take, but which plays rather as a cinematic form in my

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[459] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 232.

mind. With my imaginative eyes, I can still see motor vehicles, rickshaws and motorbikes in long queues, some stretching up to a kilometre away from the fuel station. After some hours of waiting, people get off their vehicles and walk into the fuel station to find out why the queue has remained stagnant. The shortly constituted crowd is infuriated by the insistence of the pump attendants that motorists first purchase engine oil as the prerequisite to have fuel sold to them. Yet, the product is sold at a higher-than-the-official-price rate to other buyers who have come with gallons. This duplicity aggravates the exasperation of the crowd and heated scuffle ensues between the people and the staff of the fuel station. I bring out my camera phone and hardly have I aimed it at the scene when one of the pump attendants catches sight of me. I am immediately apprehended for a photograph not taken. The confrontation speaks to a number of issues. First, it buttresses the fact that the use of the camera generates fear in certain situations. It has as Azoulay puts it, the

> ability to create a commotion in an environment merely by being there – the camera can draw certain happenings to itself as if with a magnet, or even bring them into being, while it can also distance events, disrupt them or prevent them from occurring. The camera has the capacity through its sheer presence to set all of these effects in motion without even taking a single shot.[460]

The fear expressed by the management of the filling station is apparently connected to how the photograph (if taken) of a scene created by its act of injustice would be used. Secondly, the untaken photograph is no less powerful than that which is taken. The one described above had an enormous effect. The commotion it created pressured the Oando staff to drop their unfair condition for the sale of petrol. Further, the issue of harassment in the public space is foregrounded by the incident. Don Mitchell's assertion that the "public space is increasingly (being) privatized (and) brought under greater control"[461] is demonstrated at the filling station. Privatisation in this context underlines the sense in which individuals claim to have the power to determine what happens in certain spaces in Nigeria. They

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[460] Ibid., 19.

[461] Don Mitchell, "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85, no. 1 (1995): 132.

subject others to various forms of intimidation. In another sense, such harassment results from the failure of the government to carry out its responsibilities. While the controversy in the filling station raged, fuel was sold to others in gallons at a black market price.[462] Independent petroleum marketers operate outside the price regulation set up by the state. So, as the government fails to make them comply with the regulation, the associated injustices have also gone out of its control.

The conversation on the above photograph indicates a collective sense of frustration around the oil crisis which has become part of Nigeria's daily economic life. Ordinary Nigerians see themselves as hapless people suffering in every area of life under a group of selfish politicians. They demand accountability in governance and project that desire onto the photographs of exemplary public officials. And such ones are quite few.

One of them is Late Dora Akunyili (figure 6.2). A professor of pharmacology, Akunyili was in 2001 appointed Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). The appointment took place at a time Nigeria's public health was under the threat of drug counterfeiting. In the course of that national assignment, Akunyili became an iconic figure, representing everything opposed to the personalities of the corrupt politicians. During her tenure, the sale and circulation of fake and substandard drugs in Nigeria dropped significantly. Writing on Akunyili's profile, Anne Harding highlights her patriotism by stepping back to the antecedence that earned her the position as the head of NAFDAC. Her employment with the South Eastern Zone of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) between 1997 and 2000 coincided with the time of the Obasanjo administration. PTF released some money for her medical bill in a hospital in London. As it was confirmed that she did not require surgery which was the main purpose for the financial support, she returned the money. Her boss was shocked at that gesture and recommended her to Obasanjo for the post at NAFDAC.[463]

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[462] The official price of a litre of fuel as at then was 97 Naira. The black market price was usually 100 Naira and above.

[463] Anne Harding, "Profile: Dora Akunyili: Scourge of Nigerian Drug Counterfeiters," *The Lancet* 367, no. 9521 (2006).

Figure 6.2: Portrait of Dora Akunyili.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 7 June 2014, posted by Chidi Eze with the text,
"Found this very difficult to believe; so this is life." The portrait came with a
Sahara Reporters article entitled, "Breaking News: Dora Akunyili is Dead."
URL: https://www.facebook.com/chidi.eze.566/posts/802816746396504.
Retrieval date: 3 July 2014.

The fascination with Akunyili's integrity derived from the rareness of such
personal traits among people in privileged positions in Nigeria. Undeterred by
assassination threats, and without succumbing to bribery, Akunyili embarked on
massive confiscation and destruction of counterfeit food and medicine. Sadly, in

June 2014, years after her service as Director of NAFDAC and later as the Minister of Information, the news of Akunyili's death came like a bombshell. An online article that bore her portrait was shared on Facebook. She was presented as a model whom the activists would want other government officials to emulate.

Akunyili's portrait and an "untaken" photograph of an encounter at a fuel station have been used to show how conscientisation works in the context of activism in Nigeria. The starting point of civil protest is the realisation that there exists an unfair socio-political condition that has to change. Individual experiences of injustice are shared and discussed on the online platform. And the networked individuals contemplate the biography of selfless public figures (who are sadly quite few in Nigeria). These are done to achieve a considerably unanimous perception of inequality. The idea of mass protest is premised on the public acknowledgement of the existence of unfairness. Social media mobilisation has transformed how Nigerians perceive injustice. The online relation constitutes activism in its own right as generally argued in this writing. On the other hand, it influences how the conventional civil resistance is enacted. This is explored in the next section.

Between materiality and immateriality

Social media tools could serve as self-contained means of civil movement. Still, they "are not a replacement for real-world action but a way to coordinate it." [464] They have transformed the mobilisation of social movement known conventionally to be constituted through protest marches, burning of tyres, occupation of space, and similar activities. In 2012, the "suffering and smiling"[465] Nigerians known for their capacity to cope with harsh living conditions took part in what became one of the largest protests in the history of the country.[466] It was prompted by the removal of fuel subsidy by the Goodluck administration. The event is examined to show

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[464] Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."

[465] There is a popular perception among Nigerians that they are very resilient. They live in difficult socio-economic conditions that characterised decades of military rule and have continued in the so-called democracy. They somehow find ways to cope. Even when they do protest, it is hardly sustained as to have revolutionary impacts. The Occupy Nigeria movement which came to break the jinx was made possible due to its link with social media.

[466] Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*.

how social media protest with its photographic practices activates and expands the conventional forms of civil movement. Defying the notion of resilience among the people of Nigeria, the event alerts the political elites to the transformation of the way their misrule is challenged. It is an intersection of materiality and immateriality in which the image plays a significant role. Drawing on the analysis of the Occupy protest, it can be claimed that social media activism operates as a means through which conventional protest activities are conceived and organised. On the virtual platform, images are the bearers of codes and signs that define the driving force of the struggle and the demand made by the participants. The online flow of information during the struggle helps to relate the progression of the movement and to sustain the steadfastness of the activists.

To begin with the genesis of the Occupy Nigeria movement, the then President Jonathan on the first day of January 2012, presented to Nigerians what was sarcastically regarded as "a new year gift."[467] He announced the removal of fuel subsidy by his administration. The implication was the increase in the price of petrol from 65 naira to 140 naira per litre. As the petroleum products used in Nigeria were refined elsewhere, the government claimed that it subsidised their prices on their importation into the country. It argued that the huge amount of money spent on the subsidy in turn enriched the "cabal," a few individuals controlling the oil sector. So, its removal "had become inevitable to avert the collapse of Nigerian economy" and would tackle the fraud in the sector.[468] The funds recovered from the subsidy removal would be put into infrastructural and human capital development. That argument was severely criticised. For some critics, the policy was but a ploy by the government to enrich itself and further impoverish the poor masses. They insisted that there was no such a thing as fuel subsidy in the first place. Others argued that it was a scam closely linked to the

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[467] The idea of "gift" became common in the public, media and academic discussions of the incident as it occurred in a day marked by the exchange of material gifts as part of the New Year's celebration. The sarcastic use of "gift" here underscores the insensitivity of the government to the plight of the masses. Rather than improve the economic life of the people, the Jonathan administration was perceived to have taken a step to make it more difficult.

[468] Anthony Obayi Onyishi, Okechukwu Innocent Eme, Ikechukwu Eke Jeffrey Emeh, "The Domestic and International Implications of Fuel Subsidy Removal Crisis in Nigeria," *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 1, no. 6 (2012): 58.

corruption that had destabilised the local refineries so that Nigeria would rely on importation of refined petroleum products, thereby enriching the importers. With domestic refining, they maintained, there would be no need for subsidy or its removal, and the products would be available to Nigerians at reduced prices. These controversies began at the end of 2011 when the government made open its intention. Yet, the decision was not rescinded. Once it was announced on January 1, the following day, a multitude of Nigerians took to the street in protest. The movement was dubbed "Occupy Nigeria."

The name alludes to the "occupy movement," a wave of protest involving the occupation of public spaces by disenchanted masses. Acquiring global attention beginning from the Occupy Wall Street of September 2011 in New York City, it became a way in which protesters gather to make revolutionary demands. In like manner, beginning from 2 January 2012, Nigerians gathered en masse in Lagos and later in other parts of the country for protest. Labour organisations embarked on strike. Offices were shut down. The protest was enacted in geographical spaces, but it had a virtual dimension which is common to most occupy movements. Larkin notes that internet technology enables the mediation of "exchange over distance, bringing different people, objects, and spaces into interaction and forming the base on which to operate…social systems."[469] In a similar remark, Jeffrey Juris refers particularly to social media as crucial to the mobilisation of "#Occupy everywhere" as he puts it.[470] While "everywhere" in that formulation suggests how widespread that mode of social movement has become, the hashtag (#) is a sign that has come to mark the connection with the virtual world.

Such connection was explicit in the Occupy Nigeria movement. In the book in which Branch and Mampilly puts the movement within the broader context of uprising in Africa, they fail to acknowledge the online relations behind it. Moving back into the history of the Nigerian people's frustration with the failure of the state, they regard the protest as a trigger that unleashed the accumulated anger. They also examine its organising, the coalition that enabled it, its fragility, and the

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[469] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2013): 330.
[470] Jeffrey S. Juris, Reflection on #Occupy everywhere," 259.

ultimate failure of the protest.[471] For me, it is a grave omission not to recognise how the online media and photography impacted on the uprising. The protest with its fascinating visual dimensions was not only largely organised and co-ordinated on social media, it was conceived on that platform. Certain Facebook groups named "Occupy Nigeria" were created a couple of months before the historic protest which took up the same name. By name, visual symbolism and purpose, they laid the foundation for the momentous event. The logos of the Facebook groups draw from the graphic rendering of the human fist, with only slight variations in form and colour (figure 6.3).

Since the sixteenth century, the hand has been used as a political metaphor, created into different "agitational gestures," to use Gottfried Korff's phrasing. Korff identifies three of such gestures: "the clasped hands," "the clenched fist," and "the Roman and German salute."[472] He analyses them in the historical context of workers' struggle and political revolution in parts of Europe such as Germany in Hitler's time and France during the revolution. The clenched fist in particular evolved to have close ties with forms of solidarity that underline strikes and protests. Actuated by rage and discontent, the struggle most often climax in violence either as a further expression of anger by the protesters or their encounter with the authorities they challenge. In the birthing of Occupy Nigeria on Facebook, the image of the clenched fist was mainly a representation of solidarity. It is "solidarity as group interaction based on shared values and beliefs."[473]

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[471] Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (London: Zed Books, 2015).
[472] Gottfried Korff, "From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker's Hand," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 42 (1992): 70.
[473] Aafke Elisabeth Komter, "The Disguised Rationality of Solidarity: Gift Giving in Informal Relations," *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 25 (2001):385.

