

Politics of Rumour and Rumour in the Power Dynamics

Dr. Stanley Naribo Ngoa⁴

Key Terms: politics; rumour; democracy.

Dedication: To Dr. Stanley Macebuh; who died an avoidable death.

Abstract

Rumour is generally viewed as suspect evidence because, it is supposedly, communication constructed on unverified information. However, rumour, has seemingly transcended this generalized negative connotation and has acquired some air of importance with news value placed on it.

This paper attempts an examination of rumour as a political manipulation tool, its social relevance and potency as well as its effect on the bureaucratic flow of policy decisions.

The paper argues that rumour as an agent of political power dynamics possesses powerful effects; concluding that, there is the need for new research that moves beyond the old media treatment of rumour and its associated negative connotations.

Introduction and Theoretical Approach

Rumour as a concept lacks a precise definition both in the study of the humanities as in the social sciences. But the general consensus amongst scholars and experts of different hues is that rumour involves information/messages whose veracity is quite often notoriously difficult

⁴ *Dr Stanley Naribo Ngoa is a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His e-mail is dr.snn.enigma@gmail.com.*

to confirm. Rumour, then, can be referred to as communication constructed on unverified information and thus hearsay, normative or suspect evidence.

The theoretical framework for this paper will therefore anchor within the following propositions: (1) Jason Harsin's examination of several key transformations in mediated American politics that promise the efficacy of rumour as well as encourage its use as a privileged communication strategy whose truthfulness could be in doubt (2) Rosnow & Fyne's argument that rumour could be a 'vital curative for society' on the one hand, while on the other equally viewed as distasteful, harmful and vile (3) Allport & Postman's concept of rumour that becomes 'embroidered' and (4) Stephen Ellis' observation that some rumours eventually turn out to be not just part of the truth but accurate.

Rumour is generally associated with the negative connotation of falsehood. Harsin (2006) in his examination of several key transformations in mediated American politics that promise the efficacy of rumour as well as encourage its use as a privileged communication strategy confirms rumour as a claim whose truthfulness is in doubt; adding that, even if its ideological or partisan origins and intents are clear, rumour's sources often remain unclear.

But, whereas Pendleton (1998) citing Berenson corroborates Harsin's view and defines rumor as a persuasive proposition that lacks 'secure standards of evidence', Ellis (1989) observes that some rumours eventually turn out to be not just part of the truth but accurate, providing a voice for the poor and powerless; and quite often serving as a channel this author elsewhere (Ngoa, 2006) refers to as, of 'deviant communication'; that is, the timed release of unusual piece of information concerning an opponent – especially in political contests.

Rumour, as an agent of manipulation and as such a sub-set of propaganda in politics represents a sad commentary not just for its

victim but also, sometimes, for the promoter too. Irrespective of the purpose of the message, rumour could work like a double-edged sword if not properly handled and carefully positioned. Put differently, just like a double-edged sword would cut from both ends when in motion, so could rumour backfire if not carefully planned and executed. A rumour designed to negatively affect its intended victim may in the diffusion process gather momentum and change course against its perceived original perpetrator. Rumour as a double edged sword seem to confirm the old adage that, 'words begot words' and that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

For example, during the General Ibrahim Babangida military government experimentation with democracy in Nigeria, the camp of an aspirant to a local government chair in a south-south state was alleged to have spread rumours of impropriety against their candidate's opponent. It did not take long before the rumour gathered negative momentum in the direction of the aspirant from whose camp the alleged rumour of impropriety emanated. According to this reversing rumour, our aspirant is an ex-convict. During his days as a student in London he had been found guilty of some impropriety related offence and sentenced to serve a prison term by a south London magistrate's court. True or false, the victim of this reversed order of rumour, seem to have left partisan politics for good.

