

## Ideological Shifts of Nigerian Journalists: Analysis of Dr Reuben Abati's Articles

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### **Abstract**

*Communication between elected officials and those that elected them is vital to healthy functioning of democracy. Political officeholders need to tell the citizenry what they have and intend to do for them to improve their socio-economic wellbeing. Given that such exchange may prove impossible without the agency of the media, thus, the use of media aides becomes expedient. This paper appraised how serving as the Presidential media adviser shifted the ideological positions of Dr. Reuben Abati with reference to the performance of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. The study drew on the theoretical insights of political economy and power distance theories to make sense of the changing perspectives towards Jonathan's administration. Using rhetorical analysis, the research made visible Abati's ideological positions through the arguments he makes. The study concluded that Abati operated within adversarial orientation while in the employ of The Guardian newspaper but became enormously loyal (operated as guard dog of the authorities) to the presidency once he was appointed as media aide.*

**Keywords:** Media aide; President Jonathan, Power distance; Political economy; Journalism

### **Introduction**

Communication between elected officials and the people who elected them is important for healthy functioning of democracy (Gershon, 2012). Though Gershon (2012) observes that this is very important when elections are approaching, it is pertinent to emphasize that such interaction is needed throughout the tenure of an elected public officeholder if we are to have more participation of the citizenry in the political process. Studies (Frere, 2011; Stromback, 2005) have noted that the populace tend to participate in the political process only during election, pointing out that elections are just an aspect of democracy. Scholars (Fenno, 1978; Goldenberg & Traugoff, 1984, Graber, 2001) opine that the news media is always the primary means by which members of the Congress interact with their constituents. It is equally a means

through which voters learn about their elected officials and their programmes aimed at improving the lot of the people. These elected representatives engage the services of press secretaries in this communication process. Writing about the US Congress, Cook (1988) observes that press secretaries have become regular feature in House offices. He made the observation in the following words:

Before the expansion of staff, few offices named an individual as responsible for relations with the press. In the *Congressional Staff Directory* for 1970, only 58 members listed at least one staffer designated solely as press secretary, press assistant, communication director, and the like; by contrast, in 1984, 252 members did so (Cook, 1988, p. 1049).

The excerpt above points to the growing use of press secretaries in parliamentary affairs in the US.

In Nigeria, the same trajectory has been followed in communication between the leaders and the people. It is noticeable that the use of press secretaries has wider acceptance among executive elected officials than in the legislature in Nigeria. There seems to be a greater focus of Nigerians on their elected officials in the executive arm of government than in the legislature. It is easy to find citizens who do not know the names of legislative officials representing their constituency. Consequently, the services of press secretary or communications manager is needed to manage information following the executive to the people and vice versa. Undoubtedly, press secretaries play a crucial role in conveying the activities of the leaders to the led through the mass media.

Apart from systematizing members' relationship with the media, press secretaries are successful in the "management of the news by members of the Congress and to the incorporation of a greater awareness of the media's needs into their work styles" (Cook, 1988, p. 1049). This tradition has been adopted in Nigeria at the dawn of the current democratic dispensation. Successive Nigerian Presidents have appointed media aides designated as "Special Adviser on Media and Publicity" to serve in their governments. As Cook (1988) noted, press secretaries are practiced journalists who have worked in broadcasting, print or public relations industry. Riding on the back of that experience, they can fittingly fulfil what Blumler and Gurevitch (1981, p.485) termed, "boundary roles, whose occupants are closely familiar with the values and practices of the other camp".

When President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office, he appointed late Tunji Oseni as special adviser on media and publicity. Under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Olusegun Adeniyi served as the special adviser on media and publicity. Former President Goodluck Jonathan appointed Dr. Reuben Abati as his special adviser on media and publicity. This tradition was also maintained by the Buhari administration with the appointment of Mr. Femi Adesina as his special adviser on media and publicity. A number of studies (Arnold, 2004; Burden, 2002; Clark & Evans, 1983; Vinson, 2003) have investigated why some representatives may be portrayed in a more positive way

than others and how this unequal coverage may affect electoral results by shaping the information the electorate receive about incumbents. The authors attribute the variation in coverage to the role of press secretaries. Similar studies by Grossman and Kurma (1980), and Hess, (1984) have acknowledged the influence of press secretaries in the White House and the executive. There are other studies (Jones, 1995; Gershon, 2012; Klein, 2008) that investigate how politicians manipulate or influence media content.