Figure 6.3: Logos of different Occupy Nigeria Facebook groups.
Retrieved from: Facebook.
Retrieval date: 30 May 2015.

Scholars acknowledge the role of the image in civil movements and the way it constructs group solidarity. In a lecture delivered by Jessica Winegar at the School for Advanced Research (SAR), Santa Fe, in 2011, she locates the image within the larger cultural productions that constitute the language of the Egyptian revolution. Like poetry, performance, music and humour (jokes), the image bears signs that organise the underlying sensibilities of the protest movement. It is used to show how the people articulate their exasperation, how they seek to mobilise others to

join in the cause, and how they bring attention to their demand.[474] In addition, the image exposes the brutality of the state in reaction to the uprising. Counter-resistance violence further corroborates the broader unfair treatment citizens receive in the hands of their leaders.[475] When circulated on social media as part of civil struggle, the image plays all of these roles and even does more. As I will later explain with examples, the interaction engendered by the images on Facebook for instance indicates how the protesters strengthen their resolve to change the status quo even at the height of violent crackdown. For me, such mobilisation of firmness is at the core of the meaning of solidarity.

The Occupy Nigeria online groups that heralded the offline enactment were created with such strong sense of solidarity that however transcended intra-protest group context. It rather drew on a broader international framework that marks the 21st century civil struggle. The first post of one of the earliest Occupy Nigeria Facebook groups appeared on 18 October 2011. It was an excerpt from the About page of the OccupyWall Street movement of September 2011, which in turn drew inspiration form the uprising called Arab Spring. The emergence of Occupy Nigeria a month after OccupyWall Street and the adaptation of its ideas speak of a shared concern about the avarice of global politics and capitalism. [476] In Nigeria, the oil sector is a site of that rapacity. Another Occupy Nigeria Facebook page also opened in October 2011 resisted the condition by directly addressing the removal of fuel subsidy:

> Fellow Nigerians, this is a wakeup call to you all of my generation, lets flow in to the street to tell our leaders that we (are) no longer going to be docile, we can no longer take everything they give, we must end the era of forcing iniquities down our throat. We must now stand up for our right and do what Libyans, Egyptians, Yemenis, Syrians, Americans, British, and recently Italians are doing to make their wish come through. We will decide

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[474] Jessica Winegar, "Creativity and Revolution: Egypt at a Crossroads," SAR School for Advanced Research video, 01:05:36, October 6, 2011, https://sarweb.org/?membership_lecture_jessica_winegar.

[475] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012). pp. 8-32

[476] Occupy Nigeria, "Occupy Nigeria is a people-powered movement that began on October 17, 2011," *Facebook*, October 18, 2011, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=161733580587708&id=160388144055585.

on a date and move to occupy any government installation. Do not let them force this bitter pill of Oil Subsidy down our throat.[477]

A couple of thoughts can be drawn from these lines. First, the protagonists of the struggle were influenced by the wave of occupy movements that greeted the 2010s, spilling over from one country to another. The last line in the opening paragraph of Branch and Mampilly's chapter on Occupy Nigeria is evocative of the seemingly infectious attribute of this mode of uprising. They write: "The Occupy movement had arrived in Nigeria."[478] Just as it happened in Egypt, Tunisia, and some other places, and this is the second point, it did arrive through the virtual space of social media. The Occupy Nigeria offline mass protest was initiated on Facebook. The group began to mobilise action against the government for the particular reason associated with fuel subsidy removal a few months before the public announcement of the policy and the resulting resistance. It was initiated at a time the government had publicised its plan as if to test the reaction of the masses about a decision that would not be withdrawn. In the midst of the controversy that erupted at that moment, the social media group was in essence inviting the masses to reject the move and to rise up in protest if their voice was not heard. The government remained resolute and implemented the policy. So, the masses took to the street as set out on Facebook. The civil movement adopted the same name – Occupy Nigeria – which was conceptualised and given to it on social media. More Facebook groups emerged, most of them named "Occupy Nigeria."[479] Some were created on the first day of the offline protest (January 2, 2012) and others a few days after. Images and texts pertaining to the civil movement began to be circulated from its inception and would subsequently continue to address broader socio-political concerns in Nigeria.

Once the protest had begun, further activities were arranged on Facebook. On 3 January 2012, a programme was drawn on one of the Occupy Nigeria pages with a

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[477] Occupy Nigeria, "Fellow Nigerians, this is a wake up call to you all of my generation," *Facebook*, October 22, 2011,
https://www.facebook.com/OccupyNigeriaGroup/posts/302275939786853.

[478] Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*, 86.

[479] Nationwide Anti-fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategy and Protest is an example of the groups with different naming.

list of eleven cities where the protest would be held. Date, time and the exact locations were stated.[480] Through that medium, the spatial scope of the movement was defined. It was intended to spread across the major cities in the various regions of Nigeria. Indeed, in a couple of days, the protest that began in Lagos rapidly swept through the country. Facebook was used to report the expansion of the movement. The circulated reports indicate not only how the protest was territorially spreading in Nigeria and in the diaspora, they brought to public knowledge the groups of people in support of the movement. A photograph from Warri shows a group of protesters who represent the branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in the city (figure 6.4). Similar images from other cities have shown that the union was among the key supporters of the struggle.[481]

The photograph helps to show that the movement was not restricted to the urban poor whom Ruchi Chaturvedi has argued to be powerful agents of revolutionary actions in Africa.[482] Indeed, the informal proletariats are so crucial that they most often champion the movement. But here, in addition to its circulation within the paradigm of citizen photojournalism through which updates about the protest are disseminated, the photographic image suggests the involvement of the elites in the struggle. In this regard, the Ojota Gani Fawehinmi Park was a remarkable site in relation to Occupy Nigeria. The park which was named after the late popular Lagos radical civil rights lawyer was the initial meeting point for the protesters. Then they flowed into the streets for the activist rallies. [483] There was a nationwide strike by the organised labour. Banks, airports, seaports, and other establishments

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[480] Occupy Nigeria Movement, *Facebook*, January 3, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/pages/Occupy-Nigeria-Movement/318278821540428.

[481] The NBA is but a member of a larger organisation – the Trade Union Congress – that took part in the protests. Other mega groups include the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and civil society organisations (which include the Save Nigeria Group (SNG), the Federation of Informal Workers' Organisations of Nigeria (FIWON), and Joint Action Front (JAF).

[482] Ruchi Chaturvedi, "Agentive Capacities, Democratic Possibilities, and the Urban Poor: Rethinking Recent Popular Protests in West Africa," *International Journal of Politics*, *Culture, and Society*, 29, no. 3 (2016).

[483] Innocent Chiluwa, "Occupy Nigeria 2012: A Critical Analysis of Facebook Posts in the Fuel Subsidy Removal Protests," *CLINA* 1, no.1 (2015): 51.

were shut down, resulting in "a complete paralysis of economic activities" in Nigeria.[484]

Figure 6.4: The Occupy Nigeria protest by the Nigerian Bar Association (Warri Branch)
Retrieved from: Facebook, 6 January 2012, posted by Occupy Nigeria with the text, "Protesters take over Warri." The picture came with a *Vanguard* newspaper article entitled, "Protesters take over Warri."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=228271247250052&id=160388144055585.
Retrieval date: 31 May 2015.

The enormous impact of social media on the civil movement motivates us to revisit Mancur Olson's notion of collective action. In his conceptualisation of how common interests drive the goals of groups of individuals, he argues that the smaller the size of the group, the more effective it would be in organising itself and in pursuing its purpose.[485] The Occupy Nigeria example destabilises Olson's proposition. With social media, collective actions can be efficiently articulated and

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[484] Ibid., 51.

[485] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (New York: Schochen Books, 1965).

executed, with a large number of people involved. I concur with Bimber, Flanagin and Stohl's thoughts in the article "Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment." They ask us to rethink the "group theory" in an era when technology has transformed the ways groups organise themselves for action. As they put it, "scholars should be asking…whether the theoretical ideal (such as promoted by Olson) fits the rich array of collective actions now present in public life."[486] I think it does not. There has been a successful mobilisation of large groups of protesters in Egypt, Tunisia and in Nigeria as argued here. Even if Olson's argument was relevant as at when it was made, times have changed. Digital technology and the internet have made it possible for multitudes of people to organise themselves effectively for a common cause.

The effectiveness of social media in group action is located in its complex structure of the information economy. As shown above, it facilitates in significant ways the initiation, planning and real time update on the activities of activist movement. Through the information flow, expressions of solidarity come in various forms to boost the confidence of the protesters. The reports of the Occupy Nigeria protests as they took place in different locations came with commendation to the commitment of the participants. On 5 January 2012, the protest in Kano was reported to be "an inspiration to all of us." The activists "occupied all day and night (leaving the comfort of their houses and beds) and forgetting ethnic and religious divides." [487]

The protesters had more to contend with than ethnic and religious differences, and the discomfort of the weather in the outdoor spaces. They faced a more threatening situation – a violent crackdown by the government. Lives were lost allegedly to police firearms. Tensions were heightened. The protesters sought vengeance against the police in the case of the killing of Ademola Aderinto for instance. But they later retreated for fear of the escalation of violence.[488] They eventually

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[486] Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin and Cynthia Stohl, "Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 4 (2005): 366.
[487] Occupy Nigeria Movement, *Facebook*, January 5, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=319656774735966&id=318278821540428.
[488] Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*, 104.

resorted to circulation of the images of the deceased as a means of self-consolation and reinforcement in the face of violent crackdown. This can be illustrated with the example of Muyideen Mustapha who was reported as the first victim of the police brutality that came with the Occupy Nigeria protest. A Facebook page was created to pay tribute to him: "R.I.P. Muyideen Mustapha – A Hero Of the Nigerian Revolution."[489] The heroism was articulated in visual form, used as the profile image and posted on the page. His corpse with blood on his chest is placed against a graphic representation created and circulated on Facebook at the beginning of the protest movement (figure 6.5). The graphic image like the fist of solidarity symbolises a collective ambition to change the status quo. The juxtaposition of Mustapha's body with the symbol is in itself symbolic as can be deduced from the conversations it generated on Facebook. One thought-provoking comment refers to Mustapha as a "martyred hero" whose death became a "redemptive force that will bring new light to the darkness we face in this nation…The spilt blood… (will) cause the thieves in (government) offices to come to terms with their conscience."[490]

Besides the notion of martyrdom, Mustapha's demise became a means through which exchange of encouragement among the protesters was facilitated. They resolved not to allow counter-resistance to dampen their determination. Nigerians in the diaspora also sent in words of support through Facebook and other online channels. At the places where the solidarity was demonstrated through the physical enactment of protests, photographs were taken and circulated online. In the United States, the protest took place in New York, California and Georgia. In the United Kingdom, the protesters marched to the Nigerian Embassy in London. Some of the photographs of these events that found their way to Facebook as the mark of diasporic solidarity were produced as part of articles published in other online platforms.

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[489] "R.I.P Muyideen Mustapha - A Hero of the Nigerian Revolution," *Facebook*, January 4 2012, https://www.facebook.com/311939162179813/photos/a.311968125510250.78217.311939162179813/311968248843571/?type=1.