The above narrative may have the semblance of what some people would describe as revenge rumour, but it fits more of what Allport & Postman (1947) would refer to as the rumour that becomes 'embroidered in the telling' and got enlarged like a 'rolling snowball'. Buckner (1965), Peterson & Gist (1951) suggest a 'snowballed' or 'snowballing' rumour as one with increasing enlargement and implies that details are retained as new ideas are superimposed. The result, the authors note, is a 'Gestalt of interrelated rumours, probably derived from a common origin and differentiated into a profusion of details ...' But, Marques etal (2006) also argue that, most information arises from different sources and in different forms and versions, from which,

receivers may select and evaluate by appraising their common as well as 'distinct components and sources'.

Although rumour is usually associated with false and damaging accusations against its victim and quite often dismissed by victims as bits and pieces of lies sometimes interjected with half-truths, contemporary rumour is curious enough not to be viewed from the perspective of lies interjected with half-truths. Rumour is now laced in suggestive language, carefully timed and filtered to: 'whom it may concern'.

Rumour is as old as human society itself and has been a subject of interest for as long as it has flourished; arousing in interpretive experts and scholars amongst other interest groups, diverse viewpoints, equaled by diverse areas of inquiry.

One scholarly definition of rumour locates it in the pioneering work of the German psychologist Louis William Stern who in 1902 experimented on rumour with a 'chain of subjects' instructed to simply diffuse some information/message. The 'chain of subjects', while passing their information, message or story in a process described as from 'mouth to ear', were also required not '-permitted'- to 'repeat' nor 'explain' details of their story. Louis Stern's experiment found that the story became shortened as it passed through the 'chain' and finally changed structure and content by the end of the 'chain'.

In their seminal work – *The psychology of rumour* (Robert Knapp had in his 1944 categorization of rumour used the same title) - , Gordon Allport (himself, a former student of Stern) and Leo Postman (former student of Allport at Harvard University) corroborate and confirm Louis Stern's findings that, as rumour travels it grows shorter and easier to tell.

Allport & Postman (1947) based their judgment on the movement of rumour being guided by factors which they describe as

leveling, sharpening, and assimilation. Leveling refers to the loss of detail during the transmission process, sharpening is the selection or isolation of certain details for transmission; and assimilation describes the distortion in the message during the transmission process.

Like Louis Stern, Allport & Postman studied the process of message diffusion between persons and found that between the first 5 - 6 persons in the message transmission 'chain', a significant amount – about 70% - of details were lost in the message; a confirmation that assimilation has occurred as test subjects describe what ought to be rather than what things were.

Whereas Allport and Postman's basic law of rumour seem to suggest that the strength of any rumour will vary according to thematic importance and ambiguity, Rosnow (1980) offers a possible synthesizing proposition. Rumour, Rosnow postulates, results from combinations of uncertainty and anxiety.

Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Flavien T. Ndonko and Bergis Schmidt-Ehry in a 2000 retrospective case-study of a rumour in the West African state of Cameroon seem to corroborate Rosnow's uncertainty and anxiety theory of rumour.

Feldman-Savelsberg, Ndonko and Schmidt-Ehry found that rumours of public health workers administering a vaccine to sterilize girls and women led to aborting the vaccination campaign of the Year of Universal Child Immunization in Cameroon. The 1990 vaccination campaign in Cameroon was part of the Year of Universal Child Immunization project but contrary to its original purpose, rumour spread throughout Cameroon that government intention was to sterilize girls and women and render men impotent with the vaccine as a policy of birth control. According to the study, schoolgirls leapt from windows to escape the vaccination teams. An action that can best be described not just as a demonstration of the peoples' mistrust of

government and its 'hegemonic' vaccination project, but also an expression of uncertainty and anxiety.

Rumour's diverse viewpoints may also be responsible for the diverse opinions on its worth and affective value. Thus while some experts (Rosnow & Fyne, 1976: 9) argue that rumour is a 'vital curative for society' on the one hand, it is on the other equally viewed as distasteful, harmful and vile.

But rumour, traditionally a product of face-to-face encounters amongst close communities seemingly has transcended its earlier negative connotations and has acquired some air of importance in which the news value placed on it as well as the source arguably moderate the level of arousal and the diffusion process. Thus Rosnow & Fine confirm that, the greater the news values of an event, the more rapid the diffusion processes; adding that, while some rumours occur spontaneously, others are carefully constructed to serve a purpose (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 32, 5).