While some of these studies have focused on the impact of press secretaries on the visibility of elected representatives and by extension, electoral success, others examined how press secretaries influenced media content. There appears to be scant literature on how serving as media advisers affect the ideological position or stance of journalists. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to literature in this area. This study is guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To establish the ideological position of Dr. Reuben Abati while in the service of *The Guardian* newspaper.
- (ii) To ascertain his ideological stance working in the presidency.
- (iii) To provide an explanation why the ideological shift was possible.

### **Who is Reuben Abati?**

Dr. Reuben Abati is a Nigerian journalist with over three decades of practice. He is the immediate past Special Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan. Dr. Abati has held various positions in the media such as Contributing Editor, Editor and Columnist to many publications both mainstream and the softer genre of romance. He is reputed as one of the leading columnists in the Nigerian press commenting on regional, national and international affairs. Between 2000-2011, Abati served as Chairman of the Editorial Board at the *Guardian* newspapers (Nnanna, 2012). Abati is a recipient of numerous prizes for journalistic excellence. These include the Hadj Alade Odunewu/Diamond Award for Media Excellence Prize for Informed Commentary (which he has won four times), the Cecil King Memorial Prize for Print Journalist of the Year (1998), the Fletcher Challenge Commonwealth Prize for Opinion Writing (2000), the Freedom Peace Prize for Journalism (2010) and The Red Media Africa Living Legends Industry Award (2015).

The choice of Abati is informed by the fact that he is one of the leading voices championing for good governance in Nigeria. Columnists are social crusaders who are constantly championing one cause or the other. Therefore, it is believed that you can establish their ideological stance from what they write. It is the goal of this study ascertain the different ideological positions (pro and anti) Abati occupied during Jonathan administration. Journalistic ideology is operationalised in this study to mean the overarching guiding principle that informs the actions of a journalist. Sjovaag (2013) notes that the ideological goals of journalism relate to informing the people and acting as a watchdog. Nigerian journalism operates within this framework. They function to

hold the government accountable to the people (Cammaerts, DeCillia, Viera Magalhães, & Jimenez-Martínez, 2016).

### **The Nigerian Media Landscape**

Any attempt at mapping the terrain of Nigeria media landscape should follow a historical perspective as the current media milieu is, in many ways, shaped by historical developments of the media. Several scholars (Uche, 1989; Agbaje, 1992; Jibo, 1996) state that Nigeria as a developing country has a relatively well-developed media industry. According to Bourgault (1995), it has one of the most vibrant presses on the African continent. This vibrancy, Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine (2003), dates back to the colonial era. It is well-documented that the media, especially the print media was instrumental to the attainment of the nation's independence. Oso (1991) explains that most of the Nigerian newspapers of that time were clearly political in nature deeply rooted anti-colonial struggle. It is important to note that those newspapers were private enterprises of individuals who were mostly Nigerians.

For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was reputed to own chain of newspapers during this era (Uche, 1989; Oso, 1991). That trajectory continued into Nigeria's independence. Having achieved independence, these newspapers were quickly turned into mouthpieces of the ethnic groups of their owners (Ibelema, 2003). This is in recognition of newspapers as instrument of mass mobilisation as Dr. Azikiwe advanced his political ideas through his chain of newspapers while Dr. Obafemi Awolowo did same using his *Tribune* newspaper. Ibelema (2003, p. 173) notes that "The vibrancy of the press reflected a political structure in which four powerful ethnic regional governments competed among themselves for resources, while vying for control of or influence at the federal government". (indenting is usually recommended for quotations beyond 40 word. Embed this in the paragraph above and use the quotation marks

The effect of this was that coverage of events was influenced by the ownership of the newspaper. Describing the press in early years of Nigeria's independence, Olayiwola (1991) argues that ownership influence affected the coverage of national issues such as the census, elections and regional crises. For his part, Ainslie (1974) asserts that the political loyalties of Nigerian press in the 1960s tended to produce polemical journalism of personal attack instead of debate on issue.