[490] "R.I.P. Muyideen Mustapha – A Hero Of the Nigerian Revolution," *Facebook*, January 4, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=311974932176236&id=311939162179813.

Figure 6.5: The body of Muyideen Mustapha who was shot on 3 January 2012 during the Occupy Nigeria protest. It is also the profile photograph of the Facebook page set up in his honour: "R.I.P Muyideen Mustapha - A Hero of the Nigerian Revolution."
Retrieved from: Facebook, 4 January 2012, posted without any text by "R.I.P Muyideen Mustapha - A Hero of the Nigerian."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/311939162179813/photos/a.311968125510250.78217.311939162179813/311968248843571/?type=1.
Retrieval date: 31 May 2015.

For instance, "Message of Support for the Ongoing Mass Protest" is the title of an article shared on Facebook from Sahara Reporters. It begins with the striking remark that "it is not every time one gets the opportunity to demand for a change in the political, social and economic situations in a country."[491] The author asks the activists to view the uprising as a "life-time opportunity" for a revolution that was long overdue in Nigeria given the enormity of state failure. He evokes the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr, to

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[491] Danboyi Gomsuk, "Message of Support for the Ongoing Mass Protest," *Sahara Reporters*, January 6, 2012, http://saharareporters.com/2012/01/06/message-support-ongoing-mass-protests. Sahara Reporters is an online citizen news media run by a Nigerian in the United States.

prove that the masses have the power to change how they are governed. He challenges the claim by the government that the money recovered through the subsidy removal would be reinvested into the economy and used to provide social amenities. The poor state of infrastructure in Nigeria does not result from lack of funds but the mismanagement of it. He also warns against compromise which could come in form of material enticement. No amount of bribes would match the better living conditions that would benefit all, should the revolution come true.

However, there are contentions that the Nigerian Labour Congress was compromised in the end. Without including other groups involved in the struggle, NLC entered a negotiation with the government. A hurried decision was made, not to reverse to the original fuel price of 65 naira per litre, but to enforce a partial subsidy removal that left the price at 97 naira per litre.[492] Nonetheless, I suggest that the Occupy Nigeria struggle should not be critiqued as a failure. At least, *something* was achieved. The success, however minimal, signals the possibility of social change which (most important to my argument) has a strong connection with social media mobilisation and photography. Facebook along with its visuality as shown in the case of the Occupy Nigeria protest of 2012 influences the conventional form of civil movements. Offline protests can be conceived and co-ordinated on the online platform, which also helps to sustain the information dissemination structure. It is further deployed to attend to further disparate elements that emerge in the course of the struggle, such as the tendency to cower and back down due to state crackdown. Besides motivating offline mass protest, social media mobilisation, as demonstrated in the following segment, leads to different forms of intervention.

Localised agitations – global responses

Another significant impact of social media activism in Nigeria is that it gives the agitations of the people a global reach. Through photographic acts, circulation and

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[492] Chiluwa, "Occupy Nigeria 2012." In May 2016, the Mohammadu Buhari administration would withdraw the subsidy completely, leaving the price of fuel at 146 naira per litre. NLC went on strike again, but amidst division. Only a fraction of the organisation did. And other groups of people in the country did not join, owing to what they perceived as betrayal by NLC during the 2012 event.

interpretation of images on social media, Nigeria's socio-political concerns become internationally shared experiences. In the aftermath of the Chibok kidnapping examined in chapter 5, the #BringBackOurGirls movement rumbled across the world. The campaign as produced through the convergence of photography and social media is used here to demonstrate that the world hears the voice of the Nigerian activists. And it responds with different forms of intervention. Although the interventions have their own controversies, they help to bring succor to the victims of injustice, and to pressure the Nigerian government to respond to the demands of its citizens. The deployment of photography in the mobilisation of support for victims of violence in Nigeria and elsewhere is not new. Photography was central to the narrative of international humanitarian interventions during the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970). What the #BringBackOurGirls campaign demonstrates is that digital infrastructure has increased the speed at which the photographic mobilisation is produced, and facilitates deeper entanglement of the image. The genesis of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign that is sketched out below amply demonstrates these new features that come with the digital.

Oby Ezekwesili, Nigeria's Minister of Education from 2006 to 2007 fervently criticised the Jonathan administration, demanding more accountability from it. She was disappointed at the attitude of the Nigerian army following the Chibok abduction. The army was inconsistent in its reports about the crime. At one time, it withdrew the official statement it had issued as if denying that the kidnapping occurred. Nonetheless, ignoring the implied denial, Ezekwesili insisted that everyone – both soldiers and civilians – mobilise efforts to rescue the girls.[493] She intensified her campaign on Twitter and offline. On 23 April 2014, she delivered a speech at the UNESCO World Book Capital programme in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. In the address, she drew attention to the kidnapped students and used the expressions "bring back our daughters" and "bring back our girls" to galvanise support for rescue efforts. Soon after, the Abuja-based lawyer, Ibrahim M.

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[493] Clifford Ndujihe, Dapo Akinrefon and Charles Kumolu, "The Three Options to Bring Back Chibok Girls, by Oby Ezekwesili, *Vanguard*, September 6, 2014, http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/09/three-options-bring-back-chibok-girls-oby-ezekwesili/.

Abdullahi tweeted with hashtag the two of Ezekwesili's expressions (figure 6.6). With the hashtag (#), the campaign went viral, while "#BringBackOurGirls'" dominated "BringBackOurDaughters."
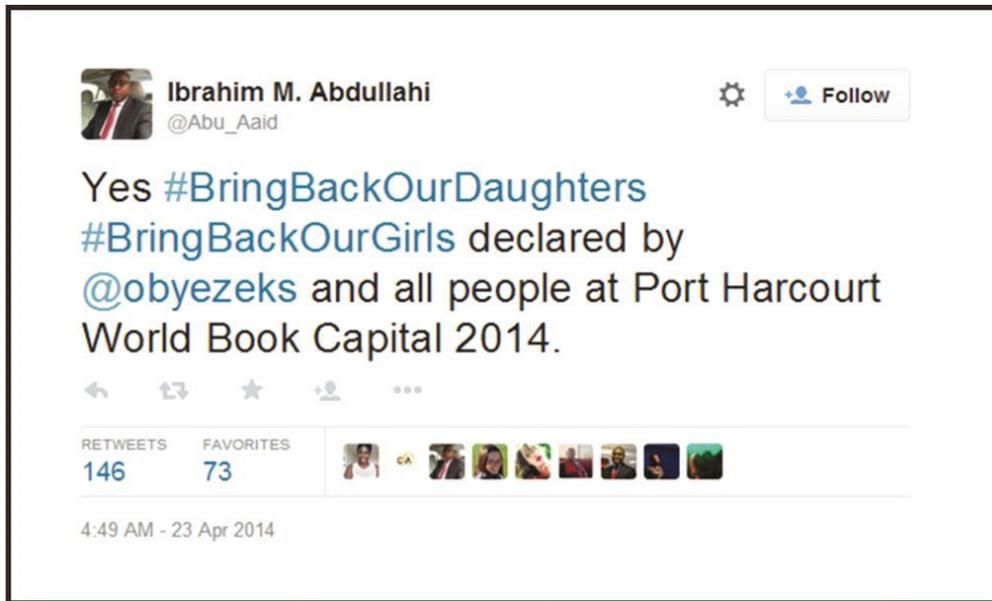
Figure 6.6: The first hashtag tweet of the BringBackOurGirls campaign. Retrieved from: Twitter, 23 April 2014, posted by Ibrahim M. Abdullahi. URL: https://twitter.com/Abu_Aaid/status/458935571076100096. Retrieval date: 15 June 2015.

The movement continued on Twitter, and more than a hundred #BringBackOurGirls pages were created on Facebook. Obiaso has examined how hashtag as a tool drove the protests, prompting international and offline mobilsations.[494] He however fails to acknowledge the importance of the photographic image in the movement. Through the use of the camera, the hashtag itself was turned into a photographic image that inspired a multitude of others. In what follows, I analyse the photographic practices that got produced on the online platforms, from the rendering of the hashtag sign into digital photographic form to other visual productions. Emphasis is placed on how all these moved the distress of

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[494] Uche Emma Obiaso, "The Hashtag as a Channel of International Communication: A Study of the #BringBackOurGirls Hashtag," *Communication Panorama African and Global Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2015).

one nation – Nigeria – to the international front burner, resulting in various kinds of intervention.

Figure 6.7: Michelle Obama's tweet of the photograph of herself holding the #BringBackOurGirls sign.
Retrieved from: Twitter , 7 May 2014, posted by Michelle Obama with the text, "Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families. It's time to #BringBackOurGirls. -mo." URL:
https://twitter.com/flotus/status/464148654354628608.
Retrieval date: 15 June 2015.

On the internet, #BringBackOurGirls turned into an iconic sign through a photograph that also became iconic by representing it. Michelle Obama posed in a pensive mood before the camera, holding up the sign (figure 6.7). Once the photograph was taken and tweeted, it reverberated the cyberspace: the US First Lady had joined in the campaign in search of the missing Chibok girls. Nonetheless, critics argued that the Boko Haram militants would not be moved by people standing before the camera lens to say, "Bring back our girls." Some of them who are Obama's fellow Americans – Ann Coulter, George Will and Christine Sisto for example – called for actions that would transcend what they regarded as a selfie. They suggested financial support, meeting with the parents of the kidnapped girls and with the Nigerian authorities to pressure them to action.[495] The criticism first foregrounds one key position in the debate around social media activism, namely, that it lacks the capacity to transform society. Second, it tends to trouble the place of photography as a site of complex social relations that have serious implications for civil resistance.

The reaction to Mrs. Obama's tweet is tied to the position that social media is a weak mode of civil movement. On the other hand, the tweet being a photographic sign calls to mind Susan Sontag's argument in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Exploring war photography as a genre, she presents an in-depth analysis of how the technologies of vision have given rise to the proliferation of the images of suffering. The pain of others is brought to the sight of viewers at their homes in safe distances. Still, Sontag concludes that it is impossible for the act of seeing to produce in the viewers the actual experience of violence. [496] Susie Linfield shows a similar attitude in her reading of the concept of solidarity in relation to the image. She remarks that solidarity possesses inspirational force. It "maintains the hope that a powerful human connection… against fragmentation…posits unity; against loneliness, brotherhood; against abandonment, support; against weakness,

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[495] Jenny Erikson, "Ann Coulter Mocks Michelle Obama's Sad 'Bring Back Our Girls' Selfie (PHOTO)," *The Stir*, May 12, 2014, http://thestir.cafemom.com/in_the_news/172323/ann_coulter_mocks_michelle_obamas.
[496] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

strength."[497] But she asks what it would "mean to create solidarity with Memuna Mansarah" whose body was mutilated by the army during the Sierra Leonean war in 2000. She argues that solidarity will not restore Memuna's arm.[498] The concerns raised by Sontag, Linfield and the critics of social media protest are in some ways addressed by the international humanitarian supports garnered through the #BringBackOurGirls online movement.