With the above as a backdrop, this paper will now attempt an examination of the role played by rumour - that unofficial, unverified, quite often factual and sometimes invented piece of news or information; exploring its influence as a manipulative tool, its effect on the bureaucratic flow of policy decisions and the political power dynamics. The paper employs Nigeria as its discursive unit of analysis, treating rumour, first as a factor in political manipulation in the context of objectives and intentions. Manipulation here refers to the attempt to control a situation, opinions, attitudes or emotions of others to one's advantage. The aim is to situate rumour as a neglected but valid agent of power in the political power dynamic equation.

The Politics of Objective or Intentional Rumour

The politics of objective¹ rumour is often associated with the timed release of appropriate rumours into the political system. These include

well spiced and accurately embellished pieces of objective or intentional rumours bordering on impropriety, credibility and personal conduct of individuals or groups with the ultimate aim being to discredit, ridicule, disfavour or simply put them in disrepute and perhaps a compromised position - even more so if and where those affected are political opponents.

For example, in Nigeria, Iornem (1998:73) recalls that Godwin Daboh who was considered a political 'enemy' of then Governor Aper Aku of Benue State², in 1982 facilitated spread of the rumour that, Governor Aku maintained foreign bank accounts; knowing of course that Nigeria's laws frown at public officers holding foreign bank accounts, because, public officers are alleged to be infamous for serving as conduits for laundering of monies stolen from the public vault.

At the end of the investigations, the rumour turned out to be completely false, as newspaper³ reports confirmed that the alleged foreign accounts belonged in fact to 'Newsweek'. Although ownership of the alleged foreign account has been clarified, the rumour had already inflicted considerable damage.

This spread of falsehood, seemingly objectively planned and intentionally well executed by the perpetrator did not only dent governor Aku's image, but also led to some cabinet officials in the government raise issues of moral authority and embarrassment for serving under governor Aku. One such example was that of Mvendaga Jibo – a Commissioner in governor Aper Aku's cabinet – who had to resign because he felt the damaging allegations hanging over the governor's 'head' were also affecting his own reputation.

In the end, the truth did prevail; nevertheless, governor Aku was probably never able to completely clear his name of rumours of impropriety before his death in 1988 (Iornem (1998:73).

On June 12 1993 Nigeria conducted what is considered to be the most peaceful and fairest in its electoral history. General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB)'s government annulled the results of that election, while its acclaimed winner, M.K.O. Abiola⁴, died in detention seeking the revalidation of his mandate (Ngoa, 2006:221). Rumours were timed and released to coincide with the eventual cancellation of the election results. The rumours, which were intentional and official in appearance, accused Chief M.K.O Abiola, the undeclared winner of the presidential elections, of tax evasion, bribery of party delegates at the Social Democratic Party (SDP) convention in Jos, and of a questionable source of wealth. According to rumours, Abiola's Concord newspapers and a bread-baking factory would not have made him the billionaire he was; and although not a military personnel, Abiola was also rumoured to be a beneficiary of the military in politics as well as making 'promises' to unnamed outside interests in order to raise money for his campaign (Maier, 2000: 60, 69 & 71).

The 'official' appearance of these rumours seem to have been confirmed by General Ibrahim Babangida (then military president) in an interview with Karl Maier – the Africa Correspondent for the Independent – during which the military president (Babangida) was quoted to allege that Abiola had supported in cash and kind - editorial support from his Concord Newspapers group - two previous military coup d'états in 1983 and 1985 respectively. Maier, (2000:60) quotes Babangida as follows: '... he did. He said so. ...We relied on him a lot for that. So there was both the media support and the financial support'.

In the interview with Maier (2000:72), although the former military president revealed that he was the single largest donor to Abiola's presidential ambition, Babangida was also quick to add that Abiola would have made a 'lousy President' would not have lasted six months' and would have been toppled in a 'violent coup'.