It is important to note that journalists working in these newspapers were not trained journalists but were largely drawn to the profession because of their flair for writing or their interest in the colonial struggle (Uche, 1989). Hence, professional values of journalism were yet to take root in the industry. To a great extent, this reflected in their reward system as the profession became an all-comer affair. As a result, journalists did not have the leverage to negotiate for better condition of service (Omu, 1978). Added to this is the fact that the Nigerian press is operating in a depressed economy and "is barely managing to keep its head above water" (Edeani, 1990, p. 183). This situation, Nwabueze (2010) explains results to poor remuneration of journalists and neglect of their welfare. Procurement of insurance policy for journalists in their employ has been a subject of controversy for many newspaper houses. With a welfare package that can

hardly take care of the needs of the journalist, acceptance of brown envelope becomes an easy way of augmenting lean resources (Lodamo & Skjerdal, 2009; Ekeanyanwu, 2012). Some newspaper houses hardly pay workers salary as and when due. In fact, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has had to picket the premises of one of Nigeria's leading newspapers, *ThisDay* over non-payment of salary (Adebowale, 2015). Similarly, *The Guardian*, another leading newspaper in Nigeria was out of circulation for months over wage dispute. This explains high prevalence of brown envelope syndrome among Nigerian journalists. Judging by these myriad of challenges, abandoning journalism profession for other vocations becomes a decision perhaps most journalists do not struggle to take let alone if it is political appointment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work has as its theoretical constructs power distance thesis and the political economy of the media.

#### **Power istance**

Drawing from existing literature, Hanitzsch (2007) conceptualises journalism culture as being made up of three essential constituents: institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies. According to Hanitzsch (2007), the three constituents further bifurcate into seven main dimensions namely interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism and idealism. Each dimension has two ideal-typical extremes on the continuum that are hardly experienced in real world of journalistic practice. This work is particularly interested in power distance dimension. The term "power distance" was initially coined by Hofstede (1980) to identify one of the main dimensions of cultural variance. In journalism, one extreme point of the power distance dimension is represented by the "adversary" pole (high); the other end should be labelled "loyal" (low). The adversary pole of the continuum,

Hanitzsch (2007) explains, entails a type of journalism that overtly challenges the power that be. Adversarial journalism has a long history in liberal democracies and is often assumed by way of functioning as the fourth estate in a democracy (Hanitzsch, 2007). Journalists operating within this framework see themselves as "watchmen" or "watchdogs" and as agents of social control (Gans, 1979, p. 295; Schramm, 1964, p.127). They offer an independent and radical assessment of society and its institutions (Fuller, 1996; McQuail, 2000). In the west, journalists as the fourth estate of the realm has been naturalised but the same cannot be said of other parts of the world like Asia and Africa where collaborative journalistic role is privileged (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2010).

The other end of the continuum of the power distance dimension is a strand or variant of journalism that positions itself as "loyal" to those in authority. This is readily seen in Asia and Africa where collaborative role of journalism is privileged (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2010). It should be noted that journalists see themselves as fourth estate of the realm because of how western strand of journalism has been so popularised that it almost becoming global journalism culture (Josephi, 2006).

In other words, journalists are taken on board to realise aims and objectives of a government. Pasti (2005) argues that this type of journalism can be extremely loyal: taking on a “propagandist role”. Sometimes, they are defensive of authorities (*see* guard dog journalism [Donohue, Tichenor & Olien, 1995]), functioning as mouthpieces of the government or the party (Hanitzsch, 2007). In Althursserian sense, it is a type of journalism that serves as an ideological state apparatus. It never questions the legitimacy of the leaders and so, offer support to established authority and tradition, though not in an obvious way (Hanitzsch, 2007). Practitioners of this kind of journalism devote excessive attention to the authorities and hardly critique official account of the story. Rather they accept information provided by government sources as authentic, reliable and genuine and “they often become public relations channels for the transmission of government messages to the public” (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 374).