The production and online circulation of the Obama image were not an end in themselves. They were part of complex civil relations of photography theorised by Azoulay. She reads photography as a space in which individuals identify with others who are going through critical conditions in nearby or distant places. The two parties come to constitute the citizenry of photography. The citizenship is not "imprinted with the seal of belonging to a sovereign… (It is) a partnership of governed persons taking up their duty as citizens and utilizing their position for one another, rather than for a sovereign."[499] The portrait taken in faraway USA by Mrs. Obama, a non-Nigerian, resonates with emotional connection to the victims of mayhem so as to put the self in their situation. The expression, "Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families"[500] helps to frame the connection. Akin to the Palette of Narmer that served as the blueprint for the rendering of the human form in the ancient Egyptian art, Obama's photograph defined how a multitude of individuals across the world would pose with the #BringBackOurGirls sign. They expressed through photography that in some ways they were victims of the circumstance that made the Chibok girls captives. The civil relations enacted in photographs are as Azoulay puts it, "performed in different places and by different people who are bound together in association on account of photography, but not necessarily with an explicit connection on the basis of a nation, race, or gender."[501]

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[497] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010): 129.

[498] Ibid.

[499] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books: New York, 2008): 99.

[500] The First Lady, "Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families," *Twitter*, May 7, 2014, https://twitter.com/flotus/status/464148654354628608.

[501] Ibid., 107-108.

This kind of photographic performance constitutes a particular way to understand contemporary humanitarian photography and the impact of new media on its mode of circulation. In Lasse Heerten's comparative reading of the Holocaust and the Nigerian civil war through the lens of humanitarian photography, he notes that horrific photographs of starving Biafran children were at the core of the visual production through which international support was mobilised for the people of Biafra.[502] Here, photographs serve to ameliorate the suffering of those represented in them. In the case of the photographic performance initiated by Obama in the wake of #BringBackOurGirls, portraits of people in safe distances – those who have no direct connection to the violence – are used to express solidarity and solicit support for the actual victims. The sheer speed at which photographs travel in this context constitutes another marked difference that digital infrastructure affords. The images in Heerten's study were brought to the Western audiences through mainstream journalism, and through humanitarian efforts of individuals who actually travelled out of Biafra to seek aid.

The visuality of the #BringBackOurGirls movement was experienced with great speed. Emanating from Ezekwesili's spoken words, it was produced visually as a harshtag sign (a tweet by Abdulahi) that became iconic. Then in a photographic staging by Obama, another iconic representation emerged as a blueprint for many more. Individuals took and circulated photographs with the hashtag sign, and some embarked on further initiatives to address the conditions of the kidnapped girls. Chiluwa and Ifukor argue that the online campaign would have been a mere act of clicking virtual signs if it had not led to interventions in actuality.[503] They however fail to examine how photography played out in the humanitarian discourse. One of the recurring elements of protest photography is the tendency to push its reformist undertaking beyond the pictorial exposure of injustice. Michelle Bogre reviews the portfolios of resistance photographers who literally provided materially for the helpless subjects they photographed. To illustrate, American activists and photojournalists Donna Ferrato and Stephen Shames founded non-profit

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[502] Lasse Heerten, "'A' as in Auschwitz, 'B' as in Biafra."
[503] Innocent Chiluwa and Presley Ifukor, 'War Against Our Children': Stance and Evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls Campaign Discourse on Twitter and Facebook. *Discourse & Society* 26, no.3 (2015).

organisations to help provide succor to those who suffered from the social conditions they challenged. Ferrato set up the Domestic Abuse Awareness (DAA) to raise funds for female victims of domestic violence in Tribeca, New York City. Shames' was LEAD Uganda through which he financially assisted "forgotten children in Uganda who show(ed) the potential to become entrepreneurs and innovators."[504]

Young Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan is not a photographer like Ferrato and Shames. But she is the subject of photographs whose relevance to the internationalisation of Nigeria's story of insurgency cannot be denied. She is one of the famous individuals who responded promptly to Mrs. Obama's tweet. In keeping with what emerged as the conventional pose from the Obama image, Malala took a portrait with the hashtag sign (figure 6.8). It was widely circulated on Twitter, Facebook and other online platforms. The photograph is evocative of a feeling other than sadness as expressed by Mrs. Obama. Being a child herself, her face resonates with child innocence that reminds one of the kidnapped girls.

Meanwhile, Malala's photograph tells two stories. The one readily visible to the viewer is the Chibok abduction. The other is her own experience as once a victim of violence. In 2009 at the age of 12, she and two of her friends were shot in a school bus by the Taliban militants in Pakistan. She survived the attack and later turned into an icon of activism against insurgency and advocacy for children's right to education.[505] She co-founded the Malala Fund foundation to "empower girls through quality secondary education to achieve their potential and inspire positive change in their communities."[506] By reacting to the Chibok violence in the photographic act, in the circulation of the image and in literally travelling to Nigeria, Malala established a strong form of connection with the girls. She told

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[504] Bogre, *Photography as Activism*, 61.
[505] Don G. Robison, "Malala Yousafzai: A Voice Worth Hearing." *The Journal of Applied Instructional Design* 3, no 2 (2013).
[506] "What We Do," *Malala Fund,* https://www.malala.org/about.

CNN: "The girls in Nigeria are my sisters and it's my responsibility that I speak up for my sisters."[507]

Figure 6.8: Malala Yousafzai holding the #Bringbackourgirls sign.
Retrieved from: CNN, 13 April 2015, as part of the article, "Malala's Letter to Nigeria's Abducted Schoolgirls: 'Solidarity, Love, and Hope.'"
URL: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/13/world/malala-nigeria-schoolgirls-abducted-boko-haram/.
Retrieval date: 3 July 2015.

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[507] Mariano Castillo, "Malala to CNN: Kidnapped Nigerian Girls Are 'My Sisters,'" *CNN*, May 11, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/07/world/africa/malala-nigeria-boko-haram/.

Figure 6.9: Malala Yousafzai meets President Goodluck Jonathan in July 2014. Retrieved from: Facebook, 15 July 2014, posted by "Bring Back Our Girls" with the text, "President Jonathan welcomes Malala Yousafzai." The image is a shared Twitter post.
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1443126529288376&id=1419935701607459.
Retrieval date: 6 June 2015.

On 14 July 2014, Malala travelled to Nigeria to meet and express solidarity with the few kidnapped students who had escaped captivity, the parents of the girls, and then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. The photograph of Malala's meeting with Jonathan (figure 6.9) was shared on Facebook. The camera froze the moment when the president had a handshake with his young guest looking directly into his face. The innocent but bold look suggests the ability to act which is intrinsic in children in spite of the abuse they face in many societies. They are brutalised, objectified and denied voice and agency.[508] Malala's mission in Nigeria is from all perspectives an expression of children's capacity to effect change in society. She pressured Jonathan to take more proactive action to save the kidnapped girls and to meet with their parents.

The meeting took place at a time the president was already facing severe criticism for mishandling the situation and for the failure to have a chat with the parents of the girls. As reported in *The Guardian* newspaper regarding Malala's meeting with the president, "Goodluck Jonathan had promised that for the first time he would meet parents of the missing students."[509] Indeed, one week later, he did. Whether Jonathan was already contemplating the action or not, it is reasonable to conclude that Malala's visit played a key role in making that happen.

The Malala Foundation also took up funding of the remaining part of the secondary education of the five girls who escaped the abduction.[510] During the one year anniversary of the incident, Malala wrote an open letter to the girls, among other things assuring them: "Our campaign will continue until you and all girls and boys around the world are able to access a free, safe and quality secondary

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[508] Okechukwu Nwafor, "Dele Jegede: On *Flower Power* and Witty Distortions of Nigeria's Power and System Failure," in *Art, Parody and Politics: Dele Jegede's Creative Activism, Nigeria and the Transnational Space*, ed. Adérónké Adésolá Adésànyà and Toyin Falola (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2013).

[509] Monica Mark, "Malala Yousafzai Shows Support for Nigerian Girls Abducted by Boko Haram," *The Guardian*, July 14, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/14/mamala-yousafzai-support-nigerian-girls-abducted-boko-haram.

[510] Josh Levs, "Malala's Letter to Nigeria's Abducted Schoolgirls: 'Solidarity, Love, and Hope,'" *CNN*, April 13, 2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/13/world/malala-nigeria-schoolgirls-abducted-boko-haram/.

education."[511] Malala's interventions demonstrate how activist photographic representations portray the sharing of the suffering of others and provoke further actions to ameliorate it.

Mindful of that possibility, some other individuals embarked on photographic projects intended to provoke more compassion for the girls. American photographer, Glenna Gordon, worked within that framework. In a broader sense, she is interested in stories of distress that make global news headlines. She documents epidemics, kidnapping, insurgency, hostages, wars, and executions, by photographing the objects that have metonymic relations to them. She has worked in different regions of the world on subjects such as hostages by ISIS and Al Qaeda, post-war Liberia and Ebola in West Africa.[512] In the aftermath of the Chibok abduction, Gordon travelled to Nigeria. She conceived of a representational strategy for the story that would be more forceful than photographing protests and other events which according to her rather detract from the victims of the abduction.

Through individuals who had access to the parents of the kidnapped girls, she got their personal belongings – school uniforms, other cloths, notebooks, footwears and jewellery. For her, the objects represented the absence of the girls while at the same time standing in for them. Her intention was to tell the story in a manner that would connect people to the victims of abduction. She successfully worked out the connection with the use of the camera to render, as Seremetakis would put it, "the imperceptible perceptible."[513] The presence of the missing girls could be felt through their absence and their disrupted youthful ambitions made to be perceived in sensorial form. Gordon reports that when she had some of the belongings of the girls in her suitcase, she felt as if she was "carrying around corpses."[514] While unpacking the objects to photograph them, she could feel the power embodied in them. "Each item" she says, "had the distinct smell of the owner…and the

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[511] Ibid.

[512] Teju Cole, "Photographing the Unphotographable," *The New Yorker*, November13, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/glenna-gordon-photographing-unphotographable.

[513] Nadia C. Seremetakis, ed, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994 .

[514] Cole, "Photographing the Unphotographable."

notebooks felt so deeply personal, with their doodles and school lessons and letters to relatives."[515] The short descriptions of some of the photographs indicate the owners of the pictured items, their family backgrounds, likes, dislikes and career goals. This mode of representation is so powerful that we feel as though the girls are just around us.

Gordon's work which won a World Press Photo prize in 2014 illustrates how historicity, cultural representation and the jolting of memory can be produced in compelling ways through modes of sensory perception.[516] Gordon uses the sense of vision – via the photographic medium – to activate other senses in narrating the story of violence. But the question is whether her project had more compelling impact or merely typified the "unequal exchange" characteristic of the civil contract of photography.[517] The photographed victims of injustice, whose situations inform other photographic productions do not always have their circumstances transformed. The photographer might turn out to be the beneficiary. Azoulay paints out the scenario:

> The photographer makes a living, and in some cases may even become wealthy; the photographer wins fame and prizes, is a member of organizations that defend his or her interests, is protected by publication contracts and agreements. The photographed individual, on the other hand, is abandoned.[518]

I think that formulation does not always apply. Consider some developments relating to the rescue of the abducted girls. In May 2016, one of the girls named Amina Ali Nkeki was "found" with her baby and "Boko Haram fighter-husband" (Mohammed Hayatu) outside the insurgents' camp.[519] "Found" is an appropriate word here given that it was uncertain whether Amina *fled* with baby from captivity or was *rescued*. For Hayatu the militant, he cannot be said to have fled or been rescued from his own stronghold unless he had revolted against the sect. Yet his

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[515] Ibid.