Intentional rumour as a manipulative activity was also manifest during the 'terrorist' government of General Sani Abacha⁵. On seizing power in November 1993, Abacha penetrated the opposition camp and even appointed some of its leading lights as cabinet ministers. However, rumour continued that many amongst his appointees remained nocturnally active members of the opposition. The rumour came to light when no sooner had Abacha dissolved his first cabinet and some of them returned to the 'Pro-June 12' groups, seeking revalidation of the annulled elections. Then, objective or intentional rumours questioning the democratic credentials, credibility and personal conduct of some of the agitators (Babatope, 2000:157) started flying around, in conjunction with rumours of state-sponsored assassinations and unidentified threat phone calls.

One such example was the rumour of a minister who, having been relieved of his ministerial post for stealing from the public vault five million US Dollars swiftly returned the money to the government treasury when faced with threats of a long jail sentence. This rumour (Babatope, 2000:156) eventually made its way into the *Champion* newspaper.

The story, which was published in a gossip format (by one Idon Mujiya), was, according to Ebenezer Babatope (Abacha's first Transport and Aviation minister) a 'ghost writing' planted by the government. Babatope (Babatope, 2000:157) who admitted that the rumour and the *Champion* story referred to him, described it as 'a deliberate falsehood designed to 'disparage' his character. He said that he started receiving life-threatening calls when the rumour did not seem to have achieved its objective. In Babatope's case the rumour may have failed to achieve its intended goal, but rumour is regarded as fact in societies and communities where most people do not have the means by which stories can be authenticated. Babatope (2000:154) himself confirms that, 'in Nigeria when rumours start to circulate, one must give such rumours sixty percent validity'.

Below, this paper employs four specific, rumour generated manipulative incidences and events to demonstrate the politics of objectified or intentional rumour and its seeming impact on the political power equation; even more so in the context where the individuals involved have '... news value ...' (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 32) and the manipulative rumour 'carefully constructed ... to serve' an intended purpose (Ngoa, 2006). These case examples below are used to typify how rumour has been used in various power struggles within the Nigerian political landscape.

The Speaker and the 'Toronto' Certificate

Alhaji Salisu Buhari, a young man in his early thirties from the northern city of Kano, was the first Speaker of the House of Representatives in post-military Nigeria (1999). Buhari's political enemies perhaps did not consider him worthy of this exalted position and started up a commonplace rumour and gossip that the Speaker was a 'Toronto graduate', an ironic statement aimed at ridiculing Buhari's academic qualifications.

As a requirement, all public office seekers are expected to file copies of their academic credentials; Buhari had accordingly filed a degree from Toronto University, but the rumour persisted that Buhari couldn't have had a qualification from a university – Toronto University - that never existed.

The Speaker threatened to sue whoever was responsible for the spread of what he considered false information; and a sizeable number of the media spoke up for him too. But the political pressure behind the rumour was quite intense and Salisu Buhari owned up to filing a 'faked' degree and was charged to the court of law for forgery, subsequently found guilty and sentenced to prison with an option of paying a fine. Although he was later given a presidential pardon, Ngoa (2006:90-94) confirms that, Buhari not only lost his exalted position for

what began as a common-place rumour turned manipulative and intended to disgrace him out of the office of the Speaker, he also left the House and had been politically quite ever since.

The Priest, the Goat and the 'Guber'

In 1998, during the electioneering campaign to return Nigeria to the fold of democratic nations, rumour spread in one of the south-south states against a gubernatorial candidate – the 'Guber'- who also doubled as a priest in a white garment religious sect. The 'Guber' was rumoured to have named his male and bearded white goat after a prominent family in the area, with the prefix 'Elder' - i.e. - an elder of the sect; and, the same goat was rumoured to have died just before elections and was accorded a human burial by its owner - the 'Guber' - and the white garment sect as a 'church elder'.

Rumours of the 'church elder' and his human burial (true or false), transformed into gossip and soon after became a political issue. The manipulative rumour seems to have worked as the 'Guber' not only lost at the polls; he was also labeled 'fetish'. The political implication here is that, like the Speaker, the 'Guber' too had gone rather very quiet but for a different reason. In an unsophisticated traditional environment like the one in context, the people take serious exception to what they consider to be untraditional or cultural taboos. Untraditional or cultural taboos such as, not just giving an animal human identity but a known and localized prominent name with the prefix 'elder', ordinarily, amounts to committing political suicide for an aspirant to political office. Although, viewed also from the angle of a polity chocked with allegations of vote-rigging and all, the 'Guber' could equally argue that he did not lose at the polls to intentional rumour but was simply 'rigged' out.