### **The political economy of the media**

The political economy of communications, news or media, is a specific branch of media studies which examines the power relations that constitute the communication of information from the mass media to its publics (Flew & Smith, 2014). The idea has been advanced by media and political economy scholars such as Herbert Schiller, Vincent Schiller, Robert McChesney, Peter Golding and Garnham Murdock. Political economic thesis interrogates the social relations between the mass media system, the communication technology and broader social/economic structure in which it operates, with a focus on making sense of both the historical emergence and current state of technological development (Havens & Lotz, 2012; Jin & Winseck, 2011). To put it differently, political economy is an approach to the study of the media with a focus on ways by which media content is produced, distributed and consumed as opposed to the interpretations of texts. Unlike mainstream economics, Golding and Murdock (2000) note that political economy is distinct in four ways: it is holistic, historical; fundamentally concerned with the balance between capital enterprise and public intervention as well as the fact that it addresses the issues of justice, equity and the public good. Focused on the relationship between economic organisation and political, social and cultural life, political economy seeks to appraise the effect of economic dynamics on the variety of media product and its availability to the people (Golding & Murdock, 2000).

In line with this thinking, this theory is relevant to this study as it provides a lens through which we can assess journalistic practice. With a particular focus on how economic considerations can shape the work of journalist, political economy theory provides the theoretical basis for the study of ideological shifting among journalists in Nigeria with Dr. Reuben Abati as a case study.

### **Textual Analysis**

Textual analysis is based on the belief that texts have the interpretations of their creators embedded in them (Knorr-Certina, 1981). Textual analysis is a type of

qualitative study that transcends manifest media content to essential ideological and cultural postulations of the text (Fürsich, 2009). In deploying semiotic, narrative, rhetorical approaches to qualitative analysis, textual analyst investigates an identified text. Cultural studies scholars find textual analysis useful in media studies as it surmounts the downside in traditional quantitative content analysis like the analysis being restricted to manifest content and to quantifiable categories (Fürsich, 2009). Not only does textual analysis enable the researcher to determine hidden meaning, it makes visible implicit patterns, assumptions and absences of a text. Drawing on rhetorical, linguistic and semiotic interpretative strategies, textual analysis is multidimensional in its approach (Fürsich, 2009). This essay will use rhetorical analysis as its tool for textual analysis.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Scholars (Richardson, 2007; Kieran, 1998; Prinsloo, 2009) are unanimous in their opinion that journalism could be approached as an argumentative discourse genre. They argue that journalistic products are never value-free but are ideologically loaded to achieve certain objectives. This is even truer for opinionated pieces in the newspapers as the writers are making a case for specific issues. Prinsloo (2009) notes that media text draws intertextually on other texts in order to convey its message. In view of this, Prinsloo (2009) counsels that a media text needs to be examined in terms of the way it is crafted. According to her, "it needs to be analysed as a social act that mediates the substance of the text and is therefore also a rhetorical act" (Prinsloo, 2009, p.211). Rhetoric basically relates to an effort at persuasion carried out by the writer or speaker via the choices made in the production of the text (Prinsloo, 2009). Seen as a political tool, rhetoric's goal is not only to achieve persuasion but to find the persuasive facts in each piece and present them convincingly to engender action. Newspaper columns provide an opportunity for the columnist to advance his or her point of view often in an argumentative way.

The texts for this study were drawn from Dr. Abati's writings both the ones he wrote as a columnist and when he became the special adviser to the president on media and publicity. Six articles (three articles he wrote as a columnist and three he wrote as presidential spokesperson) were sampled for the study. The articles selected for this study were those that offered an opinion concerning the performance of the President Goodluck Jonathan. Having gathered the texts, we immersed (reading and re-reading) ourselves in them with a view to familiarising ourselves with the gist of the texts. Using rhetorical analysis, we identified the kinds and modes of argument being put forward by Dr. Abati. Rhetorical analysis was deployed to establish the kinds of argument made by Dr. Abati and by extension, identify his ideological stance on President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. The data is descriptively presented.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **Mr. Abati in the employ of The *Guardian* Newspaper**

The underlisted articles were written by Reuben Abati in which he expressed his disapproval of President Jonathan's administration.

