

**A Review of Babafemi
Ojudu's *Adventure of a
Guerrilla Journalist:
An Autobiography* (2024)**

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In the book, *Adventure of a guerrilla journalist: An autobiography*, Babafemi Ojudu examined, for posterity, the impact that military rule had on Nigeria in the 1990s. The narratives reveal a chilling and turbulent journey that almost brought the nation and its citizenry to the brink of collapse. Importantly, it reports the adversarial nature of military rule and media reporting and at the same time, the opportunity to oppose the continuity of military governance. From the introductory chapter to the conclusion, the book paints only one picture- opposition to military rule was seen as a call to service.¹ What the author and possibly his co-travellers might not have envisaged, at the advent of their opposition to military rule, was the cost that opposition would bring their way, a cost which faint-hearted people cannot endure. Overall, this publication is a reaffirmation that Nigeria has a rich history of opposition to oppression and injustice.

If anyone is in doubt that military rule was an accident as much as an aberrant political order, then this book by Babafemi Ojudu and the wrenching stories therein are further proofs of the enduring horrors in Nigeria and the intensely painful experience that military rule left in its wake. It is a book that is evidently gripping in detail and hard to fault for its historical accuracy.

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One can safely assert that the author and his fellow journalists were indeed the nation's conscience. The entire twenty-four-chapter book is revelatory and well-detailed about the abuse that characterised military governance in Nigeria. The book is a bittersweet ode to unflagging fortitude and raw courage in the face of mortal danger, as speaking truth to power often earned one either death or incarceration. The military juntas intended to silence the people through intimidation, harassment, jail time and possible brutal death. It is nostalgic, profound and uniquely exerting to the mind as the book is being read. The book looks back into the dark alley of Nigeria's not-too-distant history to exhume a sordid past that needed to be confronted by principled opposition to the shenanigan that blossomed in the name of the armed forces. Though the bulk of the nation was silenced into acceptance of a governance style filled with terror as its defining emblem, yet some journalists rabidly insisted that demanding accountability from political leadership was a necessity never to be surrendered, hence the inevitable clash that ensued. In that clash, many were maimed, harassed, intimidated, and silenced forever, but some elected not to surrender in an effort to salvage the nation from the claws of political renegades. Ojudu was one of such that did not sit idly by in Nigeria's moment of existential crisis. This is the story in the variegated complexities of military incursion, abuses and misgovernance architecture of a badly bruised nation that was left adrift by incompetence and violations of basic rights. The book established that military rule was traumatic in every sense of the word and advanced ample pieces of evidence to buttress the fact.

One of the most consequential events of the 20th century was the entrenchment of military rule in Nigeria between 1966 and 1999 with a tightened grip and an interregnum between 1979 and 1983, but of particular note was the period under a self-styled "evil genius", General Ibrahim Babaginda (1985-1993) and the late maximum ruler, General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Both were regarded as particularly extreme in human rights violations and as kingpins of corruption. Under the former, the aphorism that "life is brutish, nasty and short" was particularly definite. Under the latter, journalists were hunted like game by security forces. Many were maimed, imprisoned, or killed, often merely for publishing factual reports. A particular case was the killing of Baguada Kaltho, a reporter who was

targeted because of his service to the country by reporting fearlessly and factually. He died because of his commitment to investigative reporting.

General Abacha was Nigeria's maximum ruler between 1993-1998, a period that pushed the country to the brink of collapse. His rule ushered a wave of unprecedented horror that many people of that age will never wish to relive. Indeed, under his rule, Nigeria became a pariah state. Abacha's grip was further reinforced by his passionate desire to transmute and possibly perpetuate himself in power by all means possible but for his sudden demise by an act of providence, one can only speculate what would have become of Nigeria. It was this brutal climate that provided the grounds for the emergence of some champions of Nigeria's political democratisation, a role fraught with dangers such as indefinite incarceration, forced exile, sudden death and more. Most of the experiences captured by Ojudu (2024) were simply harrowing. However, these stories were not fictional; indeed, they were factual and lived through. As a philosopher once said, the only thing that permits the triumph of evil is for people of good conscience to do nothing. The exceptional role played by the author and some other compatriots was dictated by the highest ideal of patriotism and by surrendering themselves for possible immolation in the face of rising typhoon of tyranny. The author's chronicle reveals a particular hunger to do what was right even in the face of maximum danger.

Babafemi Ojudu, being a leading participant in the epic confrontation against military misrule, provided a clear-eye witness account of developments that characterised that eon. Bringing together stories that appeared as an occurrence of a distant past is a great effort at helping a nation that has been accused of having a short memory, not to forget. We do not have to forget, as people who forget their history are doomed to the same cycle of history. That is why the writing of the book, *Adventures of a Journalist: An Autobiography* is both aptly commendable and instructive. The book recounts the tyranny and state gangsterism of Nigeria's military regimes, and the citizens who resisted a dictatorship that nearly destroyed both the Nation and its people. Though Abacha suddenly died in 1998, a passing that spurred Nigeria toward the path of political democratisation, this book and some others are required as essential testimonials against that dark era in Nigeria's annals of political development. Such tasks have

become all the more compelling against a culture of revisionism and outright ignorance about the history of the country by the teeming youths as displayed in many online and offline analyses of events.

Although the author was not a lone voice in the wilderness of extreme government clampdown that engulfed Nigeria during the period under review, his book is a charge against complacency. That Nigeria survived the orgies of violence unleashed, particularly by the military governments of Generals Ibrahim Babaginda and Sani Abacha is thanks to the revolutionary journalists who took up the challenge with evangelical zest to remain defiant to such abhorrence. When roadblocks were mounted against the practice of journalism, Babafemi Ojodu and his friends resorted to “*kamikaze* journalism” as a form of protest and duty. For them, there was no stopping their right to practice journalism, as continuing military rule would spell outright doom, which was most intolerable to them. Kudos to them as they went underground to continue with their reporting, which eventually changed the political landscape of the country.