The Senate President, the Mace and the Cave-Python

Nigeria's erstwhile Senate President (now late) Chuba Okadigbo and the country's then President, Olusegun Obasanjo, seemingly disliked

each other with passion. The President considered Okadigbo confrontational while the Senate President viewed Obasanjo as being dictatorial. This hostile state of affairs led to rumours that President Obasanjo was bent on impeaching from office the Senate President for the latter's alleged arrogance. The result was the disappearance of the senate president's symbol of authority - i.e. - the mace, on an equally rumoured 'D-Day' planned for the impeachment of Okadigbo.

Security agents of the state (the police) searched the Senate President's official residence for the mace to no avail and when questioned, Dr Okadigbo explained that the mace had been taken to his home-town (Ogbunike) where it was kept under custody in his ancestral place of worship. The latter turned out to be a cave by the river 'Oyi', allegedly occupied by a king-sized python (Ngoa, 2006:90-94).

Chidi Amuta⁶ who worked very closely with Okadigbo during their Platform magazine publishing days recalls that the late senate president, revered in some quarters as the Mozart of Nigerian politics 'adopted the tortoise as a personal totem, carried a fly whisk, poured libation to the ancestors and generally believed in the efficacy of the often less than obvious relationship between cause and effect in African cosmology'; but Amuta equally acknowledges, like many others who are closely familiar with Chuba, that the quintessential Okadigbo believed in God as he probably did in his 'Ikenga'⁷ and may have been bluffing about this story of the 'mace and the cave python'.

But this Okadigbo's could-be bluffing story of the 'mace and the cave python' nearly snowballed against the late Senate president, as the rumour mill was at full throttle on Okadigbo's beliefs and mode of worship; as against the somewhat favourably sympathetic rumour of the Obasanjo presidency's resolve to oust Chuba Okadigbo for amongst other touted reasons, his political sagacity. But, perhaps, there was also a probability that, this turn-around rumour about beliefs and mode of

worship was equally all in pursuit of the presidency's strategically objective rumour to impeach Okadigbo.

Okadigbo survived this episode, but another manipulative rumour of impropriety which he in his characteristic manner dismissed as 'slipping on banana peels' eventually got him removed from office.

Eighty-one of ninety-four senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria voted to impeach the flamboyant senate president on the bases of what ordinarily started as unverified rumour of impropriety of which Amuta (2003) recalls that close friends of Okadigbo came to the 'unsavoury conclusion that his tenure was over because the price on his head was too heavy and his adversaries too powerful and determined'.

But Nigeria's 7th Senate president who said the overriding interests of all Nigerians was the top of his legislative agenda confirmed to Chido Nwangwu⁸ in a 2002 interview that his insistence to work 'constitutionally on the principle of separation of powers' was at variance with the presidency's desire to control the senate and thus the negative rumours to have him impeached.

Sunshades, Bowl of Water and 'Awo...' in the Moon

'Sunshades, Bowl of Water and Awo... in the Moon' is about one of Nigeria's founding fathers, the late Obafemi Awolowo around whom there were and still are so many myths, to the extent that when he died, it was rumoured that he died giving the legendary 'V' – victory – sign as confirmation of his political victory even in death (Abati, 2005).

Although until his death Awolowo remained the president Nigeria never had, one intentional rumor about him and the effect of that rumour on his Yoruba⁹ kinsmen during the 1979 electioneering campaign in which he vied for the presidency is instructive within the context of this paper.

It rumoured on presidential Election Day 1979, that Awolowo was going to appear in the moon to his Yoruba kinsmen at a certain

time in the evening of that day - perhaps to predict and announce the anticipated victory at the polls to his followers and admirers. All people needed to do in order to see him was to wear a pair of sunshades and in the case of those who do not have a sunshade as prescribed, a simple bowl of water positioned outside under the gaze of the moon will do just fine. They must not look up towards the moon but rather into the bowl of water; and there would be Awolowo, smiling at them live, with the legendary 'V' sign.