#### **'Hurry Up, Jonathan'**

Mr. Abati argues that President Jonathan's administration is falling short of expectations of the Nigerian people. This is an epideictic argument as he tries to prove people's disapproval of Jonathan's administration. The title, 'Hurry Up, Jonathan' is a presupposition of an unsatisfactory speed. To make his claim of President Jonathan not being on the right track, he uses argument by analogy, where he makes a comparison of attitudes of African leaders, 'It is very easy in a Presidential position in Nigeria, nay Africa, to get carried away with the ceremonies of office, to be largely overwhelmed by the fawning attention of sycophants and opportunists' and he gives a verdict that, 'It looks like President Goodluck Jonathan is beginning to fall into that pit.'

From paragraphs two and three, to make visible the failure of Jonathan's administration, he deploys a forensic argument by recalling the promise the president made when he was inaugurated as acting President, 'that his administration will hit the ground running.' Abati passes his judgment, 'there is no indication that President Jonathan intends to 'hit the ground running.' He seems to have 'hit the ground dancing.' He then sends a warning, 'He should read the mood of the Nigerian people more carefully, the ordinary people, I mean. They are impatient.' By impatience, Abati suggests Nigerians are uncomfortable with their present condition and it also shows that Abati is with the Nigerian people hence he could read their mood clearly.

In paragraphs four and five, he adopts forensic argument by providing evidence of Nigeria's impatience. Hear him, 'In three years of the Yar'Adua presidency, not much transformation took place as the people continued to search in vain for the same democracy dividends they have been looking for since 1999.' Abati argues logically that the President is running business as usual government. He cites the manner in which the vice president emerged, 'He seems determined to run a government of the Godfathers..... Nothing has been more sordid than the silly politicking that has so far attended the appointment of a new Vice President.' Using argument by comparison, he contrasts the hung parliament in the UK to situation in Nigeria, 'For comparison, Dr. Jonathan should look towards Britain where a major political situation has been resolved so decently within a matter of days, without any disruptions and the country has moved on.' He concludes with a plea to the president, 'hurry up and focus on the important issues of national interest.'

#### **'How Jonathan Got his GCFR'**

In continuation of his argument that the leadership in Nigeria fails mainly because they are engrossed in the ceremonies of office often organised by sycophants in the corridors of power. As a forensic argument, he begins, 'Whoever came up with that

explanation about how President Goodluck Jonathan got his GCFR – the highest national honour in the land .... must be thoroughly disingenuous.’ Abati recounts the drama that heralded the President taking the title, ‘.... Please Sir, GCON is too small for you.’ ‘and so, Dr. Jonathan, ever-so-humble, capitulated.’ Among the dictionary meanings of the word, ‘capitulate’ is to end all resistance, hence, Abati sarcastically was emphasising resistance initially put forward by the president.

Paragraphs four and five, he trivialises the award of GCFR by questioning, ‘How could the President taking a GCFR title have created so much drama at a meeting of the Council of State? Why couldn’t such trifle wait?’ He also made a case on the illegality of a former head of state signing the award of GCFR. He uses logetic argument by citing Section 6(a)(iii) which ‘defines the role of that Council in relation to the “award of national honour,” and nowhere is it stated that former Heads of state can constitute themselves into a superior authority conferring National Honours on a sitting President.’ Abati points to the honour the president should seek ‘such general opinion which by the end of his tenure would advertise his deeds and achievements in office as truly deserving of honour and celebration and a place in the people’s hearts and memory.’ To make evident the emptiness of titles, he deploys argument by analogy by referring to a former head of State, ‘General Sani Abacha also had a GCFR. Does anyone today think that he truly deserved it?’