[516] Seremetakis, ed, *The Senses Still.*

[517] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography.*

[518] Ibid., 107.

[519] Omeiza Ajayi, "Amina Ali Nkeki: Rescued but still 'Missing' Chibok Girl," *Vanguard*, June 26, 2016, http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/06/amina-ali-nkeki-rescued-still-missing-chibok-girl/.

status as a militant was a speculation informed by the view that while under the custody of Boko Haram, Amina could not have been married to anyone other than a member of the militant group. In any case, the Chibok abduction was followed by the threat to marry off the kidnapped girls. While Amina and her baby were given a state reception, Hayatu was arrested by the security personnel who are investigating his case.

Some five months after the Amina story, 21 of the abducted girls were released, this time, following the Nigerian government's negotiation with Boko Haram, as mediated by the International Red Cross and the Swiss government. For many, this was the most significant effort by the Nigerian government towards the rescue of the girls.[520] As I write, it is on news that further negotiations are underway for the release of more 83 of the girls.[521] The rescue of the 21 girls took place in October 2016 under the new Buhari administration, nearly a year after Gordon's project. So there is a tendency to argue that there is no connection between the rescue and Gordon's work. But I suggest that we read the photographic project not as "unequal exchange" but as part of the broader visual productions which as I have argued all along helped to bring the attention of the world to the Chibok crime. Whatever negotiations and mediations (incidentally involving international organisations) leading to the release of the girls cannot be detached from the wide publicity that brought global awareness to abduction.

The United States' mediation in the crisis demonstrates another form of international intervention worth exploring here. Within the framework of the non-violent approach to counter-insurgency, USA provided support in terms of funds, intelligence, surveillance, military training, and relief supplies.[522] The non-violent strategy may be a bit strange given that in different crisis-inflicted areas, USA has

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[520] Cletus Ukpong, "Red Cross Speaks: Our Role in Release of 21 Chibok Girls," *Premium Times*, October 14, 2016, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/212743-red-cross-speaks-role-release-21-chibok-girls.html.

[521] What the negotiation with Boko Haram entails has been kept secret by the Nigerian government. There are speculations that the government either paid ransom or accepted prison swap which was once the demand of the militant group.

[522] The White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Efforts to Assist the Nigerian Government in Its Fight against Boko Haram," *The White House*, October 14, 2014, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/14/fact-sheet-us-efforts-assist-nigerian-government-its-fight-against-boko-.

deployed force in its interventions. As mentioned in chapter 5, the "war on terror"
launched by the George Bush administration in the aftermath of the 11 September
2001 attacks in the USA, was premised on the use of military force to fight against
"terrorism" as it is more commonly known. Writing on how images played in the
war, W.J.T. Mitchell condemns that approach. He contends that "terrorism" is a
tactic, and "terror" the *emotion* it produces. So, it is futile to wage war against
tactic and emotion that are imaginary phenomena. "Terrorists" mingle with the rest
of the people and keep some in their camps as captives and human shields. Any
attack on this mixed population does not kill the violence. The innocent are the
principal victims.[523] Such is the case with the Chibok kidnapping and the general
operations of Boko Haram.

As if working with Mitchell's idea, the USA subscribed to non-violence in its fight
against Boko Haram. That approach implicated the Nigerian government and
strengthened the local activists' agitation for political accountability in the country.
It was necessitated by studies that linked militancy in Nigeria to state failure. As
Onuoha and Ugwueze put it, "the Boko Haram insurgency is a mere expression of
grievance against the non-performance of the Nigerian government and therefore,
its fight should not attract direct confrontation from the United States
government."[524] The non-violence includes among other things the establishment
of the United States /Nigerian Bi-National Commission. It demands from the
Nigerian government transparent governance, promotion of regional co-operation
and development, improvement in energy supply and food security.[525] These are
some of the key concerns that fuel civil resistance in Nigeria. Hence, international
interventions become a means by which the Nigerian state is persuaded to listen to
the demand of the angry masses. Currently, under the leadership of the new
president Mohammadu Buhari, the Nigerian government continues to use force to
fight Boko Haram even as it also engages in negotiation with the sect. This has not

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[523] Mitchell, *Cloning Terror.*

[524] Jonah Onuoha and Michael I. Ugwueze, "United States Security Strategy and the Management
of Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3
(2014): 26-27; Also see Ojochenemi J. David, Lucky E. Asuelime and Hakeem Onapajo, *Boko
Haram.*

[525] Onuoha and Ugwueze, "United States Security Strategy."

eradicated the group and more militant sects have also emerged among the Fulani herdsmen and the people of Niger Delta. Socio-economic hardship has also increased.

At any rate, despite the limitations of the international interventions, we should recognise the power of photography and social media to internationalise localised struggles. The image brings together as its citizenry the victims of injustice and those who express concern about them. And the virtual platforms on which the image circulates help to facilitate the international outreach. Yet, at the local level, the online activism in Nigeria has brought significant changes in the country's politics as discussed below.

Disturbing the structures of power

Writing on the documentary genre, Martha Rosler expresses skepticism about the effectiveness of photography as a tool for social change. She argues that it "assuages any stirring of conscience in its viewers the way scratching relieves an itch and simultaneously reassures them (the powerful) about their relative wealth and social position."[526] In an age when photography is supported by digital technology for its reformist agenda, Rosler's sentiment can be extended to social media. It would be taken to apply especially in societies like Nigeria where the political elites are perceived as obdurate. In any case, that view does not hold in Nigeria's case. Activism as articulated in photographic practices produced on social media does not boost the ego of political leaders as such. It rather shakes up the positions they occupy. Although not to the extreme point of forceful overthrow, the virtual visual practice has had significant impacts on key political changes in Nigeria.

The defeat of Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general election is used to buttress the claim. It is analysed as a remarkable national experience that owes much to the virtual resistance enacted on Facebook. With rising dissatisfaction with the Jonathan administration, the then president was constructed as an incompetent

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[526] Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989): 306

leader. The online activists argued that he did not deserve to be returned as president, and voted against him in the election. He was eventually defeated. Before we explore that example in detail, let us consider another that even preceded it.

Shem Obafaiye became an object of derision on Facebook and other virtual and offline spaces following his inept television interview in 2013. He could not state the website of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC),[527] the Lagos State Command of which he was the head. Again, he had implied that NSCDC had a different website dedicated to the job recruitment exercise about which he was interviewed. As if the site was something of a secret, he said: "I cannot categorically tell you one now…The one we are going to make use of will be made known by my oga at the top."[528] That moment in the video was frozen and produced as an image whose iconic status is located in the interviewee's pose (figure 6.10). The picture in combination with the inscription – "oga at the top" – was reproduced in different formats, both in digital and traditional media. It appeared on different surfaces: bandanas, notebook covers, T-shirts and on Facebook. Obafaiye's utterances in the interview were also rendered into musical productions. Parts of the video were integrated with other hilarious clips on other public figures in a similar context of political satire.

Such humour is one of the ways civil activism is produced in Nigeria. It is meant to portray in a bad light public officers and the institutional powers they represent. Apparently embarrassed by the saga, the authorities of NSCDC transferred Obafaiye to the Oyo State Command of the organisation.

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[527] "About NSCDC," *Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps*, http://www.nscdc.gov.ng/index.php/about-nscdc. Established in 2003 during the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, "NSCDC is a para-military agency of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that is commissioned to provide measures against threat and any form of attack or disaster against the nation and its citizenry.
[528] In the Nigerian parlance, "oga" refers to "boss," or the one at the apex of the echelon of power in an institution.

Figure 6.10: "My Oga at the top (Full Interview of Lagos Commandant)" – video still.
Retrieved from: YouTube, March 14, 2013, posted by Akande Kareem.
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ3nHdBnPE4.
Retrieval date: 4 July 2014.

Although Obafaiye did not lose his job, his relocation marked a structural shift in the power of NSCDC. It validated the power of visuality and social media to change things in Nigeria. Another instance is the case of Adams Oshiomhole who went into the street in 2013 to supervise the Edo State environmental sanitation. In his capacity as the governor of the state, he mistreated a widow selling things by the roadside. The subsequent massive criticism of the act on social media moved Oshiomhole to apologise to the woman. He also offered her 2 million naira (about 6,666 dollars) and a job.[529] So, the Nigerian political elites actually care about what happens on social media.

The most recent incident to compellingly validate the influence of virtual activism in Nigeria is the 2015 election, which the then President Jonathan lost. It all began

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[529] Chikezie Emmanuel Uzuegbunam, "Young People's Engagement of Social Media for Social Transformation: A Study of Undergraduate Students in a Selected Nigerian University" (M.Sc. thesis, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2014).

with dissatisfaction with his administration. The discontent was motivated by two factors. First, the key concerns that drive online activism in the country as analysed in chapter 2 are not necessarily new. But two of them – political corruption and insecurity – escalated during Jonathan's tenure. Granted, while the rate of looting of public resources was extraordinarily high during the previous military regime, it was in Jonathan's time that democracy in Nigeria proved to be as fraudulent as military rule. On the other hand, Boko Haram which came to constitute the greatest security threat in Nigeria emerged before Jonathan ascended to power in 2010. But it was during his time that the violence by the militant group reached startling proportions, and became intractable. The other factor is that Jonathan's administration coincided with the rise of internet-based activism not only in Nigeria but across the world. The digital infrastructure gave Nigerians unprecedented access to information about the activities and the excesses of state functionaries. "Things got in the open,"[530] as one Facebook activist puts it in an interview. So, the citizens became better informed and would actively take part in debates about socio-political issues that affect them. The Facebook-based conversations that contributed significantly to the formation of unfavourable opinions about Jonathan could be first read from the sociolinguistic perspective.

Platt and Williams have explained the ideological use of language in the context of social movement. They argue that "language discourse orients moral, cognitive and emotive processes responding to and interpreting the experiences of failures and absences of cultural doctrines and structural circumstances."[531] On Facebook, Nigerians developed a language to describe Goodluck Jonathan during his tenure as president. The description touches on his character, personal life and what he stood for politically. Through a particular set of vocabulary, dissatisfaction with his personality and performance in office was expressed. His policies were criticised. His public actions were analysed and questioned. The language developed in these

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[530] Ugwu, face-to-face interview.

[531] Gerald M. Platt and Rhys H. Williams, "Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of 'Segregationists' Ideologies," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 3 (2002), 335.

instances is charged with symbolic and pejorative meanings. Consider the reaction to Jonathan's interview at the African Security Summit in France in May 2014.