According to Rueben Abati¹⁰ whose most striking memory of the late politician was during this incident, nobody questioned the wisdom of using sunshades at night or 'the chemistry of water as a reflector of images or even the possibility of anyone appearing in the moon'. But they moved from one end of Abeokuta to the other chanting 'up Awo-o-o-o' until as predicted a full moon stood out in the sky. Rumour has also been passed around that the neighbouring people of Ibadan and Ilesa among others had seen Awolowo in the moon as was predicted.

Abati who joined the sky gazing exercise confessed that he 'looked and checked' and did not see any human form in the bowl of water and as such was not convinced that 'Awo' had appeared in the moon. Abati did not have the courage to say so; but was concerned however that as soon as someone announced that he had seen Awolowo and that 'the man was waving and smiling, and toasting his admirers with his famous victory sign', all others joined by confirming that they too had seen their candidate in the moon.

Such is the potency of rumour as a political manipulation tool that in the eyes of his fellow Yoruba, Awolowo carried with him the image of an icon and a legend of uncommon ability his opponents did not possess. They believe (according to Abati) that Awolowo was capable of all things; including a rumoured appearance in the sky during electioneering campaigns; an objective rumour designed

perhaps to assure his teaming followers ('Awoists' they prefer to be called) that victory at the polls was a foregone conclusion.

This paper has so far attempted an examination of rumour in the context of objectives or intentions. It now examines the politics of situational rumour.

The Politics of Situational Rumour

Whereas a well spiced and embellished piece of objective rumour simply sets out to disparage the targeted opponent or curry favour, situational rumour as a political manipulation tool reacts to the political circumstances on ground, by identifying often with the positives of the situation. In the context of this paper, it becomes prudential as politic to identify with the power source that gratifies being associated with.

Thus during the Generals Babangida and Abacha eras for example, most elective political office seekers sought to be tagged 'government candidates' as those so labeled quite often, carried the day by simply being 'cleared'¹¹ on instructions of the powers that be.

Rumours of who would or not be 'cleared' circulated as a manipulation strategy by the military to checkmate the political elite from who they had seized political power by exploiting situational rumours of corruption. Iornem (1998:65) observes that, the military used the situational rumour as a political manipulation tool to secure public support in its 'treasonable acts' because, Nigerians are very emotional when it comes to issues of corruption.

And so it became current and vital for political office aspirants to associate with the power structure and be rumoured to have secured 'clearance' as either the 'government candidate', 'the General's man' or the 'Party choice'.

With situational rumours of ‘clearance’ and ‘official candidates’ circulating, quite a sizeable number of aspirants and office seekers – though covertly not in support of the military authorities monopolizing the political space – fell over each other to be associated and identified as ‘cleared’; which probably was what the rumour was intended to achieve – i.e. - penetrate the ranks of the opposition, create disorder by identifying and ‘clearing’ some hand-picked willing dissenters - and that, MacMillan (1978:9) notes, is ultimately, where the key to manipulation lies.

Whereas the politics of objective rumour is often associated with the timed release of appropriate rumours into the system with the ultimate aim being to discredit, ridicule, disfavour or simply put an opponent in disrepute, situational rumour reacts to the political circumstances on ground, by identifying often with the positives of the situation.

On the other hand, rumour in the political power dynamics mix seems to oil the decision-making process by appealing to the emotions and exploiting the vulnerability of decision-makers who are said to be sensitive to rumour but lack the patience to authenticate their information. Below, this paper examines the effect of rumour in the power decision-making process.

Rumour in the Power Dynamics Mix

Stanley Macebuh, presidential senior special assistant on public communications to Nigeria’s immediate past president – Olusegun Obasanjo -, ascertains that, rumour lubricates the power engine. According to Macebuh, rumours, ‘definitely play a role’; but wonders whether the exact role rumour plays within the power circuit is measurable and quantifiable in any scientific way. ‘That’, he ruminates, ‘is the big question’; adding that, in unsophisticated communities ‘rumour plays a very significant role in the process by which decisions are made’ (Ngoa, 2006:246-249).