Abati, in paragraphs six and seven, turns to argument by comparison in recalling how awards are conferred on deserving personalities in the UK, ‘Each year when the Queen’s Honours’ List is announced in Great Britain, the award is taken seriously; it is an advertisement of the British value system: merit, achievement, international diplomacy. It is not every British Prime Minister that is on the Queen’s Honours list.’ In Nigeria, ‘the Nigerian National Honours list is driven by an entitlement mentality.’ By making an ethotic argument of people deserving of national awards, he states, ‘the highest honours in the land should be reserved for the Wole Soyinkas, the Kayode Esos, the Chinua Achebes, the Chukwudifu Oputas, the Joystick Tigers, the Fela Kutis, the Margaret Ekpos, inventors, entrepreneurs, great promoters of the Nigerian dream.’ He sums up this piece like this, ‘President Jonathan has failed to eschew the business-as-usual syndrome’.

### **‘When will Nigeria ever make it?’**

Abati contends that the nation is not making any progress. Paragraph one opens with a depressing scenario about Nigeria, ‘There is nothing more exasperating, living in Nigeria, studying Nigeria, and analysing Nigeria, and being Nigerian, than the realization that our lives have become one long piece of monotonous repetition of failures and uncertainties.’ To unpack his argument, Abati, in paragraphs two to four, uses a logetic argument to advance his point, ‘Even that which works, even that which appears to move eventually careers towards a dead end.’ The tentativeness of progress is indicative of its non lasting nature. By using ‘the closure of our dreams’, ‘the abbreviation of our enthusiasm’ ‘Companies manage to survive’ ‘if the banks declare absurd balance sheets’,

Abati reinforces the fact that those successes were either momentary or spurious. Even though it was a new year, he makes a deliberative argument that the nation will not perform any better 'Next year and the year after, almost interminably, we repeat the same patterns' and 'our nation is trapped in the vortex of half-measures, and tokenisms and sheer monotony'.

Continuing on his deliberative argument that it will be business as usual, Abati says, 'It is so easy to reduce public affairs in Nigeria to a number of predictable outcomes because every year is a veritable photocopy of the other one.' 'We are starting a new year and the subject is the same because we have not moved an inch nearer to the satisfaction of public expectations in this regard'. He makes a deliberative argument that the 'local refineries are not working', 'we are import-dependent' that, 'we may have to pass through the same old routine.'

In concluding, Abati argues that, 'Government is unable to make a difference because governance in Nigeria is yet another veritable ritual' which again, is re-emphasising the business as usual disposition to governance in the country. In adopting deliberative argument, he insists that the future is bleak, 'As it was in 1999, so it was in 2003 and so it is now, and so it seems it shall be for the rest of the year and beyond.' Through the use of ideological strategy of unification, he speaks for Nigerians, 'we are a terribly short-changed people, holding the wrong end of the stick.'

### **Abati As Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to the President**

The following articles are written by Dr. Abati in which he supported the President and his policies

#### **'Face-off : The hypocrisy of yesterday's men'**

In this article, Abati argues that the president is maliciously attacked. He employs epideictic argument to make his case. It is instructive how Abati identifies critics of the president, 'loosely bound group of yesterday's men and women' which could be read to mean people who do not have any ideological base but to 'pick issues with virtually every effort of the administration.' He uses ideological strategy of expurgation to emphasise their otherness, 'they claim to be better', 'They are ever so censorious, contrarian and supercilious'. On the other hand, he unites his position with that of the audience, 'We are in reality dealing with a bunch of hypocrites' which attempts to highlight critics' insincerity.

In paragraphs four and five, Abati makes argument by comparison where he said, 'public service is seen and treated as a privilege. People are called upon to serve; they do so with humility and great commitment, and when it is all over, they move on to other things.' as opposed to the men who cling to their previous leadership positions. Little wonder he calls them, 'yesterday's men', 'self-appointed guardians of the Nigerian estate.'

Abati, in paragraph six, uses a logotic argument, 'they open social media accounts and pretend to be voices of wisdom seeking to cultivate an angry crowd which they feed

continually with their own brand of negativity.' It is also worthy of note the use of the phrase, 'angry crowd' which connotes a group of disorganised, rowdy people who hardly make use of their intellect. They are also fed with 'their own brand of negativity' implying that the criticisms were, in effect, fictitious.