Jonathan was asked why he had not visited the families of the abducted Chibok girls. After replying that a visit would not make any impact, he added his intention to "rebuild the school with good walls" to guarantee the students' protection.[532] Shared on Facebook, the video elicited abusive comments directed to Jonathan. The idea of wall building was read as a shallow understanding of how to forestall abduction and confront the insurgency that produced it. He was thus described as one who in spite of holding a PhD lacked the intellectual capacity required of someone in his position. Other users of the virtual platform articulated their comments in pictorial form. They produced and circulated images composed of Jonathan's portrait blended with zoomorphic forms. Inscribed on them were expressions taken from the derogatory vocabulary developed to ridicule the then president. They include "clueless," "brainless" and "shoeless." The Nigerian activists connected to social media have a shared understanding of the contextual meanings of these expressions. Sociolinguistic theorists would assert "that shared communication is accomplished among interacting speakers within the context of their settings. Background experiences *plus context* are the local extralinguistic features that are used as pragmatic discourse strategies to achieve shared meanings."[533]

"Shoeless" for instance was coined on social media against the backdrop of a specific shared knowledge. In a speech he gave in September 2010 to declare his candidacy in the presidential primary election of the People's Democratic Party, Jonathan painted a picture of his humble beginning. He was born and brought up in a rural settlement of Otuoke in Bayelsa State where he lacked access to basic infrastructural facilities both at home and at school. "In my early days in school,"

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[532] Abiyamọ, "We Will Build Better Walls for the Chibok Schools -President Jonathan," *Facebook*, May 24, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=548631258580795&%20set=vb.%20370495769727679&type=2&theater.

[533] Platt and Williams, "Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization," 336.

he said, "I had no shoes, no school bags. I carried my books in my hands…"[534] He remarked that these circumstances did not deter him from pursuing his educational goal, but not everyone has the capacity to make headway in the face of such odds. So an enabling environment was crucial for the crowd of Nigerians endowed with different potentialities. He promised such enabling conditions. In his biography – *Against the Odds* – Mark Hillingsworth and Von Kemedi describe him as a "reluctant politician." They read the personal history relayed by Jonathan as devoid of any "sign of political ambition."[535] The picture that further emerges is that of unpreparedness to face the task that came with the political position he later attained. So for the social activists, his utterances, decisions and actions became something of a "brainless" and "clueless" man. They further imply that while in a position to change the life of others, he seemed to forget the harsh realities that attended his own life.

Facebook is an effective space for the dissemination of this discontent. When the speech cited above was shared on the social networking site, the majority of the comments it attracted affirmed support for him. The commentators assured him of their vote in the general election if he made it in the primaries. In the end, he succeeded in both. Although one cannot deny the malpractices in the 2011 general election, he enjoyed massive support connected to what I call the "Jonathan myth." The construction of the myth followed public fascination with the circumstances surrounding his success in politics. In 1999, the governor of Bayesla State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha picked him to serve as his deputy, a position he accepted reluctantly.[536] Alamieyeseigha was impeached in 2005 on charges of corruption and Jonathan took over as governor of the state. In the general election of 2007, the People's Democratic Party picked him as Musa Yar'Adua's presidential running mate. The victory of his party in the poll meant for him the position of vice president. In the beginning of 2010, he was sworn in as acting president because of the worsening health condition of Yar'Adua. Few months later, Yar'Adua died and he became the president. At the expiration of that tenure in 2011, Goodluck

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[534] Mark Hillingsworth and Von Kemedi, *Against the Odds* (UK: Susquehanna Press, 2015),11.
[535] Ibid.,10.
[536] Ibid.

Jonathan was to take part in his first election ever. His political career became somewhat a demonstration of the belief among many Nigerians that name has the tendency to materialise into the meaning it encapsulates. So in the election, a lot of individuals supported him with a sense of obligation to a divine assignment believed to have been *given* to him.

The public support later fizzled away. Facebook was deployed as well to deconstruct the Jonathan myth and to express resistance against his government. He was aware that the public was losing confidence in him. Throughout his time as president, he was an active user of social media. He has been described as "the Facebook president," who employed social media as "a means to monitor national sentiment."[537] As noted in the introductory part of this thesis, he invited Nigerians in 2011 to have conversation with him on Facebook on the subject of his "transformation agenda." But the exchange took a different direction "with the President's Facebook page becoming a forum for dissention by his 'friends' and other Nigerians protesting against the…security situation in the country."[538] The resentment kept building up as insurgency, corruption and infrastructural failure developed into definite features of his government. In the article "Goodluck Jonathan: From Affection to Rebellion, from Beloved to Villain," Taiwo Ogunjimi makes a strong argument about how the loss of public support played out on Facebook. During the fuel subsidy removal crisis in 2012, nearly all his "friends" turned against him on Facebook and abused him. He became "the most cursed President ever on Facebook,"[539] Ogunjimi concludes.

The defamation continued. As the 2015 general election drew close, there were concerns among many Nigerians that Jonathan's re-election would mean another four years of subjection to misrule. The sentiment was manifest in the conversations around the myriad of images created in relation to him and circulated on Facebook as exemplified by the above-cited African Security Submit video. Many commentators regretted voting for him in 2011 and resolved not to

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[537] Ibid., 159.

[538] Ogundimu, "Facebook and Digital Activism," 218.

[539] Taiwo James Ogunjimi, "Goodluck Jonathan: From Affection to Rebellion, from Beloved to Villain," *Osun Defenders*, January 7, 2012, http://www.osundefender.org/?p=2487.

support his re-election bid in 2015. The longing for political change became intense in Nigeria. The then opposition party – All Progressives Congress (APC) – tapped into the sentiment. It took up the concept of "change," fashioned it into a weapon of sort and used it to wage war against Jonathan's government and his People's Democratic Party. APC mobilised an intensive campaign to sensitise the public about the need for change and presented itself as its agent. They organised rallies in public spaces and deployed the media and the internet to disseminate the idea. Consider the social media example.

The website – APC Mobilization for Change – was created along with Facebook pages to harness the power of the internet in the propagation of the "change ideology." The purpose of the group was "to mobilize and campaign nationally and globally for All Progressives Congress," in support of its quest for change.[540] A different online protest group – Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest – created in October 2011 synchronised its objectives with those of APC Mobilization for Change which was formed much later. The Global Awakening group was initiated with the goal of "positive change" but not in the context into which it metamorphosed as APC's catch phrase. It began with agitation for good governance, economic and infrastructural development, and the eradication of corruption.[541] Later, the intensification of efforts against Jonathan's government drew the group to also use the forum for that purpose. With time, the castigation of Jonathan on social media gave the indication that he had lost the support of many people. So arose the assumption that he would be defeated if the 2015 election was not rigged. The APC Mobilization for Change and the Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest groups further became concerned with how to contribute in making the election free and fair.

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[540] See *APC Mobilization for Change*, http://apcmobilizationforchange.org/ and the Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/groups/380102332101468/?fref=ts. There are different Facebook pages for the various branches of the group across Nigeria and abroad. Both APC Mobilization for Change and Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest were created by Mirian Awolowo.
[541] The demands are stated on the "Description" panel of the group's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/?fref=ts.
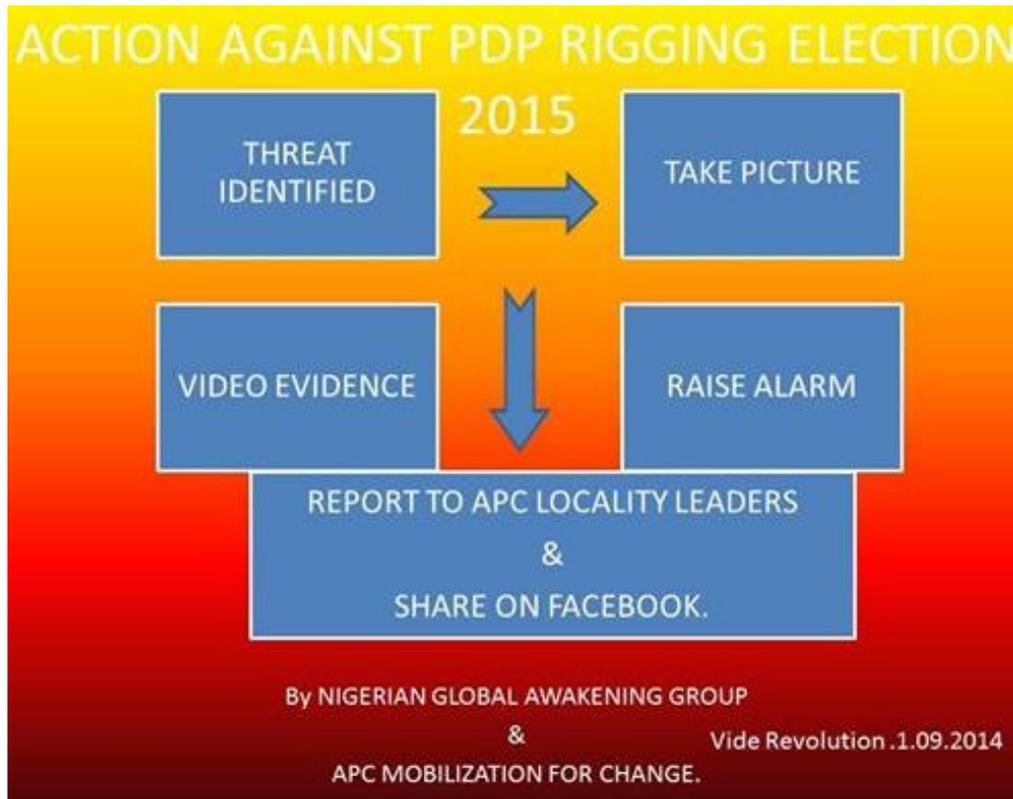
Figure 6.11: Action against rigging of election.
Retrieved from: Facebook, 22 December 2014, posted by Marian Awolowo with the text, "New alert shared by Sulaiman Mahir Badamasi."
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/908214882531338/.
Retrieval date: 22 December 2014.

The image above (figure 6.11) was shared on the Facebook page of each of the two groups. It was accompanied by the short description of an incident considered disturbing by members. It states that members of People's Democratic Party in Yobe State were collecting the details of people's voter's cards. Questioning the motive behind such action, the protest groups read it as a strategy to rig the gubernatorial election in the state. The evidentiary power of photography would be used to address the concern. Individuals were to use the camera to photograph or video incidents of electoral crime. They would "raise alarm" by reporting to APC officials and by sharing the visuals on Facebook. The image would serve as "evidence" against the perpetrator(s). The power of the camera "to see and record;

(the) power of surveillance that affects a complete reversal of political axis of representation" [542] does not exclusively belong to the state as John Tagg would suggest. The virtual protesters believe that they have some agency: the power to observe with the camera the very process that ultimately determines their living conditions. Granted, it is the institutional framework – the electoral body in this context – that "guarantee(s) the authority of the image …to stand as evidence or register a truth,"[543] that process cannot take place in the absence of the image. The Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) can only cancel election if there is a proof of malpractice. The image constitutes such "evidence" which the activists could present, should Jonathan's party commit electoral fraud. All these mobilisations were intended to reduce his chances of emerging victorious in the 2015 presidential election.

Another strategy adopted for the same purpose is associated with the notion of enticement as a means to influence voter decision. McClosky and Dahlgren argue that people's "political beliefs and affiliations," and the shifts in these are most often influenced by "those small, face-to-face solidary, informal and enduring coteries that we commonly experience as family, friendship and occupational peer groups."[544] In Nigeria, political loyalty is influenced differently; it is commodified. Due to the enormous material enrichment that comes with political positions in the country, the "power of incumbency"[545] also means financial power to win the loyalty of avaricious or deprived electorates. The social media protest group reminded its members that Jonathan and his party had that power. They were therefore urged to resist the tendency of being lured into voting for him. The party's tactic of enticement articulated through the "stomach infrastructure" was criticised as the exchange of public infrastructure for the satisfaction of the mundane needs of citizens. The concept which has become popular in the Nigerian political lexicon is credited to Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State.