Macebuh advances that most husbands will be hard put to claim that they are hardly ever influenced by the sentiments expressed by their wives at home, as quite often such sentiments are derived from rumour. The presidential Special Assistant hypothesizes the situation where a presidential appointment is in the works and in his privileged position he is privy to the information. At home, Mrs. Macebuh opens a conversation about the potential candidate and ends with: 'they say he treats his wife very badly and so for that reason he is not qualified to take-up the job'.

The husband could presumably afford to ignore his wife's opinion or sentiment but quite often it sticks; because, according to Macebuh, sometimes, the husband comments on the attitude of the nominee gentleman in question when asked to make an input. And that domestic conversation based on rumour may affect a presidential decision. 'Quite often', he recollects, 'it does; especially when the boss-man is also interested in the gist'.

Ray Ekpu, Chief Executive Officer of Newswatch - one of Nigeria's leading news magazines - insists that rumour is important in political power dynamics because most people in positions of authority are 'very' sensitive to rumour but hardly cultivate the patience required to cross-check whatever information at their disposal, and thus creating the fertile grounds for more rumours.

Ekpu explained to this author that someone who 'runs a very powerful government intervention agency' (Ngoa, 2006:246-249) narrated to him how 'the President believes and reacts instantly' to rumours. According to the Newswatch Chief, the President reacts the way he does because, in Nigeria 'the worst is believed about people in certain positions, particularly where it concerns money ... but the big man springs to action' without verification.

Recalling his days as Chairman of the Editorial Board of The Concord newspapers published by the late rich and powerful M. K.O Abiola, Ekpu remembered how some people who 'were in competition ... and looking for higher positions' would go to the publisher and tell him the Editors of the newspaper were doing 'all the wrong things'; and Abiola would gratify them with cash gifts and 'put them a few notches up in his own calculations of who should assume higher position'. Mr. Ekpu concluded by declaring that 'people in authority are very vulnerable to rumour (Ngoa, 2006:248)' and that to a large extent is responsible for the role of rumour in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

Beyond the theoretical abstract of rumour being an agent of manipulation in politics, Jayson (2006) posits that, when a policymaker or a candidate is forced to expend time and energy to respond to his/her damaged image/character, when rumour as a political manipulation tool force people to resign or be impeached from powerful positions because of claims that may just be a hoax, when communication constructed on unverified information and thus a hearsay – normative or suspect evidence – warrant presidents to drop from the list of contenders otherwise perfect candidates for public office, rumour do have powerful effects; and therefore calls for new research that moves beyond the old media treatment of rumour and its associated negative connotations.

Notes:

1. The word 'objective' is here used as a clear representation of rumour as something deliberate, disseminated with intentions.
2. Aper Aku served as Nigeria's 2nd Republic governor of Benue State from 1979 – 1983. He died in 1988.
3. *Nigerian Voice*, 28th September 1982.
4. MKO Abiola, presumed winner of the annulled 'June 12 1993' presidential elections died in detention while seeking the revalidation of his mandate.

5. General Sani Abacha, second to the last of post-independence Nigeria's serial military rulers is famed to have been involved in virtually every forceful take-over of government in the country. Before his *coup d'état* that took him to power in 1993 as the *kalifa* – ultimate ruler-, he served as Defense Minister in the General Babangida military presidency.
6. Chidi Amuta, friend and colleague of the late Chuba Okadigbo in an on-line tribute to the late Senate president - 'Chuba: pragmatic idealist and political strategist', www.usafricaonline.com/amuta.chuba2003.htm. Accessed: 12th September 2009.
7. 'Ikenga' is an Igbo word representing at different levels the material, symbolic and the spiritual. At the material level, 'Ikenga' is a human being endowed with authority. Symbolically it represents power and authority that is usually exercised within the ambits of justice; whereas spiritually it represents some sort of personal god and perhaps a guiding spirit. The word is here used at the spiritual level.
8. Okadigbo confirmed to *usafricaonline* in a 2002 interview with *usafrica* publisher, Chido Nwangwu that Obasanjo's presidency was bent on removing him as the Senate President because his insistence to work 'constitutionally on the principle of separation of powers' was at variance with the presidency's desire to control the senate.
9. Yoruba people are kinsmen of Awolowo; they are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa and are predominantly situated in the west of Nigeria.
10. Rueben Abati is Editorial Board Chairman of the *Guardian* newspapers (Nigeria) and a leading newspaper columnist in the country.
11. 'Cleared' was the word in currency for public office seekers approved by the military government as eligibility criteria.