From paragraphs seven to nine, in a bid to discredit them, he makes forensic argument by reviewing their tenure in office as leaders, 'When one of them was in charge of this same estate called Nigeria, he shut down the Port Harcourt airport ... two years under the guise of renovation', 'They once promised to solve the crisis of electricity supply in Nigeria.... leave the country in darkness with less than 2,000 MW; abandoned independent power projects, mismanaged power stations, and 'One of them was even accused of having awarded choice plots of government land to himself, his companies and other relations when he was in charge of such allocations!'

Concluding this piece, Abati employs ideological mode of unification in rejecting the position of these past leaders and appears to be speaking for the Nigerian people. Hear him, 'we've already seen what some of them are capable of doing .... and to that the people have spoken in unison – they have had enough.'

### **'The Jonathan they do not know'**

Abati contends, as the title suggests, that Jonathan is being criticised as a result of misconception. He does this by using an ethotic argument. He commences the article by using predicational strategies to qualify those who constitutes the 'they', 'all the cynics, the pestle-wielding critics, the unrelenting, self-appointed activists, the idle and idling, twittering, collective children of anger, the distracted crowd of Facebook addicts, the BBM-pinging soap opera gossips of Nigeria.' He uses the word, 'anarchists' to describe this people in order to highlight the thoughtlessness of their action and to delegitimise their position.

In paragraphs three and four, Abati dismisses criticisms against the president saying, 'we have a lot of unintelligent people repeating stupid clichés and too many intelligent persons wasting their talents lending relevance to thoughtless conclusions'. He makes an ethotic argument that he is better placed to give a true account of the president, 'I have spent the last fourteen months working with President Jonathan. .... I can write a whole book on his Presidency so far'.

Attempting to counter the criticisms that have trailed Jonathan's presidency, Abati from paragraphs five and six, makes an ethotic argument by emphasising the leadership qualities of the president. While responding to the allegation that the president is clueless, he had this to say, 'He is not clueless. Nobody is more committed to the Nigerian Project than President Jonathan.' Once more he argues, 'President Jonathan is a clever, methodical and intelligent man'.

Between paragraphs seven to nine, he makes a logetic argument by listing steps taken by the president to transform Nigeria, 'He knows Nigerians want regular power supply. He is working at it. That is why we have crossed 4, 400 MW', 'He knows Nigerians want infrastructure. That is why he is telling Bi-Courtney to fix Lagos-Ibadan

Expressway or get out' and 'he has directed the relevant agencies to get corrupt persons to answer for their misdeeds'.

In concluding, Abati uses argument by comparison to liken the action of the president's critics to what he referred to as, 'the Saul Complex. Saul could not accept the fact that somebody as simple as David could be favoured by God.' On virtues of simplicity, he makes an ethotic argument, 'that the President is a simple man but simplicity is not naivety. If simplicity were to be naivety then the world would not be where it is today because it is simple men like Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Kwame Nkrumah, who have shaped the world that we live in by simplifying what others have complicated.' Through this, Abati placed the President Jonathan on the same pedestal with these great men.

### **'Abati: The Economist won't re-elect Jonathan'**

Abati makes a pathotic argument. In paragraph one, he evokes patriotic emotion of the reader by insisting that the president will be re-elected by patriotic Nigerians. This presupposes that anyone who votes against him is unpatriotic. Describing the paper's decision to endorse Gen. Buhari as 'baseless, jaundiced and rather malicious vilification of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan', Abati uses epideictic argument to discredit the Economist. He was in essence arguing that action is ill-informed because they could not see clearly the true state of things in Nigeria.

In paragraphs three and four, Abati uses forensic argument to recount Buhari's past actions, 'as a former military dictator, curtailed freedom of speech, ordered the kidnapping of opponents and jailing of journalists, and is accused of incitement to violence and grave human rights violations in Nigeria's current democratic dispensation.'