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[542] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation,* 259.

[543] Ibid.

[544] Herbert McClosky and Harold E. Dahlgren, "Primary Group Influence on Party Loyalty," *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 3 (959): 757.

[545] As obtainable in other parts of the world, the Nigerian political system allows one to vie for another political position while occupying one. Such is what Nigerians refer to as the "power of incumbency."

Figure 6.12: Distribution of "stomach infrastructure" rice in Ekiti State in June 2014.
Retrieved from: 22 June 2014, posted by Nura Abubakar with the text, "If this happens in Ekiti, with all the PhD holders, why not somewhere else?"
URL:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/occupy.naija/permalink/764110980300270/.
Retrieval date: 3 July 2014.

Prior to the June 2014 election that brought him into power, Fayose distributed rice and other foodstuff to electorates (figure 6.12). He strongly defended his action as a generous gesture which once elected as governor, would be consolidated by the appointment of a special adviser on "stomach infrastructure."[546]

In Nigeria, the use of food and other material things to buy political support can be traced back to Lamidi Adedibu who joined the Action Group party under Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the 1950s. In his post-independence career, Adedibu became a "political patron," a success achieved through "his philosophy of *amala-gbegiri* politics."[547] Adedibu turned his residence in Ibadan into a refectory of sorts, serving his loyalists the much-desired *amala-gbegiri* meal. The practice was read as philanthropy so that Adedibu endeared himself to the people and commanded unimaginable respect. Abubakar Olusola Saraki who served as a senator in the second republic (1979-1983) adopted a similar practice and became a political stronghold in Kwara state. "Stomach infrastructure," is a recent adaptation of the "amala politics." By September 2014, President Jonathan had proclaimed the subscription of his party to the concept, insisting that "any leader who claimed not to believe in stomach infrastructure was not ready to lead, as 'you cannot lead hungry people.'"[548]

Omobowale and Olutayo invite us to read this political idiom as a characteristic of "societies bedeviled by a high degree of poverty with the quest for daily survival being the major concern, (where) goods in the form of food and/or access to the means of production/survival may readily attract the attention of a large number of potential and actual clients."[549] This is precisely what Jean-François Bayart explores with "the politics of the belly."[550] It is a particular mode of politics in

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[546] Sani Tukur, "Fayose to appoint Special Adviser on 'Stomach Infrastructure,'" *Premium Times*, October 16, 2014, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/169623-fayose-to-appoint-special-adviser-on-stomach-infrastructure.html.

[547] Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale and Akinpelu Olanrewaju Olutayo, "Chief Lamidi Adedibu and Patronage Politics in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 3 (2007) 431.

[548] "Why the PDP Believes in Stomach Infrastructure — Jonathan," *Premium Time*, September 27, 2014, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/168731-why-the-pdp-believes-in-stomach-infrastructure-jonathan.html.

[549] Omobowale and Olutayo, "Chief Lamidi Adedibu," 431.

[550] Bayart, *The State in Africa*.

Africa predicated upon the struggle to eat for survival, because "'to eat' is a matter of life and death."[551] The underlying social condition is that of inequality about which the failure of the post-colonial African states has made the common people obsessed. In the public imaginary, the idea of "national cake" is used to describe state resources as what belong to all. Politics of the belly is also about the struggle against the monopoly of the right to the resources by the powerful class.[552] But in in this process, there is a tendency for the loyalty of the people to be bought over by the same group that strives to maintain the inequality. The social media activists warn that to allow oneself to be bought is to be complicit to the power relation that substitutes the creation of conducive socio-political atmosphere for the satisfaction of the mundane needs of the people.

Through these forms of mobilisation, a negative image of Goodluck Jonathan was constructed. The one perceived once as a "divine gift" became for many a "badluck" to the nation. It began with dissatisfaction with his administration which came to be characterised by a high rate of insecurity and corruption. He also happened to be in power when it had become difficult to conceal the frivolities of those in power. On the social media platform, a language of derision was developed to create and sustain the perception that he lacked the art of governance. His utterances, his deeds and his policies became somewhat repudiated and there was a dramatic public craving for change. The change would begin with voting against him in the presidential election of 2015. The aggressive galvanisation against him on Facebook, I have argued, contributed immensely to his defeat.

Conclusion

Explored in the chapter are the various ways the possibility of socio-political transformation through online photographic civil struggle presents itself in Nigeria. The mobilisations on social media enable the internationalisation of localised anxieties. The underlying visual economy of this process transcends the notion of pictorial representation of upheavals. The photographic image becomes the site of relations where individuals perform the expressions of feelings towards the harsh

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[551] Ibid.
[552] Ibid., 241.

living condition of others. People across geographical distances demonstrate their belonging to the space provided by the image. Such space emerges from the civil engagement of the photograph. This "citizenship of photography," as Azoulay calls it, works for digital, more than the analogue she proposes. It becomes something of "global citizenship"[553] as the image gets into the circuit of the cyber world. The produced relations in turn beget interventions where individuals, institutions and governments of other nations are moved to do something about the injustices suffered among distant populations. The interventions have their own limitations. Still, it does not dismiss the key point, which is that cyber platforms with their visuality broaden the scope of civil struggle. The activism begins with the creation of civil consciousness among the citizenry. The attention of individuals is directed to acts of injustice and they are motivated to see why it is imperative to challenge them. The virtual movement materialises into protests enacted in geographical spaces. It brings people into physical contact with one another in pursuit of the common goal of transforming the socio-economic conditions in which they live. It shapes and diffuses public opinions that in turn transform democratic processes. Before the 2015 Nigerian general election, opinion polls were carried out on social and mainstream media between Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammadu Buhari, the contenders for the presidential position. Jonathan lost. The defeat materialised in the actual world as he and his People's Democratic Party failed in the election. That was the first time a sitting government lost an election at the federal level in Nigeria. The strong link between social media and that historic event (including others that have even a wider reach) shows that online activism with its photographic practice is transforming Nigeria.

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[553] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.

Conclusion

The Ariaria market located in Aba, Abia State, is one of the largest in Nigeria. It is a space for various forms of business transaction, an assemblage of individuals highly skilled in different trades such as shoe and dress-making. But, like other public infrastructure including roads, electricity, and hospitals, the market is in a dilapidated state. The space on which a large population of Nigerians relies for economic survival, has been allowed to degenerate into a slum by the government for which it is also a source of revenue. In September 2014, a set of photographs depicting different views of the ghetto-like market were posted on Facebook with the comment:

> After over a decade I visited the famous Ariaria International Market Aba to pick some materials for my travelling. What I saw shocked me. This is the famous Faulks Road that linked the market with the Enugu-Port Harcourt Express. May I and my generation be cursed if I didn't take this picture today and may they be blessed if I did. Likewise, anyone that will come here to say it is not Aba or a recent picture, may his or her generation be blessed if he or she is saying the truth.[554]

The picture of a different view posted by another Facebook user attracted comments that affirmed the pitiable condition of the market: "I couldn't believe it was that bad until someone from Abia started showing us pictures of the state of affairs there."[555] Another user says: "We cannot just look away," adding that it

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[554] Peter Agha Kalu, "After over a decade I visited the famous Ariaria International Market Aba to pick some materials for my travelling," *Facebook*, September 6, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/peteragbakalu/posts/10202898765892577.

[555] Marian Awolowo, September 13, 2014 (2:15p.m.), comment on Michael Williams, "Is there a governor in Abia State," *Facebook*, June1 3, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/849593728393454/.

should be taken as a "responsibility" to raise the consciousness of the masses about the official corruption that produces the infrastructural failure in Nigeria.[556]

The photographs and the comments raise crucial questions that string together photography, social media, and civil resistance in Nigeria. Frustrated with the level of the Nigerian state failure, the ordinary people demand social change. The photographic image for them possesses evidentiary power that makes it a crucial site for the struggle. Again, they recognise Facebook as an important space for the deployment of the image. This thesis has engaged with civil resistance as enabled by the convergence of those two sites – the visual and the virtual. It gives us insight into the complexity of the socio-political tensions in Nigeria and how they have evolved since independence in 1960. On the other hand, it draws us to how various theoretical formulations of photography work in the context of civil resistance in an African postcolony, and in a digital age. Still, we are prompted to rethink certain other theories and assumptions about the image.

To begin with the history of photography in Nigeria, it is predominantly read within the paradigm of fine art and news media (especially photojournalism). This is not in itself out of place. The problem is the way political readings are occluded such that the photographic image is on the one hand treated as a work of art to be enjoyed only for its aesthetic qualities, and as mere illustration of news stories on the other. More than such genres as family photography and studio portraiture, there is a public face to art photography and photojournalism that enables a critique of the public discontent that dominates the relation of ordinary Nigerians to the state. So in a project that explores the activist use of photography on Facebook, I began with the claim that historically, photography in Nigeria cannot be separated from politics. But the activist engagements of artists and photojournalists are constituted differently.

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[556] Michael Williams, September 13, 2014 (2:13p.m.), comment on Michael Williams, "Is there a governor in Abia State," *Facebook*, June1 3, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Nigerianglobalawakeningdayprotest/permalink/849593728393454/.

The post-independence tensions in Nigeria commenced as early as the mid-1960s. The response of art photographers in condemnation of the socio-political conditions was not often overt. In the beginning of that decade, the photographers were as overwhelmed by the euphoria of colonial independence as they were by the thrill of a technology that enabled a life-like depiction of the world. So, they invested their creative energies in the documentation of socio-cultural experiences in ways that foregrounded self-presentation and construction of identity. This convention flourished in Nigeria even when intense plotical crisis had set in by 1966. During the military tyranny of the 1980s, art photographers became conscious of the atrocities of the state, but subtle in their response due to fear of oppression. In the instance of no explicit political attributes in the image, I have brought out the political by examining the incidents that marked the time of its production. In that way, we get a sense of the living conditions that escaped explicit depiction. However, things have changed since the beginning of the 21st century. Democracy came with disappointment that turned art photographers into strong activists in an unconcealed sense. The same democracy is responsible for the considerable freedom of expression that has allowed its own critique.

Unlike art photography, photojournalism was at the outset open in its response to the Nigerian crisis. Since the 1960s, newspapers and magazines that operate outside state control have used images strategically to expose inequality. Beyond careful choice of images for the basic need of body text illumination, they have over the years put photography to radical use. For instance, images are used independent of body texts or along with evocative headlines to draw attention to serious socio-political issues. Documentary approaches are also adopted to follow stories that highlight harsh living conditions. An example is Peter Obe's coverage of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) for the *Daily Times* newspaper.

In the argument for the activist history of photography in Nigeria, I drew on the work of Ariella Azoulay with which I have more broadly worked as my theoretical frame. She notes that the image should not be taken to be political in a self-evident sense.[557] One can choose to read it as political. This project is mainly about digital

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[557] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination.*

photography. But the reading of the evolution of analogue practices helps us to appreciate that activist photography in Nigeria did not begin with the digital. The new media only ensures a continuation of the visual resistance, but in more radical and fascinating ways. Picturing devices have not only become highly accessible, they are connected to the vast networks of World Wide Web. The networks connect people and enable them to share media contents and to have conversations about them. Thus, the photographic image enters a complex circuit of sociality that resonates with Azoulay's civil *discourse theory* of photography.[558] It posits that photography is an *event* that brings different people together, all of whom are important in the interpretation of the image. In other words, there is no single meaning of the photograph to be attributed to a particular individual. Azoulay was working with an analogue photography archive when she developed that idea. I have argued that the formulation works even more appropriately with digital photography produced on social media.