References:

Abati, R.(2005)., 'Awo and Asari Dokubo', *Guardian* (Nigeria), Friday, March 25th

Ajuluchkwu, M. C. K. (2000) 'Strengthening Democratic Institutions: The Role of the Media', *Report of Workshop on Media & Democracy* (Nigerian, A Press Council Publication).

Allport, G. & Postman, L. (1947) *The Psychology of Rumour* (New York, Holt).

Babatope, E. (2000) *The Abacha years: What went wrong?* (Lagos, EbinoTopsy Publishers).

Buckner, Taylor H. (1965) 'A Theory of Rumour Transmission', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 29, no 1, Spring, pp. 54 – 70.

Ellis S. (1989) 'Tuning in to Pavement Radio', *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society*, vol. 88, no 352, pp. 321 – 330.

Ellis, S. & Ter Haar, G. (2004) *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*. (Johannesburg, Wits University Press)

Feldman-Savelsberg, P. Ndonko, F.T. & Schmidt-Ehry, B. (2000) 'Sterilizing Vaccines or the Politics of the Womb: Retrospective Study of a Rumour in Cameroon', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, New Series, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 159 – 179.

Harsin J, (2006) 'The Rumour Bomb: 'Theorizing the Convergence of New and Old Trends in Mediated US Politics.' *Southern Review: Communication, Politics & Culture*, vol. 39, no 1, pp. 84 – 110.

Iornem, D. (1998) *How to win Elections: Tactics and Strategies* (Nigeria, JVC Press,

Karl, M. (2000) *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (London, Penguin Books).

Knapp, R. (1944) 'The Psychology of Rumour', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 8 no. 1, spring pp. 22 – 37.

MacMillan, I. C. (1978) *Strategy Formulation: Political Concepts* (New Jersey, West Publishing Company).

Marques, J. Pavez, D. Valencia, J. & Vincze, O. (2006) 'Effects of Group Membership on the Transmission of Negative Historical Events', *Psicologia Politica*, no 32, pp. 79 -105.

Ngoa, S.N. (2006) '*Agenda-Setting: The Neglected Role of some Agents of Power – Propaganda (Rumour, Gossip, Religion ...)*', Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. (Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand).

Omo, Omoruyi (1999) *The Tale of the June 12: The Betrayal of the Democratic Rights of Nigerians* (1993), (Lagos, Wordsmithes Printing & Packaging Ltd)

Pendleton S.C. (1998) 'Rumor research revisited and expanded', *Language & Communication*, vol. 1, no 18, pp. 69 - 86.

Peterson, W.A. & Gist, N.P. (1951) 'Rumour and Public Opinion', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 57, pp.159 -167.

Rosnow, R.L. (1980) 'Psychology of Rumour Reconsidered', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 87(3) pp. 578-591.

Rosnow, R. L. & Fine, G. A. (1976) *Rumour and Gossip: The social psychology of hearsay* (New York, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company Inc).

Websites:

'Rumour' – www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Rumor 8 February 2010

www.servinghistory.com/.../rumour::sub, 8 February 2010

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/2746856> , 19 April 2010

'Rumours': www.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Stern , 19 April 2010.

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/119629921/articletext?DOI=1> , 9 April 2010.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/649700> , 18 April 2010.

www.kwenu.com/bookreview/obaze/chuba_okadigbo.htm 9 September 2009.

www.usafricaonline.com/chubaokadigbo.chido2003.html 16 September 2009.