He makes a deliberative argument that Nigerians will vote for President Jonathan based on the following: 'Nigerians who, ..., know that President Jonathan has worked very hard to fulfil all the major promises he made to them on assumption of office', 'know that President Jonathan has developed our economy and created more jobs' and 'Nigerians are also aware that President Jonathan has worked tirelessly to improve power supply across the nation.' Finally, Abati uses a pathotic argument to express his confidence that Nigerians will truly vote for President Jonathan because, 'they understand that a Buhari Presidency will, for their beloved country, represent a stark setback and retrogression from the tremendous ongoing positive transformation of Nigeria under President Jonathan's leadership.'

### **Discussion**

From the analysis above, we have established two ideologically-opposed positions occupied by Dr. Reuben Abati. First, as a columnist in the employ of *The Guardian* newspaper from the opinion pieces he wrote, it is self-evident that he, like many Nigerians, was unimpressed by the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. Operating within the watchdog role of the press, Abati questioned, challenged

and sometimes, condemned the actions of Jonathan administration. Through his writings, he articulated the needs of Nigerians. However, when he was appointed the special adviser to the President on media and publicity, all those changed. Abati began to defend the presidency and never saw merit in the criticism of Jonathan's government. He sometimes attacks the character of those criticizing the government he was serving in. It leaves one to wonder, "what has changed?" or "why the change in Abati's disposition towards Jonathan's government?" To account for the shift in ideological stance towards Jonathan's government, two theoretical constructs (political economy theory of the media and power distance thesis) may provide useful lens through which the issues can be interrogated. In line with the political economy theory of the media, the contents of Abati's opinion pieces were largely influenced by editorial policy of *The Guardian* newspaper. To be clear, *The Guardian* is an independent newspaper that is not directly influenced by the government and so, is at liberty to play their watchdog role without undue interference. Using the power distance thesis, Abati as the chairman of editorial board of the Guardian was operating within the adversary pole of the continuum. As Hanitzsch (2007) points out, adversarial type of journalism openly challenges the authorities. This is exactly what Abati was doing through his articles. He was that fiery journalist who took Jonathan's administration to task on many issues.

On the other hand, when he was appointed as media aide to President Jonathan, his writings changed. From being the watchdog of the society, Abati became, as it were, the guard dog of the government. Based on the political economy theory of the media, his views, expressed in the content of his writings, changed to reflect the economic influence on his career. He was no longer paid by *The Guardian* but the presidency. On the power distance continuum, Abati was low and so loyal. Pasti (2005) contends that this type of journalism can be enormously loyal, often times, assuming a propagandist role. Journalists operating in this perspective are defensive of the authorities as seen in guard dog role of journalism. This finds expression in Dr. Abati's writings as president's aide. Many of the articles were defending President Jonathan and his policies while others attacked President's perceived critics as the examples above attest.

## Conclusion

This study sought to examine the shifting ideological positions of Dr. Reuben Abati with reference to his positions as a columnist and spokesman respectively. Anchored on the political economy and power distance theories of the media, this qualitative research, informed by rhetorical analysis, indicated how Dr. Abati, through his writing, criticised President Jonathan's poor performance. Following his appointment as presidential spokesperson, Dr. Abati moved from being the chief critic of Jonathan's government to being its main defender. What is interesting is that he held markedly contrasting views about President Jonathan's administration. As the Chairman of Editorial board of *The Guardian* newspaper, Abati held a negative view of Jonathan's government. He had positive opinion of the administration once he was appointed Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to President Jonathan.

To account for Abati's change of opinion on the administration he once vilified can be located in his place of employment. Richardson (2007) argues that the ownership structure of a newspaper is likely to impact on its content. Working in the *Guardian*, a privately-owned media outfit with no pressure from the political class provided Abati the opportunity of staying true to the ideals of the paper part of which is captured on the paper's motto, 'Conscience nurtured by truth'. Conversely, serving as the government's spokesperson also impacted on his views about Jonathan's administration. Also, power distance thesis also provided useful insight to this change. While he was working for The *Guardian*, Dr. Abati was distant from the presidency which enabled him to operate under watchdog role. When hired to serve as presidential spokesperson, the distance was reduced thereby making him to be loyal as expressed in guard dog journalism.

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