The author’s narrative, a voice that railed against military misadventure in politics, is loud and insistent and plays a daring role in confronting the military through the instrumentality of his profession. Daring journalism, in itself not a novelty in Nigeria, was instrumental in so many ways in ending colonialism in Nigeria. It is a continuation of a noble call to act in the national interest. Hence, Babafemi Ojodu only acted as an heir to a noble professional heritage. That historical awareness reinforced his conviction during the crusade against military misrule in Nigeria in the 1990s. The rule of the jungle characterised military rule, with military officers gleefully undermining constitutional order by extra-constitutional intervention in the body politics of the country at the slightest opportunity.

Also narrated is the extraordinary resilience, courage, sacrifices and devotion of a crop of journalists whose only motivation was to save the country from obvious ruination. They confronted the abnormal situation in a clash that was uneven but necessary to save the country from the jackboot of some megalomaniacs who insisted on ruining the country in perpetuity because they bear arms, arms bought by taxpayers. For this group of military officers, power flows from the barrel of the gun, and anybody who stood in their way was marked for ruination. The author, as an idealist, believed in

some fundamental rights of citizens and such rights were anachronistic under military rule, but he was ready to ventilate regardless. That course of action, commendable as it was, came at a heavy price. He became an object of persecution, was hunted and incarcerated several times.

Babafemi Ojodu and a group of young men and women of this era chose confrontation- opting for harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, and in some extreme cases, annihilation- over the illusion that comes with military rule. The military viewed them as nuisances and as individuals who must be silenced at all costs. In response, these journalists adopted guerrilla journalism, a novel approach that challenged the foundations of military governance. Although forced into hiding, the military underestimated the journalists' ability to employ unconventional tactics to oppose them. It was an epic struggle that marked the reversal of military influence from the country's governance architecture. The story of Babafemi Ojodu, a brave and committed journalist, should be preserved and retold perpetually, as the country- though not currently under military rule- is still beset with challenges as it endeavours to consolidate democratic governance.

The book is handy, highly educative and a huge resource for researchers and the general public. It awakens nostalgia, though with mixed feelings of some sweet-bitter experiences of Nigeria's not-too-distant past. Some of the other stories were personal to the author, while some of the stories were relatable to the horrors, shocking and oftentimes brutal experiences in play during the period under focus. Those were the days of hell, a period, hopefully, never to be returned to. During this period, civil liberties were systematically eroded, and the notion of "national security" served as a vague pretext for political repression. The military consistently acted with impunity, enforcing illegitimate orders while disregarding reason, viewing all matters exclusively through the narrow lens of "national security." This approach facilitated an authoritarian grip on power with significant negative implications for national cohesion, peace, and security.

The journalists of that era faced significant risks for standing up against ongoing military misadventures; nevertheless, their actions eloquently testified to their resilience, commitment, and sense of mission to resist a criminal political system. Through their acts of defiance, especially by writing news, editorials and reportage that revealed the bankruptcy of that system,

Ojudu and his colleagues made sure their reports were factual. Their factual presentations won them sympathies and admirers, and this ensured their victory. Their weapon was confronting the military with the truth. Driven by patriotism, guided by their leftist political orientation, they sustained their opposition to the military by their passion and convictions. For them, the country was worth saving, and they did not turn their backs on a bleeding nation, a nation that the military selected to serially rape to death.

Over three decades after the military withdrew from the country's political governance, full Uhuru is yet to be achieved. Many of the ills that the author and his fellow journalists stood against have metastasised with no less virulence. The list has grown further with some of the actors changing sides in a circus show of the absurd. The country remains stunted with the political process still yet to be fully democratised. Of course, the military has since reverted to its constitutional role, but some of the crooks of yesteryears are now on the saddle as 'new actors on the scene'. Hence, and of particular note is that this lucid and highly perceptive book is only a valuable guide and an instructional manual with a resolution that 'never again'. Indeed, vigilance is the eternal price for liberty.

Another lesson to learn from the book is that journalism is only valuable if it is based on truth, presenting facts regardless of whose interests are affected. As the author stated, "an authoritative journalist is one who can back every assertion with facts that would hold up in any court of law." Unfortunately, nowadays, some 'journalists' ranting on social media fabricate stories and dismiss complaints with "damn you." They rarely present real facts. This is dangerous and could lead to chaos in the near future if left unchecked. Honestly, a responsible journalist has the important duty to fact-check news and reports in this era of misinformation. In fact, media studies should include courses on journalism ethics and verification. This can help media students learn about significant contributions they can make to the country's socio-economic development. Learning about figures such as Babafemi Ojudu can motivate them to achieve greater heights.

As much as many have hailed this book as apt and commendable, yet it is not necessarily without some gaps. For one, it contains some inconclusive stories. The author narrated the story of a man who sojourned abroad, came back home and perished in the hands of the police. The man remained

anonymous. Also, the book lacked an index. Such major gaps should be avoided in a future updated publication.

In conclusion, despite the insights stated above, the book is a unique contribution to Nigeria's recent history and could possibly guide against revisionism. The book is a fascinating work that presents important lessons for genuine national healing and reconciliation. Therefore, the vital message to the readers is simply the need to guard their civil liberties, and even now, under a democratic order, the call to Nigerians is that liberty should be guarded. In short, the author should be commended for a job well done.