The structure of Facebook supports the democratised circulation of images and the discussion of their meanings. Posting, sharing, commenting, liking, and chatting are associated with various interactive possibilities that produce the image as a multiple story. Once a photograph arrives on the Facebook page, the context in which it was originally produced changes with the kind of comments that go with it. This sociality is crucial to the political force that marks the convergence of photography and social networking. The once unreachable Nigerian government officials can now be accessed virtually by the ordinary people who make demands for better living conditions.

Such political interchange dominates my reading of the history of Facebook. I see the crisis encountered by Facebook in its early years as an experience that prepared it for the revolutionary task ahead of it. Beginning especially in 2011, Facebook became a site of civil struggle, mobilising momentous world events. The political engagement is not a one-directional movement. The platform simultaneously serves for protest and counter-protest. Images are central to these exchanges, although not hitherto well explored in scholarly literature. In the context of

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[558] Ibid.

activism, Facebook takes on the status of the archive in the way it organises the traces of resistance against inequality. In structure and content, it borrows from the analogue archive, although digitally constituted. On the other hand, it makes us rethink some conventional notions of the archive. For example, it challenges the power of the state to monopolise the production of state-related narratives. The ordinary citizens have got the agency to document and interpret the injustices of the state. However, Facebook has its own limits as an archive. It is not a homogenous site, but a conglomeration of spaces managed by individuals and groups. Access to certain documents is consequently limited to the logic of network and of access to the management of pages. Documents can also be deleted from the site. It could be a page administrator's decision, or an outcome of complex workings of Facebook algorithm and the cyber world. It could as well be connected to issues that are themselves as political as censorship and reports directed to Facebook as an institution.

In any case, in the context of activism in Nigeria, Facebook is an important site where Nigerians archive the records of the country's post-independence conditions. Although the practice may not be acknowledged as a form of archivisation by the online activists, the photographs they circulate and discuss are archived virtual placards. They reflect the agitations of the online protesters namely, corruption, poverty, insecurity, infrastructural failure and power tussles. These are not the only questions that confront Nigeria, but they manifest in ways that shed light on others. They also overlap in certain ways. High-profile corruption transferred from one administration to another is sustained by impunity and ethnic sentiments. Through fraudulent practices, the political elites create and maintain poverty among the greater population of Nigerians. The dilapidated condition of public infrastructure is an outcome of the unaccountability of the leaders.

The Nigerian state is complicit with violence, not only due to the weakness of the security system but because government officials at times get directly involved in crime. This is demonstrated by the various forms of co-operation between Boko Haram and state functionaries. Crime in Nigeria also manifests in form of

resistance against the injustices of the government. Again, violence, fraud and egoism mark the struggle for power among the political elites. Through the photographic practices on Facebook, Nigerians express their worries about these situations. They see themselves as luckless people who live behind time and whose leaders have lost their humanness. With a sense of commitment to photography to which they ascribe evidentiary power, they pressure for social transformation.

The image becomes for them a language of revolution and the language community is constituted on Facebook. Incidentally, there is public access to devices that have the capacity to take photographs, such as digital cameras, computers, tablets, iPads, and smart phones. There is something revolutionary in the ubiquity of these devices and the way they are used in Nigeria. The Foucauldian order of surveillance has been destabilised. With the ubiquitous camera, members of the public have got the capacity to return the gaze of the state. The picturing devices are at times used surreptitiously to expose the fraudulent life of the political elites and to counter the false presentation of themselves as selfless.

Meanwhile, much of the power of the visual economy is located in the mutability of the image. Through various forms of editing, the photographs circulated on Facebook produce their activist effects. Such practice is questioned by those obsessed with the realist understanding of photography. Realism can be traced to the early history of photography when its inventors proclaimed the medium as an innocent depiction of the world. That claim is problematic because it tends to overlook the human and technical mediations that come into play in the production of the image. In the political use of photography, picture manipulation, whatever negative connotation it evokes among realists, is crucial for adequate representation of the realities of life in Nigeria.

In the visual production, a set of technological tools are deployed – digital hardware and software applications. The camera devices are not only used for the taking of photographs. They are compatible with various types of image-editing software whose use does not necessarily require special enterprise. But this presents another question. Trained photographers are critical of photographic democratisation in the digital age. A lot of the images circulated on Facebook are

of low resolution and thus described as amateur, or grainy. Such description implies an understanding of the image as merely about the visual qualities that appeal to our sense of aesthetics. But there is more to photography than that. In the context of activism, the political force of the image is important and is not undermined by its poor resolution. As exemplified by the eye witness report of the South Asian tsunami of 2004, the so-called grainy images and shaky videos are at times the only testimony of significant world events. Such visual productions undertaken with the ubiquitous camera have been used to call attention to the dubiousness of Nigerian public officials.

To further appreciate the political force of the image, one has to ponder the circumstances in which they are produced. There is a sense of commitment that drives ordinary Nigerians to expose the inequality in which they live. Even in difficult circumstances, that is, when the mere presence of the camera and its use pose some kind of risk, many strive to take photographs that call attention to injustice. Such efforts should not be dismissed as worthless merely because the end products are images of low visual quality. So, it is not only about the photograph itself but what can be termed "civil attitude" that organises its production. The civil attitude manifests in yet another fascinating way. In the face of infrastructural limitations, Nigerians put a lot of resources and energy to sustain the online struggle. Electricity and internet connection which are fundamental to the virtual-visual practice are inadequate. So, individuals resort to various forms of appropriation and improvisation to power their digital devices and to access the internet.

Apart from the above questions of social and technological modalities of image production, we can contemplate the power of the photograph in terms of the tasks assigned to it. In a world of widespread resistance against injustice, which produces cycles of violence, the photographic image is confronted with two opposing tasks. It is asked to produce violence and to counter it. The Boko Haram militancy in Nigeria appropriately illustrates this. Although connected to religious radicalism, the insurgency is framed as a revolutionary response to state fraud and the state reacts with force. The militants fashioned the image into a weapon

comparable to the firearm and the bomb, deploying it in the advancement of brutality. The parallelism of gun and camera is not necessarily new. In his essay on the role of photography in the making of the empire in Africa, Paul Landau connects the two by reading "snapping a shot" and "to snipe" as both denotative of "shooting at a…target."[559] Like the firearm, the camera was a tool of colonial domination. In the post-colonial Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency involves a similar deployment of the camera, but also in intriguingly different ways. The militants make "political demands" in "direct-address videos and photos."[560] Reversing the direction of power as what is exercised by the photographer through the camera and over the photographed, the image in the context of insurgency harasses us. It talks to us, threatening to cause violence and eventually does so. On the internet, there are many videos in which the Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau takes responsibility for attacks before and after their execution. In this way, our understanding of the image as a representation of events is altered. The image can cause or come before the event.[561]

The response of the Nigerian army to Boko Haram's use of images was to fight back with the same. As part of what was termed "counter-terrorism," images were presented to claim that the military had killed Shekau. It was a victory declared over the image that perpetrated violence. But afterwards, the picture of the ringleader reappeared, claiming invincible. It is an unresolved visual war that validates photography's relation to political violence. Although the territories once occupied by Boko Haram have been recaptured, the group has not been defeated. It has continued to launch gun and bomb attacks on both soldiers and civilians. New militant groups have also emerged in Nigeria.[562] One is therefore prompted to ask

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[559] Landau, "Empires of the Visual."

[560] Gürsel, "The Politics of Wire Service Photography," 73.

[561] Ibid.

[562] The groups include the Fulani herdsmen and the Niger Delta Avengers. The nomadic cattle rearers have their herds graze all over the places with lush green vegetation in Nigeria. They destroy farms in rural settlements and occupy urban roads. Through their constant confrontation with the owners of the farms, the herdsmen (who also complain about cattle rustling) have turned themselves into another dreaded group. They attack the villagers and kill them in large numbers. On the other hand, Niger Delta Avengers is a new group in the oil-rich Niger Delta region which has been a site of struggle for decades. The agitation is mainly about marginalisation and environmental degradation, but the newly constituted sect demands for secession of the region.

if the online activism is changing anything in Nigeria. The answer would be "yes," although not in the extreme sense of the revolution that took place in Egypt for instance, where President Mubarak stepped down in February 2011.

The impact of social media mobilisation in Nigeria is first demonstrated in how it has changed the notion of civil struggle. On the one hand, it is a form of activism where the protesters operate outside actual spaces where they could be hunted down by the challenged authorities. Not only is it difficult for the Nigerian political elites to ignore the online criticism against their excesses, they are drawn into the conversations. While they may try to exonerate themselves, the ordinary people directly communicate with them, castigate them and demand accountability from them. On the other hand, while the virtual practice is a mode of civil resistance in its own right, it impacts on how offline protests are organised. Through the interactive processes of Facebook, multitude of Nigerians raise the consciousness of one another about socio-political realities they already know or may have taken for granted. The online conscientisation develops into mass mobilisation that materialises in actual spaces. The materialisation is not only about the mass protest within the Nigerian territory. It is also about how the concern for the Nigerian condition crosses national boundaries, so that localised struggles become internationalised. Here, another theoretical formulation by Azoulay is foregrounded: "citizenship of photography."[563] She uses the concept to explain how the image provides a space to which people belong outside the constraints of nationality. The individuals insert themselves into the living condition depicted in the photography of which they are citizens.

The citizenship transcends the expression of sympathy for the distress of others. It translates into various forms of intervention. For instance, the world responded to the movement against Boko Haram's student abduction, not only by condemning the crime, but doing something about it. The Nigerian government was given financial and military supports, and pressurised to intensify efforts for the rescue of the kidnapped girls and for the counter-insurgency project. Apart from the fact that some of the kidnap victims have been freed, the interventions reassured the

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[563] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.

Nigerian activists that their agitation for social change was not unnoticed. The greatest impact of the social media movement in the country is that it contributed to the defeat of Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general election. Irresponsible leadership is at the centre of the concerns that drive online activism in Nigeria. The Jonathan administration (2010-2015) coincided with the period during which social media protest shaped world politics (and the practice continues). So, more than previous governments which also lacked accountability, Jonathan's was under severe attack which social media helped to intensify. The desire of his critics was to have him overthrown to give way to a leadership that would bring socio-political transformation. That position was shared by multitude of Nigerians who consequently withdrew their support for him in the election, leading to his defeat. This historic experience leaves one with some sense of curiosity about how Nigeria has fared since the beginning of the Mohammadu Buhari administration. It would be fascinating to return to the same social media platform to see what Nigerians make of the change for which they voted.

Meanwhile, this thesis demonstrates how to read the tensions in an African postcolony through the visual-social practice of the ordinary people. It makes a photography-related contribution to the literature on social media activism on the one hand, and its impact on African politics on the other. The ideas advanced through the analysis of images in the thesis motivate us to think and rethink the established notions of photography. We are prompted to ponder how digital facilities and practices affect the political use of the image.

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